

QUESTIONS FOR EXAMINATION

No one may be required to subscribe to any explicit formulation. But the Presbytery of Yukon earnestly commends this summary. We believe a list of essential tenets of the Reformed faith *includes* these doctrines and distinctives, based on the scriptures and confessions shown here. We urge nominees and candidates to look them over so that we may have a conversation about them.

In that conversation, questions that clarify a candidate's theology may be raised. These questions then become the way of fulfilling our responsibility to examine a candidate to discern whether his or her theology truly demonstrates they have received and adopted a Christian faith that is authentically Reformed. These questions are not to be viewed as either a complete listing of those areas and questions which should be asked or a specific listing of questions to be covered in their entirety. Rather, these should be looked at as guides to help initiate a conversation.

Scruples

In “the old days,” candidates for ministry would be questioned on their fidelity to the Westminster standards. They would be asked to declare scruples—areas of doctrine where they parted company with Westminster. Are there scruples you would declare with respect to the major themes of Reformed theology expressed in the Book of Confessions?

As you look through this summary of doctrines and distinctives, would you take significant exception to any of the doctrines summarized here? Would you exclude any of them from your own list of essentials or distinctives—and on what grounds, biblical or otherwise? Would you add anything to the list?

As you examine this list of doctrines and distinctives, would you say of them that you sincerely receive and adopt them as expressing essential tenets of the Reformed faith and also your faith?

Trinity

Do you consider the doctrine of the Trinity an “essential tenet”? What relevance does this doctrine continue to have, if any? Why do you believe in the doctrine of the Trinity—and why is it important?

Would you consider yourself a Trinitarian Christian in the sense expressed in the Scots Confession (3.01), the Nicene Creed, the Westminster Confession (6.013), and the Brief Statement (10.1) Explain.

Some theologians have proposed replacing Father, Son, and Holy Spirit with Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer or Comforter. Is this a valid reformulation of the Trinity? Why or why not?

Of the world's major religions, only Christianity seems to be Trinitarian. Other religions are either radically monotheist (Judaism and Islam) or polytheist (animism, Hinduism). How is Christianity's revelation of a triune God fundamentally in harmony with or different from these other major religions?

Humanity/Sin

What is your understanding about the Reformed doctrine of humanity and sin?
How would you describe the human situation that requires a savior or salvation?
Do you think people are, by nature, basically good, bad, or neither?
What is the origin of sin?

Do you believe that there are real and eternal issues of judgment at stake in life? Why or why not?

Reference Westminster (7.137) and Scots (3.03) on judgment. What do you think about this formulation of sin and judgment?

The Brief Statement (10.3) says: "We deserve God's condemnation." Do you agree with this assessment of human guilt?

Christology

How would you summarize the core truth about Jesus Christ in the Nicene Creed?
According to the Nicene Creed, who is Jesus Christ—and why does it matter?
As an issue of theological integrity and conscience, are you in agreement with the Nicene formulation (repeated in all the Reformation confessions, such as Westminster 6.044, and in C'67 9.07-08 and Brief Statement 10.2) that Jesus Christ is the unique incarnation of the eternal Son and "very God from very God"? That is, that he had an eternal divine preexistence before he "came down from heaven" and was incarnate as a human being?
what do you make of these descriptions of Christ?

What is your belief about the nature of Jesus Christ? How do you compare your belief in Jesus to those beliefs found in other religions?

Do you consider the miracle stories of Jesus' life—such as healing the sick, raising the dead, casting out demons—to be historically true? Why or why not?

Do you believe Jesus died on the Cross and was bodily resurrected by the power of God as a historical event—or do you consider this a "faith event"? Explain.

How do you understand the phrase from the Apostles' Creed: "conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary" (2.2)?

What does it mean that Jesus Christ is "Lord"? What does it mean that Jesus is "our Savior"?

Reformed Christology often uses the phrase "fully God and fully human." (For example, Brief Statement 10.4.) What is the origin of this formulation? Is this a relevant phrase describing Jesus Christ—and if so, why is it important?

How important is Jesus to the church's worship, proclamation, life, and mission? In what way(s)?

