Test Results
Theology
1/25/2013

Section I
Confessional Heritage

OPEN BOOK REQUIRED
(The Book of Confessions only)

One of the adult classes at the church you serve is discussing eternal life as part of an Easter season study. You are asked, “Does an understanding of eternal life speak to our lives in the here and now, or is it all about life after death? What does the Church think about eternal life?”

REQUIRED RESPONSE

Write an essay articulating the concept of eternal life in Christ as evidenced in The Book of Confessions. Use and discuss at least one (1) citation (e.g., 0.000), from each of three (3) different documents in The Book of Confessions, including:

- at least one (1) from the Reformation-era documents, and
- at least one (1) from the twentieth-century documents.

Answer

Eternal life is a concept in which the church has believed for centuries. The church has repeatedly affirmed that Jesus Christ, God Incarnate, came to earth as a man, lived, died, was resurrected, and will come again. He promises eternal life to those whom God has chosen. Many people assume this concept of eternal life is something which will be bestowed upon us at death. However, the Reformed tradition, as evidenced in the Book of Confessions, affirms that eternal life is not only something which will come after death, but is something the Christian has here and now, in this life.

Scripture tells us that when God created the earth, God called everything good. Humanity was in harmony with God, and humans were able not to sin. The story of Adam and Eve gives us a glimpse of this. However, we also find that in this same story that things went horribly wrong. When sin entered the world, it made it so that humans were not able not to sin; in other words, we cannot help but sin. Sin separates humanity from God. The
Old Testament illustrates this sin as it unfolds in various ways throughout the history of Israel. Israel was God’s covenant people, but Israel’s primary sin was idolatry.

God loved God’s people so much, however, that God came to the world as a man in Jesus Christ. Israel’s promised Messiah. Jesus lived on earth, died on the cross, and was resurrected on the third day, which is the day the church celebrates Easter. But Jesus’ work was not just for the Jews: it extended to the whole world. Through Jesus, we today are also God’s covenant people.

Through Jesus’ death on the cross, our sin is taken away. This is referred to as the atonement. Jesus’ work on the cross puts us at one with God (at-one-ment). Jesus’ atoning work pays for our sins, but it is not only something that will come. We have assurance that Jesus’ work is valid in this life, here on earth (3.25). By God’s grace, through faith in Christ, we are forgiven! This does not mean that we do not still sin in this life, because we do. But our sin is not counted against us.

The miracle of Jesus’ death, however, is that he did not stay dead. He rose again, and he appeared to many people in his resurrection body in order to demonstrate the hope to come before he ascended again to heaven. In Jesus’ resurrection and ascension, he promised to also take us, his people, up to himself some day (4.049). In so doing, he promised that he would come to earth again. We do not know when this will happen, but we have faith that it is so.

This means that, today, we are living in time that theologians call “the already and the not yet.” In Jesus, the Kingdom of God has already begun, but sin still exists in the world. In this life, though, we are assured that, by faith, we are “righteous in Christ before God. and an heir of eternal life” (4.059). However, the day will come when, at Jesus’ return, the Kingdom of God will be fulfilled. At that time, humans will not be able to sin any more.

But this future hope is present for us today. Jesus is alive today and reigns through the power of the Holy Spirit. This means that eternal life for the Christian has already begun in this life (9.26). Eternal life is not just life after death, but it is both a present reality and a future hope. God calls us to action, here and now, that the whole world may know the reality that Christ is Lord, and enter into this eternal life as well.

### Reader Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S</th>
<th>This is a strong and clear statement of the theology of eternal life that begins now and continues forever.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>This essay succeeds in responding to the requirements of the question but only barely. Much time is spent in elaborating the reality of sin which could have been summarized and the space used in better explaining what the confessions have to say about eternal life itself. A good example of this is in the citation of the Scots’ Confession 3.25. While the essay correctly maintains that “Jesus’ work is valid in this life,” although we continue to sin, a fact corroborated by the citation, little or no time is given to the citation’s further statement that the present effect continues beyond time—“...such as continue in well-doing to the end...shall receive glory, honor, and immortality...” In a similar way, the concept of eternal life itself, as the gift of God, as dependent on Christ, and as promise would have benefited by an increased time spent on each confessions themselves rather than the more general summation of atonement and forgiveness.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Section II
Constructive Statement of Christian Doctrine

OPEN BOOK REQUIRED
(The Book of Confessions only)

As pastor, you are leading a Bible study. One week you teach from Acts 2:1–4:

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. (New Revised Standard Version)

The following discussion takes place in the class:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mary:</th>
<th>My friend told me the most important benefit of receiving the Holy Spirit is the power to speak in tongues. Do we believe that?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greg:</td>
<td>And, I thought that when I became a member of the church the Holy Spirit would come over me, my life would be better, and I would be happy every day. Why hasn’t that happened?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darnell:</td>
<td>The Holy Spirit is a gift to the Church, not us personally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tracy:</td>
<td>Does the Holy Spirit do anything any more? I thought Pentecost was just a one-time thing. We’re the ones who make the church work.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

REQUIRED RESPONSE

Write an essay on a Reformed understanding of the Holy Spirit’s work in the life of the Church. As part of the essay, identify and discuss at least two (2) theological issues raised by the class. Base your essay on your knowledge of Reformed theology, using at least two (2) of these resources: the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.

