Reformed Theological Seminary – 06PT520 Church Polity (1 credit)
Syllabus 2014

I. Course information
Time: Friday 9:00-4:30
       Saturday 9:00-4:30
Dates: December 12-13, 2014

Instructor: Dr Chad B. Van Dixhoorn
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Email: cvandixhoorn@rts.edu
Office hours: Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 10:00am – 12:00pm; or by appointment

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: Early Presbyterian polities
For our second session, read items 1-6 and answer two questions:
   1. In 1-2 pages, what do the six forms of church government have in common?
   2. In 1-2 pages, where do they differ?
   3. In 1-2 pages, note where the Westminster assembly’s directory differs from the directory for government employed by your church.

Discussion B: Basic principles
For our first session, read items 7-9.
   1. In 1-3 pages, outline the arguments made by Calvin in each assigned chapter.
   2. In 1-3 pages, outline Samuel Miller’s argument.
3. On one page, list what you think are the essential elements of a Presbyterian church polity.

**Discussion C: Presbyterianism and Episcopacy debate**

For our second discussion, read **items 10-11**:

1. Please read items **10-11** and digest the material by Rutherford (1-2 pages) and Gillespie (2-3 pages).
2. In 2-3 pages outline the main distinctives of Episcopalian church government (use item 12 as a resource, or some other source of your choosing).
3. Familiarize yourself with the basic contents of **items 12 and 13**, which will provide raw materials for the class debate.

In this third discussion the class will be divided into two groups. One will defend Presbyterian ecclesiology and the other will defend Episcopalian ecclesiology. The question put to the class will be, “Shall this body adopt an Episcopal polity that is hierarchical in structure, with regional bishops over local presbyters?” Please keep this in mind while you are reading.

Students will be given some class time to develop their arguments, but pls come to class with some ideas and resources.

**Discussion D: Presbyterianism and Congregationalism**

For our third discussion, please familiarize yourself with **item 14**. This provides the raw materials for our class debate. 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.

In this fourth discussion period the class will be divided into two groups. One will defend Presbyterian ecclesiology and the other will defend Congregational or Independent ecclesiology. The question put to the class will be, “Does the Scripture hold forth that many particular [or local] congregations may be under one presbyterial government?” Please keep this in mind while you are reading.

Students will be given some class time to develop their arguments, but pls come to class with some ideas and resources.

**Discussion E:**

For the fourth discussion session please read **items 15-16**.

1. In 2-3 pages, explain the debate over subscription to the Westminster Confession of Faith and the importance of the Adopting Act.
2. In 1-2 pages, indicate the practice of your local presbytery or denomination with respect to subscription. This will probably require a discussion with one or more ministers in your presbytery or denomination.
Discussion F.
For the fifth discussion session read item 17.
   1. Provide a 2-3 page summary of the history of the dispute and the issues at stake.
   2. Familiarize yourself with items 18 and 19, which will provide the raw materials for the class debate.

During this session students will be divided into two groups, one in favour of Hodge’s position, and the other of Thornwell’s. The question put to the class will be, “Shall we retain the use of church boards in our denomination?” Please keep this in mind while you are reading.

Students will be given some class time to develop their arguments, but pls come to class with some ideas and resources.

Discussion G.
For the sixth session please read items 20 and 21.
   1. Digest the argument of Murray’s two chapters essay into one page each.
   2. Digest Clowney’s essay into one page.

During this session students will be divided into two groups, one in favour of Murray’s position, and the other of Clowney’s. The question or statement put to the class for debate will either be, “Shall we adopt term eldership?” OR “We believe that the Bible favour’s a two office polity.” Please keep this in mind while you are reading.

Students will be given some class time to develop their arguments, but pls come to class with some ideas and resources.

Discussion H.
Read your denomination’s directory for church government or Book of Church Order (item 22). Be prepared to discuss your church’s polity, and to entertain questions in class. During this session the instructor will ask questions based on your Book of Church Order. If multiple denominations are present, the class will divide into teams, seeing which denomination team is first able to answer the question with a specific citation from their Book of Church Order.