Atonement

What is your understanding of the atoning work of Christ?

Scripture speaks variously of Christ's atonement—he died for our sins (1Cor 15:3); he who knew no sin became sin on our behalf (2Cor 5:21); he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins (1Jn 2:2); he took the punishment for our sins and to satisfy God's righteous anger (Rom 3:25); he suffered to bring us to God (1Pet 3:18); on the cross he took upon himself the curse for our wrongdoing (Gal 3:13); he gave his life as a ransom (Mark 10:45). What do you understand by these phrases? Are they true or helpful? What do they mean to you personally?

Some recent theologians have considered this sacrifice and atonement language primitive, barbaric, violent, patristic, and unworthy of God. What do you think?

How central is the atonement of Christ to the Christian message?

In your understanding, what does the death of Christ accomplish for our salvation?

What is your personal relationship to the cross of Christ?

Salvation by Grace through Faith

Many regard the doctrine of "justification by faith" to be the central Reformation tenet. What does it mean to you?

In one sentence, use the words *grace, faith, righteousness, Christ, and salvation* to explain "justification."

Look at Heidelberg Q21, *What is true faith?* Explain the Reformed themes set forth in this classic formulation of faith.

What is the relationship between Christ's death on the cross, my faith, and justification?

What is the difference between justification and salvation?

Do people need to be saved? What does salvation mean?

What do you make of the Bible's declarations that Christ is the unique and sole Mediator and Savior (such as John 14:6, 1Jn 5:11-12, and Acts 4:12)?

Based on the Bible and our Reformed confessions, is it your conviction that everyone is "saved"? Is there salvation apart from Christ? Explain your understanding.

A person is uncertain whether he or she is a Christian or "saved" and turns to you for help. What would you explain or do which corresponds to your own understanding of the gospel and salvation?

In your own language, what is the gospel of Jesus Christ?

What is your understanding of heaven and hell?

Respond to the following statement: “All religions are essentially different but equally valid paths to God?”

Scripture

The Westminster Catechism says, “the holy scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the Word of God, the only rule of faith and obedience.” What does it mean to you that the scriptures are God’s Word? Would you consider Scripture “the only rule” of faith and obedience? In your view, are there other words of God from other sources than Scripture that carry comparable authority—such as the inner witness of conscience or personal revelation from the Spirit, or scientific research, or holy writings from other religions?

Explain the authority of Scripture in your own words.

What does the Bible say about its own authority?

Which of our confessions best expresses your own doctrine of biblical authority?

Inerrant, infallible, trustworthy, authoritative—is there a good word or phrase that best describes for you the inspiration and authority of Scripture?

As a prospective “ruling or teaching elder,” how well do you know the Bible’s content?

What disciplines and habits of Bible reading and study do you observe?

Elder nominees: What experiences have you had in Bible study, leading a Bible study, or teaching the Bible? (Reference G-6.0304, “They should cultivate their ability to teach the Bible.”)

The following are central, significant texts in the Bible. How familiar are you with their location in scripture and their importance to articulating the Christian faith:

- 10 commandments
- *Shema*? Where is it?
- “The Lord is my shepherd.”
- the Lord’s Prayer
- the birth narrative of Jesus
- , the Great Commission,
- the Great Commandment,
- the Sermon on the Mount,
- the Parable of the Good Samaritan,
- the Parable of the Prodigal Son,
- the story of the raising of Lazarus?
- an exploration of the relationship between law and gospel
- how Christ fulfills the Old Covenant system of priesthood and sacrifice
- “the fruit of the Spirit,”
- the “armor of God,”

- the famous “love chapter” (“love is patient...”),
- the passage about Christ emptying himself and “every knee shall bow,”
- the gallery of Old Testament heroes of faith?
- a good description of the deity of Christ...the meaning of Christ’s death...the importance of Christ’s resurrection...and justification by faith

Sovereignty of God

How important is God’s sovereignty in your theology and faith?

The Westminster Catechism says the chief end of human beings is to glorify God. What does this have to do with God’s sovereignty?

Somebody in your Christian Ed class says, “God is sovereign. So what?” How do you respond?