If you use Acts 2:1-4 for the essay, you must use at least two (2) additional resources.
Answer

The Triune God is at work all the time, throughout all time and space, and even in our lives. The Triune God is present through Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit. The three persons of the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are together always active as one God, and such has always been the case. Some people have tried to divide the work of the Trinity, saying, for example, that God was present during the time of Israel; then sent the Son, Jesus Christ, and was present through him in the New Testament; and finally, when the Church was formed, God was and now is present through the Holy Spirit. However, this view of the Trinity, called modalism, has been rejected by the church because it does not affirm the continual action of the whole Trinity in all of history.

This is helpful to remember when working in the church. For example, one of the issues raised in by Tracy in the discussion is a common belief in the church. Tracy’s comment regarding Pentecost having been a one-time event in the past suggests an underlying belief that the Holy Spirit is also a thing of the past. However, this view mistakenly associates Pentecost exclusively with the Holy Spirit. A proper understanding of Pentecost is the event which marked the birth of the church through the ever-active work of the Holy Spirit. The focus is on the birth of the church, not on the birth of the Spirit. There is often a heavier focus on the Spirit during Pentecost because of its highlighted presence, but Pentecost as it is related to the Holy Spirit is not only a one-time thing of the past. Furthermore, it is the birth—the beginning—of the church, not its beginning and end.

So, when we speak of the particular work of the Holy Spirit in the church today, we must remember that the Holy Spirit does not work in an isolated manner, but as part of the Triune God working in our midst. However, we can identify specific ways in which we see the Spirit at work in our lives. The Holy Spirit is present in all aspects of church life. By the Spirit we, as Christians, are bound together with other Christians in the Body of Christ, which we call the Church. The Holy Spirit is exactly that which knits us together. The Spirit also rules our individual and communal faith and life in Christ. Apart from the Spirit, we can do nothing. The Holy Spirit is ever-present. It is the Spirit who calls us to ministry and service in Christ’s name, and equips us answer God’s call to love all people. Finally, as the first question of the Heidelberg Catechism affirms, it is God’s Holy Spirit that assures us of eternal life.

Within a more formal idea of church (such as in the liturgy), we can be confident that the Holy Spirit is actively working as well. It is the Spirit who speaks through the Word of God proclaimed. In other words, when the preacher is preaching in Church, it is the Spirit at work to help us understand what is being said. The Spirit claims us as God’s own in the waters of baptism, and the Spirit is present and working through the elements of bread and wine at the Lord’s Supper. In Romans, Paul says that when we pray, it is the Holy Spirit who intercedes for us and on our behalf. With groans that only God knows.

Scripture promises us that the Spirit abides in us (1 Jn. 2:27, 3:9). Therefore, we do not have to be afraid of what is to come. However, in all that has been discussed up to this point, it is telling that there is no mention neither in the Scriptures nor in our Confessions, of a life of daily, guaranteed happiness because we have the Spirit. This issue, brought up by Greg in the question, is one which can cause disappointment and disillusionment if such is the expectation. Greg can be assured that the Holy Spirit has indeed come over him, and the hope is that, in at least some ways, he can recognize that his life is better. However, just because God is with us does not mean there will not be struggles. This is why we hope for the resurrection, when Scripture tells us that our tears will be wiped away and our struggles will cease. Until then, we are thankful for those days when we do, indeed, have happiness in our lives, and we pray and depend on God when our days are difficult.

Really, our whole lives are dependent on God, and certainly the Church is dependent on God. This has been shown throughout this essay. Tracy’s comment about humans being the ones who make the church work.
therefore, is inaccurate. The Triune God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, makes the church work. We are graciously called by God to participate in what God is already doing in God’s church.

