

PC 502 P.C. (USA) History and Confessions **Fall, 2011**

Richard E. Burnett, Ph.D.
Wednesdays, 1:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.
Bowie Divinity Hall

NB: There is an assignment due in preparation for the first class meeting!

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Office hours: Mondays and Tuesdays, 2:30 - 5:30 p.m. I will make every reasonable effort to be in my office during these hours. However, due to meetings and unforeseen circumstances that may arise, my schedule may change. If you need to see me, please contact me by email or telephone to schedule an appointment.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

The main focus of the course is the history and theology of the P.C.(USA). The *Book of Confessions* receives particular emphasis, as well as the mission outreach, distinctive issues, ethos, and history of the current P.C. (U.S.A.) and her predecessors. Where pertinent, the course touches on Presbyterian polity.

Required for P.C. (USA) M.Div. students. Alternate years. Three hours.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

The purpose of this course is to gain an understanding of the history and confessional documents of the Presbyterian Church (USA). In accord with the seminary's mission statement, one of the goals set for students in this course is that they will be prepared to utilize the Church's historical and theological heritage as an important resource in their personal spiritual development and ministry.

REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS:

Students are expected to secure their own copies of all required textbooks (below). As a convenience, the seminary has a bookstore portal of the website at <http://www.erskineseminary.org/bookstore.html>. There you will find links to familiar vendors (CBD, Amazon, B&N, and Books-A-Million) and can check availability of texts, compare prices, and place orders. The ETS SBA will receive a modest percentage of the profits from students' and professors' purchases through this portal. The Erskine Campus Bookstore will carry a limited number of copies of every required text and orders for books can be placed through the Campus Bookstore.

Conversations with the Confessions, ed. Joseph Small. Louisville; Geneva Press, 2005.

P.C. (USA) Office of the General Assembly, *Book of Confessions*. Louisville: Presbyterian Church (USA), 2004. [Available here as a PDF file.](#)

(<http://www.pcusa.org/oga/publications/boc.pdf>)

RECOMMENDED BOOKS:

Briggs, C.A. *American Presbyterianism*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1885.

Cochrane, Arthur C. *Reformed Confessions of the Sixteenth Century*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003. ISBN 0-664-22694-9

Hendry, George. *The Westminster Confession for Today* ??

Leith, John H. *Assembly at Westminster: Reformed Theology in the Making* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2008. ISBN 978-1-55635-900-2

Rohls, Jan. *Theology from Zurich to Barmen*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998. ISBN 0-664-22614-0

Rogers, Jack. *Presbyterian Creeds: A Guide To The Book of Confessions*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985. ISBN 0-664-24627-3

Smylie, James H. *A Brief History of the Presbyterians*. Louisville: Geneva Press, 1996.

Ursinus, Zacharius, *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing (reprint).

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

1. All assigned readings. At each class meeting there will be a quiz on the course web site covering the readings assigned for that day. Each quiz represents 5% of the course grade.
2. Participation in class (20% of course grade). There will be resources, including a bulletin board for discussion, at an online classroom at <http://eden.erskine.edu>.
3. A take-home sample of the standard ordination examination of theological competence will be handed out on October 31 and is due at the beginning of class November 21 (30% of course grade).
4. There will be a final exam similar in content and administration to the P.C.(USA)'s standard ordination examination of theological competence, worth 30% of the course grade.

OVERALL GRADING SCALE:

See Seminary Catalogue, 85-86.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS:

The criteria for evaluation are grasp of material covered, sensitivity to the theological issues involved, originality and creativity in doing the assignments, correct use of written English, and overall contribution to the class.

Written work is due at class time on the date scheduled in the syllabus unless re-negotiated in class. Written work turned in late is subject to grade reduction. Written work turned in excessively late is subject to refusal.

SEMINARY POLICIES:

Click this link and read carefully as a part of this course syllabus contract:
http://seminary.erskine.edu/content_policies/SeminaryPoliciesforETSStudents.pdf

COURSE SCHEDULE:

September 5:

- Introduction and orientation to the course
- The meaning of confession
- Creeds and confessions in American Presbyterianism (including discussions of the Adopting Act of 1729, the history of its interpretation and use, and the formation of the *Book of Confessions*).
- An overview of the *Book of Confessions*

To prepare for this class meeting, read the introduction to each document in the *BOC*, and the excerpts from the *Minutes of the Presbyterian Church in America 1706-1788* (downloaded from the course web site.)

September 17:

To prepare for this and all the remaining sessions, study carefully the documents in the *Book of Confessions* scheduled for consideration.

- Nicene and Apostles' Creeds
- Scots Confession
- Heidelberg Catechism

October 8:

- Second Helvetic Confession
- Westminster

October 29:

- Barmen
- Confession of 1967
- Brief Statement of Faith

November 19:

- Loose ends
- Final exam