

AUGUST 2009

EXAMINATION OF THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE

(OPEN AND CLOSED BOOK)

MAXIMUM TIME: 3 HOURS

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

WHAT IS BEING EXAMINED

The Examination of Theological Competence seeks to determine the candidate's readiness for ministry in the use of biblical, classical, and contemporary theological insights within the Reformed heritage of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The examination may deal with questions of confessional, doctrinal, historical, or ethical significance. Accordingly, questions intend to test a candidate's ability to discern the theological issues inherent in a situation and to address them competently as follows:

1. Articulating the contemporary relevance of the Reformed tradition as it is embodied in the confessional documents
2. Showing that Christian doctrines as expressed in the Reformed tradition illuminate Christian faith and life
3. Applying Reformed theology in the practice of ministry in relation to questions of ecclesiastical, political, social, economic, and personal ethics

The word "Reformed," wherever it is used in this examination, means a theological perspective in broad agreement with the theology of John Calvin, the confessional literature of the Reformed churches, and *The Book of Confessions*.

WHAT IS NOT BEING EXAMINED

This examination does not seek to examine personal faith or to determine the acceptability of the candidate's views within Presbyterian confessional standards. That determination rests with the presbytery. Rather, this examination seeks to determine the candidate's competence to work within the Reformed theological heritage. There is some latitude within this heritage, and an answer will not be graded down for taking one position rather than another within the heritage. However, answers outside the scope of the Reformed heritage would tend to demonstrate lack of readiness for Presbyterian ministry.

It is to be recognized, however, that in becoming a candidate or officer of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), one chooses to exercise freedom of conscience within certain bounds. His or her conscience is captive to the Word of God as interpreted in the standards of the church so long as he or she continues to seek or hold office in that body. (*Book of Order* G-6.0108b)

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GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS (continued)

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

A clean, unmarked, printed copy of *The Book of Confessions* (copyright 2002 or later) will be needed as a resource for Section I of the examination. (The Westminster Shorter and Larger Catechisms will be considered one document for the purposes of this examination.) No additional books, notes, outlines, or other outside resources may be used.

Sections II and III of the examination are **CLOSED BOOK**.

You may write your answers in ink in your own handwriting, type them, or use a computer. Do not use pencil; any such answers shall be returned ungraded. If you handwrite your examination, do not skip lines in the examination book. You may make corrections, deletions, or additions without rewriting or erasing. Identify every answer by the number and letter assigned to it (e.g., III. B.). Illegible papers shall be returned ungraded.

You are strongly urged to use a computer. You may bring your own equipment, or, at some exam sites, you may use equipment provided by the proctor. If you use one of these means:

- **You may not consult or copy from personal notes or any other source on the computer or a network during the exam.**
- **A printed copy of the exam must be turned in before you leave the test site. Not turning in a printed copy will result in failure. You are strongly urged to make sure that all the necessary equipment (computer, printer, font and printer software, etc.) is properly working and coordinated.**
- **Number the pages.**
- **Include your candidate number on each page of the exam.**
- **Print responses using double spacing and 12-point font size.**
- **When finished, staple the printed copy to the first few pages of the exam book.**

Syntax or grammar will not be graded. However, the grades of papers that cannot be understood because of poor syntax or grammar may be affected.

The final grade for the examination will be the average of grades received on all three sections. Rounding up or down shall be determined by the reader on the basis of the examination's overall merit. All three sections must be answered. The paper must receive a grade of 3 or higher on at least two of the three sections to be considered Satisfactory.

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SECTION I. CONFESSIONAL HERITAGE

ONE HOUR

OPEN BOOK

REQUIRED

(THE BOOK OF CONFESSIONS ONLY)

Several members of the congregation you serve as pastor have been discussing a popular television documentary on the historical Jesus. One of these members drops by your office and says, “The church worships Jesus as God. But scholars in the documentary said that even though he was a great religious leader, he was just a human. I’m not sure what to believe.”

