



CA-CRT22 Westminster Confession of Faith Unit Outline

About this Unit Outline

This unit outline contains information essential to finding your way around the unit **The Westminster Confession of Faith**. It provides a structure for your learning, giving details of lecture topics, assessment requirements, and key resources.

SEMESTER 1 2021

Important notice

While every care has been taken to ensure accuracy in the information given below, **it is the personal responsibility of each student to check the current QTC Handbook**, a copy of which may be found in the Library.

It is very important that students plan their time carefully to ensure that reading and especially assignments receive adequate attention and so as to prevent a bottleneck of work at the end of the semester.

It is very important that all quoted material in assignments be properly footnoted and acknowledged. Although this unit is not taught for ACT credit, the attention of students is drawn to the ACT's **Academic Misconduct Policy**, as well as ACT **Late Penalties Policy** and **Extensions Policy**, all of which are available on the ACT's website. Failure to comply with the standards required will incur penalties as outlined in the relevant ACT Policies.

The attention of students is also drawn to the section in the current ACT Handbook, headed **"Guidelines for Essays in Coursework Units"** (see also the QTC Student Handbook). All essays and assignments should comply with these standards.

Information about this unit

Unit description

The unit *Westminster Confession of Faith* is designed to introduce students to the background and content of the Westminster Confession of Faith, the doctrinal standard of the Presbyterian Church of Australia (as subordinate to the Bible, the written Word of God). This unit will consider this statement of classic Reformed theology by first looking at the historical and theological background to the Confession and then examining the chapters of the WCF in turn.

Learning Outcomes

CA-CRT22 Learning Outcomes

On completion of the unit, students will:

Know and understand:

- The teaching of the Westminster Confession of Faith
- The distinctive doctrinal positional that PCA/PCQ candidates for the ministry and reception of ministers candidates will be committing themselves to at their licensing or reception

Be able to:

- Explain the Scriptural teaching behind the confession's positions
- Read the confession in light of its historical and theological context and how it has functioned in the history of Reformed thought

Be in a position to:

- Appreciate the role and importance of confessions in church denominational life
- Show how the theological position of the confession is appropriated in personal life and the life of the Christian community
- Apply the theological teaching of the confession to situations and issues in contemporary church and society

How this Unit Contributes to the Course

This unit should normally be taken towards the end of a student's course (3rd or 4th year of the Candidates Course), or by students who already have a theological degree and who wish to work in a Presbyterian context. It is assumed that students are already familiar with the content of the majority of the key Christian doctrines, have developed academic skills in studying the Bible, and a working knowledge of the outline of church history and of the Reformation period in particular.

WCF builds on students' existing knowledge of theology/doctrine by helping to systematize and organise it conceptually in terms of a major Protestant confession of faith. It correlates existing doctrinal knowledge with the key Presbyterian summary of doctrine and provides students with an opportunity to flesh out and clarify their doctrinal understanding on various matters in the context of a smaller and more informal class.

Lastly, WCF also enables ordination/reception candidates to consider, after they have completed much of their theological education and formed reasonably settled views, whether ministry within the Presbyterian denomination is in fact the appropriate place for them to serve after college – and in cases where the answer to this question is “yes”, to go out and serve, suitably confident as to their theological convictions.

Pre-requisites and Co-requisites

PCQ candidates (or those intending on applying for candidacy in the near future) may take this unit if they are classed as being in the third or fourth year of the candidates' course as defined by the GAA College Committee.

PCA reception of minister's candidates may take this unit at any stage of their program of study.

Other QTC students enrolled in ACT awards may enrol in this unit after they have successfully completed 192 credit points, including at least two TH units.

There are no co-requisites for this unit.

This unit is not available for ACT credit.

How this unit is organized & what we expect of you

This unit involves attendance at and participation in two hours of classes per week over a 13 week Semester. The first couple of weeks will be taught in lecture format, and after that as seminar-style discussion.

Lecture Times:

As usual, students are expected to attend all lectures. The normal Attendance Rule of 80% minimum attendance applies, in order to gain credit for and successfully pass this unit. Students who enrol for this unit are expected to have made appropriate arrangements to ensure that they are able to attend all lectures.

Part-time students should note the times of QTC breaks during the Semester, by checking the QTC calendar, available on the QTC website.

It is expected that you will spend an average of around 5 hours per week, including class time, on this unit over the course of the Semester. If you find that you are consistently having to spend more time than this on the unit, please speak with the unit lecturer as a matter of urgency.

