

AN EDUCATED LAITY--AN OBSOLETE IDEA?

INSTRUCTOR: Dr. R. Bruce Douglass

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COURSE MEETINGS: 2nd Saturdays, February-June, 10:00 a.m.-12:15 p.m.

(Feb. 13, March 13, April 10, May 8, June 12)

LOCATION: Lewinsville Presbyterian Church, McLean, Va.

The idea of a Biblically and theologically literate laity is basic to the Reformed understanding of Christian discipleship, and adherence to that idea has long been one of the defining features of the Reformed tradition. But for some time now the commitment to it has been eroding, and today more than ever it is being called into question. Life these days is simply too fast-paced and people are too busy to practice the faith in that manner any more, it is said. The purpose of this course is to explore the merits of that claim in the light of what Reformed Christians have said and done in the past about the role of learning in the practice of the Christian religion. The course does not presuppose prior familiarity with the topic.

The course is designed to enable the participants to make sense of the current situation in the light of the relevant historical developments, beginning with the Protestant Reformation and moving forward to the present time. Why was it, they will be asked to consider, that the earliest Reformed Christians placed such emphasis on education? What were they hoping to achieve? What strategies did they use? What did they in fact accomplish? And why was it that, even with the obvious dividends that this feature of Reformed piety delivered, it eventually came in for criticism from other Protestants? But the focus of the course will ultimately be on the current situation, and the participants will be provided with materials that enable them to understand why that situation presents a distinctive challenge to traditional Reformed thought and practice. In the end, participants will be invited to consider together what to make of this new situation. Has the time now come to give up the old way of thinking about the role of learning in the practice of our religion? Or should it be retained? And if so, is there a way to do so that stands some reasonable chance of practical success?

The readings will be drawn from a variety of sources, many of them available online. Copies of the selections that are not available in that form will usually be provided to the participants. In addition, participants will need to have access (through either purchase or library use) to these two volumes: 1) Richard R. Osmer's *A Teachable Spirit--Recovering the Teaching Office in the Church* (Westminster/John Knox, 1990) and 2) Stephen Prothero's *Religious Literacy--What Every American Needs to Know--and Doesn't* (HarperSanFrancisco, 2007).

Topics for the course in the order in which they will be examined are as follows:

February 13	-	The Idea of an Educated Laity in the Reformation
March 13	-	The Impact of the Idea: A Culture of Literate Piety
April 10	-	Theological Challenges to the Idea: Evangelicals and Pietists
May 8	-	The Current Challenge & Its Consequences
June 12	-	What Is To Be Done?

In preparation for the initial meeting of the class, participants should read ch. 5-7 of Osmer's *A Teachable Spirit*. Participants in this class will be encouraged to attend the Reformed Institute's April 17 event at Virginia Theological Seminary on "Passing on the Faith."

Registration:

Contact the Program Coordinator, Mary Hill: 703.518.5125 or mhill@reformedinstitute.org.

Online registration is also available at www.reformedinstitute.org.

Cost:

\$75 for members of sponsoring churches; \$100 for others.