SECTION I. Confessional Heritage:

Reformed Christianity recognizes the sovereignty of God by viewing all aspects of creation as being under God’s power. Starting from this point, a discussion of the relationship between the church and the civil government begins with acknowledgement that both organizations owe their existence to God. Such reasoning can be seen to be behind statements such as, “We confess and acknowledge that empires, kingdoms, dominions, and cities are appointed and ordained by God; the powers and authorities in them... are ordained by God’s holy ordinance for the manifestation of his own glory and for the good and well being of all men.” (3.24) As well as, “As we believe in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, so we firmly believe that from the beginning there has been, now is, and to the end of the world shall be, one Kirk, that is to say, one company and multitude of men chosen by God....” (3.16)

In the aforementioned statements from the Scots Confession, we cannot help but recognize that even those organizations with which we disagree exist only because God allows them to do so. This is far from saying that God approves of or orders everything that is done by a government, but merely that only by the grace of God does any such organization belong. A quick look through the Old Testament can easily demonstrate how God has allowed an evil government to exist for a time before bringing them to ruin (such as the Assyrians and Babylonians.)

The question is then raised: If civil and sacred are ordained by God what does each owe the other? The Second Helvetic Confession goes beyond the scope of the Scots Confession and states, “The chief duty of the magistrate is to secure and preserve peace and public tranquillity. Doubtless he will never do this more successfully than when he is truly God-fearing and religious.... For as God wants to effect the safety of his people by the magistrate... so all
subjects are commanded to acknowledge this favor of God in the magistrate. Therefore let them honor and reverence the magistrate as the minister of God: let them love him, favor him, and pray for him as their father; and let them obey all his just and fair commands. Finally, let them pay all customs and taxes, and all other such dues faithfully and willingly. And if the public safety of the country and justice require it, and the magistrate of necessity wages war, let them even lay down their life and pour out their blood for the public safety and that of the magistrate.” (5.253 – 5.258). The strength of the words and the degree to which they include obedience can easily distract away from some of the key thoughts. Namely, that the magistrate would ideally be a Christian and that Christians are only to obey “just and fair commands.”

The guiding clause of “just and fair” should be seen as exactly that - a clause which guides us in all the ways we obey a civil authority. For if we truly seek to fulfill the great aims of the church (especially comes to mind the “promotion of social justice” and the “exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world”) then we must be willing to resist in an acceptable way those commands of the government which are contrary to God’s will as set forth in the Word of God. It is not in the state that we find our ultimate hope and salvation but in Jesus Christ so it is to Christ we owe ultimate allegiance. Thus the Theological Declaration of Barmen states, “We reject the false doctrine, as though the State, over and beyond its special commission, should and could become the single and totalitarian order of human life, thus fulfilling the church’s vocation as well.” (8.23) And also the reverse, “We reject the false doctrine, as though the church, over and beyond its special commission, should and could appropriate the characteristics, the tasks, and the dignity of the State, thus itself becoming an organ of the State.” (8.24)

The Theological Declaration of Barmen clearly states that each organization has its own duties and that the other should not try to take over the tasks of the other. Ideally they will be
able to work together, however, even as the church respects the authority given to the
government by God it can never obey the government over and against God as this would
prevent the church from fulfilling the two great commandments of loving God with all our heart,
mind and strength as well as loving our neighbor as ourselves. Obeying the government insofar
as it does not prevent us from fulfilling these two commandments is actually part of fulfilling the
commandments. Obeying the government beyond them breaks the trust God has placed in both
our hands and those of the government.

Both organizations have been created by God and exist by God’s grace. Each should
seek to work with the other and while it is best when those who are in government are guided by
the truth who is Jesus Christ, the church and those within it must obey the government as long as
they do not seek to take the place of God in our life. In the same manner the church must also be
careful to avoid taking the place of civil authority in the lives of men. In this manner God may
be honored and God’s commandments may be fulfilled as best as possible.

