Section I
Reformed Confessional Heritage

You are talking with Eleanor, a member of the congregation you serve as pastor. She remarks, “When I visit with my Grandma, we watch her favorite religious TV programs together. They often feature people speaking in tongues and dancing in the aisles. Is that what it means to be filled with the Spirit, Pastor?”

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

1. Write an essay discussing a Reformed understanding of the experience of the Holy Spirit. In the essay, identify and discuss at least one (1) citation (e.g., 0.000) from each of three (3) different documents in The Book of Confessions.

2. Building on the essay in Required Response 1, respond to Eleanor’s question.

Answer

1. The Holy Spirit dwells within each believer, enabling the faith of the believer, uniting them with Christ. The Holy Spirit is the source of good works, done through those believers, providing gifts, calling, and anointing believers to roles within the Body of Christ. "We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life... who has spoken through the prophets" (Nicene Creed, 1.3). The Holy Spirit, through which life is given, therefore was at the beginning of creation. As the "giver and renewer of life" the Holy Spirit inspires, gives courage, and empowers us in our gratitude to God so that we might "strive to serve Christ in our daily tasks" (B. Stat 11.4). Thus the Holy Spirit, through which our lives are created, speaks daily into our lives so that we might follow Christ to the best of our ability, representing Christ in the world,
to the world. The Spirit is then working within us to prepare us for the good works of God. According to the Scots Confession, “the cause of good works, we confess, is not our free will, but the Spirit of the Lord Jesus, who dwells in our hearts by true faith, brings forth such works as God has prepared for us to walk in” (Scots Confession, 3.13). The good works that we as Christians perform then, are not of our own doing, but by the inspiration, courage, and empowerment of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us as we seek to follow Christ. Apart from the third person of the Trinity, we are incapable of those good works.

The Holy Spirit also unites us with Christ and to one another in the Church. “The Holy Spirit creates and renews the church as the community in which men are reconciled to God and to one another. He enables them to receive forgiveness as they forgive one another and to enjoy the peace of God as they make peace among themselves” (Confession of 1967, 9.20). Another way of saying this, according to the Westminster Catechism, is that all believers are “vitaly united to Christ, who is the Head, are thus united one to another in the Church” (Westminster Catechism 6.054, 6.186). In this uniting, we are called and anointed, qualified, and imparted “various gifts and graces” (Westminster Catechism, 6.054, 6.186).

The Holy Spirit is the giver of life in all ways: from our belonging to the Church, to hearing and responding well to God’s call on our lives, to the gifts and graces that we have been given. Without the Spirit, we are incapable of fully participating in the good works of God.

2. Eleanor, I appreciate your question. Indeed, this is something I have struggled with in my own life. In the past I have found myself wondering if I truly know the Holy Spirit, or if my “frozen chosen” upbringing, membership, and ordination in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) have stunted my abilities to experience the Holy Spirit. I can confidently answer, with the support of our Reformed Tradition, that no, speaking in tongues and dancing in the aisles is not the only way to be filled with the Spirit.

One of the Confessions that the P.C. (U.S.A.) accepts as truth, the Westminster Catechism, tells us that the Holy Spirit “calls and anoints ministers for their holy office, qualifies all other officers in the Church for their special work, and imparts various gifts and graces to its members” (Westminster Catechism, 6.054, 6.186). Speaking in tongues and being moved to move by the Holy Spirit are a part of those gifts. Though we are not all given those gifts.

1 Corinthians 12:7-17 shares some of those gifts that may be given. Let's look there now. Indeed, in verse ten Paul shares that speaking in tongues is a gift. But so too do we see that healing, wisdom, and knowledge are also gifts of the Spirit. There are several other gifts that we have all been given. If we look further down in this passage, Paul tells us that as the Body of Christ, which, the Holy Spirit unites us into being, there are to be many gifts and abilities in order for the Body to work and move as God has willed. We, in our Reformed Tradition, accept this to be true, as we recognize that the Holy Spirit unites us to Christ and to one another (Westminster Confession 6.054, 6.186). If we could all speak in tongues, it would certainly be incredible. But then, who would heal the sick, provide education, or give counsel when we need it?

