

**The Reformed Institute's 2014-2015
Lay Theological Colloquy
at the Old Presbyterian Meeting House,
Alexandria, VA**

**Syllabus:
*Christianity and Religious Plurality in
Historical and Theological Perspective***

Christian thinking about and engagement with other traditions of belief and practice is hardly uniquely modern. By way of a historical survey, this colloquy seeks to investigate the relationship between Christianity and the world's non-Christian religious and philosophical traditions from a Christian theological point of view. After some introductory matters are addressed, attention is given to Biblical texts which address the question of other faiths. Next, the views of various pre-modern theologians are examined in order to highlight the diverse pre-modern positions available for thinking about the relationship of Christianity to other systems of belief and practice. Christianity's premodern status as a world religion is also examined briefly *vis-à-vis* Islam. Thereafter, an examination of the formation of the modern world sets the stage for thinking about the profound rebirth and urgency of the question of Christianity's status in a religiously diverse and interdependent globe. The analysis of the historical materials results in a somewhat problematic although much employed typology of theological positions: exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. In the last part of the colloquy, special emphasis is placed on Reformed theological attempts to confront the reality of religious plurality.

Required Text: Richard Plantinga, ed., *Christianity and Plurality: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999)

Sept. 19-20, 2014: Session 1:

Introduction

Reading: Richard Plantinga, "Introduction: Religious Pluralism Old and New" (*Christianity and Plurality*, 1-7)

The Bible and Religious Plurality

Reading: Richard Plantinga, "The Bible and Religious Pluralism" (*Christianity and Plurality*, chapter 1, pp. 11-12)
Biblical texts listed on page 13 of *Christianity and Plurality* (of these texts, the following readings—Esther, Psalms, Proverbs, Isaiah, Daniel, Amos, Romans 8-11, 2 Corinthians, Revelation—are not required but recommended)
Richard Plantinga, "The Bible and Religious Pluralism" (*Christianity and Plurality*, chapter 1, pp. 13-25)

The Early Patristic Period and Religious Plurality

Reading: Justin Martyr, "The First Apology" (*Christianity and Plurality*, chapter 2)
Tertullian, "The Prescriptions Against the Heretics" (trans. S.L. Greenslade in *Early Latin Theology in The Library of Christian Classics*)
http://www.tertullian.org/articles/greenslade_prae/greenslade_prae.htm

Nov. 14-15, 2014: Session 2:

The Late Patristic Period and Religious Plurality

Reading: Augustine, from *The City of God* (*Christianity and Plurality*, chapter 3)
The Athanasian Creed (*Christianity and Plurality*, chapter 4)

The Middle Ages and Religious Plurality

Reading: Aquinas, from *Summa Theologiae* (*Christianity and Plurality*, chapter 5)
Pope Boniface VIII, "Unam Sanctam" (*Christianity and Plurality*, chapter 6)
"Islam" (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam>)
"Crusades" (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crusades>)

The Reformation and Religious Plurality

Reading: Martin Luther, "Preface to the Complete Ed. of Luther's Latin Writings" (*Christianity and Plurality*, chapter 7)
John Calvin, from *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (*Christianity and Plurality*, chapter 8)
"The Creed of the Council of Trent" (*Christianity and Plurality*, chapter 9)

Feb. 6-7, 2015: Session 3:

Modernity and Religious Plurality

Reading: René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy* (Meditations I and II) (<http://www.sacred-texts.com/phi/desc/med.txt>)

Herbert of Cherbury, "Common Notions Concerning Religion"
(*Christianity and Plurality*, chapter 10)
G.E. Lessing, from *Nathan the Wise* (*Christianity and Plurality*, chapter 11)
Friedrich Schleiermacher, from *The Christian Faith*
(*Christianity and Plurality*, chapter 12)
Ernst Troeltsch, "The Place of Christianity Among the World Religions" (*Christianity and Plurality*, chapter 13)

Apr. 10-11, 2015: Session 4:

The Twentieth Century and Religious Plurality

Reading: Joachim Wach, "General Revelation and the Religions of the World" (*Christianity and Plurality*, chapter 16)
Karl Barth, "The Revelation of God as the Abolition of Religion" (*Christianity and Plurality*, chapter 14)
Hendrik Kraemer, "An Attempt at an Answer" (*Christianity and Plurality*, chapter 15)
Vatican II, "Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions" (*Christianity and Plurality*, chapter 19)
Karl Rahner, "Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions" (*Christianity and Plurality*, chapter 18)
Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "The Church in a Religiously Plural World" (*Christianity and Plurality*, chapter 20)
John Hick, "Whatever Path Men Choose Is Mine"
(*Christianity and Plurality*, chapter 21, pp. 322-34)
John Hick, "A Philosophy of Religious Pluralism"
(*Christianity and Plurality*, chapter 21, pp. 335-46)

The colloquy is held on Fridays from 3:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. and on Saturdays from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

The expectation is that participants will attend all four sessions.



Cost: \$385 for members of RI churches; \$425 for all others.
Cost of books is extra; limited to \$80.

Dr. Richard Plantinga is Professor of Religion at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan where he teaches courses in theology, world religions and Christianity and plurality.



Christianity and Religious Plurality

2014-2015 Lay Theological Colloquy

The Reformed Institute is pleased to offer an annual opportunity for a group of lay people to explore together a particular topic in Reformed theology and ethics that has relevance to contemporary life, and to do so under the leadership of a Reformed theologian who is known for his or her expertise on the subject.

This year's colloquy will be led by Dr. Richard Plantinga, Professor of Religion at Calvin College. The syllabus for the colloquy and information about the leader may be found in this brochure.