

A Few Words from the Director

June 2010

For a number of years now the Reformed Institute has offered courses taught by members of our Company of Teachers. Those courses have covered a wide range of different subjects, and most of the subjects we have covered have fallen into one of three areas--theology, history and ethics. A few times we have repeated these offerings, but for the most part we have kept offering new courses on new topics.

Typically these courses have met five or six times, usually on Saturday mornings. Many of them have been taught over a period of several months. In all of them the participants have been expected to do some assigned reading in the intervals between class meetings.

The people taking these courses have tended to be members of our sponsoring churches, but they have also included some individuals from other churches--and even the occasional representative of another faith tradition.

The size of the enrollments in these courses has not grown, however. In fact, in recent years it has actually shrunk, which has meant that we have not had the kind of enrollments that are necessary to justify the effort and cost it takes for the Institute--and the instructors--to provide this service. So, on my recommendation, our Program Committee has decided to put this part of our program on hold for the time being and to experiment with alternative offerings that are designed to serve essentially the same purpose.

Like what?

In the upcoming (2010--11) program year we intend to offer a retreat or two on specialized topics that will be designed to accomplish in a more compressed period of time (a day or two) the sort of thing we have sought previously to do in the courses. Like the courses, these events will be carefully prepared in advance; they will be led by people with appropriate expertise; and the participants will be expected to do some advance reading.

The first such offering is scheduled to occur on Saturday, November 6, and it will have as its theme the work of Marilynne Robinson, the celebrated novelist who also is a gifted philosopher and lay theologian. I know Robinson has many fans in this area; I also know that her work is provocative in the best sense--i.e., it almost demands serious discussion. I also think there has not been nearly enough good critical discussion of her work to date; we hope in this event to contribute in a modest way to bringing about such discussion.

This event is still in the planning stage, so many of the details are yet to be worked out. But they will be available on this website before long; and I hope very much that those of you who have an interest in Robinson and the sort of issues she examines (e.g., Calvin's relevance to the world we inhabit) will take note and make a point of setting aside the date now on your calendars, if at all possible.

If this offering is at all successful, it almost certainly will be followed by other such events on other suitable topics--perhaps as early as the spring of 2011. Our working assumption in this experiment is that it will be easier for some, at least, of the people we aim to serve to commit themselves to events that take up only a day or two. We are looking forward to discovering whether that is in fact the case.

R. Bruce Douglass, Director

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