

**AUGUST 2006**

**EXAMINATION OF THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE  
(OPEN AND CLOSED BOOK)**

**MAXIMUM TIME: 3 HOURS**

**GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS**

**WHAT IS BEING EXAMINED**

This examination shall assess the candidate's capacity to make effective use of the classical theological disciplines and of the confessional documents of the church in relating the Gospel to the faith and life of the church in the contemporary world. [*Book of Order* G-14.0310d(3)]

The Examination of Theological Competence seeks to determine the candidate's readiness for ministry in the use of biblical, classical, and/or contemporary theological insights within the Reformed heritage of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The examination may deal with questions of confessional, doctrinal, historical, and/or ethical significance. Accordingly, questions intend to test a candidate's ability to discern the theological issues inherent in a situation and to address them competently as follows:

1. Interpreting a confessional stance faithfully in context. An open book question utilizing *The Book of Confessions* of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) will be included on this examination. The purpose of this question is to explore the candidate's capacity to articulate 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 graded down 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.

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**GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS (continued)**

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 of *The Book of Confessions* (published in 2002 or later) will be needed as a resource for Section I of the examination. (The Westminster Shorter and Larger Catechisms 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**.

You may write your answers in ink, in your own handwriting, type them, or use a computer. Do not use pencils for your answers. Any such answers shall be returned ungraded. Please write on every line in the examination book supplied for the examination. You may make corrections, deletions, or additions without rewriting or erasing. Identify every answer by the number and letter assigned to it (e.g., III. B). Illegible papers shall be returned ungraded.

If you prefer you may use a typewriter or word processor. You may bring your own equipment or, at some exam sites, you may use equipment provided by the proctor. You may not consult or copy from personal notes or any other source on the computer or network during the exam. A printed copy of the exam must be turned in before you leave the exam area. Because failure to turn in the exam before leaving will result in failure of the exam, you are strongly urged to make sure that all the necessary equipment (computer, printer, font and printer software, etc.) is properly working and coordinated. Please use double spacing and 12-point font size. Please number the pages, type your candidate number on the exam, and staple the printed copy to the first few pages of the exam booklet.

Papers that cannot be understood by the readers because of poor syntax and/or grammar shall be graded accordingly.

The final grade for the examination will be the average of grades received on all three sections. Rounding up or down shall be determined by the reader on the basis of the examination's overall merit. All three sections must be answered. The paper must receive a grade of 3 or higher on at least two of the three sections to be considered Satisfactory.

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**SECTION I. CONFESSIONAL HERITAGE**

**ONE HOUR OPEN BOOK REQUIRED**

**(THE BOOK OF CONFESSIONS ONLY)**

A Bible study class is reading the following text from Romans:

What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us.

Romans 8:31-34, NRSV

The class asks questions about the relationship of Christ's intercession to our own prayers.

**REQUIRED RESPONSE:**

Write an essay discussing how *Christ's role as intercessor shapes a Reformed practice of prayer*. Use and discuss at least one (1) citation (e.g., 0.000) from each of three (3) different documents in *The Book of Confessions*.

**NOTE:** You must use a clean, unmarked, printed copy of *The Book of Confessions*, copyright 2002 or later, for Section I. For the purposes of this examination, the Westminster Shorter and Larger Catechisms 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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**THIS PAGE HAS BEEN INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK**  
**UPON COMPLETING SECTION I,**  
**TURN IN YOUR COPY OF THE *BOOK OF CONFESSIONS*.**  
**THE PROCTOR WILL GIVE YOU SECTIONS II AND III.**

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**SECTION II. CONSTRUCTIVE STATEMENT OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE**

**ONE HOUR CLOSED BOOK REQUIRED**

A group of elders from the congregation you serve as pastor is talking before a meeting. Recently the news has been covering terrible killings in another country.

**Mikala:** I think that all this evil starts with the moral choices individuals make. We need to convert people to Jesus one at a time, and the world will be less evil.

