

“When Christianity takes itself seriously, it must either forsake or master the world, and at different points may try to do both at once.” Bainton

Political and public life has often confounded and bothered Christian witness in the world. Conservative, liberal, or otherwise, Christians are often asked what certain political policies and campaigns say about their faith. What this brief course will begin to explore is just the opposite. It will ask: what does the *faith* say about our commitments in political and public life.

As stewards and members of the Reformed tradition, we have often had a lot to say regarding these matters. Our tradition is rich with resources that aim a critical eye on the political world and to question whether or not our civil and religious leaders are upholding their end of the bargain. But the tradition has also carried a stain of political domestication and even terror, especially in America, and words and phrases like justice, righteousness, the common good and public witness, have often fallen on skeptical ears.

What this course then aims to do is to begin a *conversation* at the church level, to use intellectual and theological resources – mostly, and purposefully, Protestant and/or Reformed - to build up public and political formation for 21st century Presbyterians.

Questions the course will ask:

- Do we forsake or do we master? Neither? Both? How do we see our political and public lives together?
- What does social justice *actually* mean for the Christian?
- How do we negotiate societal integration while maintaining healthy difference?
- How do we respond to political cruelty and fear?
- How has the church failed the most vulnerable?
- What does Reformed theology say about political resistance and political order?
- What does it mean to a white, Western, church that in many ways is no longer the center of the Christian world?
- What can we learn from other religious traditions?
- Political realism or political idealism?

What the course asks from you.

Readings: There will be multiple readings assigned for each week. You will have the opportunity to read some of the world’s leading theologians today. All I ask is that you read *at least two* of the assigned topics each week, and bring discussion points and questions to our meetings each Sunday.

What you can expect from me.

Structure of Sundays: we will have roughly 45-50 minutes each Sunday to go over the material. I’ll spend 10-15 minutes covering an overview of the assigned readings for the week. The rest of the time will be spent discussing the material. As such, my role is to be a discussion partner, not a lecturer.

*I may update the readings throughout the course

1st Sunday – Setting the tone “Vision and System” “Prophetic and Structure” “Resistance and Order” “What does it mean to have very few ruins?” “Lightness and Darkness” “Justice and Righteousness”

James Skillen ‘Introduction’ from “The Good of Politics”

Glenn Tinder “The Prophetic Stance” from ‘The Political Meaning of Christianity’

Miroslav Volf: “Public Engagment” from ‘A Public Faith’

2nd Sunday – Social Justice, Civil Rights, Legacy of Martin Luther King

Martin Luther King Jr. “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”

http://kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/kingweb/popular_requests/frequentdocs/birmingham.pdf

Jemar Tisby “The Misappropriation of Martin Luther King, Jr.”

<https://thewitnessbcc.com/misappropriation-martin-luther-king-jr/>

Dorrien, “King and His Mentors” <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/king-his-mentors>

Thompson, “The Friend We Need But Do Not Want” <https://www.cardus.ca/comment/article/5158/the-friend-we-need-but-do-not-want-martin-luther-king-jr/>

3rd Sunday – Theologies of Fear and Trauma

Lynn Japinga “Fear in the Reformed Tradition” from ‘Feminist and Womanist Essays in Reformed Dogmatics’

James Cone “Nobody Knows de Trouble I See” from “The Cross and the Lynching Tree”

Serene Jones “Mourning and Wonder” from Trauma and Grace

Marilynne Robinson “Fear” from The Givenness of Things

4th Sunday – Resistance, Liberation, Apartheid

Garcia & Nunez “A Borderland Reimagining of the Reformation” from ‘Wittenberg Meets the World’

Kristine Culp “Always reforming, Always resisting” from “Vulnerability and Glory”

Allan Boesak – Black and Reformed

5th Sunday – Integration and Pluralism

Kaemingk – The Headscarf: Islam’s Gift to Western Democracy

<https://www.cardus.ca/comment/article/5073/the-headscarf-islams-gift-to-western-democracy/>

Wenger – Americans Have Never Agreed What Religious Freedom Means

<https://www.christiancentury.org/article/critical-essay/americans-have-never-agreed-what-religious-freedom>

James KA Smith – “The City of God and the City We are In” from ‘Awaiting the King’

6th Sunday– Moving Forward

John De Gruchy – “Theology for a Just Democratic World Order” from ‘Christianity and Democracy’

Paul Elie – A Man for All Reasons <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2007/11/a-man-for-all-reasons/306337/>

Phillip Jenkins: Readings from “The Next Christendom”