

**Reformed Theological Seminary
6HT504 The History of Christianity II**

Syllabus

I. Course information

Time Wednesday nights, 7.30pm to 10.00pm
Instructor Dr Chad B. Van Dixhoorn

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 Vienna VA 22180
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Office hours: I am happy to meet with students. Please email for an appointment time.

Study night: If there is sufficient interest I will schedule two ‘study nights’, one prior to the mid-term examination, the other prior to the final exam. Interested persons can join the Van Dixhoorns for dinner at 6.00pm or come after dinner, circa 7.30pm. Dessert will typically be served at 9.30pm. Fellowship will wind down around 10.00pm.

Dinner: Each term my wife hosts a class dinner at our home at 6.00pm (spouses and fiances are welcome). After dinner we hold class in our home, from 7.30 to 10.00pm.

II. Course overview

A. Key issues in theology and apologetics in the history of the church

The history of Christianity is, among other things, a history of ideas. These ideas shape the Christian church and contribute to our convictions as believers. This course aims to provide an overview of Church history and theology from the birth of Martin Luther to the twentieth century in a breathtaking thirty-seven and a half hours of class time – supplemented, of course, by many additional hours of reading time. The class is designed to increase your knowledge of this period and to guide you in further self-study. I do hope that each one of you will get a feel for the contours of the Christian faith as they were hammered out at the Reformation, codified during the post-Reformation period, and developed in the centuries since that time.

This course aims to acquaint us with our past, and help us interpret the present. But since Christianity has been shaped as much by its failures as by its triumphs, these lectures will trace both the low and high points in the history of Christian doctrine and experience. Significant emphasis will be placed on key moments and key thinkers in church history. But we will also try to reflect on the lives of normal Christian people and ordinary Christian pastors. It was the collective experience of God’s people, often in the ordinary settings of worship, church government, or pastoral counselling that helped clarify the central truths of God’s word in the midst of persecution, heresy, and confusion.

B. In class

It is my conviction that reformation in the church today must involve a willingness not only to hear what the Holy Spirit is teaching us today, but to listen to what he has taught our brothers and sisters in the past. In this course students will have the opportunity to read and discuss primary source material most weeks as we examine the doctrine of God, the Scriptures and their formation, and the fall of humanity into sin. We will listen to what our forebears had to say about the good news of redemption planned, accomplished, and applied. We will try to deepen our understanding of the church, Christian worship, the sacraments, and the formation and relevance of creeds and confessions, each from an historical and theological perspective.

While first seeking to understand the history of Christian doctrine on its own grounds and for its own sake, most lectures contain apologetic undertones and will answer questions which are still relevant today.

Our heritage is a rich and varied one. I hope this course will equip teacher and student alike to be better articulate, defend and live out the gospel in our pluralistic society.

C. At home

Students will have extensive take-home reading, as well as readings in class. You will be well-advised to keep up with your class texts.

The number of pages read for this course, although significant, will be lower than some other three-hour classes at RTS. The main texts are an easy, even delightful read. Each of the authors has been chosen not only for their astonishing knowledge of their period, but for their ability to write in an engaging manner. Here, reading may edge toward entertainment.

Many of the primary texts, on the other hand, are more difficult to penetrate. It is for this reason that the reading load has been adjusted downward. Some of the smaller readings will be distributed in class, usually one week prior to the class in which they will be discussed. Here, reading will be work, but hopefully an investment that will pay long-term dividends.

III. Reading list

A. Secondary sources (circa 930pp.)

Carter Lindberg, *The European Reformations* (Chichester, 2010), 379 pp.

Mark A. Noll, *A history of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids, 1992), 553 pp.

B. Primary sources (circa 315pp) including, but not limited to:

Martin Luther, *On Christian Liberty*, trans. W. A. Lambert, rev. H. J. Grimm (1520; Minneapolis, 2003), 94 pp.

John Calvin v. Jacopo Sadaoleto, *A Reformation Debate*, ed. J. C. Olin (1539; Grand Rapids, 1976) pp. 29-94.

J. Grescham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (1923; Grand Rapids, 2009), 152 pp.

C. Recommended reading

Reformation

Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Reformation* (New York, 2004).

Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Reformation of Church and Dogma (1300-1700)* (Chicago, 1984).

Post-Reformation

Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A religious history of the American people* (New Haven, 1972).

E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian thought from the age of the Puritans to the civil war* (New Haven, 2003).

Mark A. Noll, *America's God: from Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (Oxford, 2002).

D. Purchase list

Carter Lindberg, *The European Reformations* (Chichester, 2010), 379 pp.

Mark A. Noll, *A history of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids, 1992), 553 pp.

Martin Luther, *On Christian Liberty*, trans. W. A. Lambert, rev. H. J. Grimm (1520; Minneapolis, 2003), 94 pp.

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IV. Assessment

A. Reading reports and responses (20% of grade)

Students will be required to submit reading reports varying of approximately 10 pages in length on each of the primary sources for the course. These reports will be due at the beginning of class and will later serve the student as aids to study and review. Typically the student will answer a question posed by the instructor.

