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 assess 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 evaluated more rigorously 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)

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

A clean, unmarked, printed copy and/or a PDF version of The Book of Confessions (copyright 2002 or later) will be needed as a resource for Section I of the examination. These resources may not be used on other sections of the exam. (The Shorter Catechism and The Larger Catechism of the Westminster Standards 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.
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GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS (continued)

You are required to use a computer to write this exam. You may bring your own equipment or, at
some exam sites, you may use equipment provided by the proctor. You must confirm with the
proctor in advance of the testing date what equipment (power strips, computers, printers, etc.) is
available at the testing site. You are strongly urged to make sure that all the necessary equipment
and software are properly working and coordinated.

When writing this exam:

- Identify every answer by the number and letter assigned to it (e.g., III. B.).
- Do not consult or copy from personal notes or any other resource on the computer or a
  network during the exam.
- Number the pages.
- Include your candidate number on each page of the exam, but not your name.
- Double-space your responses and use a 12-point font.
- Staple the printed copy inside the exam cover on the right-hand side when finished.
- The completed exam packet must be turned in before you leave the testing area or it
  will not be accepted.
- Papers that cannot be read for any reason shall be returned without being
  evaluated.

Syntax or grammar will not be evaluated. However, the evaluation of papers may be affected if
they cannot be understood because of poor syntax or grammar.

Maintaining the candidate's anonymity is of fundamental importance to assure fair
evaluation of examination papers. Failure to comply with any of the following instructions
will result in an unsatisfactory exam:

- Do not include your name.
- Do not include the name of your congregation or presbytery.
- Do not identify the seminary you attend or have attended.
- Do not identify professors with whom you have studied.
- Do not indicate whether you have taken this or other ordination exams before.

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IMPORTANT: READ THE ENTIRE QUESTION BEFORE BEGINNING TO WRITE YOUR ANSWER.
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SECTION I. CONFESSIONAL HERITAGE

ONE HOUR OPEN BOOK REQUIRED
(THE BOOK OF CONFESSIONS ONLY)

As pastor of a church, you are leading an adult church school series on the Jewish Holocaust. While talking about the role of the church in Germany during World War II, you read a few excerpts from The Theological Declaration of Barmen. The following discussion ensues:

Jeff: I really appreciate what you’ve been saying about the Barmen Declaration and think we should remove the American flag from the sanctuary.

Barbara: As a veteran, I must say that the flag has never conflicted with my faith. As a Christian citizen, I have duties to both God and country, right?

Seth: I agree. After all, we’re a Christian nation founded on biblical principles of freedom and justice.

Matthew: But aren’t we called to be in the world without being of the world?

Leah: Yes, we are called to be in the world, therefore the church should advocate for specific government policies.

REQUIRED RESPONSE

Write an essay from a Reformed perspective in which you discuss the relationship between the church and the civil government. Use and discuss at least one (1) citation (e.g., 0.000) from each of three (3) different documents in The Book of Confessions. One of the documents must be The Theological Declaration of Barmen.

NOTE: You must use a clean, unmarked, printed copy and/or a PDF version of The Book of Confessions (copyright 2002 or later) for Section I. These resources may not be used on other sections of the exam. For the purposes of this examination, The Shorter Catechism and The Larger Catechism of the Westminster Standards 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
OF THE EXAMINATION.
SECTION II. CONSTRUCTIVE STATEMENT OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

ONE HOUR  CLOSED BOOK  REQUIRED

You have recently been installed as the new pastor of a church that is in decline. There is serious pessimism about the church’s future, but people are hoping the new pastor will turn things around. The congregation longs for the “good old days” when both the pews and the nursery were full.

You have been asked to give a presentation at the church’s 100th anniversary dinner. With the congregation’s situation in mind, you consult The Book of Confessions as a resource. You find the following:

Biblical visions and images of the rule of Christ, such as a heavenly city, a father’s house, a new heaven and earth, a marriage feast, and an unending day culminate in the image of the kingdom. The kingdom represents the triumph of God over all that resists his will and disrupts his creation. Already God’s reign is present as a ferment in the world, stirring hope in [people] and preparing the world to receive its ultimate judgment and redemption. (The Confession of 1967, 9.54)

REQUIRED RESPONSES

1. Write an essay discussing how a Reformed understanding of eschatology is relevant to congregational decline. Base your essay on your knowledge of Reformed theology, using at least two (2) of these resources: the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.

2. Building on your answer in Required Response 1, briefly describe at least two (2) key points for the presentation that relate eschatology to the congregation’s situation.
A.

At a session meeting, you lead a devotion on the following verse:

"Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear."
(Ephesians 4:29, English Standard Version)

After the meeting, Elder Lydia comes to you, her pastor, asking for advice. She says:

I saw Elder Virginia at a restaurant with her male neighbor when her husband was out of town. I was concerned that she might be heading toward an affair. When I brought up my concern to her, Virginia said I should stop gossiping and mind my own business. Pastor, what is the difference between gossip and legitimate Christian concern for Virginia?

REQUIRED RESPONSES

1. Write an essay discussing Christian ethical issues related to the way we talk with and about other people. Include reflection on both the verse from Ephesians and the situation. Base your essay on your knowledge of Reformed theology, using at least one (1) of these resources: the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology. Ephesians 4:29 cannot be the only resource used.

2. Building on Required Response 1, describe how you would respond to Elder Lydia.

- OR -
B.

While you are on a retreat with fellow pastors, you are part of a conversation about a national news story: a certain pastor has been taking sermons from the Internet and preaching them as if the sermons were this pastor’s own work. Several additional issues about preaching come up in the conversation, including the need for prayer, study of the text, and attention to the context in which you are preaching. You and some of your colleagues realize how important it is to honor the proclamation of the Word of God and make a commitment together to encourage one another in the practice of faithful preaching.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

1. Write an essay on the work of preaching from a Reformed perspective. Base your essay on your knowledge of Reformed theology, using at least one (1) of these resources: the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.

2. Describe and discuss the practices that you and your colleagues will engage in to encourage one another in the practice of faithful preaching.