

The Reformed Institute's 2010-2011 Colloquy Westminster Presbyterian, Alexandria, VA

Syllabus for *Calvinism and the Rule of Law: Struggles over Religion and Human Rights*

That “human rights should be protected by the rule of law” is affirmed by the Preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. That John Calvin and his followers, up to a point and with some ambivalence, supported such a proposition is the conclusion of recent scholarship. Reformed Christians ought to be aware of this new scholarship, and given a chance to investigate and consider it, as well as to study its implications for modern life. Consequently, the Reformed Institute Colloquy of 2010-2011 will devote itself to examining, both historically and contemporarily, the connections, as well as the tensions, among Calvinism, the rule of law, and human rights.

Part of what Calvin meant by “reform,” as in “Reformed” Christianity, was the restructuring of institutions, and especially church and state, in accord with the rule of law or constitutional government. By that is meant *a government based on written, publicly disclosed laws equally applied to officials and citizens, guaranteeing fundamental rights and the separation of powers, and established by and for the people, and answerable to them*. As a student of law and humanities in the late Renaissance, and as a prominent citizen of sixteenth-century Geneva, Calvin was exposed to these principles in one way or another, and throughout his career explored and experimented with various interpretations, endeavoring to apply them to church and state. Most important of all, Calvin set these principles in a compelling theological framework that came to inspire energetic reform movements, both theological and political, in France, Holland, England, Scotland, and Colonial America.

These reform movements reflected Calvin’s ambivalence toward the relation of religion and fundamental rights. That ambivalence was replicated in the drafting of the Universal Declaration and continues to influence the implementation of human rights right up to the present. That is true whether the subject is the right of Muslim women to wear head scarves in France or Turkey, or of Native

Americans to smoke peyote as part of a religious ceremony in the U.S., or of newspapers in Denmark to publish cartoons insulting to Muslims, or of Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka to restrict acts of proselytism by evangelical Christians. In one way or another, the issues are all about the relation of religion and human rights as regulated by the rule of law. Calvinists would appear to have a large stake in these matters.

Oct. 1-2, 2010, Session 1: Calvin, Constitutional Government, and Natural Rights

Readings: John Calvin, *On God and Political Duty*, John Witte, Jr., ch. 1, “Moderate (Religious) Liberty in the Theology of John Calvin: The Original Genevan Experiment,” *Reformation of Rights: Law Religion, and Human Rights in Early Modern Calvinism*, 39-80.

Dec. 3-4, 2010, Session 2: The Anglo-American Experience: Religion, Constitutions, and Rights

Readings: Irwin H. Polishook, ed., *Roger Williams, John Cotton and Religious Freedom: A Controversy in New and Old England*. Selections. John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, selections. John Witte, Jr., ch. 5, “How to Govern a City on a Hill: Covenant Liberty in Puritan New England,” in *Reformation of Rights*, 287-321. David Little, “The Puritan Background of the Establishment Clause” (in ms.)

Feb. 4-5, 2011, Session 3: The Human Rights Revolution of the Mid-twentieth Century: Context and Controversies

Readings: *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
Mary Ann Glendon, *A World Made New: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, chs. 3, 4, 5, 9, 10, 11, 12. Margaret MacDonald, “Natural Rights,” in A.I. Melden, ed., *Human Rights*, 40-60.

Apr. 1-2, 2011, Session 4: Contemporary Setting: The Continuing Global Debate, with Special Attention to the Right to Religious Freedom

Readings: David Little, “Ground to Stand On: A Philosophical Reappraisal of Human Rights Language.”

Natan Lerner, *Religion, Beliefs, and International Human Rights*, selections. Ann Elizabeth Mayer, *Islam and Human Rights: Tradition and Politics*, selections. Selected Legal Cases from International and U.S. Courts

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.



Dr. David Little

Dr. Little retired in 2009 as Professor of the Practice in Religion, Ethnicity, and International Conflict at Harvard Divinity School, and as an Associate at the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs at Harvard University. Until the summer of 1999, he was Senior Scholar in Religion, Ethics and Human Rights at

the United States Institute of Peace in Washington, DC. From 1996-1998, he was member of the Advisory Committee to the State Department on Religious Freedom Abroad. Little is co-author with Scott W. Hibbard of the USIP publication, *Islamic Activism and U.S. Foreign Policy* (1997). Little is author of two of the volumes in the USIP series on religion, nationalism, and intolerance (RNI), *Ukraine: Legacy of Intolerance* (1991), and *Sri Lanka: The Invention of Enmity* (1994). The RNI conference report on Tibet, *Sino-Tibetan Coexistence: Creating Space for Tibetan Self-Direction*, written by Little and Hibbard, also appeared in 1994. He has edited two recently published volumes, *Religion and Nationalism in Iraq: A Comparative Perspective* (2007), with (Donald K. Swearer), and *Peacemakers in Action: Profiles of Religion in Conflict Resolution* (2007).

Dr. Little is married and he and his wife, Priscilla, have three married children, and seven grandchildren. They are members of Western Presbyterian Church in D.C.



2010-2011

**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. David Little, recently retired as Professor of the Practice in Religion, Ethnicity, and International Conflict at Harvard Divinity School and as an Associate at the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs at Harvard University. The syllabus for the colloquy and information about the leader can be found in this brochure.