I. Course information

Instructor: Dr Chad B. Van Dixhoorn

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

II. Course overview

PT520 Students examine the biblical data relative to church government and the Book of Church Order of their respective denomination. The organization and function of church courts, including discipline and appeals, are considered, and parliamentary procedure is emphasized.

The class is a two-day intensive discussion about church polity and the biblical foundations for church government. Rather than talk our way through a book of church order, we will look at the issues underlying our denominations’ texts, culminating in a discussion of the Book of Church Order. This will keep us all awake, and give students a better grasp of their denomination’s polity, and help students distinguish between matters of Presbyterian conviction and matters of decency and good order.

The two days will be divided into seven discussion periods. Each session requires prior reading and reflection. ALL reading and digests must be done prior to the start of class.

III. Assignments

The grade is based on digests of required readings (75%), as well as class discussion and debate (25%). Point form or bullet-point outlines are acceptable for all digests. These are intended to be useful for your use in class and for your later reference. Think of them as your reading notes.

Discussion A.
For our first session, read items 1-6 and answer two questions:
1. In 2-3 pages, what does Calvin say about church government in the *Institutes* and why?
2. In 2-3 pages, what do the five forms of church government have in common, and where do they differ?

**Discussion B.**
For our second discussion, please read items 7-8 and digest the material by Rutherford (1-2 pages) and Gillespie (2-3 pages).

In this second discussion the class will be divided into two groups. One will defend Presbyterian ecclesiology and the other will defend Episcopalian ecclesiology. Students will be given some class time to develop their arguments, but pls come to class with some ideas and resources.

You may wish to skim item 9 in advance of this session. Item 9 is not required reading.

**Discussion C.**
For our third discussion, please read item 10. Please write a 1-2 page summary of the major aspects of church government that differ between this Directory and the form of government in your denomination or local church. You can compare and contrast the two documents using point form and two parallel columns, if you so wish. Conclude with a paragraph summarizing any insights that you found helpful.

In this third discussion period the class will be divided into two groups. One will defend Presbyterian ecclesiology and the other will defend Congregational or Independent ecclesiology. Students will be given some class time to develop their arguments, but pls come to class with some ideas and resources.

You may wish to skim item 11 in advance of this session. Item 11 is not required reading. If you choose to read this text, please note that the first three unnumbered pages of text contain the brief statement of the assembly FOR a key aspect of Presbyterian church government. The forty pages which follow are written by the Congregationalist minority. The eighty pages which follow comprise the assembly’s majority (Presbyterian) response to the Congregationalist minority report.

**Discussion D.**
For the fourth discussion session please read items 12-16. Digest the argument of each piece in 1-2 pages, focusing especially on Miller’s arguments in his essay, “Presbyterianism” (2-3 pages).

**Discussion E.**
For the fifth discussion session read items 17-20 and provide a 2-page digest for Hodge and for Thornwell, and a 1-page digest for each of the other two readings.
During this session students will be divided into two groups, one in favour of Hodge, and the other of Thornwell. Limited time will be given to formulate arguments, after which we will entertain our third class debate.

You may wish to read item 2, by Craig Troxel, analyzing an aspect of the Hodge-Thornwell debate. You are not required to read item 21.

**Discussion F.**
For the sixth session please read items 22 and 23. Digest the arguments of each of Murray’s essays into one page each, and Clowney’s essay into one page. Be prepared to debate in class (1) two or three office views and (2) term or life eldership.

**Discussion G.**
Read your denomination’s directory for church government or Book of Church Order. Skim Robert’s rules. Be prepared to discuss your church’s polity, and to entertain questions in class. We’ll talk together about how best to use these texts as presbyters.

**IV. Required and recommended reading**

**For purchase**
Calvin, *Institutes*
Hall and Hall, eds., *Paradigms in polity*
John Murray, *Collected works*, vol. 2

**Supplied by instructor**
PDFs of assigned Gillespie reading, plus optional readings

**On reserve at RTS**
Mark Brown, ed., *Order in the offices*

2) John Calvin, *Institutes*, VI.iii, ix, xi, xii (60 pages)
8) George Gillespie, *A Treatise of miscellany questions* (1649), in *Works*, Chapters 1-4, 6-8 (35 pages)
9) [RECOMMENDED BUT NOT REQUIRED] Smectymnuus (i.e., Stephen Marshall, Edmund Calamy, Thomas Young, Matthew Newcomen, William Spurstow), *An answer to a booke entituled An hvmble remonstrance in which the originall of liturgy, episcopacy is discussed: and quares propounded concerning both: the parity of bishops and presbyters in Scripture demonstrated: the occasion of their imparity in antiquity discovered: the disparity of the ancient and our moderne bishops manifested: the antiquity of ruling elders in the church vindicated: the prelaticall church bownded* (London, 1641) (104 pages).


18) Thornwell, ‘Church-Boards and Presbyterianism’, in Hall and Hall, eds., *Paradigms in polity*, pp. 558-584 (27 pages)


20) J. Aspinwall Hodge, ‘What is presbyterian law?’ in Hall and Hall, eds., *Paradigms in polity*, pp. 477-493 (17 pages)


V. Grading

**A. RTS Grading Scale**
The seminary uses the following grading system:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Score Range</th>
<th>Quality Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>97-100</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>94-96</td>
<td>3.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>91-93</td>
<td>3.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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."

**VI. Class advice**

1. I recognize that many of you work long days and have awkward 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 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 do not use web access for web-surfing, chatting, and emailing.
8. You may quietly snack and drink and stretch in class, or pace about the back of the room if it helps you stay alert.