Discussion I.
Purchase, skim, and bring to class a copy of Robert’s rules or a digest thereof (item 23). Students do not need to own the latest edition.

In this final session we will stage a mock presbytery, practicing church polity according to Robert’s rules of order.

IV. Required and recommended reading
Recommended for purchase
Calvin, Institutes
Hall and Hall, eds., *Paradigms in polity*
John Murray, *Collected works*, vol. 2

**Supplied by instructor via Dropbox invite**
PDFs of assigned Gillespie reading, plus recommended but not assigned readings

**On reserve at RTS**
Mark Brown, ed., *Order in the offices*
Calvin, *Institutes*
Hall and Hall, eds., *Paradigms in polity*
John Murray, *Collected works*, vol. 2

**Reading list**

**A: Early Presbyterian polities**

**B: Basic Principles**
7) John Calvin, *Institutes*, IV.iii; ix.1-7, 13-14; xii.1-10 (20 pages)

**C: Presbyterianism and Episcopacy**
12) [RECOMMENDED BUT NOT REQUIRED] Smectymnuus (i.e., Stephen Marshall, Edmund Calamy, Thomas Young, Matthew Newcomen, William Spurstow), *An answer to a booke entitvled 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 prelatical church bounded (London, 1641), (PDF, 104 pages).

13) [RECOMMENDED BUT NOT REQUIRED] Joseph Hall, Episcopacie by divine right asserted (London, 1640), (PDF, 262 pages)

D: Presbyterianism and Congregationalism

14) [RECOMMENDED BUT NOT REQUIRED] Westminster assembly, Reasons of the dissenting brethren (London, 1648), (PDF, 120 pages)

E: Subscription


16) ‘The adopting act’, in Hall and Hall, eds., Paradigms in polity, only pp. 348-350 (3 pages)

F: Polity and Ecclesiology


19) [RECOMMENDED BUT NOT REQUIRED] Thornwell, ‘Church-Boards and Presbyterianism’, in Hall and Hall, eds., Paradigms in polity, pp. 558-584 (27 pages)

G: Offices in the church

20) John Murray, Works, vol. 2, chapters 26-30 (15 pages)


H: Your denomination’s polity

22) Read your book of church order.

I: Robert’s rules

23) Skim Robert’s rules of order, or a digest thereof. Students do not need to own the latest edition.

V. Schedule

FRIDAY

9:00 - 10:00 Lecture: Who cares about church polity?
10:00 - 10:45 Discussion A: Early polities
10:45 - 11:00 BREAK
11:00 - 12:00  Discussion B: Basic principles
12:00 – 12:45  Planning period for Discussion C
12:45 - 1:45  BREAK (lunch)
1:45 - 2:45  Discussion C: Episcopacy v. Presbyterianism debate
2:45 - 3:30  BREAK and planning period for Discussion D
3:30 – 4:30  Discussion D: Presbyterianism v. Congregationalism debate

SATURDAY
9:00 - 9:30  Discussion E: Subscription?
9:30 - 10:15  Planning period for Discussion F
10:15 - 10:45  Discussion F: Hodge v. Thornwell debate
10:45 - 11:30  BREAK and planning time for Discussion G
11:30 – 12:45  Discussion G: Murray & Clowney (incl. term, and 2 v 3, office)
12:45 - 1:45  BREAK (lunch)
1:45 - 3:00  Discussion H: Church polity
3:00 - 3:15  BREAK
3:15 - 4:30  Discussion I: Polity in practice

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

<table>
<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>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>94-96</td>
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<td>B+</td>
<td>91-93</td>
<td>3.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>88-90</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>86-87</td>
<td>2.66</td>
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<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>83-85</td>
<td>2.33</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>below 70</td>
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<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>incomplete</td>
<td>0.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>W,WP</td>
<td>withdraw, withdraw passing</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>satisfactory</td>
<td>0.00</td>
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</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."

**VII. 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.
3. Take notes of these discussions. These exchanges are a vehicle for learning and you will be expected to retain 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 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.