

Theological Competence Exam

The *Book of Order* states: " This examination shall assess the candidate's capacity to make effective use of the classical theological disciplines and of the confessional documents of the church in relating the gospel to the faith of the church in the contemporary world" [G-14.0310d (3)].

General Musings

This test examines the way you, as a pastor, use theological insights in a practical situation. What are you going to do with all this theological knowledge that you learned in seminary when you get out into the "real" world?

- The examiners want to see the balance between what you know and how you would use that knowledge (of the Bible, of theological issues, of church tradition, of Reformed tradition, of *The Book of Confessions*) as a pastor.
- Remember the readers are not your professors but clergy, educators, and lay people, so don't use jargon or large theological terms. You wouldn't suggest that a parishioner "exegete" Corinthians for an insight to a problem!
- Support any generalizations with details. This may be theology but it is also a test. What exactly do you mean?
- Although the questions present real life pastoral situations, remember it's a theology exam. There is no substitute for a solid theological discussion.
- Include Biblical, classical, reformed, and/or contemporary theology in your response. You don't need to incorporate all four, but you should touch on two or three to demonstrate your broad knowledge.
- Include some personal reflections and concerns. Make this your test. Let the readers get to know you as a knowledgeable, caring pastor who struggles with issues just like your congregants will. You might want to write something like, "I, too, have struggled with the problem of suicide and how to understand that tragedy theologically."

The Sections of the Theological Competence Exam

I. Confessional Heritage

II. Christian Doctrine

III. Application to the Ministry

You have one hour for each of the three parts. You should bring a clean unmarked copy of *The Book of Confessions* to use in the first section of the exam.

Section I--Confessional Heritage-open book

- You may use a clean, unmarked copy of *The Book of Confessions*.
- When you cite from the *Book of Confessions*, give the specific number and exact words. Make sure you tie these citations to the rules, discipline, and community life of the Christian church. It is not enough to just write, "the xxxx confession says." Don't just list the name of the confession but the exact citation. One example might be, "Section 5.023 of the Second Helvetic Confession states that God, alone, should be worshiped."
- Include a couple of sentences explaining why you chose each citation: why these and not others, what do they say to you, what do they communicate to the congregation?
- It is very important to carry the theological insights developed in part 1 over to part 2. In the second part of the question refer back to the theology in part 1. How does the theology apply to the life of the Church and the lives of Christians?

Section II--Christian Doctrine-closed book

- This question asks for a theological response, not just an argument on the basis of church authority. Remember the readers want to see how you, as a pastor, would respond using scripture and/or classical or contemporary theology as a base.
- It is very important to carry the theological insights developed in part 1 over to part 2. In the second part of the question refer back to the theology in part 1.
- 3. Look at the situation from different points of view--not just you as the pastor. It is important to evaluate issues from different perspectives.

Section III--Application to Ministry-closed book

- You will be asked to respond to one of two given situations. Read both of the questions before you decide which one to answer. Once you've decided, reread the chosen one.
- Consider including suggestions about what kind of support the community could contribute
- Be sure to have a Biblical and theological base for your answers and tie your practical solution to the church's faith and the Bible.
- Look at the situation from each person's point of view--not just you as the pastor. It is important to evaluate issues from different perspectives.
- Remember that you are the pastor and should have that kind of understanding and relationship.

Suggested Bibliography*

Book of Confessions: Study Edition. Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 1999.

Dowey, Edward J. *A Commentary on the Confession of 1967 and an Introduction to the Book of Confessions.* Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968.

Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith. Donald K. McKim, editor: David F. Wright, consulting editor. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992.

Leith, John. *Introduction to the Reformed Tradition.* Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981.
(especially helpful in giving lists, e.g. "9 motifs that shape Reformed Christianity")

Guthrie, Shirley. *Christian Doctrine*, Revised Edition. Louisville KY: Westminster John Know Press, 1994. (originally published as church school curriculum)

Rogers, Jack. *Presbyterian Creeds: A Guide to the Book of Confessions.* Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985. (Adds consideration of the Brief Statement of Faith)

Migliore, Daniel L. *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology.* Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1991.

Mulder, John M. *Sealed in Christ : The Symbolism of the Seal of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).* Louisville, KY: Denominational Resources, Presbyterian Pub. House, 1991.

Placher, William C. *Belonging to God : A Commentary on A Brief Statement of Faith.* Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992.

Rogers, Jack. *Presbyterian Creeds: An Introduction to the Book of Confessions.* Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991. (Inadequate for graduate level work, but the best currently available)

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