We express and experience the Holy Spirit differently, but I firmly believe that we each encounter Christ’s Spirit daily. Another way to consider how we encounter and are filled with the Spirit is this: in our Reformed understanding of the Holy Spirit, we confess that the Holy Spirit “is the Lord and Giver of life, everywhere present, and is the source of all good thoughts, pure desires, and holy counsels in men” (Westminster Catechism 6.052, 6.184). Each time you admire the new leaves on the tree, or another part of nature, it is the Holy Spirit within you that draws forth that thought. When you love your neighbor, sharing genuine compassion and kindness with them, it is the Holy Spirit allowing you to see Christ in them, loving them because God loves you.

So yes, those people on your grandmother’s favorite shows are absolutely encountering the Holy Spirit, and are certainly filled with the Holy Spirit. But so is each and every believer. We all express our fullness of Spirit in different, unique, and beautifully crafted-by-God ways. How do you think you might experience the Holy Spirit?

**Reader Responses**

| S | This portion of the exam describes well the experience of the Holy Spirit. Good work and thanks for an engaging pastoral response. Several confessions were put into conversation with an overall thesis that it is the Holy Spirit who gives us the courage to express faith in Christ, unites the church and engages individuals for particular ministries. |
Response One:
The response makes good use of the confessions in illustrating the experience of the Spirit in the life of the individual believer. While the response then goes on to name the presence of the Holy Spirit in the church, noticeably absent from this section of the response is any mention of how those gathered into the church experience the Spirit through Word and Sacrament.

There are several incorrect citations in this response - Westminster Confession (NOT Catechism) is cited in 6.054, 6.186

The response could have been strengthened by being presented in a clear essay format, including a thesis statement, supporting paragraphs, and a conclusion.

Response Two:
The tone of the response is pastoral, conversational, and open. It does a good job of addressing Eleanor's question in a manner that lifts up the Reformed experience while maintaining a respectful tone toward other traditions. Well done.

Again, here are several incorrect citations in this response - Westminster Confession (NOT Catechism) is cited in 6.054, 6.186, 6.052, 6.184

The pastoral response again focuses on the individual faith of a believer (gifts and works) and omits any reference of the Spirit's role in the life of the proclamation of Word and Sacrament within the life of the church. This is an essential component of a Reformed theological understanding of the experience of the Holy Spirit.

Section II
Constructive Statement of Christian Doctrine

The congregation you serve as pastor regularly recites the Nicene Creed in Sunday worship. You are meeting with the worship committee, and the following conversation ensues:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nina:</th>
<th>Pastor, can we talk about dropping the Nicene Creed from the order of worship? The language seems outdated, and a lot of folks have told me that they just don’t relate to it.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Max:</td>
<td>And it requires us to say things that some people don’t believe.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tom:</td>
<td>If you don’t believe what’s in the Creed, I’m not sure you can call yourself a Christian! We can’t get rid of the Nicene Creed! It’s basic Christian faith!</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jia:</td>
<td>We have a whole Book of Confessions. I wish we could use some of those other documents in worship every once in a while. Aren’t they as important as the Nicene Creed?</td>
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REQUIRED RESPONSES (Total responses for this Section not to exceed 1,200 words)

1. Write an essay discussing a Reformed understanding of the authority of The Book of Confessions. In the essay, use at least two (2) of the following resources: the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.
2. Building on the essay in Required Response 1, respond to each member of the worship committee.

Answer

1. *The Book of Confessions* has authority within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in relation to the truth of the Scriptures that they claim. "The creeds and confessions of this church arose in response to particular circumstances within the history of God's people. They claim the truth of the Gospel at those points where their authors perceived that truth to be at risk" (Book of Order, F-2.01). The Nicene Creed is one example of pointing to these truths. At a time where a prominent Christian Theologian was suggesting that Christ was less than God, The Council of Nicaea wrote the creed to clarify that Jesus and God are equal. John Calvin supports its authority by referring to scripture itself. Calvin explains "when it is so often asserted in Scripture that there is one God, and further, when Christ is called so often the true and eternal God, one with the Father--what else are the Nicene fathers doing when they declare them of one essence but simply expounding the real meaning of Scripture?" (Calvin, 4.8.16). For Calvin, and for the church, the authority of the creeds and confessions come from their witness to Christ and to Scripture.