**Gavin:** I disagree. It's not about individuals and their choices. The Evil One captures the hearts of people, the way Satan entered Judas. God is the one who does battle with principalities and powers.

**Helena:** I don't like all this talk about how the Devil made me do it. Anonymous corporations, systems, and governments are the root of evil. The church needs to live prophetically, transforming evil social organizations and systems.

**Eun-Joo:** I believe that since God created everything good, all the things we think are evil are just our misunderstanding of what God is doing.

**REQUIRED RESPONSES:**

1. Write an essay discussing a Reformed understanding of *evil*. Base your essay on your knowledge of Reformed theology, using at least one (1) of these resources—the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.
2. Building upon your answer in Required Response 1, briefly identify at least one (1) thing that is wrong or incomplete in each of three (3) of the comments above.

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**SECTION III. APPLICATION TO MINISTRY**

**ONE HOUR CLOSED BOOK REQUIRED**

**CHOOSE ONE: A or B**

**A.**

You are visiting Pat, one of the older members of the church you serve as pastor. During the conversation, Pat says to you:

As I get older, there is less and less I can do for the church. I can't witness door-to-door anymore because I can't climb steps. I can't drive at night, so I can't come to evening meetings. Sometimes I'm so sick I can't even make it to Sunday worship. How can I serve anyone? I hear in my mind "faith without works is dead," so if I can't work, it feels like my faith is dead. And if that's the case, I wonder if grace is gone too. I'm afraid that I'm becoming passive, doing nothing, instead of glorifying God by being an active Christian. I know I'm not saved by my works. But I don't know if simply having faith is enough.

**REQUIRED RESPONSES:**

1. Write an essay discussing the *significance of justification by grace through faith for someone in declining health*. Base your essay on your knowledge of Reformed theology, using at least one (1) of these resources—the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.
2. Building upon your answer in Required Response 1, respond theologically to Pat's concern.

**- OR -**

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**SECTION III. APPLICATION TO MINISTRY (continued)**

**ONE HOUR CLOSED BOOK REQUIRED**

**CHOOSE ONE: A or B**

**B.**

The church you serve as pastor is considering how to tell non-believers who God is. The following discussion takes place before a session meeting:

- Priscilla: I'd tell people to add up the biblical data: the prophets, the resurrection, and the growth of the church. I can prove with certainty from the Bible that God exists and that Jesus is the Savior.
- Thomas: The Bible doesn't prove anything. Priscilla, to be human is to doubt. None of us can see God. We bear witness to a God we never really know.
- Kesia: I feel I can explain God best to non-believers if I take them hiking and let them see God's handiwork in nature.
- Stephen: People don't need any evidence. I know in my heart that God loves me. God's Spirit speaks to my spirit. And God will speak to others, too.

**REQUIRED RESPONSES:**

1. Write an essay on a Reformed understanding of *how Christians can help non-believers know who God is*. Base your essay on your knowledge of Reformed theology, using at least one (1) of these resources—the Scriptures, classical theology, contemporary theology.
2. Building upon your answer in Required Response 1, respond theologically to three (3) of the people above.

Examination in Theological Competence  
August 25, 2006  
ID Number 1627Y

Section I.

The Reformed tradition understands prayer as an essential practice of Christians – “the chief exercise of our faith,” as John Calvin said. Our prayers, though, are not something we “do” in order to please God, or to prove to God (or neighbors) how “holy” we are (think of the “hypocrites who pray on the street corners”). Although we are to be diligent in prayer (“persevere in prayer,” Paul says), we understand our prayers as response to God’s gracious gifts. It is, as the Heidelberg Catechism states, “the chief part of the gratitude which God requires of us” (4.116).

The Second Helvetic Confession affirms that “God alone is to be worshipped (5.023), in keeping with the First Commandment; that Christ alone is “our only mediator and intercessor” (5.024) and reinforces this by explaining that, therefore, we do not worship, invoke or pray to the saints in heaven (5.025).

