

Presbyterian History and Confessions (HT615)

Instructor: Gary S. Eller, Ph.D.

Telephone: 888-244-6714

Email: GEller@dbq.edu

Introduction:

Welcome to the summer online class on the history, creeds, and confessions of the Presbyterian Church. The course is designed for all who want to learn more about the theology of the Reformed churches. Most of you are seeking training to become a Teaching Elder or Commissioned Ruling Elder in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). In any case, I am delighted to share this theological journey with you.

We will be drawing upon a variety of resources this semester with particular attention given to classic and modern Reformed theological confessions and catechisms. These resources will be helpful for both Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) students and non-Presbyterians.

We will follow a “seminar” method which combines readings, discussions, lectures, and instructor’s notes. As we read texts and share our reflections, I will encourage you to pursue key themes through follow-up comments and questions. Since this is an online course, you will be able to make your comments and respond to questions at any time during the week of that particular assignment. Hopefully, you will find this both a convenient and sound approach to learning.

Course objectives: These are our goals for the semester:

1. To give you a working knowledge of the major themes in Reformed theology.
2. To familiarize you with the *Book of Confessions* of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).
3. To engage you in a faith dialogue with these confessions and catechisms.
4. To share with you the history of the Presbyterians both in the United States and abroad.

You will not be asked to memorize the confessions or catechisms. Instead, you will become familiar enough with them that you can draw upon them to discuss your own faith convictions with others in an informed way. This is an important part of your preparation to take vows as either a Commissioned Ruling Elder or Teaching Elder in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) as well as ordination exams. If you are a member of another denomination then you will discover how these confessions and catechisms have impacted the broader Church and where they continue to impact your tradition.

Required texts:

Leith, John H. *An Introduction to the Reformed Tradition: A Way of Being the Christian Community*. rev. ed. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981.

P.C. (U.S.A.) *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I, The Book of Confessions*. Louisville: Office of the General Assembly. (also available online from www.pcusa.org)

Longfield, Bradley J. *Presbyterians and American Culture: A History*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013.

Rogers, Jack. *Presbyterian Creeds: A Guide to the Book of Confessions*. Westminster John Knox, 1991.

Small, Joseph D., ed. *Conversations with the Confessions*. Louisville: Geneva Press, 2005.

Recommended for further study (not required):

Alston, Wallace N., Jr. and Michael Welker. *Reformed Theology: Identity and Ecumenicity*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2003.

Alston, Wallace N., Jr. *The Church of the Living God: A Reformed Perspective*. rev. ed. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002.

Balmer, Randall and John R. Fitzmier. *The Presbyterians*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994.

Barnes, M. Craig. *Body and Soul: Reclaiming the Heidelberg Catechism*. Louisville: Congregational Ministries Publishing, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 2012.

Barth, Karl. *Credo*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962.

Barth, Karl. *The Theology of the Reformed Confessions*. Darrell L. Guder and Judith J. Guder, trans. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002.

Bierma, Lyle D. *An Introduction to the Heidelberg Catechism: Sources, History, and Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005.

Boesak, Alan A. *Black and Reformed: Apartheid, Liberation, and the Calvinist Tradition*. Marynoll, NY: Orbis, 1984.

Coalter, Milton, et al., *The Reforming Tradition: Presbyterians and Mainstream Protestantism*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992.

Cochrane, Arthur C., ed. *Reformed Confessions of the Sixteenth Century*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003.

Dowey, Edward A., Jr. *A Commentary on the Confession of 1967 and An Introduction To The Book of Confessions*. Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1996.

Guthrie, Shirley C. *Always Being Reformed: Faith for a Fragmented World*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996.

Guthrie, Shirley C. *Christian Doctrine*. rev. ed. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994.

Hart, D. G. and Mark A. Noll, eds. *Dictionary of the Presbyterian and Reformed Tradition in America*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P and R Publishing, 2005.

Hesselink, I. John. *On Being Reformed: Distinctive Characteristics and Common Misunderstandings*. Ann Arbor: Servant Books, 1983.

