Worship & Sacraments
10/22/2015

Section I
Reformed Liturgical Heritage

You are the pastor of Fifth Presbyterian Church. At a young adults’ retreat, several people engage you in a discussion about marriage. They raise the following questions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paul:</th>
<th>Marriage is a sacrament, right?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Bertha:</td>
<td>Isn’t marriage just loving one another and living together?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ken:</td>
<td>My wife Karen and I don’t want children. Does this mean we are going against the church’s teaching?</td>
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REQUIRED RESPONSES (Total responses for this Section not to exceed 1,200 words.)

1. Using The Book of Confessions and guided by the provisions of the Directory for Worship, discuss a Reformed understanding of the nature and purpose of Christian marriage, making certain to address at least one (1) issue raised by each person in the scenario. Support your discussion with citations (e.g., 0.000) from at least three (3) different documents from The Book of Confessions. All references to the Directory for Worship must cite the paragraph number (e.g., W-0.0000).

2. Informed by your answer in Required Response 1, write a prayer suitable for a wedding service that addresses at least one (1) of the issues raised in the scenario.

Answer

Part I
The Reformed tradition understands marriage to be a gift from God to humankind (W-4.9001). More than merely a civil institution, marriage is an institution "ordained by God, blessed by our Lord Jesus Christ" (6.131).

Though it is a God-ordained gift, contrary to Paul's question, the Reformed tradition does not consider marriage to be a sacrament for a few reasons. First, the two sacraments (Baptism and Eucharist) are the distinct signs and seals of the promises of God to the Church. These practices are unique to the Church, and serve as a marker of the community of faith (3.21). In contrast, marriage is a gift to all humankind, whether or not they recognize God to be the Giver (6.136). Secondly, the sacraments are rooted in Jesus' actions as seen in the Scriptural narrative (6.152). Jesus, the forerunner of our faith (Heb. 6:20), institutes, participates in, and commands the Church's continued participation in the sacraments (5.178). Not only does Jesus not institute marriage for the Church (it is instituted by for all humankind in Genesis), but He does not marry. In Christ, we see that singleness is a valid path of faith, whereas marriage is a call of God for certain people (Christian or non-Christian). Only some Christians will (and should) get married, while all Christians partake in the sacraments. Therefore, the Reformed tradition recognizes marriage as an ordinance but not a sacrament (5.171).

To say that marriage is not a sacrament is not to devalue the significance of marriage. Marriage is a God-initiated, life-long covenant between two people (W-4.9001; W-4.9002). Marriage is not just a piece of paper, nor is it reducible to, as Bertha says, "loving one another and living together." It is the reality of two persons becoming one flesh — being cleaved together by God (5.246) — such that the identities of both people are now intertwined. Spouses not only live together but abide in one another in a mysterious way. This is not to be entered into ignorantly or lightly, which is why it is typical for a pastor to assess a couple's readiness for the ordinance (W-4.9003). Marriage entails a profound commitment, made before God, the community, and one another (W-4.9004). Also, there is the recognition that spouses are not joined together by their love, but by the God who brings them together. This is why the covenant is to be protected from infidelity (5.248; 7.249), and why divorce is so tragic (6.137). God, not Cupid or fleeting emotion, is the active agent in marriage (W-4.9002)

Marriage carries with it a host of promises and purposes. First, we unabashedly confess that the spiritual and physical union of marriage is for the happiness and wellbeing of the couple (6.131.) Second, marriage sustains the couple in self-sacrificial love (W-4.9001). This includes, as Westminster says, "Cherishing a mutual esteem and love, bearing with each other's infirmities and weaknesses, comforting each other in trouble, providing in honesty and industry for each other and for their household, praying for each other, and living together the length of their days as heirs of the grace of life" (6.131). Marriage is for the mutual edification and sanctification of the couple. Thirdly, because marriage builds the couple up, it necessarily edifies the Body of Christ, with which they are still united. Marriage encourages and strengthens the church as a whole, which is also why the church is invested in the health of the marriage (9.44). Finally, since sexual relations are appropriate within the marriage bond, it is the appropriate context for the birthing and rearing of children (5.249).