Therefore, Christ’s role as intercessor is vital to our understanding of prayer. To begin with, it helps us to understand that our prayers do not depend on *our* worthiness, but on Christ’s. The Heidelberg Catechism explains that prayer which is “pleasing to God and is heard by Him” is that in which “we rest assured that, in spite of our unworthiness, he will certainly hear our prayer for the sake of Christ our Lord” (4.114). Because Christ is our intercessor, our prayers are made pleasing and acceptable to God.

The Westminster Larger Catechism speaks of the work of the risen Christ, who sits “on the right hand of God the Father...with power over all things in heaven and on earth; [he] gathers and defends his church...and maketh intercession for them (7.164).

Christ does this, the catechism goes on, by “procuring with boldness access to the throne of grace, and acceptance of their persons and services” – notwithstanding [our] daily failings” (7. 165). This reaffirms that Christ the intercessor is the one who can do boldly that which we, because of our failings, cannot do – without Christ. This Christ, further, is not only our intercessor, but our advocate; as the Scots Confession, for example, confesses that Jesus Christ is “our Head and only Mediator...our only High Priest, Advocate, and Mediator” (3. 11). The one who intercedes for us is on our side.

## Section II

II.1. – “Evil” can and has been understood many ways in the Reformed tradition. There is what might be called personal evil – those thoughts and actions that individuals engage in. There is corporate or institutional evil, which may cause individuals to become complicit, however unwillingly. And, lastly, there is cosmic evil, which we can understand as an active force in the world.

The first thing to affirm, however, is that evil is neither caused by or acceptable to God. In Reformed theology, then, the task is not so much to explain the origin of evil as to recognize its power over us – even as we affirm God’s decisive victory over such power in Christ. In Scripture, “evil” is called by different names: Sin, Death, Satan, Evil. Perhaps one way to understand all these terms is that they represent the “non-God” or “anti-God powers” in the world.

In the baptismal vows of the church, an individual person may “renounce evil.” However, this is not a renunciation of the power that evil has in our lives, but of our allegiance to such power. As Paul says in the Letter to the Romans, he does not do the

good that he desires to do, but the evil that he does not want to do. As much as he may desire to “do good,” he is still caught up, enslaved, to Sin. Calvin, too, affirms that it is not possible to choose good over evil by themselves – only God can free us for positive acts, and even those can be in service to evil.

The prophets rallied against what we call today “institutional evil” – those societal structures that infect the actions of the people. Amos, for instance, condemned empty worship practices that caused the people to think they were fulfilling God’s law even as they contributed to the “trampling” of the poor. Institutional evils radiate outward till it is hard to separate ourselves from it – and, as we see from Amos, even the church is not immune.

In understanding evil as a cosmic force, we recognize its ability to intrude, if not take over, in every aspect of life – personal and corporate. That does not mean, though, that we should just throw up our hands in the face of evil. Knowing that in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ God indeed has overcome evil, we can join in as willing (albeit limited) partners in working against evil in this world.

II.2. –

In Mikala’s statement, evil seems too easily contained. Her statement makes it sound as if we can merely “choose” not to do evil, and doesn’t recognize the difficulty of such a task (As Paul pointed out).

Helena’s remark goes too far in the other direction, and removes personal responsibility. God indeed fight against evil, but we are called as well to work against the forces of evil in both our personal relationships and the worldly realm.

Eun-Joo is certainly hopeful but, I think, too simplistic. Her comment might, for instance, lead to the view that the suffering caused by cancer or famine, for instance, is not really so bad. I think this fails to recognize that, although God may indeed be able to use such evil for good purposes, God abhors the evil of suffering, and is not its author.

### Section III. A.

#### III.A.1

“By grace you have been saved,” the apostle Paul wrote. In Reformed theology, justification by grace through faith is, of course, a central tenet. Our salvation is God's doing, not ours – even our faith is God's work, not ours: it is the work of the Holy Spirit, not something we “achieve” by ourselves. Further, our justification by grace is not provisional – our confessions make clear that the God whom we have come to know through Jesus Christ is steadfast and faithful. Having granted us faith, and so justified us, God will not go back on God's promise of new life in Christ. Yes, we may – in fact, we will, continue to sin – but *our* faith is, in and of itself, the assurance of God's faithfulness.