What is the Reformed belief regarding the sovereignty of God? How do you experience God’s sovereignty in your life?

If a parishioner came to you and said “With all of the evil in the world, God is either weak or just doesn’t care anymore.” How would you respond?

How does the problem of evil relate to the doctrine of the Sovereignty of God?

While justification is associated with Luther, God’s sovereignty is often associated with Calvin. What important Reformed themes or teachings flow from this emphasis on sovereignty?

Election

If we are elected to salvation, does it matter whether we preach the gospel or not? Why should we preach the gospel and urge people to believe?

A woman is a passionate worshipper, Bible-believer, and church-goer, but is anxious about whether she is truly elect and going to heaven. She asks you, “How can I know if I am elected?”

“Election” is a strong Reformed theme. What do we understand by it?

What teachings or emphases of John Calvin do you appreciate in our Reformed heritage?

A person made a “decision for Christ” 20 years ago in youth group. There hasn’t been any interest or involvement in church or God for the last 10 years. What would you tell them (or their Christian spouse) about how secure their salvation is?

Covenant Life/Stewardship

What is distinctively Reformed about our understanding of covenant life and stewardship?

H. Richard Niebuhr described three different Christian approaches to culture—Christ *against* culture, Christ *over* culture, Christ *transforming* culture. Which of these three is distinctively Reformed—and why?

Two huge Bible themes are *covenant* and *the kingdom of God*. What is your understanding of the relationship between these two themes? How do they come together in Christ? What is the church's role in *covenant* and *God's kingdom*?

What does it mean that Christ is the Lord of the whole of life?
How is a Reformed understanding of this different from an historic Lutheran or Roman Catholic understanding?

What is a Reformed understanding of “secular work” as a vocation or call?

The Church's Mission and the Transformation of Society

How would you summarize the church's mission?

What is the gospel of Jesus Christ—in 3 or 4 sentences?

The first evangelistic crusades by the early church demanded that people repent and that there was salvation in no one else but Jesus Christ. How might the church have a more inclusive and culturally sensitive message?

What right do we have telling people of other religions to believe in Jesus?

What does the Bible say about the church's responsibility to the rest of the world—and do you agree? What is your theology of “world mission”?

How have you personally been involved in the evangelization of the world (Mark 16:15, Matt 28:18-9, Acts 1:8)?

What does the promotion of social righteousness have to do with the church's mission?

What does “the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world” mean?

Should the church expect to see miraculous works happen today like they did in Jesus' time? Jesus and his disciples spent a lot of time healing the sick and casting out demons. Is this still part of the church's mission?

Sacraments

The Reformed tradition has some distinctive teachings about the sacraments vis-à-vis Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Anabaptist theology. How would you describe and champion the Reformed position? What advantages does it have? What practical difference does it make?

How would you justify infant baptism biblically and theologically? How do you feel personally about infant baptism? Do you have a preferred mode of baptism? How would you counsel a parent requesting infant dedication rather than baptism?

Does baptism guarantee a person is saved? How do you think Calvin would answer this question?

Does anything *supernatural* happen in the Lord's Supper? Is the bread and wine actually changed into something? Is Christ really present in the sacrament? What should I be thinking and doing to get the most out of Holy Communion?

Related Questions

Sanctification

Reformed theology historically holds a doctrine of total depravity. What do we believe about the possibility of real change, transformation, and holiness in this life? Describe the individual, social, and cosmic dimensions of this understanding of sanctification.

Should a Christian really expect to see and experience a supernatural dimension to their life? Why? What, specifically?

What is holiness? How do we grow in holiness?
Is it possible to attain moral and spiritual perfection in our present life?

Are the miraculous gifts of the Spirit listed in 1 Corinthians 12-14 available to the church today? If so, how should they be exercised by the body of Christ?

Priesthood of All Believers

In the Reformed view of the church, who is responsible for doing ministry?

What does the term "priesthood of all believers" mean to you?

Scripturally, where does the Reformed tradition get the idea of a "priesthood of all believers"?

How might the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers determine how you structure the ministry of your new church?

Theological Challenges

What do you consider the biggest theological challenges the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. is facing today?