Teaching staff

UNIT COORDINATOR & LECTURER:

Rev. Dr Andrew Bain

E abain@qtc.edu.au

P 07 3062 6939

If you have any questions throughout the unit, please use the forums on Moodle for this unit to ask your questions, or contact Andrew via email.

Other Key Contacts

Registrar's office

Contact the Registrar's office for any queries about which unit to enrol in next, if you wish to change your enrolment, defer due to illness, family circumstances etc., or request an extension for your assessment (criteria apply).

P 07 3062 6939

E registrar@qtc.edu.au

Moodle functions and queries

Contact the Registrar for help if something on Moodle is not working, if you need help using Moodle etc.

P 07 3062 6939

E registrar@qtc.edu.au

Library/Resources

Contact the Librarian for help with finding resources for your assessment, for finding full-text database articles, for help with logging into the library databases and catalogue, to request a chapter of a book or article emailed to you, to request a book posted to you, and for help with how to renew a book for longer or place a hold on a book currently out to another person. Also contact the library for any queries about audio recordings of your class on Moodle.

P 07 3062 6939

E library@qtc.edu.au

Unit timetable: topics & teaching and learning activities

WEEK	LECTURE TOPIC
WEEK 1	1. Unit introduction 2. Tradition and Scripture, Creeds & Confessions
WEEK 2	Historical Background to the Confession, and to Reformed theology in the 17 th Century
WEEK 3	1. WCF Chapter 1: Scripture 2. Ch 2: God
WEEK 4	1. Chs 3-4: Decree, Creation 2. Chs 5: Providence
WEEK 5	1. Ch 6: Fall & Sin 2. Chs 7-8: Covenant, Christ
WEEK 6	1. Chs 9-10: Free-will, effectual calling 2. Chs 11-13: Justification, Adoption
WEEK 7	1. Chs 14-15: Sanctification, Saving Faith, Repentance. 2. Chs 16-17: Good Works, Perseverance of the Saints
MID-SEMESTER BREAK	
WEEK 8	1. Ch 18: Assurance 2. Chs 19-20: Law & Liberty
WEEK 9	1. Ch 21: Worship & Sabbath 2. Ch 24: Marriage & Divorce
WEEK 10	1. Chs 25-26: Church & Communion of Saints 2. Chs 27: Sacraments
WEEK 11	1. Chs 28-29: Baptism & Lord's Supper 2. Chs 22-23: Oaths & Vows, Civil Govt
WEEK 12	1. Chs 30-31: Church Censures & Councils 2. Chs 32-33: After death; Resurrection & Judgement
WEEK 13	Catch-up week for any material not yet covered
ASSESSMENT PERIOD	

CA-CRT22 Assessments

In order to pass the unit, you must submit all assessment pieces and attain a mark of at least 50% for the unit as a whole.

ASSESSMENT TASKS	DESCRIPTION	SUBMISSION DATE
<p>Oral Exam</p> <p>100% of total grade</p>	<p>A 45 minute oral examination covering all content and aspects of the unit.</p> <p>All students will be asked a standard set of questions. Students will be asked to answer some questions from memory (i.e. without the WCF text in front of them) and others with selections from the WCF made available to them on the day of the exam.</p> <p>Students will be examined by the Lecturer plus one other member of the teaching staff at QTC.</p>	<p>Exam dates and times will be scheduled individually with students and will occur at some time during the three Assessment Weeks.</p> <p>The Academic Services office will make the appointments by consulting the student and the lecturers, and then advise students of the time set.</p>

Guide to Assessment

In this unit we are looking for the student to obtain a working knowledge and facility with the Westminster Confession of Faith suitable for someone in ordained pastoral ministry and who sits on the courts of the church. Due to this specific goal, it is considered that an oral exam, rather than the more common written assessment items, is the best way to test the student's ability to use the Westminster Confession in ways analogous to how it is used in ordained ministry in the PCQ. This is because in general a graduate will need to use the Confession in spoken contexts more than in print. Using the Confession in this context involves three main qualities, two of which are appropriate to examine in this format.

First, it requires you to *have a working knowledge of the teaching of the Confession* on its topics. This involves a grasp of the gist or key ideas in each chapter, the key concerns the Confession is seeking to achieve in each chapter, the kinds of debates or disagreements it was addressing, and the language and key concepts the Confession uses to organize and explicate these ideas. This knowledge is something that you need to have learned, and do not need to turn to the Confession to obtain. Accordingly, there will be questions that will seek to test the quality of your understanding of the teaching of the Confession on particular topics.