However, the Reformed tradition does not consider procreation as a necessary purpose of marriage. Therefore, to answer Ken, a couple may enter into this holy union without the expressed purpose of having children. Procreation is a matter of conscious, not of necessity.

Part II

Almighty Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,

We thank you for your mighty act of joining together these, your people. We praise you for your providence that brought them here, as well as for your love which called them into this covenant
for their benefit. We thank you for their commitment to one another, for their commitment to your Church, and for their commitment to you, O Lord. May these commitments be ever strengthened as you bind these two together as one flesh.

Lord, we ask that you would bless this union with peace, happiness, and holiness, whatever life may bring. Holy Spirit, be there in sickness and health, in poverty and wealth, in times of peace and times of turmoil, in both the presence and absence of children… May you bring about your purposes in all of these life situations, and use them to fortify their love of each other and of you. And we pray that the celebration that they enjoy today may characterize the rest of their life together.

We also ask that we – the community of faith that stands in witness of this union – would be blessed with the eyes and hearts to see and know how to encourage this couple in their journey together. May we be a blessing and encouragement to them as they have been to and for us. May we be inspired by their love for one another; may it be a picture of the covenantal love you have for all of us. And Lord, above all, may you be glorified for who you are and all that you do.

In the name of Christ our Lord we pray, Amen.

**Reader Responses**

| S | Part one uses Westminster, Scots and Second Helvetic as well as the confession of 1967. The answer demonstrates a well grounded understanding of the reformed teaching as it relates to the nature and purpose of marriage. It is responsive to all the questions, and the prayer is equally responsive to all the concerns. On the whole, the answer goes above and beyond what was expected, was well written, logically organized and easy to understand, clearly exhibiting readiness for ministry. |
| S | RR 1: The essay offered here is superb, fit to be used in a seminary classroom or in pre-marriage counseling. There are ample (and suitable) citations from both the Directory for Worship and The Book of Confessions. So much more than a compilation of references, this essay demonstrates well integrated theological thinking informed by Scripture and our Reformed heritage. This is synthesis, not merely catalogue. It sets out clearly and helpfully the distinction between marriage in the world and marriage in the faith of Jesus Christ. It answers cogently the concerns and questions raised by the young adults, with rich Scriptural and confessional resources that broaden our understanding of marriage.

To pick a nit, one looks to the last sentence: "Procreation is a matter of conscious, not of necessity." This brought a smile. Yes, hopefully both parties are conscious during procreation, or else a serious crime may have occurred.

The prayer in RR 2 is suitable for the occasion and clearly reflects a Reformed understanding of the nature and purpose of Christian marriage. Reference is made to the covenant nature of marriage, and also to its communal nature: the Christian community is present not merely to witness the making of a covenant between God and the two spouses, but to be reminded of their own covenants and to encourage and support this new couple not merely on their wedding day but all their lives long.

All in all, these are excellent responses! If there were an evaluative mark higher than "satisfactory" these responses would deserve it. |
Section II

Constructive Theological Reflection on Worship

Angela is the moderator of the session’s mission committee in the congregation you serve as pastor. At a meeting of the session, she presents the committee’s suggestion that an upcoming worship service be devoted to the problem of refugees throughout the world. She indicates that the committee has videos, pamphlets, bulletin covers and many other resources that could be used. In response, the following comments are made:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cesar</td>
<td>Is worship the place to address this issue, or could we have a potluck dinner with a program devoted to the refugee problem?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julia</td>
<td>I feel sorry for foreign refugees, but I think we should focus on the needy people right here in our community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marti</td>
<td>The best thing we could do is to increase our mission giving.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**REQUIRED RESPONSES** *(Total responses for this Section not to exceed 1,200 words.)*

1. Guided by the provisions of the Directory for Worship, discuss the relationship between the church’s worship and its mission in the world. All references to the Directory for Worship must cite the paragraph number (e.g., W-0.0000).
2. Informed by your answer in Required Response 1, prepare a detailed order of worship for a service that focuses on refugee issues, to be reviewed by the mission committee. Your order of worship should incorporate a Reformed understanding of worship and give attention to the session’s concerns.