Leith, John H. *Assembly at Westminster: Reformed Theology in the Making*. Richmond: John Knox Press, 1963.

Leith, John H. *Basic Christian Doctrine*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993.

Leith, John H., ed. *Creeds of the Churches*. 3rd ed. Louisville: John Knox Press, 1982.

Longfield, Bradley J. *The Presbyterian Controversy: Fundamentalists, Modernists, and Moderates*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.

McKim, Donald K., ed. *Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992.

McKim, Donald K. *Introducing the Reformed Faith: Biblical Revelation, Christian Tradition, Contemporary Significance*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001.

McKim, Donald K., ed. *Major Themes in the Reformed Tradition*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992.

McKim, Donald K. *Presbyterian Beliefs: A Brief Introduction*. Louisville: Geneva Press, 2003.

McKim, Donald K. *Presbyterian Questions, Presbyterian Answers: Exploring Christian Faith*. Louisville: Geneva Press, 2003.

McKim, Donald K. *More Presbyterian Questions, More Presbyterian Answers: Exploring Christian Faith*. Louisville: Geneva Press, 2011.

Pauw, Amy Plantinga and Serene Jones, eds. *Feminist and Womanist Essays in Reformed Theology*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006.

Placher, William C. and David Willis-Watkins. *Belonging to God: A Commentary on A Brief Statement of Faith*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992.

Rice, Howard L. *Reformed Spirituality: An Introduction for Believers*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991.

Rogers, Jack. *Reading the Bible and the Confessions the Presbyterian Way*. Louisville: Geneva Press, 1999.

Wilmore, Gayraud S. *Black and Presbyterian: The Heritage and the Hope*. rev. ed. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998.

van Wijk-Bos, J. W. H. *Reformed and Feminist*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991.

Weekly assignments:

The confessions and catechisms are found in *The Book of Confessions* (BC) with the exception of the ecumenical versions of the creeds. There are two books by Donald K. McKim which are identified in the assignments as *PB* (*Presbyterian Beliefs*) and *PQ* (*Presbyterian Questions, Presbyterian Answers*) which are **not required** but which many students of the creeds and confessions have found very helpful. Additional materials may be assigned during the course and posted on the HT615 site. Usually, these are journal articles. The other books listed below are from our Required texts.

Week 1 The Nicene Creed (ecumenical version is in *The Presbyterian Hymnal* (1990))
BC, pp. xi-3; *PQ*, pp. xi-9; Rogers, pp. 17-56; Small, pp. ix-31

Week 2 Lecture: The Apostles' Creed (ecumenical version is in *The Presbyterian Hymnal* (1990))
BC, pp. 5-7; *PB*, pp. xi-10; *PQ*, pp. 11-20; Rogers, pp. 57-76; Leith, pp. 17-31

Week 3 Read: The Scots Confession
PB, pp. 11-33; *PQ*, pp. 21-28; Rogers, pp. 79-95; Leith, pp. 32-55; Longfield, pp. 1-51; Small, pp. 33-50; **Assignment #1 by Friday, June 24**

Week 4 Read: The Heidelberg Catechism
PB, pp. 51-64; *PQ*, pp. 29-36; Rogers, pp. 96-115; Leith, pp. 86-130

Week 5 Read: The Second Helvetic Confession
PB, pp. 37-50, 65-70; *PQ*, pp. 37-53; Rogers, pp. 116-139

Week 6 Read: The Westminster Confession of Faith
PB, pp. 71-76; *PC*, pp. 140-171; Rogers, pp. 140-171

Week 7 Read: The Shorter Catechism
PB, pp. 77-87 and *PQ*, pp. 55-70; Longfield, pp. 53-147;
Small, pp. 51-68

Week 8 Read: The Larger Catechism
Assignment #2 by Friday, July 29

Week 9 Read: The Theological Declaration of Barmen
PB, pp. 91-102; *PQ*, pp. 71-86; Rogers, pp. 175-201; Small, pp. 69-91;
Longfield, pp. 149-174;