These confessions and creeds were developed within the context of a living, breathing tradition, in a particular time and place. *The Book of Confessions*, compiled in 1983, are to be held as "subordinate standards in the church, subject to the authority of Jesus Christ, the Word of God, as the Scriptures bear witness to him... They are not lightly drawn up or subscribed to, nor may they be ignored or dismissed" (Book of Order, F-2.02). While *The Book of Confessions* is subject to Scripture and Christ, they are to be used to explore both our history and our current context as the Church and Body of Christ.

As the authority of the confessions lies within their testament to Scripture and to Jesus Christ, subordinate in authority where those higher sources of authority, there is opportunity for individual members or groups to disagree with the church at large which holds the confessions as standards. "Because individual members or groups who disagree with the consensus of the church sometimes may have a better understanding of Scripture and be more open to the guidance of the Spirit than the church as a whole, the church should listen to them respectfully, with openness to be reformed by them. But until such time as the church as a whole is convinced that it should change its position, its interpretation of the confessions should be considered authoritative" (Book of Confessions, xix).

The authority of the confessions is not absolute or concrete. John Burgess writes "the church's confessions are more than personal statements of faith, although individuals may claim the confessions for themselves. The documents in the *Book of Confessions* represent what we together as a church have resolved to believe and do" (John P. Burgess, Confessing Our Faith: The Book of Confessions for Church Leaders (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018), 12.). These confessions are written in particular times, and places, often in response to particular situations, are adopted by the church for then and for today. Burgess points out that "On the one hand, it would be a mistake to see the church's historic confessions as divinely revealed truths set in stone, never to be supplemented or revised. Reformed Christians have always been open to amending their confessions or writing new ones when circumstances arise for clarifying what we resolve to believe or do" (13). In fact, "the church, in obedience to Jesus Christ, is open to the reform of its standards of doctrine as well as of governance. The church affirms *Ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda secundum verbum Dei*, that is, "The church reformed, always to be reformed according to the Word of God" in the power of the Holy Spirit" (Book of Order, F-2.02). There is an openness then, to change as far as which confessions we hold in authority, particularly as new confessions continue to be written, history continues to be made, and Christians find themselves in need of clarifying to the church and to the world what it is that Christians believe.

2.

Nina: You are right! The language of the Nicene Creed is outdated. Though the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), did adopt an inclusive language translation in 1991 (Burgess, 16), it's a little difficult to understand. That said, our church polity does not allow us to simply dismiss the confessions or creeds. Perhaps we can step back from using the Nicene Creed momentarily, but not permanently. I wonder if we might team up with the Christian Education Committee to discuss the potential for a class specifically aimed at looking at the many confessions that the P.C. (U.S.A.) accepts as part of its theology. What do you think?

Max: You are absolutely correct. D you want to know what's remarkable? "The Nicene Creed is the most universal of the church's confessions, since it is accepted by Orthodox, Catholic, and many Protestant bodies" (Burgess, 16). You know what else is remarkable? They still don't agree, the Orthodox church even changes a few words. Some people don't believe exactly what the Nicene Creed is saying, but as Presbyterians, we still include it in our theology. There is space for people to disagree, and opportunity for the Spirit to move and speak. I wonder what it might be saying to us. Taking the opportunity to have a discussion about what the Nicene Creed is saying, perhaps as part of that class, may help to discern for our congregation what the Creed means.

Tom: That's a complicated statement, and I have to disagree with it. Our confessions indeed help us to express our
faith, but they are not for everyone. Even the members of the Church that accept the Nicene Creed don't necessarily use the same words. Where our version reads that the Holy Spirit comes from the Father and the Son, the Orthodox church prefers that the Spirit comes from the Father. Why? Because some believe that that particular phrase makes the Spirit less than the Father and Son, when they understand the three to be equal and of the same. And still more, there are some denominations that don't ascribe to creeds or confessions at all. It does not make them less Christian.

Jia: You are absolutely correct. There are many confessions that could be used as well. The Nicene Creed and Apostles Creed are the most common ones used in worship, though I have heard portions of others, like the Belhar Confession, used during worship as an affirmation of faith. Those other confessions are indeed important, and have been written throughout history to express to the Church and to the world what it is that we believe about Jesus Christ. This gives me another idea! Perhaps, in considering holding a class to teach about the confessions we might use them in worship to additionally familiarize ourselves with them as we confess our faith.

