SYLLABUS - STMA 589 - PRESBYTERIAN POLITY & HISTORY

School of Theology and Ministry
Seattle University
900 Broadway
Seattle, WA 98122

Winter, 2010

Presbyterian Polity: 3 credits
Building/Room
Thursdays, 1:30-4:20 p.m.

Instructor: Dennis J. Hughes
Office by arrangement
Office hours by appointment
Email: dennis@northminsterpres.org

Required Texts:
Book of Confessions: Study Edition (Geneva Press, Louisville, 1999)
Book of Order 2009-2011 (Office of the General Assembly, PCUSA, Louisville)
[Available from instructor at cost: $10.00]
Jack Rogers, Reading the Bible and the Confessions the Presbyterian Way (Geneva Press, Louisville, 1999)
William E. Chapman, History and Theology in the Book of Order: Blood on Every Page (Witherspoon Press, Louisville, 1999) OPTIONAL

Supplemental Materials: Recent Standard Ordination questions in polity for discussion and final exam, supplied by instructor

On reserve in the library: Book of Order: Annotated Edition (Office of the General Assembly, PCUSA, Louisville) for research into the history of amendments

Course Description:

Goals: The polity course has as its primary goal the preparation of seminarians to successfully pass their Presbyterian Standard Ordination Examination in Polity. This requires knowledge of the Constitution, Part I, the Book of Confessions, and Part II, the Book of Order. The Exam requires, however, that the student be able to answer situational, pastoral questions typically encountered in the practice of ministry, rather than a straight recitation of the "law" of the denomination. The nature of the questions reflects centuries of Presbyterian experience of living within a particular, even peculiar, ethos. Every Presbyterian pastor functions as a resource on polity and a parliamentarian in the Session (local congregational governing body) and participates regularly in Presbytery (regional governing body), where all procedures, including amendment of the Book of Order itself, are governed by these foundational documents. Further, the Directory for Worship, the central section of the Book of Order, regulates the liturgical life of the Presbyterian Church and guides pastors, in cooperation with Sessions, in the planning and celebration of the liturgical life of the congregation. A second, equally important goal is, therefore, the preparation of seminarians for their role as minister and

“teaching elder,” where the ability to interpret and use the Confessions and polity of the church are matters of frequent, sometimes daily, practice.

Objectives and Student Outcomes: Working knowledge of the polity of the PCUSA; confidence in one's knowledge as one takes the Standard Ordination Exams; formation of ministers for their role as presbyters in every governing body (Session, Presbytery, Synod, General Assembly); deeper appropriation of the Presbyterian ethos within an ecumenical setting; knowledge of and ability to practice within the liturgical standards of the Directory for Worship.

Requirements:
Attendance: Expected (no unexcused absences)
Participation: Everyone will be invited and expected to participate in class discussions and response to presentations in a small group seminar style of class. Students will be invited to help design and carry out several small group assignments.
Readings: As indicated in the schedule below
Written Assignments: For each class meeting, a paragraph or two of reaction/reflection/ critique of the assigned reading materials, together with 3-5 questions for discussion. These are to be prepared in sufficient copies to distribute to instructor and class members. [These assignments, together with class participation, will represent 25% of the grade for the class.]

A 5-6 page paper on a topic drawn from the Book of Order, in consultation with the instructor or a complete liturgy for Sunday worship including the celebration of a Sacrament, together with a discussion of the appropriate authorizations, participation, actions, material elements, and other considerations according to the Directory for Worship. Due on February 4, with copies for instructor and class members to facilitate class discussion. [25% of grade]

A one-page Statement of Faith (a draft toward preparation for Ordination Examination in the student's Presbytery) with 5-6 pages of background and argument from the Constitutional documents and Scripture. The Statement is to be read aloud (as will be required in Presbytery) and discussed in class. Due on March 4 for presentation and discussion on that day or on March 11, with copies for instructor and class members. [25% of grade]

The final exam will be comprised of questions drawn from recent actual Standard Ordination Exams in polity. [25% of grade]

Schedule of Course Assignments and Activities:

January 7, 2010: Introductions of class members and instructor; personal stories, reflections, and sharing of expectations; communications with each other; presentation of syllabus and discussion of class style and requirements; introduction of topics and reading materials ["People of Three Books"]; preview of next week's assignment.

January 14, 2010: Assigned readings: Rogers, *Preface* through p. 50; Book of Confessions: Study Edition (hereafter BOC), Appendix A, "The Confessional Nature of the Church;" Book of Order (hereafter BOO), G-1.000-4.0403. Discussion of the problem and necessity of the interpretation of Scripture and of the rationale for a Book of Confessions in the Presbyterian Church. Introduction to the BOO and its preliminary principles.

January 21, 2010: Assigned Readings: Rogers, pp. 53-127; BOC pp. 1-48; BOO W-1.000 - 3.6205. Discussion of the interpretation of the BOC and of the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and The Scots Confession. Introduction to the Directory for Worship and discussion of the first three sections. Negotiation of topics for Feb. 6 paper.

January 28, 2010: Assigned Readings: BOC pp. 51-157; BOO W-4.000 - 7.7001. Discussion of The Heidelberg Catechism and The Second Helvetic Confession and the second half of the Directory for Worship.

February 4, 2010: Assigned Readings: BOC pp. 161-300; BOO G-5.000 - 13.0203. Discussion of the Westminster Standards and the assigned sections of the BOO. Brief paper due.

February 11, 2010: Assigned Readings: BOC pp. 303-349; Student papers from Feb. 3. Discussion of Barmen, C-67, Brief Statement of Faith, and student papers.

February 18, 2010: BOO g-14.000 - 18.0401; Discussion of assigned readings, with emphasis on G-14.000 chapter on ordination. [Optional Reading Chapman, pp. 1-48. Chapman will serve as a review of materials covered.]

February 25, 2010: BOO D-1.000 -14.0502 Discussion of the disciplinary procedures of the PCUSA. [Optional: Chapman pp. 49-103 will serve as a review.] Discussion of Statement of Faith papers in preparation.

March 4, 2010: Statement of Faith paper due. Sample questions from recent Standard Ordination exams will be distributed for discussion. Discussion of the role of a presbyter in the governing bodies of the church and opportunities for service in the larger church.

March 11, 2010: Assigned readings: Statement of Faith papers. Discussion of papers with suggestions for improvement.

March ? [To be determined] Final Exam. Questions will be from recent Standard Ordination Exams and will fairly represent what candidates for ordination will face.

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