Week 10 Read: The Confession of 1967
PB, pp. 103-110; *PQ*, pp. 87-94; Rogers, pp. 202-230; Small, pp. 93-149;
Longfield, pp. 175-203

Week 11 Read: A Brief Statement of Faith
PB, pp. 111-123; *PQ*, pp. 95-113; Rogers, pp. 231-270; Small, pp. 151-221

Week 12
Rogers, pp. 271-283; Small, pp. 223-237; Leith, pp. 212-223;
**Assignment #3 by Friday, August 26 and your Personal Statement of Faith
by the following Monday, August 29.**

****Note: If the Belhar Confession is approved by the General Assembly this summer,
then we will include some study material on that confession of faith.**

Written assignments and grading:

There are four written assignments. The due dates are noted in the weekly assignments above. Three will be on Presbyterian history. Each of these three assignments should be 3-4 pages, double-spaced and will count 30% of your final grade. You are free to choose a topic related to the history and theology of the confessions that we have studied to that date. Topics must be emailed to GEller@dbq.edu in advance and receive approval from the instructor.

The fourth writing assignment will be your Personal Statement of Faith. It should be a one page statement plus a 7-10 page commentary relating your affirmations to the teachings of the confessions. This assignment will count 25%.

The remainder of your grade will be a combination of timely, informed participation in posted class discussions (15%) and thoughtful reflection on the theology of the confessions (30%).

Course design:

1. Each week's assignments and information will be posted by Friday evening, 7 pm (CDT) of the **preceding week**, unless otherwise noted. This will give you a full weekend plus Monday and Tuesday to do some reading and make your first post. The first week of the course is, by necessity, an exception. In this case, the first week's materials will all be open for you by Noon (CDT), Friday, June 3.
2. Instructor notes will be provided to underscore key points in the weekly readings. These notes are a study aid but cannot replace the readings. Always be sure to read the creeds and confessions in full. Secondary materials should be read next.
3. You will be assigned to a discussion group. The deadline for initial discussion group posts is Tuesday evening with responses due by Thursday evening. I will usually offer comments by Saturday evening.

Group discussion:

These are the minimum requirements:

1. Write a post in response to the assigned discussion question(s) for the week. Each post should be no less than two paragraphs long. Your post should: answer the question asked, demonstrate what you have learned, and include your personal viewpoint on the topic. The deadline for initial posts is Tuesday evening.
2. Write a response to ONE of the initial posts in your discussion group. Your responses should be at least one paragraph in length. The response should contribute to the discussion and not simply restate the initial post or say, "I agree" or "I disagree." You may question and disagree so long as your post is stated in an academically and socially appropriate manner. Deadline for responses is Thursday evening.
3. **You may read posts and responses in other discussion groups. However, you may only post in your discussion group.** You are encouraged to exchange ideas and comments with any other participants as well as your group through **The Virtual Café**.
4. Once you have made your required posts and read everything including instructor responses then you are finished and can sign off on the discussion.

Additional administrative items:

1. Late Policy – this online course is designed for interaction so deadlines are

important. If you fall behind then you cannot participate as fully in the course. Exceptions to this policy must be approved by the instructor prior to deadlines.

2. Plagiarism – definitions and consequences are stated in the current Student Handbook.
3. Inclusive Language – it is a course expectation that you will use inclusive language in all posts, assignments, and communications.
4. Electronic Communications – you are expected to check the UDTS Learning site regularly for course updates. Check the News Forum and your UDTS email several times a week.
5. Tech Support – direct your technical questions to Nicky Story, Director of Seminary Technology Services (NStory@dbq.edu or SemTech1@dbq.edu or 563-589-3647), not your instructor. The spirit would be willing, but my technical skills are much more limited than Nicky's!
6. Brief videos will be posted on the course site to stimulate your thinking and to encourage discussion of the confessions.
7. Subject to Change Clause – this syllabus, course calendar, and other attending materials are subject to change during the semester by the instructor.