Bibliography:

Reader Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>This exam exceeds the required expectations. Faithful and good research with a thoughtful pastoral response.</th>
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<td>One way to address a member who disagrees (Tom) may be to begin with the teaching and then ask, &quot;what has been learned today which may shift what it means to be a Christian?&quot; In light of the reformed tradition, where scripture is the authority for faith under Christ, how might the creeds/confessions expand upon that?</td>
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<th>Response One:</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>This was an excellent response, thoroughly explaining a Reformed understanding of the authority of the Book of Confessions. Citations used were clearly connected and the response demonstrates both a deep respect for the confessions while simultaneously acknowledging their relative, temporary, and provisional authority. Well done!</td>
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<th>Response Two:</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Response to Nina - Great job acknowledging her concern while still upholding the importance of utilizing the creed in worship and making a plan to go forward to seek greater understanding.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Response to Max - Positive, direct, and pointing to the tensions that can truly be a blessing in our tradition. Great job.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Response to Tom - Again, direct but still pastoral and points clearly to our Reformed understanding of the BOC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Response to Jia - Excellent, positive, and again reiterates the authority of each and every document in the BOC.</td>
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|   | Overall, this was an extremely well-written essay and an exceptional pastoral response. Well done! |

Section III
Application to Ministry

You are a pastor leading a Sunday School series on “A Christian Response to…,” with various topics being discussed each week. When you get to the topic of terrorism, the following conversation occurs:
Tom: I am so afraid for my children and the kind of world in which they will grow up.

Fred: That's just what terrorists want—for us to be afraid.

Erica: But what else can our response be, besides fear?

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

1. Write an essay on a Reformed understanding of fear. In the essay, use at least two (2) of the following resources: the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.

2. Building on the essay in Required Response 1, describe how you would respond to the class’s concerns about terrorism.

Answer

1. There are two kinds of fear in the Scriptures: the fear of God, and a fear that comes with the perceived absence of God. Time and time again, we are told that the characters in the Bible are afraid, they fear the negative or bad things that may happen, and we are told of faithful people fearing God. And yet over and over, the phrase "do not be afraid" is repeated. In Deuteronomy 31, we find Moses explaining that he will not go with Israel into the promised land, but that "it is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not fail you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed" (NRSV, Deuteronomy 31:8). And again in the book of Joshua the promise is repeated to Moses' successor, "do not be frightened or dismayed for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go" (NRSV, Joshua 1:9). The phrase "do not fear" is repeated in Isaiah 43:1 as Israel is reminded of God's goodness in bringing them out from Egypt, and God promises to deliver Israel again. The command is also present in the New Testament.

In Matthew 8 as a storm threatens their boat, the disciples are afraid, and Jesus asks "Why are you afraid, you of little faith?" Jesus commands the disciples "do not be afraid" as he makes his way across the sea to the boat in John 6:20. In 1 John 4:18 we are reminded by the author that "there is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love" (NRSV, 1 John 4:18). This passage invites us to love each other as Christ commanded, treating each other with love, not punishment, with forgiveness, not retribution. Christ has perfected love, and as we love with the love of Christ, there is no room in our hearts for fear or hatred.

Of course, as the Israelites and the disciples demonstrate for us in the Bible, we humans are difficult to convince that there is nothing to fear in the world. We constantly are acting out of fear rather than out of trust that God is with us and provides more than enough of what we need. Our faith in Christ does not immediately release us from the daily events and happenings of the world. "The new life does not release a man from conflict with unbelief, pride, lust, fear. He still has to struggle with disheartening difficulties and problems. Nevertheless, as he matures in love and faithfulness in his life with Christ, he lives in freedom and good cheer, bearing witness on good days and evil days, confident that the new life is pleasing to God and helpful to others" (Confession of 1967, 9.23).

The world is broken, and full of fear. Vengeance, anger, decisiveness and hatred seem to take over our news stations. Yet it is precisely this world which our Confessions and theology speaks into acting out of love and faith in God, not our of fear. In 1933, after Hitler took power, the German Evangelical Church wrote a declaration which condemned the rhetoric of fear which Hitler operated out of. Indeed, in their declaration they claim "if you find that we are taking our stand upon Scripture, then let no fear or temptation keep you from treading with us the path of faith and obedience to the Word of God, in order that God's people be of one mind upon earth and that we in faith experience what he himself has said: "I will never leave you, nor forsake you." Therefore, "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom"" (Barmen, 8.04). The Church spoke out against the rhetoric of hatred that was prevalent, seeking to stop the divisions that were happening.