B. Class debate (10% of grade)

Course requirements include a class debate. The debate re-enacts some of the Westminster assembly's discussions over church government. Students are to read the *The reasons presented by the Dissenting Brethren* and the *The answer of the assembly of divines to the Reasons*. This debate is an historical theological exercise and students will be expected to use arguments and exegesis as presented in these texts. Procedures will be explained in class, but be advised that if students have an existing commitment to a presbyterial or congregational form of church government, they will be permitted to espouse

positions in the debate which they already hold (unless one side is seriously underrepresented). PDF files containing these texts will be distributed to students in advance of the debate.

C. Examinations (70% of grade)

Each student's understanding of the material will be assessed, in part, by examination. There will be two take-home exams. These exams are to be proctored by a pastor or church secretary or by someone who is not a peer, family member, or fellow student. Please arrange your own proctor well in advance of the exam. (1) The first, covering the history of the early church first part of the course, will be worth 35% of the course grade. This two to three hour exam is designed to help students get a sense of their own comprehension of the course material and will aid students in preparing for the final examination. (2) The final, two to three hour exam, covers all material after the mid-term and is worth 35% of the course grade (but see "Optional research paper," below).

Typical examination questions include the following elements:

- **Essays** (perhaps choosing two or three of four or five major themes to discuss). The students discusses the history and theology of the relevant theme and, where appropriate, the differing perspectives presented in assigned texts and class lectures.
- **Chronological arrangements** Students may be asked to recall the names of fifteen to twenty theologians or heretics and list them in order of their birth.
- **Identifications** Students may be asked to
 - recall the names of ten to twelve theologians
 - the titles of one or two books by each theologian (but no less than 15 total)
 - provide two-sentence descriptions of each title
- **Map placements** Students may be asked to
 - recall the names of ten to twelve theologians and place them in the country where they served
 - recall ten to twelve church councils and synods in the country where they were held.

All persons, councils and places mentioned in the student's answers must be those within the chronological frame of the course. The same persons can be mentioned in chronological arrangements, identifications and map placements.

C. Optional research paper

Some students prefer writing a paper, and I offer the option of writing a 2,500 to 3,000 word page research paper *in place of the essay questions on one or the other of the examination*. NOTE: If you choose to write a paper that will replace the essay questions on one or the other of the two examinations, you must choose to do so BEFORE sitting that examination. If you wish to write a paper on the Reformation period, this must be communicated to me prior to the mid-term exam. If you wish to write a paper on a following period, this must be communicated to me prior to the final examination.

Evaluation: The research paper will be worth 25% of the course grade. The topic must be approved by the instructor prior to writing.

Due date: The research paper will be due *one week* later than the date of the final exam.

If you do choose to write a paper, the examination for that period will be abbreviated. The student will answer short questions only, and the exam will be evaluated at 10% of the course grade (instead of 35%). The abbreviated exam will take – at most -- one hour to complete.

V. Grading

A. RTS Grading Scale

The seminary uses the following grading system:

A	(97-100)	4.00 quality points
A-	(94-96)	3.66
B+	(91-93)	3.33
B	(88-90)	3.00
B-	(86-87)	2.66
C+	(83-85)	2.33
C	(80-82)	2.00
C-	(78-79)	1.66
D+	(75-77)	1.33
D	(72-74)	1.00
D-	(70-71)	0.66
F	(below 70)	0.00
I	(incomplete)	0.00
W,WP	(withdraw, withdraw passing)	0.00
S	(satisfactory)	0.00

The grade "I" indicates that the work required for the course was not completed. It is given only when special, extenuating circumstances (such as illness) prevent the student from completing the work or taking the examination. A written request for an extension must be submitted prior to the due date of the work concerned. If the request is granted, it remains the responsibility of the student to complete all work for the course as soon as possible. In any case, an "I" grade must be removed within the extension time granted; otherwise it will be changed to "F."

B. Considerations for grading optional research papers

In addition to providing a grading scale, I think it is helpful to see the elements I will be looking for in the optional research paper and, to some degree, in essay questions. I have adapted the following from guidelines used for undergraduates in my previous place of employment. You may find this useful. You may find it distracting (in which case, just do your best!) It is merely an attempt to try to articulate in words some of the thoughts that a grader will have in marking your paper.

Letter Grade	Addressing the question	Quality of Argument	Range of knowledge and understanding
A	Work which engages closely with the question and	Work which displays the ability to use the knowledge at the writer's disposal	Work which displays an impressively wide range of knowledge and critical