Reader Responses

| S | The discussion shows an adequate understanding of the question. |
| S | As in the first response, this one tips the line between satisfactory and unsatisfactory. In the initial paragraph the discussion of modalism unnecessarily muddies the waters as does the extended discussion of Trinitarian theology. This could have been summarized and more space devoted to the actual question at hand, the work of the Spirit in the life of the Church. The second paragraph asserts that the Spirit’s work is not a one-time event of Pentecost, but is ongoing in the growing life a church that was born by that event. But there is little development of that assertion which even the further reference to later stories in Acts would have buttressed. In a similar way, the reference to the first question of the Heidelberg Catechism also misses an opportunity—while it is correctly asserted that Holy Spirit gives assurance of eternal life, the answer in 4.001 also goes on to refer to the Spirit’s ongoing work—“...and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.” Finally while the citation of 1 John 2:27 could be elaborated upon to defend the point the paragraph makes that the Spirit enables life to be better even when not “happy” and trouble free (the use of 1 John 3:9 seems irrelevant to that question), the essay could have benefitted by a full use of BOC 10.4 which shows the Spirit’s work in creating benefit even in a “broken and fearful world.” While the response will be rated as satisfactory, it could have been much better with a little further thought. |

Section III

Application to Ministry, Option A

**OPEN BOOK REQUIRED**

*(The Book of Confessions only)*

**CHOOSE ONE: A or B**

A.

As pastor, you have invited the youth group to help plan and lead a Sunday morning worship service. As part of their preparation, they worshiped at several different churches. They offer these ideas:

<p>| Lina: | When it’s time for the Gospel reading, let’s ask everyone to stand while I |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>carry the Bible to the middle of the sanctuary and read it there. We saw that at two different churches. It shows special respect for the Gospels, which contain Jesus' words.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pam:</td>
<td>At one church we sang songs that really made me think about asking Jesus into my life. It was so inspiring!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dave:</td>
<td>And worship should be inspiring. That’s why we should skip the confession of sin. God forgives us anyway.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**REQUIRED RESPONSES**

1. Choose two (2) of the youth group's comments. For each comment, identify one (1) theological issue it raises and discuss a Reformed understanding of that issue. Base your discussion on at least one (1) of these resources: the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.

2. Based on Required Response 1, explain to the group how Reformed theology informs our worship practices.

--- OR PROCEED TO NEXT PAGE FOR OPTION B ---

**Answer**

**RESPONSE #1:**

The issue Dave raises is the reality of sin in the world. Jesus came to earth, proclaiming the Kingdom of Heaven, and he died for our sins. This means that the Kingdom of Heaven has already begun on earth, but we still live with the reality of sin. We are sinners. In the Book of Romans, Paul tells us that indeed *all* have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, but he goes on to say that, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. This is still our present reality. Our Reformed understanding of sin and forgiveness says that, while it is true that God forgives us of our sin in Jesus Christ, we must not ignore the gravity of sin. If we do, we are in danger of falling into a mindset of works-righteousness, leading us to falsely believe that we can save ourselves and do things on our own. Karl Barth said that sin is neither the first nor the last thing in our lives. Although Jesus Christ has defeated sin, we are still called to confess our sins before God. Scripture even tells us this in 1 John 1:9. There is assurance of forgiveness in this verse, but confession of sin is assumed.

Pam raises a different issue, which is the relationship between the providence and sovereignty of God. This means that there is one God; there are no other gods nor are there lesser gods. Furthermore, God does not let anything happen outside of God’s good will for our lives. God is all good and all powerful. Genesis 1 tells of this one God who created the world and who created human beings. Indeed, God created us and came to earth in the form of a man. God wants relationship with us. However, a reformed understanding of God’s providence and sovereignty tells us that God is already at work in our lives, and our relationship with God is dependent on God, not on us. The Apostle Paul tells us that there is nothing we can do that can separate us from the love of God. Therefore, we are not the ones who can initiate a relationship with Jesus Christ by asking him into our
lives, but rather we simply acknowledge and accept that Jesus is already working in our lives and has already invited us to be in relationship with God. While Karl Barth said that Jesus is God’s assurance of the forgiveness of our sins, he also said that Jesus is also God’s mighty claim upon our whole life. Because of this, we are called to serve God. God in Jesus Christ has already claimed us before the beginning of the world, and before we can even respond in faith. This is what we celebrate in baptism.

RESPONSE #2:

Hey guys, thanks for inviting me to help you plan and lead this Sunday worship service. I’m so glad you all have been so enthusiastic about all this, and I’m excited that you’ve gotten to see some different things at the churches you’ve visited in preparation for all this. It’s good to sit down now and talk about some of what we’ve seen and how our Reformed understanding of theology and what the Bible says informs our worship practices here at our church.