SECTION II. Constructive Statement of Christian Doctrine

QUESTION II.1.

The eschaton is generally viewed as something yet to happen – something which may
happen at any moment but has not yet started. However, this view is only partly true. The final
day of the eschaton has not yet happened. The Day of the Lord to which all Christians have
looked forward since the Christ’s resurrection has not yet happened but something has happened.
Our eager looking to the future sometimes clouds from view that which has already happened.
We forget that Paul calls Christ the “first fruits” of those who will rise. We forget that already
the Kingdom of Heaven has been brought near to this world both in the person of Jesus Christ
and also through his presence in the power of the Holy Spirit which fills, guides and regenerates
the church.

We are existing in a time period which reformed theologians such as Karl Barth and Tom
Torrance have described as “already and not yet.” The end has been initiated but it has not yet
arrived in totality. Much of what the Bible gives as results of or signs of the end are here now
even if it is not to the extent of which it will one day be. For instance, we have been already
resurrected with Christ as part of our baptism, yet we have not yet received our resurrection
bodies. We have already been justified, yet we are still being sanctified. We have already been
brought into the Kingdom, yet we are waiting for the Kingdom to be brought to earth.

This is the good news for us whether we are in times of growth or decline. Because we
know that regardless of our current status we are already a part of those who will be at the
marriage feast in the last days and that we have and still can be used by God as agents of Jesus as
we live in this world filled by the Holy Spirit. We do not need to worry if we have done enough.
We do not need to worry about whether or not each local church body will stand before a
triumphant God on that final day. We already stand before the God who is already triumphant
now.

This is not to say that we should not continue to labor or to run the good race of faith as
Paul says we must continue on. For though we are already with God, we have not yet reached
the end. We may stand firm and confidant in our place but we should not be arrogant in it.
Instead, knowing that we have not yet reached the end we should work until God brings us to a
final rest. We should always be racing for the crown of the victor as long as we are able even as
we are sure of that which has already been done. The aspect of a race is very good in this respect
as you can see that in the resurrection the “race” was begun and someday Christ will return so
signaling the end of the great "race". Until that day we each have our parts to run of this race which began and ends with Jesus Christ. Already it has been started, but not yet are we done.

**QUESTION II.2.**

The first point I would want to include in the celebration would be to bring a focus to the congregation that in this time of decline they should not focus too much on what has happened or what might happen. It is good be assured by what has happened from the day of resurrection up to the current day of the church. They need to realize that they already have experience and are currently experiencing the blessings of God. Also, they should not be overly concerned with what is to come, but properly concerned. Our worrying should be expressed not only in fond memories, concerns about ensuring we can pay our bills, but also in still running the race that God has put before us. The heartache of decline and wish for former days may not go away as long as the church is in a state of decline, but even so we still must love God and our neighbors even as we help and support each other in this difficulty and this heartache. I would not want to dwell too much on the heartache and might even leave it out if I felt the particular community would not benefit from it, but I would still address that which the community can do as long as they keep their eyes focused on the prize which is Jesus and service to him and others with the assurance of what has already happened in, through and with our Triune God as we celebrate that which was started in Jesus' resurrection and will be completed upon his return.

The second point would likely revolve around one of the great aims of the church. Likely, I would use "the exhibition of the Kingdom of God to the world" as the act of doing this could be seen to concern the other aspects. I would start by saying that in the birth, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus as well as the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Kingdom of God has been put
into the world. Someday it will be brought in fullness with the return of Jesus Christ, but until then we are to demonstrate this to everyone. Even though we are in a state of decline we can still proclaim the Gospel, provide a place for the building up of God’s community and the worship of God, we can still present the truth and lead the way in social righteousness and we can certainly show the world around us what it means to be part of the Kingdom of God. It does not matter if we have large numbers or if we have a budget to do what we did 50 years ago. We have the Holy Spirit to renew us. We have Jesus Christ to guide us. We have the Father to recreate us. We can run the race that God has set before us no matter when it will end for any of us because it is not we who run but Christ who runs within us.