	addresses its broader implications, demonstrating the ability to engage with abstract issues. The structure of the answer will allow a clear, coherent unfolding of the writer's argument. Descriptive and factual elements will be linked effectively to the argument, and their relevance to the issues under discussion made clear.	to the very best effect. Linguistically and structurally the writing will be clear, authoritative and to the point. Where relevant students will be aware of scholarly debate or difference of opinion, but will go beyond merely paraphrasing the ideas of others and demonstrate their own conceptual command. In this sense work should be original rather than derivative. It may, more rarely, also be original in the sense of putting forward persuasive and well-supported new ideas or making unexpected conclusions.	understanding, drawing on evidence relevant to the question and showing awareness of the conclusions of other writers. Awareness of argument and interpretation will be held in an appropriate balance with factual information, so that the work is neither too generalising nor too weighed down by detail. Students will show the ability to evaluate the knowledge at their disposal, where necessary identifying apparent contradictions and resolving them.
B	Work within this class can cover a broad range of achievement. It will display understanding of the question and will deploy a range of relevant evidence in answering it. At best it will be regularly, but not consistently, analytical, perhaps failing to explore all the implications of the issue under discussion, or not bringing out the full relevance of the evidence cited. These weaknesses will be more marked at the bottom of grade B.	Work which displays the ability to deploy ideas and knowledge to create a sustained argument. The answer will shape the structure of the work rather than emerging piecemeal, but will lack the conceptual grasp of a grade A answer, demonstrating rather the ability to synthesise the view of others. At the top of the range this will be done persuasively and efficiently, but work towards the bottom of the scale, although competently structured, will lack sharpness. There may be a tendency to state ideas, rather than analysing them, or the answer may rest on unsupported claims.	Work which at best reveals a high density of relevant knowledge and deploys it effectively, demonstrating an awareness of critical issues. Nevertheless the work falls short of the highest standards in some way, perhaps by an imbalance between information and interpretation. At the bottom of the scale this imbalance may be marked, or the knowledge deployed may at times seem hackneyed and imprecise.
C	Work which may make some relevant points but is inadequately focussed on the specific question under discussion, leaving the reader to draw out the implications of what is being said. The structure of the answer is likely to be dictated by the information available to the writer, rather than by the requirements of the question under discussion. The implications of the question may have been overlooked or misunderstood.	Work in which the ideas and knowledge at the writer's disposal are presented as an end in themselves, rather than as an answer to the question at hand. Such argument as there is may be fragmentary or unfocussed, or may be explicitly addressed only in the opening and closing paragraphs. Stylistically as well as structurally the presentation of ideas may be rather clumsy, with points imperfectly explained. There is likely to be a sense of other people's ideas being repeated uncritically; and at worst the accretion of points may give rise to unreconciled contradictions, or raise issues which are not explored.	Work which displays a degree of knowledge sufficient to answer the question only at a relatively generalising level, in which statements are supported by trite or imprecise evidence, such as a tendency to simplify the thoughts of other writers or to stumble over factual detail.
D+	Work which makes little sustained attempt to develop an answer in response to the question or which does so at a superficial level. The presentation of what the writer is able to remember	Work which makes only a rudimentary attempt to develop a sustained answer, with the question treated as a peg upon which to hang any available ideas. The answer is likely to take the form of bald assertions, which may themselves be trite or hackneyed but which are not	Work which demonstrates either too little knowledge or too little understanding to provide an acceptable answer, or at worst to sustain a full length answer. The information deployed may be misremembered or vague, or may

	will, to a very marked extent, take precedence over the development of an answer in response to the question.	developed into a coherent line of thought. Structurally and linguistically the presentation may be muddled or unclear.	reveal actual misunderstanding. The views of others may be distorted.
D, D-	Work with only occasional glimmers of any answer, based mainly on what little the writer can remember.	Work which makes little if any attempt to develop a sustained argument. Any answer is likely to take the form of unsupported assertions. Structurally and linguistically the presentation is likely to be muddled or unclear.	Work which demonstrates only a vague knowledge or understanding, with either actual mistakes or insufficient detail.
F	Work which makes no sustained attempt to develop an answer in relation to the question, or where what the writer can remember does not amount to an argument.	Work which makes no attempt to develop an answer, but simply makes unsupported and often disconnected assertions. Structurally and linguistically the presentation will be muddled, unclear or otherwise deficient.	Work which demonstrates knowledge that is so deficient, vague, distorted or inaccurate, as to provide no basis for an acceptable answer.

VI. Class advice

1. I recognize that many of you work long days and experience challenging commutes. Please leave sufficient time to battle adverse traffic so that you can arrive on time.
2. Please come to each class prepared, with readings and reading reports completed. From the first class, I will call on students to discuss assigned material. It is a courtesy to teacher and fellow students alike if your class contributions are informed by prior study. There are no reading reports due for the first class.
3. Take notes of these discussions. These exchanges are a vehicle for learning and you will be expected to retain (and be tested on) the material that we discuss.
4. Please ask questions in class. When necessary, I will establish the boundaries and let you know when I need to press on in delivering information and when we should to stop to enjoy a discussion. But a certain amount of class time is set aside each week for discussion and I would be disappointed if we did not pack it with useful comments and queries.
5. Give some thought to your questions. There is no question too simple to ask (although there are many that are too difficult to answer). But please do not stop the class to regale it with stories, ride hobby-horses, play teacher to your fellow students, or ask to have a word spelled.
6. Please turn off your cell phones. Checking your mobile phone in a class discussion or lecture is as thoughtless as checking it while holding a conversation with another person.
7. Please refrain from online chatting, and the use of email in class.
7. You may quietly snack and drink and stretch in class, or pace about the back of the room if it helps you stay alert.