**Answer**

Part I

Worship and mission are unanimously considered essential practices of the Christian Church. Though we are inclined to think of worship and mission as two separate acts, the two are inextricably linked in Reformed understanding. The Directory of Worship opens its chapter on worship and ministry with a discussion of the relationship between mission and worship. It reads, “The church participates in God’s mission to the world through its ministry and worship” (W-7.1001). The Church joins in God’s mission to proclaim God’s Word to the entire world in word and deed. This takes place in a profound way when the Church gathers for corporate worship. Worship is the
church's mission. All acts of ministry and service flow from, permeated with, and are gathered back into our collective worship of God.

In our worship, we proclaim that the reign of God has come in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Though we do not cause the Kingdom to come about (Jesus has done, will do, and is doing that), we testify to and join in Christ's work (W-7.6001). Our worship cannot be divorced from all other forms of ministry in which we join in Christ's mission. This especially pertains to our advocating for peace and justice in the world. In our worship, we recognize that reconciliation is possible because God has first reconciled us in Jesus (W-7.4001). We proclaim that the healing of individual and systemic brokenness is the work of God in Christ, and that we can only do justice when we share in Christ's work in the power of the Holy Spirit. This is why mission without worship is groundless.

On the other hand, it is precisely the interconnectedness of worship and mission that the Church's worship must recognize its role and responsibility to enact the reconciliation of God in Christ for the world. In worship, we proclaim forgiveness so that we will not be inhibited in fulfilling our ministries of reconciliation, justice and peace (W-74004). We proclaim peace in our words, as well as our involvement in God's work of peacemaking (W-7.4003). We not only confess the multifaceted nature of the body of Christ, but we also embody that diversity by casting off our racial, national, and ideological differences (W-7.4003). Worship is inherently missional.

In recognizing the mission of Jesus Christ and the Church's participation in it, worship is a very appropriate time to explicitly address the brokenness of the world. Indeed, special worship services for the purpose of expressing particular missional endeavors are allowed by the Directory of Worship. These services should include prayers for the particular situations, offerings with intentional purposes, times for raising awareness of societal ills both at home and abroad, and times for recommitting ourselves to manifesting Christ's justice to the world (W-3.5601; 3.5602). All of these acts are welcome in the context of worship, because we recognize that they make up the ministry of Jesus Christ to which we attest in worship.

Part II

(Bulletin covers may be used for each bulletin. This is one way that Angela's materials can be used to reinforce the theme of this service.)

We Gather Around the Word

Preparation for Worship (This is a time to explicitly articulate the purpose of this service. It is here that we will make the connection between worship and mission. Also, per Cesar's suggestion, we will invite the people to a meal after the service in order to continue our consideration of the refugee's needs and situations.)

Call to Worship (adapted from Psalm 137; through the words of this song we lament vicariously for those who are in exile)

Hymn

Call to Confession (This prayer will confess our failure to care for our brothers and sisters in broken situations, particularly those who have been exiled from their homes. Also, Julia's concern is a great reminder that refugees and exiles exist in our immediate context. Therefore, reference will be made here and throughout the service to the "exiled" [i.e. homeless] people in our own community.)
Silent Meditation
Assurance of Pardon
Passing of the Peace

We Hear the Word Proclaimed

Prayer for Illumination

Scripture – Luke 9:51-58 (“The Son of man has no place to lay his head…”)

Sermon (Due to time considerations, the sermon will be more succinct than usual. Though shorter, it will involve no less than the appropriate preparation and faithful exposition of the Word as required by the Book of Order.)

Prayer for Refugees in all Lands (At Home and Abroad)

We Respond to the Word

Affirmation of Faith – Apostle’s Creed

An Extended Time to Hear the Stories of Refugees and How Our Church is Responding To Their Needs (As this is a specialized service, more time will be allotted for Angela to raise awareness of the refugee crises, as well as what Jesus Christ is doing through us. If technology allows, choice materials may be presented, albeit with respect to time and the fact that there will be even more time for those resources after the service.)

Offertory Prayer (It will be made explicitly clear that this offering will be dedicated to the service of assisting refugees. As this is not a general offering, but one with a specified, missional purpose, this will hopefully serve to address Marti’s concern.)

