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THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

*For Christ and His Church*

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**ST 715 The Westminster Standards**

Spring 2011

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Professor of Systematic Theology

**Class Meeting Times and Location**

Fridays, 1:00 to 4:00 p.m.

February 4<sup>th</sup> to May 6<sup>th</sup>

Erskine Theological Seminary

Room 11, Reid Hall

Due West, South Carolina

## CONTACT INFORMATION:

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## OFFICE HOURS

In Columbia: Thursdays, 2:00 – 4:00 p.m.

*My office is located at the Erskine Theological Seminary Columbia Campus, 1500 Lady Street, Suite 200, Room 205. Enter by the side door off the driveway from Lady Street and go to the second floor. Due to meetings and unforeseen circumstances that may arise, my schedule may change. If you need to see me, I strongly recommend that you schedule an appointment. You are welcome to call me at home. Please make your calls between 9:00 a.m. and 9:00 p.m. Because Columbia is not convenient for many students, I will do my best to be available. We can meet before or after class or by telephone.*

## CATALOG DESCRIPTION

This course considers the origin and convening of the Westminster Assembly. Students analyze the theology of the Assembly through a study of the Westminster Standards. *Required for ARP M.Div. students. Recommended for EPC and PCA M.Div. students. Open to others. Three hours.*

## COURSE OBJECTIVES

The mission of Erskine Theological Seminary is to educate persons for service in the Christian Church. This course is particularly aimed at preparing students for the doctrinal exams in Presbyterian churches where the Westminster Standards are a part of their constitutional standards. Students in other traditions may also benefit from this course. Because of its comprehensive coverage of Biblical doctrine, it would serve well as a survey of systematic theology. Something that is often not understood about the Westminster Assembly is that it was a truly ecumenical document in its day, with significant influence among non-Presbyterians, e.g. Anglicans, Congregationalists, and Baptists. The Savoy Declaration of the Congregational Churches (1658) and the Baptist Confession of 1677 (and 1688, also called the Second London Confession of 1689), were versions of the Westminster Confession of Faith modified to fit Congregational and Baptist convictions on the doctrine of the church and the sacraments, but

with the majority of the Confession mostly unchanged. In America, both Congregationalists and Baptists adopted these versions of the Westminster Confession as their doctrinal standards. In its day, therefore, much of the Westminster Confession was truly a shared faith among Christians who held different views on the doctrine of the church, its government, and on baptism.

Consequently, according to Sydney Ahlstrom, the Westminster Assembly was very influential in the formation of “the religious tradition of three-fourths of the American people in 1776” (*A Religious History of the American People*, 1972; Yale University Press, p. 350). This course will help students of all traditions to understand better the doctrinal history of the church from the seventeenth century to the present, and to assist them in formulating their views on matters of doctrine, worship, and church government. Students will become acquainted with the historical background and context to this influential assembly, its doctrinal achievements and influence, and its views on church government and worship. By successful completion of this course, the diligent student should:

1. Know the historical background to the calling of the Assembly, and its place in English and Scottish church history.
2. Understand the purpose of the Assembly in its time.
3. Understand the views of the Assembly on doctrine, church government, and worship.
4. Understand the significant influence this Assembly has had on subsequent church history.
5. Explain the major doctrinal emphases of the Westminster Standards.
6. Acquire greater confidence and ability in oral presentation of doctrine.
7. Grow in one’s understanding of the vital connection between doctrine and life.
8. Grow in one’s understanding of the Scriptures.
9. Increase in one’s motivation to love and serve God.

### REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS

1. William Beveridge, *A Short History of the Westminster Assembly*. Revised and edited by J. Ligon Duncan III. Greenville, SC: Reformed Academic Press, 1993. [This book may be secured from the professor. It is otherwise hard to locate.]
2. *Westminster Confession of Faith*. Glasgow, Scotland: Free Presbyterian Publications, 2001. ISBN: 0902506080
3. Robert Letham, *The Westminster Assembly: Reading its Theology in Historical Context*. P & R Publishing, 2009. ISBN-10: 0875526128, ISBN-13: 978-0875526126

### RECOMMENDED BOOKS

1. *Reformed Confessions Harmonized*, Joel Beeke and Sinclair Ferguson, eds. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1999. ISBN: 0-8010-5222-X
2. For Presbyterian students, you should have a copy of your denomination’s version of the Westminster Confession of Faith and catechisms. ARP students should have a copy of *The Standards of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church*.
3. Robert Shaw, *An Exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith*. Fearn, Tain, Ross-shire. Available online at <http://www.reformed.org/documents/shaw/>.