I know you all have seen some different things, and maybe you’re wondering what makes it different. As we plan worship, I want to talk about this, because it affects what we do in worship, and some of you are already starting to give voice to that. The Reformed tradition believes that Jesus is God Incarnate, which means that Jesus is the Word of God. What we read in the Bible is a witness to Jesus. The Word of God, both in Jesus Christ and in Scripture, is for all people. That means that we take the whole Bible to be authoritative. We don’t put emphasis on one part over the rest, and you might notice that our Scripture readings each week come from a lot of different places. We don’t just read every Sunday from one passage, or one book, or even just the Old or New Testament. We try to make sure we incorporate all different parts of the Bible in our worship. A lot of churches do a procession with the Bible into the sanctuary at the beginning of worship, usually putting it on the lectern (or pulpit or podium, depending on the church). Because this area is at the front of the sanctuary, everyone can see it when the liturgist gets up to read Scripture. Can you imagine what it would be like in our sanctuary if the liturgist came to the middle to read Scripture? That would mean that the liturgist would always have their back to the congregation, which wouldn’t be a very good way of showing that this is the Word of God for all people. If you guys want, though, why don’t we try a procession this Sunday? Do I have a volunteer to be the one to carry the Bible in? You can put it on the lectern, open when you get there. Then, if you guys want to show extra respect for the reading of Scripture (not just the reading of the Gospels), you can ask people to stand for the reading. That’s something that’s been a long-standing tradition in a lot of churches throughout history, and it might be neat to incorporate it around here every once in awhile.

Have you guys ever thought about why we structure worship the way we do? Because it all centers around Jesus Christ, that means that worship is centered around the witness to him which we have in Scripture. So, we center the whole service around the Scripture passages which are chosen for the day, and we try to make the sermon and all the songs and prayers focus around whatever that passage is talking about. We begin worship with a time of praise and adoration for the God who made us. In our church, we usually do this with hymns, but you guys can switch it up a little and include some praise songs if you’d like. Do you have any suggestions?

Now, do you guys know why Jesus came to earth? Part of the reason was to die for our sins on the cross. The Bible tells us we are all sinners, and even though we are forgiven of our sins because of Jesus, that doesn’t mean we can ignore that sin still exists in our lives. Scripture assures us that, if we confess our sins, God will forgive us. So, a Confession of Sin and Assurance of Pardon are pretty important in worship in the Reformed tradition. Which one of you would like to do this in the service? I’ll help you write out everything you need to say so you don’t get nervous.

We do recognize that it is God who has made us, and we believe there is only one God. Our Reformed tradition believes that God created and formed us before the beginning of the World, and God knows us each by name. Therefore, God is already at work in our lives. God came to earth in the form of a man, Jesus Christ, and God does want a relationship with us. But that relationship is dependent on God, not us. There’s nothing
we can do to initiate a relationship with Jesus by asking him into our lives, because God has already taken the initiative. So, instead of inviting people to ask Jesus into their lives, maybe we could ask in prayer that God renew our spirits in joy for God and thank God for claiming us as God's own. What do you guys think of doing this in the Prayers of the People? This can come either before or after the Sermon, but it usually comes after.

Now, we need to choose our Scripture passage, and I'm wondering if you guys want me to preach or if you want to do some sort of drama as an exposition on the reading of Scripture. What are your thoughts?

The last parts of Reformed worship generally include a response to the Word. You all have seen these things regularly in worship, but maybe you haven't thought much about it. Usually this includes the Prayers of the People, the offering, another hymn or praise song, and if we have a baptism or communion on any Sunday it's often placed here in the service. This Sunday, though, we'll just do the prayers, offering, and song, and I'll close us with a benediction. I'd appreciate your input for the prayers and the song. Do you have any questions?

# Reader Responses

| S | Response 1: This paper might have dealt a bit with the way Pam's life had been touched and how to nurture the work of the Holy Spirit in her life.  
Response 2: The shape of worship rightly starts with Scripture but this paper might have dealt also with the needs of the congregation.  
The paper adequately deals with the question. |
|---|---|

| U | This response seems unsatisfactory for a few reasons. Again as in the previous responses, too much time is given to general elaboration of doctrine without specific relevance to the question. But in this case the requirements of the question are not met. The secondary response to the group is to grow out of the first two responses. However, in the response to the group a good deal of space is given to a consideration of Pam's ideas which are not considered in the first part. Secondarily it seems that little theological thought is given even here to what the group might do with the Bible in the worship service. For instance, the Reformed faith has always shied away from showing reverence to objects regardless of their holy use—why then is the procession of the Bible a good idea and what theological end is served by having people stand during the reading? While the response and essay both recognize the need of confession in worship, it is never clearly established what is the benefit to worship of doing so as part of a service—the preparing of hearts I meet with God. Finally the last two paragraphs seem to be merely add-on, doing little to further the essay. Throughout, additional reference to the confessions would have been helpful, as would have been the identification of the words in the second initial response to Pam as not solely from Karl Barth, but more specifically from the Declaration of Barmen. |

# 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>This paper has a good theological foundation and understanding of the questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In these answers there has been a tendency shown to generalize about theology rather than to connect specific statements with specific theological work. It would be useful to spend more time focusing on the BOC and other theological work for its specific application. It would also be useful to practice addressing focused ideas in writing rather than the more scattershot approach shown here.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>