The Westminster Standards 06ST624 (2 credits)
Prof. Chad Van Dixhoorn

Dates:
- January 4 (Monday) 9am to 5pm
- January 5 (Tuesday) 9am to 5pm; 7pm to 10pm
- January 6 (Wednesday) 9am to 5pm

Class locations:
- Tysons Campus, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, 9am to 5pm
- Van Dixhoorn home, Tuesday evening, 7pm to 10pm

Class dinner:
- January 5 (Tuesday) 5:30pm to 7pm
  Home of Chad and Emily Van Dixhoorn
  348 Ayr Hill Ave. NE
  Vienna VA 22180
  703.255.2935

Email: evandixhoorn@rts.edu
Work Phone: 703.448.3393

I. Course description
The primary purpose of this course is to help the theologically literate become theologically fluent. The first part of the class will briefly treat the history of the Westminster assembly (1643-1653) and select theological topics. The second part of the class will engage with the texts that Presbyterians adopt as their confessional standards. Thus readings, assignments, and lectures will explore the Westminster assembly, Confession of Faith, and catechisms. Participants will be equipped to defend our confessional standards from the Scriptures, and lectures will visit the historic contexts of these classic documents.

II. Course overview
Students of theology need to be steeped in the Word of God and familiar with the best statements of faith produced by the Christian church. These are prerequisites for usefulness to the church. For confessional Presbyterians, that means knowing the Bible and understanding the Westminster assembly’s catechisms, and the Confession of Faith as revised between 1789 and 1903. For non-Presbyterian students, a study of the Westminster assembly and its texts remains theologically and spiritually enriching, and useful for ecumenical fellowship and dialogue within the international Reformed community.

This course provides an opportunity to contemplate a confession and catechetical inheritance. It is also designed to (1) aid students in employing these texts as confessional documents per se, (2) promote from the Scriptures the theology they teach, and then (3) defend that theology persuasively. This course will endeavour to foster these strengths, and either offer students a survey of Christian doctrine, prepare men for ordination, or refresh or revitalize men who are already ordained servants.
The class will be comprised of three days of lecture and discussion. Students will be required to read one history of the assembly and one commentary on the Confession, as well as selected articles. Articles, as well as lectures, will discuss aspects of and themes in our confessional standards.

I cannot respond in advance to emails about the Westminster assembly or the Westminster Standards, but I look forward to speaking with you during our hours together. If you need to speak about the syllabus, or have questions related to the class, please email me.

III. Reading list

A. Primary sources
   - *The Westminster Confession of Faith*
   - *The Westminster Larger Catechism*
   - *The Westminster Shorter Catechism*
   - *The Assembly’s “Shorter Confession”* (to be supplied)

B. Commentaries (read one of the following which you have NOT read previously)
   - A. A. Hodge, *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (many editions; recently, Banner of Truth)

C. Chapters and articles (including)
   - S. Rehman, “A particular defence of particularism,” *Journal of Reformed Theology* (pre-publication copy)

D. Optional reading
IV. Assessment

Please come to our first class with assignment ‘A’ completed, and the Westminster Confession of Faith, Larger Catechism, and Shorter Catechism memorized. That last bit was an attempt at humour. Please come to class having completed assignment ‘A’ and having carefully read these three texts.

Assignment ‘C’ will be completed in class.

Assignments ‘B’ and ‘D’ are due on the date of the final examination. All assignments should be double spaced, with a standard font (Times New Roman 12 pt) and margins (1”).

**A. Confessional comprehension (10% of grade)**
Render the first two chapters of the Confession in modern English.

**B. Response papers (35% of grade)**
1. Commentary: summarize in 1-2 pages your commentator’s approach to the Confession. Indicate that you read the entire volume.
2. Provide in 3-4 pages your own commentary on any paragraph of the Westminster Confession of Faith. Imagine the commentary as a teaching tool for your church.
3. In 3-4 pages, explain how you would argue for your own interpretation of a disputed reading of a paragraph in the Westminster Confession Faith.

**C. Class debate (20% of grade)**
Course requirements include a class debate. The debate will centre either on the ecclesiological disputes of the assembly or on a current debate in the interpretation of the Confession.

**D. Final exam (35% of grade)**
The course will conclude with a final exam focusing on the Confession of faith. Careful reading of the Confession, a commentary, and diligent attention to lectures will amply prepare students for the exam.

**V. Class advice**
1. I recognize that these are long days. Please come to class well caffeinated. You may quietly snack and drink and stretch in class if the seminary permits it, or pace about the back of the room if it helps you stay alert. Provided you don’t hum or sing, I will remain supportive of your staying-awake activities.
2. 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.
3. Please do not check email or chat online during class. Of course you should feel free to use your breaks for this purpose.
4. Please come to class on time.
5. Please come to each class prepared, with all readings and the appropriate assignments 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.
6. Take notes of all discussions and debates. These exchanges are a vehicle for learning and we hope you will retain the material that we discuss.
7. 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 day for discussion and I would be disappointed if we did not pack it with useful comments and queries.
8. Give some thought to your questions. There is no question too simple to ask (although there are many that are too difficult for me 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.