Offering

Doxology

Prayer of Thanksgiving/Lord’s Prayer

Hymn

Charge/Benediction

***After the service, we will gather in the dining hall for a potluck and an information session on the plight of refugees and the needs that they have. We welcome you to join us and learn how you can participate in God’s service to these refugees. (This is the time for videos, pamphlets, and other materials to be distributed.)

Reader Responses

While more direct discussion of the way the general discussion of mission and worship related to the specific concerns of
the three members would have been appreciated, the response fulfilled the requirements of the question. The response demonstrates a thorough understanding of the scope and significance of the relationship between worship and mission. There are direct answers to at least two of the concerns in the general discussion. The applied response of the bulletin for a worship service pastorally includes the concerns of all the members. This response more than adequately exhibits readiness for ministry.

The material presented in RR 1 is very good as far as it goes. The essay is theologically informed and Biblically rich. A worship committee could use it as a study document, so for that matter could a mission committee. The writing is thoughtful and fully conversant with the rich resources of the Directory for Worship. Ample use is made of chapter 7 in particular. One searches in vain, however, for any mention of the underlying issue that instigated this conversation in the first place: the vexing matter of how the church should respond to the refugee crisis. The question as posed on the exam does not require that the questions and concerns brought forward by the worship committee members be addressed in the response. This excellent essay would have been even stronger if those issues had been integrated. This is a task for the pastor as the peoples’ theologian: informing and educating them about Scripture and our confessional and constitutional resources, but also drawing lines of connection between these lodes and their particular questions and concerns.

The worship service outline makes a good start but is incomplete. The sermon text is provided, but no sermon title and no hint as to the contents of the message. Time is allotted for congregational singing, but what will they sing? Will the hymns connect with the refugee theme? General ideas are suggested for the Prayer of Confession but are not fleshed out. Wouldn’t a "detailed order for worship" include these things? A creative response requires more than listing out the components of a Reformed-shaped worship service and then plugging in a few references to refugees.

The responses given here in Section II are difficult to assess. Both make a good start but are incomplete. More work is needed. But with respect to the exam the work is now finished. This reader would give an "incomplete" if such a mark were available.

Section III

Application to Ministry

At a meeting of the worship committee of the congregation you serve as pastor, a member of the committee relates that communion does not feel sacred to him. He grew up in a faith tradition that used wine exclusively, and the syrupy sweet smell of the grape juice used in this congregation is a distraction. He has talked to others who have the same problem and therefore asks if the church would please switch to using wine instead of grape juice. He also wonders why this church does not have communion every week and does not use a common cup.

REQUIRED RESPONSES (Total responses for this Section not to exceed 1,200 words.)
1. Guided by the provisions of the Directory for Worship, identify and briefly discuss at least three (3) issues in this situation relating to a Reformed understanding of the administration of the Lord’s Supper. All references to the Directory for Worship must cite the paragraph number (e.g., W-0.0000).

2. Informed by your answer in Required Response 1, and demonstrating appropriate pastoral and cultural sensitivity, respond to the concerns brought by the committee member.

**Answer**

**Part I**

The committee member has brought up five issues that we must thoughtfully consider in addressing his overall concern:

First, the congregant speaks to the issue of whether it is appropriate for the Church to use grape juice instead of wine. While wine has traditionally been used throughout church history (and its exclusive usage is still important in other traditions), our Directory of Worship gives to session the permission to decide the form the fruit of the vine is to be used (W-3.3611). We use grape juice in order to accommodate to those for whom alcohol might be harmful to their wellbeing or conscience. Therefore, while I can certainly bring this issue before the session for consideration — particularly since this is allegedly coming from more than one voice — grape juice must be provided as an alternative according to the Directory of Worship (W-3.3611).

Second, the concern about the lack of the common cup is a valid one. However, considering the previous point that wine must be accompanied by grape juice, the member’s request to change to wine would have the effect of further illustrating the division of cups. Now the congregation will literally be drinking different things from different cups. We use exclusively grape juice in order to symbolize the drinking from a common cup, and it is our conviction that introducing fermented wine would negatively affect the symbolism.