4. R. C. Sproul, *Truths We Confess: A Layman's Guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith*. Three volumes. P & R Publishing, 2006. ISBN-10: 159638039X, ISBN-13: 978-1596380394
5. G. I. Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith: For Study Classes*. P & R Publishing, 2003. ISBN-10: 0875525938, ISBN-13: 978-0875525938
6. G. I. Williamson, *The Westminster Shorter Catechism: For Study Classes*. P & R Publishing, 2003. ISBN-10: 0875525210, ISBN-13: 978-0875525211
7. Johannes G. Vos, *The Westminster Larger Catechism: A Commentary*. Edited by G. I. Williamson. P & R Publishing, 2002. ISBN-10: 0875525148, ISBN-13: 978-0875525143
8. John H. Leith, *Creeds of the Churches: A Reader in Christian Doctrine, from the Bible to the Present*. Third edition. Westminster John Knox Press, 1983. ISBN-10: 0804205264, ISBN-13: 978-0804205269
9. Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*.\* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1996 reprint. ISBN-10: 0801082323, ISBN-13: 978-0801082320

*\* This is a valuable reference work, as it contains the major creeds and confessions which have been produced in the history of the church, with a good historical introduction to each. For the purposes of this class, it contains the changes to the Westminster Confession made in the Savoy Declaration of the Congregational Churches and those made by the Particular Baptists in their Second London Confession of 1689.*

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. **Attendance** – Preparation, attendance, and participation in class sessions are required. Bring your Bible to each class session, as well as the Westminster Confession of Faith textbook. Students must arrive on time for class and following breaks. You are expected to remain at each session until it concludes. Students who miss more than 3 class sessions or the equivalent in hours will ordinarily be asked to withdraw from the course or receive a failing grade.
2. **History Exam** – There will be an exam on the historical and theological context of the Westminster Assembly, based on the reading in Beveridge and Parts 1 and 2 in Letham. The exam will focus on factual content concerning the background, history, membership, major theological issues, and documents produced by the Assembly. There will be 15 short answer questions, requiring a word, a phrase, or a few sentences to answer. There may be multiple parts to each question. It will be worth 15% of your grade.
3. **Oral Exams** – Each student will be given an oral exam of ten questions in front of the class three times during the semester. These exams will be comparable to the oral exams given in presbyteries for candidates seeking licensure or ordination. The basis of the exam will be the assigned readings or Shorter Catechism questions for the day. The oral exam(s) will each be worth 10% of your grade. If class size prohibits three oral exams for each student, a written exam of 10 questions may be substituted.
4. **Choose One: Take Home Exam or Recitation of the Shorter Catechism.** A student will choose between reciting the Shorter Catechism or completing a take home exam of seven questions, each requiring two to three pages to answer (approx. 750 words). It will be worth 35% of your grade.

5. **Final Exam** – The final exam will be a short answer exam of 20 questions, worth 20% of your final grade. It will be comprehensive of the doctrinal portion of the class. It will not include questions on the historical background or context of the Assembly.

### GRADING AND EVALUATION

The grading scale published in the seminary catalog will be used to arrive at your final grade. The total for all exams is 100 points. The scale is:

A	95-100	B	88-90	C	80-83	D	72-75
A-	93-94	B-	86-87	C-	78-79	D-	70-71
B+	91-92	C+	84-85	D+	76-77	F	0-69

The take home exam questions are worth five points each and will receive a letter grade, which will be converted to points according to the following scale:

A	5.0	B	4.5	C	4.1	D	3.6
A-	4.7	B-	4.3	C-	4.0	D-	3.5
B+	4.6	C+	4.2	D+	3.8	F	0

### SCHEDULE OF ASSIGNMENTS

*“For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it?”*

Luke 14:28

For this class work is apportioned at the ratio of two hours outside of class for every hour in class. That means, if three hours per week are spent in class, you should plan six more hours for completing the reading and the assignments. Let the one who has ears to hear, hear!

***Dates given indicate when the assignments are to be completed!***

- |                           |   |
|---------------------------|---|
| February 4 <sup>th</sup>  | The Westminster Assembly in History <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read Letham, <i>The Westminster Assembly</i>, pp. v-119</li> </ul>   |
| February 11 <sup>th</sup> | The Westminster Assembly in History <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read all of Beveridge, <i>A Short History...</i>, pp. 1-125</li> <li>• Read in <i>Westminster Confession of Faith</i>, Prefaces, pp. 13-18</li> <li>• Read in <i>Westminster Confession of Faith</i>, pp. 345-416</li> </ul> |
| February 18 <sup>th</sup> | The Holy Scriptures <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read <i>Westminster Confession of Faith</i>, Ch. 1</li> <li>• Read Letham, ch.7</li> </ul>   |