What, then, are “good works”? Well, in light of the above, they are clearly not a “means to the end” of our justification. Therefore, rather than understanding good works as leading to our justification, we can understand our justification as leading to our good works: they are the “fruits” that “every good tree will bear.”

Having laid the above groundwork, we can look at this significance for the person in declining health in light of our understanding both of justification by grace, and of “good works.” To begin, the Reformed emphasis on “grace alone” is good news, for it means that we are not required to be “worthy” – indeed, we cannot be. Calvin reminds us that our whole beings – even our best actions – are saturated with sin. Put another way –

we are “of worth” in God’s eyes through the loving grace of God. And the promise of God is that, having been claimed by God, God will not turn away from us, no matter what.

The second thing at issue here is the matter of works. If works are understood not as something we “have to” do but as our grateful response to God’s gracious initiative, if a person’s life is bereft of works, it may indeed seem barren to that person. That seems to be the case with Pat. But if we have been freed to “walk in newness of life,” if we have undertaken the task of growing into our baptisms, then all our acts and thoughts can be “good fruit.” So, a person in declining health might find strength and solace in the knowledge of the steadfast grace of God, and the understanding that whatever the nature of their offering to God, it can bear witness to that steadfast grace.

### III.A.2.

In responding theologically to Pat’s concern (the question does not ask me to respond to Pat herself), I would begin by saying, “Yes! Simply having faith *is* enough.” While hearing and affirming her feelings of helplessness that she cannot be “an active Christian” as she once was, I would also try to help her see that her life is still bearing “good fruit.” I might remind her of the story of the “widow’s mite,” wherein Jesus makes clear that it is not the size or worldly worth of one’s offering that makes it valuable, but that it comes from one’s heart and represents one’s own gifts and abilities, whatever situation or time of life. Rather than feeling sad or worried because she cannot give as she once could, then, I would urge Pat to see her prayers as contributions to the life and mission of the church. I also sense that she may be feeling cut off from her faith community, and would try to find ways to feel more involved.

**READER'S GRADING SHEET IN THEOLOGY**

**I. OVERALL EVALUATION OF THIS EXAMINATION.** A single overall grade must be assigned by the reader to this examination. The overall grade for the examination will be the average of grades received on all three questions, with rounding up or down to be determined by the reader on the basis of the examination's overall merit. **However, the examination must receive a grade of "3" or higher on at least two out of the three questions in order to be considered "SATISFACTORY."** The examination will be graded unsatisfactory if any one of the sections is omitted.

Each examination will be read independently by two persons. If both grades are 3, 4, or 5, the final grade is **SATISFACTORY**. If both grades are 1 or 2, the final grade is **UNSATISFACTORY**. If one final grade is 1 or 2, and the other final grade is 3, 4, or 5, the paper will be given a third reading to determine the final grade.

**II. THIS GRADING SHEET GOES TO THE CANDIDATE.** The reader's comments on this grading sheet should represent his or her considered appraisal of the paper, which will be read by the candidate and the committee on preparation for ministry. Use the back of the sheet for comments explaining why the grade for this paper has been assigned.

**III. GRADING EACH SECTION.** Indicate on the spaces below your grade for each section of this examination, using the following scale:

- |                       |                                 |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------|
|                       | <b>5 - EXCELLENT</b>            |
|                       | <b>4 - GOOD</b>                 |
| <u>Satisfactory</u>   | <b>3 - ACCEPTABLE</b>           |
| <u>Unsatisfactory</u> | <b>2 - LESS THAN ACCEPTABLE</b> |
|                       | <b>1 - POOR</b>                 |
|                       | <b>0 - SECTION OMITTED</b>      |

**GRADES:**

			Grade
Section I	(Required)	- Prayer	<u>5</u>
Section II	(Required)	- Evil	<u>5</u>
Section III	A	- Justification/Health	<u>5</u>
	- OR - B	- Know who God is	<u>5</u>
<b>FINAL GRADE</b>			<u>5</u>

HAROLD L. STUCKEY, JR  
Printed Name

Harold L. Stuckey, Jr  
Signature

**NOTE: Comments include message for Committee on Preparation for Ministry.**

(Please check if applicable)

(Over for comments)

1-A Well-written + well-cited. Skilled response  
to question of Christ's role as mediator.