Third, addressing the issue of separate drinking cups versus one common cup more precisely, the Directory of Worship includes the provision for numerous smaller cups in the distribution of the grape juice (W-3.3611). This is not because we don’t take the one cup seriously. Rather, we are permitted to do so because we invoke the common cup imagery when the minister pours out the wine and lifts up the cup while presiding over the sacrament (W-3.3615). Whether for reasons of sanitation or practicality, the community has chosen to distribute the common cup element via smaller cups, as is their prerogative according to the Directory of Worship (W-3.3611).

Fourth, he references the question of how often a church should celebrate communion. The Directory of Worship allows for a congregation to celebrate the sacrament every week, but it also allows for it not to be celebrated every week, as long as it is done regularly and frequently enough to be recognized as integral to the Service for the Lord’s Day (W-2.4009). It is the conviction of this church that celebrating the sacrament on the first Sunday of the month is an acceptable fulfillment of this provision.

Fifth, and most importantly, is the issue of the inherent sacredness of the Lord’s Supper. The sacrament of communion is the Christ initiated “sign and seal of eating and drinking in communion with the crucified and risen Lord” (W-2.4001). It is the time when we gather around the Table as the family of God; a family not defined by our tastes and preferences, but by our union with Jesus Christ.
(W-2.4006). Therefore, the sacredness of the sacrament is not dependent on whether or not we feel it. It is sacred because Jesus has made it thus. While we must address the member's concerns, we must also remind him that Jesus Christ is still in this sacrament... even in the midst of syrupy smells.

Part II

Dear Committee Member,

Thank you for airing your concerns to me after service last week. I really appreciate your honesty and am encouraged that you are wrestling these things. I am glad that the faith tradition of your youth instilled in you a sense of the reverence and worth of the sacraments. I want to affirm that the Presbyterian tradition also holds the sacraments in high esteem, and that is why I would like to address some of the concerns that you brought to my attention.

If I am remembering correctly, you had asked me if we could please switch the communion vintage from wine to grape juice. You revealed that the smell of grape juice is distracting and that the change would help in your experience of celebrating the sacrament. I would first like to say that our Book of Order does allow for the use of wine in the Lord’s Supper, though it is ultimately the Session’s decision to allow for that. Though I can certainly raise this issue for Session, I must also add that the Book of Order also stipulates that the presence of wine not abolish the use of grape juice. Because we have members in this congregation with health issues that may prohibit their partaking in an alcoholic drink, we must accommodate with a non-alcoholic alternative. I am sorry to hear that the smell is distracting to you, but the grape juice must remain in some capacity according to our Directory of Worship.

While, again, I can and will bring this up in Session, my inclination is that they will stick with the exclusive use of grape juice precisely in light of another concern you raised: the lack of a common cup. That we do not drink from the same cup is a keen observation, one that I am thankful that you raised. It would seem that the use of smaller, individual cups does take away from the powerful symbolism of the one, shared cup poured out for all. I try to mitigate this by lifting up the cup before the congregation. Also, the Directory of Worship assumes the symbolism of the one cup even though it allows for the use of small cups in the distribution. However, by introducing wine into the ceremony, we would take a further step away from the one cup symbolism. We would not only be drinking from different cups, we'd have two different elements! You can see how problematic this is for our sense of community. Therefore, I am convinced that Session will stay the course because they share your high regard for the common cup.

You also asked why we do not celebrate communion every week. The simple answer is that the Directory of Worship does not require that we observe the sacrament every week. Instead, it requires that it is done “regularly and frequently enough to be recognized as integral to the Service for the Lord’s Day.” The Session of this congregation has decided that once a month is enough to fulfill this provision. I hasten to commend you for your desire to participate in the sacrament more frequently!

Ultimately, we are free to have this friendly (yet, important!) discussion over our communion preferences and convictions because it is not our actions that make this sacrament holy. Rather, it is Jesus Christ Himself that gives this practice its sacredness. In the Lord’s Supper, we commune with the Lord Jesus as one Body, joined and knit together despite our racial, ideological, or personal differences. While we will do our best to accommodate to your concerns, we maintain that those realities inherent to the sacrament take place even when we can't feel them. You presence in at communion, even when you can't stand the smell, is a powerful testimony to the transcendence of
the sacrament. Thank you for bearing with us and we journey together.