- Memorize Shorter Catechism Qs. 1-10
- February 25<sup>th</sup>      God and the Holy Trinity
- Read in *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Ch. 2-3, (34)\*
  - Read Letham, ch. 8
  - Memorize Shorter Catechism Qs. 11-20
  - **History Exam to be given.**
- March 4<sup>th</sup>      Creation and Providence
- Read in *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chs. 4-5
  - Read Letham, ch. 9
  - Memorize Shorter Catechism Qs. 21-30
- March 11<sup>th</sup>      Humanity's Fall, God's Covenant with Man, and Christ the Mediator
- Read in *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Ch. 6-8
  - Read Letham, chs. 10-11, pp. 198-241\*
    - \* In Letham, read Excursus 2, pp. 206-223, but you will not be examined on the details of this section
  - Memorize Shorter Catechism Qs. 31-40
- March 18<sup>th</sup>      The Order of Salvation (I)
- Read in *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chs. 9-13
  - Read Letham, ch. 12, pp. 242-267
  - Memorize Shorter Catechism Qs. 41-50
- March 25<sup>th</sup>      The Order of Salvation (II)
- Read in *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chs. 14-18
  - Read Letham, ch. 12, pp. 267-292
  - Memorize Shorter Catechism Qs. 51-60
- April 1<sup>st</sup>      Law, Liberty, and Worship
- Read in *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chs. 19-21
  - Read Letham, ch. 13, pp. 293-310
  - Memorize Shorter Catechism Qs. 61-70
- April 8<sup>th</sup>      Oaths and Vows, the Civil Magistrate, Marriage and Divorce
- Read in *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chs. 22-24
  - Read Letham, ch. 13, pp. 311-318
  - Memorize Shorter Catechism Qs. 71-80
- April 15<sup>th</sup>      Church and Sacraments
- Read in *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chs. 25-27
  - Read Letham, ch. 14, pp. 319-343
  - Memorize Shorter Catechism Qs. 81-90

- April 22<sup>nd</sup>                      SPRING BREAK
- April 29<sup>th</sup>                      Baptism and the Lord's Supper
- Read in *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chs. 28-29
  - Read Letham, ch. 14, pp. 343-357
  - Memorize Shorter Catechism Qs. 91-97
- May 6<sup>th</sup>                              Church Government, Death, Resurrection, and the Last Judgment
- Read in *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chs. 30-35
  - Read Letham, chs. 14-15, pp. 357-367
  - Memorize Shorter Catechism Qs. 98-107
- May 9-12                      Final Exam period. The **final exam** will be given at the assigned time during this period.

\*Chapters 34 and 35 of the Confession of Faith mentioned above were not part of the original Westminster Confession of Faith. They are additions added later by many Presbyterian denominations. They may be found in the current confessions of various Presbyterian denominations and are available on the internet.

## ERSKINE SEMINARY POLICIES

### **Drop/Add and Course Withdrawal**

Once a student has completed, signed, and submitted his/her registration to the Registrar for this class, it is a binding contract, and billing will be based on this registration. If the student decided not to take this class, he/she must complete a “drop/add” form and secure the appropriate signatures prior to the drop/add deadline during the second week of the semester or term. If one wishes to withdraw from the course after the drop/add deadline, one must complete a withdrawal form, and tuition will be refunded on a pro rated basis. Failure to withdraw from the class properly will result in the student's receiving a grade of “F” for the course, and full tuition charges will apply. No exceptions will be made to this policy.

### **Office Hours**

My normal office hours are printed in this syllabus. However, due to meetings and unforeseen circumstances that may arise, my schedule may change. If you need to see me, I strongly recommend that you call or e-mail to schedule an appointment.

### **Required Textbooks**

Students are expected to secure their own copies of all required textbooks. 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.

### **Language about God and Humanity**

Although God transcends the distinction between male and female, the Bible and the Church's historic creeds and confessions use masculine language in reference to God. Thus, the Seminary encourages all students to retain this masculine usage when speaking and writing about God. Furthermore, the Seminary recognizes that all human beings, male and female, are created equally in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27), and believers of both sexes are fellow heirs of the grace of life (1 Pet. 3:7). Accordingly, whenever students are speaking and writing about males and females, they should use language that clearly includes both men and women (for example, by saying/writing "humanity" rather than "man" or "people" rather than "men").

### **Conduct in Theological Discussions**

Erskine Seminary is committed to the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church, and it expects its students to show respect for all who identify with that one Church. In all written work, oral presentations, and discussions both inside and outside the classroom, the Seminary expects students to conduct discussions of controversial issues in a context of respect for those with whom one disagrees. Please see the Community Life Statement in the Catalog for more information.