SECTION III. Application to Ministry

QUESTION III.A.1.

The question of what is gossip and what would be genuine concern for another person is a fine line. We know from the teaching of Christ that we are to watch out for others and bring our concerns to them. We know also from Paul that we should not speak anything that is not true about another person. Gossip and slander are condemned. Loving correction and loving expression of a concern are lifted up. What is the difference?

In the case of Jesus talking about correcting a person he says that we may do this, but that we should examine ourselves before we do. This suggests that we should make sure that we ourselves do not do that same as the person we seek to help as we are told that how we have judged we ourselves will be judged as well. However, it also suggests that we should examine ourselves as to our reason for helping through correction or concerns. In the case of Elder Lydia the question would be: why did she immediately think that Elder Virginia was heading toward an
affair? Was their flirting or some sort of touching such as holding hands? Was it a romantic evening restaurant or was it an afternoon lunch as friends might have? What specifically was the reason why the possibility of an affair came to mind? Has she ever been jealous of Elder Virginia? Or do they not get along for some reason?

As far as Paul’s regular prohibitions against slander and gossip we can see behind this the commandment to not bear false witness. Just as Jesus intensified the commandment of murder to include the way we think of people, Paul is expanding this commandment to bearing false witness in any way shape or form regardless of whether or not you are in a court of law as well as spreading rumors whether true or false that would hurt or malign a person. Instead we should speak only truth and only that truth which builds people up as the text from Ephesians says.

In the case of the two Elders it does not at first seem that Elder Lydia was gossiping when she approached Elder Virginia if in fact at that point she had spoken to no one else. It may be that she was speaking from wrong motives or was jumping to conclusions and in that regard was going against both the advice of Jesus and the text of Ephesians. By telling me which elder she was concerned about right away it could be considered gossip at that point. So I would rather that she told me she had a concern about another member and then told me the rest without revealing a name.

If it were to turn out that she had cause to be afraid that this other member was indeed taking actions that were heading toward an affair then it would be time to consider more words of Christ. If you go a person with a concern and they reject you, go and get another person so perhaps the two of you can get them to listen. In this case the concern for Elder Virginia would have to seem genuine. It would have to be determined that by two people going to talk with her about their concerns the goal would in fact be ultimately “building up” Elder Virginia “as fits the
occasion” of the possibility that ultimately we would “give grace” to her. In this case there would be no slandering, lying or gossiping going on. The concern would not go beyond the three people involved and the intentions would be only to keep a fellow sister from sin.

However, if it was determined that the worries of Elder Lydia were baseless then it would have been wrong for her to go to Elder Virginia as she would have been going with wrong intentions and pursuing speech that did not fall in line with the text of Ephesians. This demonstrates why it would be better for Elder Lydia to not use a name as if her concerns are baseless she could be seen as gossiping.

Ultimately, we must all be careful that what we say to an about others is said with a genuine concern with a realization of our own faults and problems. It must not be used with the primary purpose of causing pain. Pain may be part of loving correction as the scriptures tell us, but we shouldn’t seek to cause pain. Finally, our speech should ultimately hold fast to the guidelines of Ephesians.

QUESTION III.A.2.

I would start out by telling Lydia that it is good for us to watch out for and help each other but that we need to be careful in what we do when we feel the need to say something. I would encourage her to use lots of pray and to not be rash. I would also encourage her to come to me if she needs to talk with someone but to be more circumspect at first regarding identities.

I would encourage her to go home and relax – to not get upset with herself or anyone else – and to pray and really examine her reasons for why she thought what she did and why she confronted Virginia. Then the next day she could come over and we could discuss the why’s of what she thought and from that point whether or not she spoke properly.
Section I: Civil Government

The essay is a clearly-presented and well-supported discussion of the relationship between the church and civil government, using the Barmen Declaration, the Scots Confession, and the Second Helvetic Confession, as well as examples from the Bible. It would have been further strengthened by alluding to other confessions and specific views of various theologians who have spoken on the issue.

