

AUGUST 2008

**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. Please write on every line in the examination book supplied for the examination. 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 may 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 exam. 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 and 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)***

Recent events in your town and in the life of your church members leave you struggling to help them understand the providence of God in a world that seems incoherent. A minister colleague points you to two resources:

**Q. 27. What do you understand by the providence of God?**

A. The almighty and ever-present power of God whereby he still upholds, as it were by his own hand, heaven and earth together with all creatures, and rules in such a way that leaves and grass, rain and drought, fruitful and unfruitful years, food and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, and everything else, come to us not by chance but by his fatherly hand.

(Heidelberg Catechism, 4.027)

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

(Romans 8:38–39, New Revised Standard Version)

**REQUIRED RESPONSE**

Write an essay on a Reformed understanding of *how the doctrine of providence is illuminated by God's love*. Use and discuss at least one (1) citation (e.g., 0.000) from each of three (3) different documents in *The Book of Confessions*. You may not use the quotation from the Heidelberg Catechism given above as one of the three. You may use other quotations from the Heidelberg Catechism.

**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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**UPON COMPLETING SECTION I,**

**TURN IN YOUR COPY OF *THE BOOK OF CONFESSIONS*.**

**THE PROCTOR WILL GIVE YOU SECTIONS II AND III.**

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**SECTION II. CONSTRUCTIVE STATEMENT OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE**

**ONE HOUR CLOSED BOOK REQUIRED**

You, as pastor, are leading the weekly confirmation class. You are explaining the importance of the Prayer of Confession and the Declaration of Pardon in the Service for the Lord's Day. The following discussion ensues among the twelve- and thirteen-year-olds in the class:

Rick: When I confess sin and hear the Declaration of Pardon, I don't feel forgiven until I hear the person I hurt tell me, "I forgive you."

Sally: Are you ever on a guilt trip! We're all basically good people. You don't need to confess anything; just get on with life!

Jane: I went forward at a revival meeting at my friend's church. I told God I was sorry. I even cried. The preacher said repenting once was enough. That means I don't have to say I'm sorry anymore.

Mike: But when I feel guilty, how do I know that I'm forgiven? What if I'm not?

**REQUIRED RESPONSES**

1. Write an essay on a Reformed understanding of *confession and repentance*. 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 students in the class.

SECTION III. APPLICATION TO MINISTRY

ONE HOUR CLOSED BOOK REQUIRED

(CHOOSE ONE: A or B)

A.

You, as pastor of a Presbyterian church, are on the planning committee for a joint worship service among Christian churches in your community. The committee has chosen the theme of "Christian unity and diversity." The committee has selected two quotations to express the theme.

John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come.

(Revelation 1:4a, New Revised Standard Version)

One, then, is the River, but many the channels of the gifts of the Spirit.

(Ambrose of Milan, *On the Holy Spirit*)

REQUIRED RESPONSES

1. Write an essay discussing a Reformed understanding of *relations among Christian churches*. Include reflection on the above quotations. 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, state at least two (2) particular theological emphases Presbyterians bring to ecumenical dialogue and discuss how those emphases could be expressed in the ecumenical worship service.

- OR -

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**SECTION III. APPLICATION TO MINISTRY (continued)**

**ONE HOUR CLOSED BOOK REQUIRED**

**(CHOOSE ONE: A or B)**

**B.**

Ray, a member of the congregation you serve as pastor, comes to you and says:

I met Tom while working at the local homeless shelter. It was clear by just looking at him that he was not the average homeless person. When I took him out to dinner the next night I discovered that he's a graduate student.

I think God's telling me to help. I have an old garage in my backyard and feel like I should allow Tom to sleep there until he gets his feet on the ground. I remember Jesus' words, "I was a stranger, and you took me in."

He asks you what you think.

**REQUIRED RESPONSES**

1. Write an essay on a Reformed understanding of *hospitality*. 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, guide Ray theologically and pastorally.