Later, in the 1990s, the writers of the Belhar Confession sought to do the same, declaring that "any teaching which attempts to legitimate such forced separation by appeal to the gospel, and is not prepared to venture on the road of obedience and reconciliation, but rather, out of prejudice, fear, selfishness and unbelief, denies in advance the reconciling power of the gospel, must be considered ideology and false doctrine" (Belhar, 10.5). Indeed, the events in South Africa, the apartheid and separation of society was driven by fear of the other, and a lack of trust that God was providing for God's people.

To sum up what each of these confessions above aimed at, I give you the following: "In a broken and fearful world the Spirit gives us courage to pray without ceasing, to witness among all people to Christ as Lord and Savior, to unmask idolatries in Church and culture, to hear the voices of peoples long silenced, and to work with others for
justice, freedom, and peace." (B. Stat, 11.4). As Christians, trusting in our Lord Jesus Christ, in a God who promises from the very beginning that God will be with us, that reminds us time and time again to be unafraid, we are called to go into a world full of brokenness and fear to "do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God" (NRSV, Micah 6:8). Even in the face of fear, we are to lean on our community, and on God, for support and the constant reminder to "be unafraid" that rings true from Deuteronomy through today.

2. Fear is an absolutely human response. When we are threatened, we feel the need to respond with fight, flight, or freezing sort of responses. All come out of a fear and need for self preservation. And terrorism has certainly been rampant as of late. Knowing these things, I would first invite the class to elaborate. I would ask the class to name what about the future and terrorism has made us afraid.

Once we speak about their responses and I understand them a little better, I would turn to Scripture, and to the Confessions. Often, we quote single verses, like Jeremiah 29:11, "For I know the plans I have for your declares the Lord..." without fully looking further into the Scripture. It would be important for this context to look at particular verses in which the reassurance to "be unafraid" is given and the context in which those reassurances are given. To examine Scripture such as Isaiah 43, where the command to be unafraid comes amid the condemnation and punishment of Israel, when things are pretty awful, or Matthew 8 when the waters are filling the disciples' boat, would provide interesting discussion and possible parallels for the current feelings of the class.

I would absolutely acknowledge our need to condemn terrorism. If in planning the class, I considered my congregants and potential responses, I might already have planned to seek answers in our tradition. Using various confessions, which have been written in response to mass forms of terrorism, such as the Barmen's Declaration or the Belhar Confession, may provide insight for how we might respond today as the church.

I would also utilize section 11.4 of the Brief Statement of Faith as a way to format the question of how Christians might respond to acts of terrorism, and other topics covered in the class series.

Reader Responses

**U**

This is an excellent essay and answer, however, it does lack dialogue with a contemporary or classical theologian. One way to think about this may be to engage a preacher/theologian who has tackled fear in response to violence happening today or to consider how Bonhoeffer may have responded since the exam dialogues with Barmen.

The connection between the natural response humans have when faced with fear and the choice to live in faith, and be directed by scripture, which calls the community to a more profound and thoughtful response is quite good. Both Old and New Testament texts speak to the covenant community who is called to invite God into hard spaces of fear to help the faithful with a response of peace, justice, love and reconciliation. This exam engages a good variety of texts with action for the class to consider at the end.

**S**

Response One:

This response does a very good job of addressing the reality of human fear, as well as distinguishing the fear of God from the fear of bad things that may happen to individuals. Scripture, confessions, and theological references are very well-chosen (particularly historical references.) Well done.

The response could have been strengthened by organizing information into a clearer essay format (thesis statement, supporting paragraphs, and a conclusion.)

Response Two:

This response does an excellent job of balancing pastoral concern with theological and Scriptural exploration. It clearly builds upon the material presented in part one of the response and allows room for discussion, theological pondering, and places references (Scriptural, confessional, historical and theological) before the class that open up helpful venues of discussion. Excellent!
## Additional Comments

### For Examinee and/or Presbytery

You may include here any additional 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>Comment</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excellent work. The last essay would be better by engaging a theologian's work on fear as requested. However, given that one missing item, this reader believes the work overall is satisfactory.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Particularly in the last two sections of this exam, the responses did an excellent job of utilizing Scriptural, confessional, and theological resources to address the topic at hand. The pastoral responses demonstrated maturity, depth of theological knowledge, and pastoral sensitivity. Very well done!</td>
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