Section II: Eschatology

Part 1. The explanation of the eschaton and its relevance to the Church and to a congregation in decline is apt and leads into the discussion of the contemporary Reformed theology of hope, supported with statements by Barth and Torrance. Additional support from confessions from various periods would provide further substance. Part 2 shows pastoral sensitivity in advocating a balance between directing assurance and proper concern for the situation at hand. The point of focusing on one of the great aims of the church demonstrates leadership ability in the theology of hope embedded in the Reformed understanding of eschatology.

Section III:

Part 1 acknowledges the complexity of talking with and about other people, bringing in Paul’s advice and reaching back to the law of Moses. However, the discussion appears more situational than Reformed; references to some of the confessions in regard to motivation and the responsibilities of elders would be helpful in addressing that lack. Part 2 deals with Lydia rather summarily and fails to deal with Virginia or to the issue of reconciling the relationship between the two.

Comments to CPM:
READER'S EVALUATION SHEET IN THEOLOGY

I. EVALUATIONS OF THIS EXAMINATION. The examination consists of three sections, each designed to be completed in one hour. All three sections must be answered. Section III has two options, from which the candidate is instructed to select one. Each section must be evaluated as either “Satisfactory” (S) or “Unsatisfactory” (U). The reader must also assign an overall evaluation for this examination. If any section is omitted it will receive an evaluation of “O”; the examination must then receive an overall evaluation of “Unsatisfactory.” The examination must receive an “S” on at least two out of the three sections to receive an overall evaluation of “Satisfactory.”

Each examination will be evaluated independently by two readers. If both overall evaluations are “S,” the conveners will record a final evaluation of “Satisfactory.” If both readers evaluate the exam overall as “U,” the exam receives a final evaluation of “Unsatisfactory.” If the two readers disagree in their overall evaluations, the exam will be given to a third reader. The conveners will record the final evaluation based on the two concurring overall evaluations.

II. THIS EVALUATION SHEET GOES TO THE CANDIDATE. Each reader’s comments should represent his or her considered appraisal of the paper. These comments are read by the candidate and the candidate’s Committee on Preparation for Ministry. Use the back of this sheet OR attach a separate page for comments explaining the evaluations assigned to each section of this examination.

III. EVALUATIONS: 

| Section I | (Required) | Civil Government | S |
| Section II | (Required) | Eschatology | S |
| Section III | (Required) | Talking about People | U |
| A | -OR- | Preaching |
| B |

IV. OVERALL EVALUATION

NOTE: COMMENTS INCLUDE A MESSAGE FOR COMMITTEE ON PREPARATION FOR MINISTRY. (Please check if applicable.)

Kevin R. Boyd

Reader's name printed

Reader's Signature
Section I: Civil Government
This was a very well written essay. Thank you!

Section II: Eschatology
"We have already been brought into the Kingdom, yet we are waiting for the Kingdom to be brought to earth." Very well said.
Again, the essay was well done. However, the second of your points to the congregation, which certainly not incorrect, did not have clear foundation in the essay. Certainly the Great Ends of the Church are applicable. This should have been brought out in the essay.

Section III: Talking about People
This essay was weak in that it gave few references, other than scripture, and even then only in a generic way. How does Lydia's plan of action compare with Matthew 18:15-19 or perhaps Galatians 6:1?

To "go home and relax" is not the level of response this exam calls for. It was intended to "build on Required Response 1".

Comments to CPM:
# READER'S EVALUATION SHEET IN THEOLOGY

## I. EVALUATIONS OF THIS EXAMINATION

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## III. EVALUATIONS:

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## IV. OVERALL EVALUATION

**NOTE: COMMENTS INCLUDE A MESSAGE FOR COMMITTEE ON PREPARATION FOR MINISTRY.** (Please check if applicable.)

Nancy Koger

Reader's name printed

[Signature]

Reader's Signature