Second, it requires you to be able to *closely read and interpret key paragraphs of the Confession* that might be unclear on a first or even second glance by a modern reader. Accordingly, there will be questions that will ask you to explain the meaning of particular paragraphs in the Confession. For these questions you will be asked to look at a copy of the Confession and offer an explanation of the sense of the words in a particular paragraph.

The third major competency is not suitable to be tested in an academic format, but is the ability to use the confession practically to address contemporary challenges in practice and doctrine, especially when they are not directly addressed by the Confession itself. While this is not examined in the oral exam, this capacity is directly linked to a student's knowledge of the Confession's teaching and their ability to read it sensitively, and so the two aptitudes examined are pre-requisites for this one.

Learning Resources

Essential references

Your *Bible* (ESV preferred). You will need this for all of our class discussions on the WCF.

The Westminster Confession of Faith. You will need your own copy, to bring to the class each week. The QTC Librarian has copies for sale at below the market price, and you should contact her well ahead of the start of semester to secure your copy. You will need to use the edition of the WCF which is published by the Presbyterian Church of Australia (beware American editions, which read differently to the Confession which was approved in 1646/7, and to the Australian edition). This edition is as follows:

The Westminster Confession of Faith, with Supplement containing the Amendments of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Australia, and the Declaratory Statement of 1901. Sydney: The Westminster Society within the Presbyterian Church of New South Wales, 1901.

Copies to purchase and borrow are available through the QTC Library

Other references

Many commentaries and other works on the Westminster Confession have been published over the years, a good number of them being available in the QTC Library for you to browse. My intention for this course is for you to devote most of your energies engaging with the Confession itself and reflecting on your own doctrinal position in light of it. However, if you would like to, you can refer to the following:

Coffey, J. and P. C. H. Lin, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2008.

Cooper, Paul F. & David A. Burke, eds. *Read in the Light: The 1901 Declaratory Statement of the Presbyterian Church of Australia*. Stanhope Gardens, NSW: Eider, 2019.

Dickson, David. *Truth's Victory Over Error: A Commentary on the Westminster Confession of Faith*. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2007.

Duncan, L., ed. *The Westminster Confession into the 21st Century*. Fearn: Mentor, 2003.

Fesko, J. V. *The Theology of the Westminster Standards: Historical Context and Theological Insights*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014.

Letham, Robert. *The Westminster Assembly: Reading its Theology in Historical Context*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009.

Van Dixhoorn, C. *Confessing the Faith: A Reader's Guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith*. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2014.

Williamson, G. I. *The Westminster Confession of Faith: for Study Classes*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1964.

If you at any stage want to look in detail at the work and immediate context of the Westminster Assembly and the documents it produced, you might like to dip into:

Van Dixhoorn, Chad. *The Minutes and Papers of the Westminster Assembly, 1643-1653*, 5 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

In terms of material on Reformed Christianity in the century or so after Calvin and his contemporaries, the various books and articles on this topic by Paul Helm (*Calvin & the Calvinists*), Richard Muller (*Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* – what a title! – and more) and to a lesser extent Carl Trueman (works on John Owen plus various articles) have set a new standard in terms of careful scholarship re-evaluating old assumptions and stereotypes.

Regarding major historical statements of Reformed doctrine along the general lines of the WCF (apart from things like polity), the most readily available of the great classical authors / works from the same broad period of the WCF are: Turretin's *Institutes* (representing the Continental stream), the doctrinal works of John Owen (representing the intellectual peak of 17th Century English Reformed thought), and of Jonathan Edwards (representing the same in early 18th Century North America). These represent various major strands and theological positions within the world of Reformed theology in the era of the WCF – each with their own distinctive strengths and weaknesses! Some would want to add to these names various later writers, like George Whitefield, RW Dale, Charles Spurgeon, BB Warfield, Greshem Machen, JI Packer... all of whom are major contributors to the Reformed tradition in different ways, but really belong in periods long after the WCF and who addressed different challenges.

ACT Standards: Grades

Grades in assessment instruments are awarded in the following categories-

Grade	Score	GPA
Fail (F)	0-49%	0
Pass (P)	50-57%	1
Pass+ (P+)	58-64%	1.5
Credit (C)	65-74%	2
Distinction (D)	75-84%	3
High Distinction (HD)	85+%	4

Although this unit is not taken for credit towards an ACT Course, you will be given a percentage score and grade for your Oral Exam.