REQUIRED RESPONSES

1. Write an essay from a Reformed perspective in which you discuss *the divinity and humanity of Jesus*. Use and discuss citations from *The Book of Confessions* (e.g., 0.000), at least two (2) citations for Jesus’ divinity and at least two (2) citations for Jesus’ humanity. Citations must come from at least four (4) different documents in *The Book of Confessions*.
2. Building on your answer in Required Response 1, explain at least one (1) way in which the doctrine of the two natures of Christ makes a difference for Christian belief.

NOTE: You must use a clean, unmarked, printed copy of *The Book of Confessions*, copyright 2002 or later, for Section I. For the purposes of this examination, the Westminster Shorter and Larger Catechisms will be considered one document. Turn in your copy of *The Book of Confessions* to the proctor by the end of the first hour of the examination. The proctor will then give you Sections II and III (pp. 5–7) of the examination.

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SECTION II. CONSTRUCTIVE STATEMENT OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

ONE HOUR

CLOSED BOOK

REQUIRED

During a training session for newly elected officers you, as pastor, read aloud the third ordination question:

Do you sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of our church as authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do, and will you be instructed and led by those confessions as you lead the people of God? (W-4.4003c)

In the discussion that ensues, you hear the following comments:

David: I like some of the more recent confessions, but the older ones seem out of date to me. Why does our denomination have so many confessions from the past?

Olivia: I'm uncomfortable promising to be led by the confessions. The freedom of my conscience is important to me.

Matt: Most of the people in our congregation have never even heard of *The Book of Confessions*. What difference do these confessions really make for our church?

Theresa: I've noticed that on Sundays we use one of the confessions in worship. I've never quite understood why we do that.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

1. Write an essay in which you explain from a Reformed perspective *the purpose and authority of the church's confessions of faith*. Base your essay on your knowledge of Reformed theology, using at least one (1) of these resources: the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.
2. Building on your answer in Required Response 1, respond theologically to two (2) of the officers above.

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SECTION III. APPLICATION TO MINISTRY

ONE HOUR

CLOSED BOOK

REQUIRED

(CHOOSE ONE: A or B)

A.

You, as pastor, are teaching the youth class on Sunday morning. In one session, you introduce the topic of creation using the following passage from the Westminster Confession:

It pleased God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, for the manifestation of the glory of his eternal power, wisdom, and goodness, in the beginning, to create or make of nothing the world, and all things therein, whether visible or invisible, in the space of six days, and all very good.

(Westminster Confession of Faith, 6.022)

Jeremy, a young man in the class, responds, "I learned in biology class that life forms began in the ancient seas and evolved over millions of years into human life. How can the church believe that God created the world? Do I have to believe this? It doesn't make any sense."

REQUIRED RESPONSES

1. Write an essay discussing a Reformed understanding of *God's creation of the world*. Base your discussion on your knowledge of Reformed theology, using at least one (1) of these resources: the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.
2. Building on your answer in Required Response 1, discuss how you would respond theologically to Jeremy.

OR

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SECTION III. APPLICATION TO MINISTRY (continued)

ONE HOUR

CLOSED BOOK

REQUIRED

(CHOOSE ONE: A or B)

B.

You are pastor of a church whose elders review the session's duties each year at a retreat. During the retreat, one of the elders reads the following passage from the *Book of Order*:

When persons baptized as infants reach an age when they are ready to make public their profession of faith and accept their responsibility in the life of the church, the session should invite, encourage, and help them prepare for their responsibility as active church members. (G-5.0101c)

Elders note that in the past many teenagers have left the congregation before their public profession of faith. The elders agree that something better should be done to bring young adolescents into the active membership of the church.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

1. Write an essay articulating a Reformed understanding of the *public profession of faith for adolescents baptized as infants*. Base your essay on your understanding of Reformed theology, using at least one (1) of these resources: the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.
2. Building on your answer in Required Response 1, identify and discuss at least three (3) practical ways the session can “invite, encourage, and help [adolescents] prepare for their responsibility as active church members.”

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INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK.**

**UPON COMPLETING SECTION I,
TURN IN YOUR COPY OF
*THE BOOK OF CONFESSIONS.***

THE PROCTOR WILL GIVE YOU SECTION II AND III.