2- generally, well written and concise. Statement  
"In Reformed theology, then, task is not so much to  
explain origin of evil..." is true to a point.  
"separation from god" with resulting Ramifica-  
tions could have been addressed

Response to 4 elders is excellent, well-reasoned,  
and realistic: grounded in reformed theology and  
not popular myth of the times.

3- Again, excellent response to question  
PATW is concise, but sufficient content  
to render a good response

The response to PAT's concern is pastoral  
& the last line of essay is insightful.

see  
mpb

AUGUST 2006

CANDIDATE'S I.D.# 1627Y  
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**READER'S GRADING SHEET IN THEOLOGY**

**I. OVERALL EVALUATION OF THIS EXAMINATION.** A single overall grade must be assigned by the reader to this examination. The overall grade for the examination will be the average of grades received on all three questions, with rounding up or down to be determined by the reader on the basis of the examination's overall merit. **However, the examination must receive a grade of "3" or higher on at least two out of the three questions in order to be considered "SATISFACTORY."** The examination will be graded unsatisfactory if any one of the sections is omitted.

Each examination will be read independently by two persons. If both grades are 3, 4, or 5, the final grade is **SATISFACTORY**. If both grades are 1 or 2, the final grade is **UNSATISFACTORY**. If one final grade is 1 or 2, and the other final grade is 3, 4, or 5, the paper will be given a third reading to determine the final grade.

**II. THIS GRADING SHEET GOES TO THE CANDIDATE.** The reader's comments on this grading sheet should represent his or her considered appraisal of the paper, which will be read by the candidate and the committee on preparation for ministry. Use the back of the sheet for comments explaining why the grade for this paper has been assigned.

**III. GRADING EACH SECTION.** Indicate on the spaces below your grade for each section of this examination, using the following scale:

- 5 - EXCELLENT
  - 4 - GOOD
  - 3 - ACCEPTABLE
  - 2 - LESS THAN ACCEPTABLE
  - 1 - POOR
  - 0 - SECTION OMITTED
- Satisfactory  
Unsatisfactory

**GRADES:**

			Grade
Section I	(Required)	- Prayer	<u>3</u>
Section II	(Required)	- Evil	<u>2</u>
Section III	A	- Justification/Health	<u>3</u>
	- OR - B	- Know who God is	<u>    </u>
<b>FINAL GRADE</b>			<u>3</u>

JIM BENNETT  
Printed Name

J. R. Bennett  
Signature

**NOTE: Comments include message for Committee on Preparation for Ministry.**

(Please check if applicable)

(Over for comments)

I. Essay makes the connection between prayer and Christ's role as intercessor, and discusses briefly, but adequately, how Christ's role shapes a reformed practice of prayer.

II.1. Paper's explanation of "cosmic evil" is inadequate; however the other two discussions are acceptable. Perhaps it would have been better not to bring up "cosmic evil" if it weren't going to be discussed/explained/supported-by-references.

II.2. Mikala response is shallow. For example, it says nothing about our reliance on Christ to overcome evil. Helena response is shallow. For example, it says nothing of Helena's claim that the church can/should fix it, which is the main focus of Helena's position. Eun-joo's response is shallow. For example, it misses the point in Eun-joo's claim that there is no evil, only our misunderstanding of God doing good.

III.A. 1+2. Answer is adequate, but could have been stronger with a discussion/explanation of justification (salvation) and sanctification (holiness) and how Pat can participate, in both of these forms of God's grace.  
{ through works or otherwise,

AF  
mfb