In Christ,
Your Pastor

Reader Responses

**S** While the overall tenor and tone of the response is pastorally enlightened and theologically grounded, there were a couple concerns. The usage of "We" in the statement - it is our conviction that introducing fermented wine would negatively affect the symbolism, and "It is the conviction of this church that celebrating the sacrament on the first Sunday of the month is an acceptable fulfillment of this provision." The pastor should be careful speaking for the session in this manner, when nothing in the question stipulates that this is the case. Recognizing that nothing in the question disallows this sort of imaginative license, is a good reason to not disallow the response on these grounds. But, it does raise pastoral concern. The argument against a wine and a grape juice common cup proves too much - two elements would be used if wine is introduced with grape juice as suggested earlier in the response. So, the response taken as a whole appears to be inconsistent, and strained in its argument at this point and would benefit from reconsideration and rewording. On the whole, though, the response demonstrates pastoral sensitivity and theological grounding adequate to the task. The question was responded to carefully, directly and gracefully, indicating a readiness for ministry.

**S** RR 1 is well done: It provides a lucid and informed response to the question(s) asked. It successfully identifies the issues of the elements in the Lord's Supper, the frequency of its celebration, and the mode of sharing the cup. Helpful responses are offered for each concern, with ample reference to support from the Directory for Worship. The comments on the use of grape juice instead of wine, or the option of having one cup with wine and another with juice, are especially apt, pointing out as they do that, "the member's request to change to wine would have the effect of further illustrating the division of cups. It is the congregation will literally be drinking different things from different cups." Very good insight.

The comments on the final paragraph about the inherent sacredness of the Lord's Supper is incisive. "...the sacredness of the sacrament is not dependent on whether or not we feel it. It is sacred because Jesus has made it thus [emphasis added in appreciation]. While we must address the member's concerns, we must also remind him that Jesus Christ is still in this sacrament... even in the midst of syrupy smells. Yes!

On the question of individual cups versus a common cup, the response might also have included the Reformed doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. When individual cups (and bread) are passed within the congregation, it may be said that the believers are serving the sacrament one to another, thus providing a living parable of our joint priesthood.

RR 2 is strong as well. Written as a letter to the concerned committee member, the tone is friendly and conversational. It expresses appreciation for the member and recognizes the validity and significance of the person's prior experiences with the sacrament. This is an excellent starting point for a conversation. If the person feels heard, it's far more likely that she or he will be able to hear a counterpoint.

The letter clearly explains why we in the Reformed tradition generally choose juice over wine, and roots the response in our constitution.

The closing paragraph returns to the theme elucidated in the final paragraph of the first section; That the sacrament is
sacred by its very nature
because of the presence of the living Lord Jesus Christ. "While we will do our best to accommodate to your concerns, we maintain that those realities inherent to the sacrament take place even when we can't feel them. You presence in at communion, even when you can’t stand the smell, is a powerful testimony to the transcendence of the sacrament. Thank you for bearing with us and we journey together.” This is good stuff: sympathetic to the concerns of the person and yet standing firm on our tradition and explaining it clearly. “Thank you for bearing with us [on the] journey” is a terrific close. Sometimes bearing with each other is the best we can do, and when we do so even when it’s difficult then that’s a sign of spiritual maturity and true community.

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Overall Evaluation

General Comments for Examinee and/or Presbytery

Please include here any comments about the examination as a whole or notes for the presbytery committee/commission overseeing the examinee’s preparation for ministry.

Reader Responses

The responses demonstrate a thorough understanding of our theological tradition, and a pastoral sensitivity to its application in the context of the congregation. Overall the responses demonstrate readiness for ministry.

The responses are very well done. They demonstrate a solid understanding of Scripture and the Confessions, along with the Directory for Worship.

They show evidence of a pastoral sensibility and theological soundness. While the reader responses on each section point out a few omissions, the essays were a pleasure to read and are highly commendable. Good work! And congratulations to the seminary professors who laid in such a strong foundation.