### **Incompletes**

The grade of "I" or incomplete is given at the discretion of the professor. A grade of "I" is normally given when a student has substantially completed the requirements for a course but has been prevented by extraordinary circumstances from completing the remainder of the course requirements. A student who wishes to request an incomplete should normally complete an incomplete form prior to the end of the semester and ask the professor to grant the request. (Under unusual circumstances, the student may communicate with the professor by phone or email rather than in person, and the professor may then agree to fill out the form at the student's request. Under exceptional circumstances, the professor may initiate the process by filling out the form on the student's behalf.) If the professor grants the request, he/she will sign the incomplete form and turn it in with his/her final grade report. An "I" in any course must be removed by March 1 for the Fall Term, April 1 for the January Term, August 1 for the Spring Term, and November 1 for the Summer Term. Only the Dean may grant extensions of incompletes beyond the established completion date. Otherwise, these grades automatically become "F."

### **Official Seminary Class Attendance Policy:**

Class participation is considered an important part of the total educational experience at Erskine Seminary. Students are expected to attend classes on a regular basis and are responsible for the mastery of all materials required in the course. Each professor will indicate in writing the specific class attendance policy at the beginning of each course. In general, students are allowed up to three hours of unexcused absence without penalty. Students wishing to take a course which meets four times over the semester **must** attend the first meeting of the course.

### **Policy Regarding Absences**

Students are required to attend all class sessions. If students have to be absent for any reason, they are still responsible for all work missed and all work due. A student who misses more than three class sessions for any reason will automatically fail the course.

## **Style and Bibliographical Formatting Requirements**

All papers must be typed/processed (12-point type, double-spaced, one-inch margins) and fully documented, following the standards in the “Style and Form Standards” (Erskine Seminary). In this course, footnotes and a bibliography are required in each paper. The paper’s cover page and bibliography are not counted towards page requirements.

## **Plagiarism**

Plagiarism is the use in writing of wording or ideas produced by others without crediting the author and/or source from which the material was taken. As the following statement indicates, plagiarism is a serious offense that undermines both the witness and the integrity of the Christian community:

*Plagiarism injures the community by inhibiting the recognition and cultivation of gifts imparted by the Spirit. Clearly unattributed use of the words and/or ideas of others fails to give appreciative recognition of their gifts. But this illegitimate appropriation of the gifts of others also blocks the recognition and cultivation of the actual gifts of the person engaged in plagiarism.*

*Plagiarism creates an atmosphere of falsehood in the community’s discernment and cultivation of gifts, both within the Christian community and in God’s larger creation. Since freedom comes only by way of truth (Jn. 8:32), such falsehood can only result in captivity, and therefore has no place in the Christian community.*

*On this basis, the Seminary adheres to the following general requirements for the acknowledgement of sources of academic work. These requirements apply to both print and electronic media.*

- 1. Quotations. Any sentence or phrase that a student uses from another source must be placed in quotation marks or, in the case of longer quotations, clearly indented beyond the regular margin. Any quotation must be accompanied (either within the text or in a note) by a precise indication of the source.*
- 2. Paraphrasing. Any material that is paraphrased or summarized must also be specifically acknowledged in a note or in the text.*
- 3. Ideas. Specific ideas that are borrowed should be acknowledged in a note or in the text, even if the idea has been further elaborated by the student.*
- 4. Bibliography. All the sources consulted in the preparation of an essay or report should be listed in a bibliography.*

*In addition to plagiarism, the following related practices are also unacceptable compromises of the truth requisite to a free community:*

- 1. Multiple submission. Failure to obtain prior written permission of the relevant instructors to submit work which has been submitted in identical or similar form in fulfillment of any other academic requirement at any institution.*
- 2. False citation. The deliberate attribution to, or citation of, a source from which the material in question was not, in fact, obtained.*
- 3. Submission of work done by someone else, either with or without that person’s knowledge. Neither ignorance of the regulations concerning academic violations nor personal extenuating circumstances are an adequate defense against charges of plagiarism. The Seminary’s provisions for “due process” apply in cases of alleged plagiarism.*

[The italicized statement above is used by permission of The Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia and Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey, based upon a document adapted by LTSP, with permission, from “Princeton University Rights, Rules and Responsibilities,” 1990 Edition. Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey.]

For details refer to the Erskine Seminary Handbook under the Honor Code.

**NOTE:** Under no circumstances will the professor accept a paper containing others’ work, either downloaded from Internet sites or used from other students’ papers. (In other words, the purpose of the assignment is for the student to reflect critically on the topic at hand and to articulate those reflections in writing.) If the student turns in such a paper to the professor, the grade is an automatic “F” or “0”. As in scholarly writing, the student may quote from a reference work using proper citations. The student may also reference others’ work in the student’s own wording but must give proper credit by citing the original source. (See Turabian for instructions on footnotes, parenthetical references, citations, reference lists, and bibliographies.)

If the student is a published author and chooses to cite from his/her copyrighted material, proper citations must be made as well. Not to do so is considered plagiarism.