

Dr. Papanikolaou - Lesson 1

Supplies Needed for this Unit

- Student guide for each student
- Writing utensil for each student
- Optional: binder for each student, and three-hole punch, so that students can compile their student guide handouts all in one place.

Big Question: What is the role of the intellect in the Christian life?

Key points

Teachers should understand these few, key points before the lesson, and students should take these points away from the class.

- A. Our intellectual and spiritual lives can and should be integrated.
- B. An intellectual life is part of our lives as Christians. Thinking, if done properly, can be a form of prayer.
- C. We do know things about God, even if don't know everything about God. We can make sense of the Trinity, even if we can't comprehend the mystery fully.

Unit Introduction

Begin the unit by saying something like:

- For the next several weeks of class, we're going to be viewing short clips of lectures by an Orthodox professor, Dr. Aristotle Papanikolaou. He has some strong opinions about what theology is, why it's important, and the role it plays in the church and our lives.
- Dr. Papanikolaou is the Archbishop Demetrios Professor in Orthodox Theology and culture at Fordham University. He did his Ph. D at Chicago University and his M.Div at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology. He specialized in contemporary Orthodox theology.
- Context of the video: Dr. Papanikolaou is teaching at the CrossRoad Summer Institute, a Program of the Office of Vocation & Ministry at Hellenic College Holy Cross in Brookline, Massachusetts. (For more information on CrossRoad visit www.crossroadinstitute.org or contact us at crossroad@hchc.edu.)
- Optional point: Can a layperson (such as Dr. Papanikolaou) know enough to teach theology well? YES! It is the vocation of some to learn and study the faith extensively and to teach in Orthodox and non-Orthodox settings. We can bring our Orthodox faith in Christ into any profession. It is not just the job of priests and monastics to know the faith well, but all of us.

Opening Reflection

Ask students to turn to their study guide and answer the first question:

1. Define the word theologian.

Ask students to share their definitions. Many students may give you a response that has something to do with going to seminary, being smart or intellectual, reading books from ancient sources, writing essays, etc.

Next ask them to answer all three of the following questions on their study guide, and then prepare them that there will be time for discussion.

2. Think about this quote by Evagrius the Solitary (345-399 AD): *“If you are a theologian you will pray truly and if you pray truly you are a theologian”* Does Evagrius the Solitary agree or disagree with your first definition?
3. So, according to Evagrius, who can be a theologian? Can you be one? Can your mother be one? Do theologians still walk the earth?
4. Do you like this definition of theologian? Why or why not?

Allow students to share their answers, and refrain from commenting too much on their answers at this point in the lesson.

Preparation for Video Clip

- Now it’s time to turn to the video clip!
- Encourage students to take notes in their student guide as they watch and listen to the video clip. Tell them that you will discuss the lecture afterwards.
- Take a moment to help students get oriented with the student guide, and then play the lecture.

Reflection on the Video

5. Dr. Aristotle Papanikolaou says that “Thinking, if done properly, is a form of prayer.” He does not see a distinct separation between our mental capabilities and our spiritual capabilities. How do you think this statement relates to Evagrius’ statement, that the theologian is one who “prays truly?”
6. Has your opinion of what it means to be a theologian changed at all today? If so, how?
7. Are there any other key points that grabbed your attention from today’s session?
8. Do you see any application to your own life, and if so, what are they? If not, why not?
9. Any final thoughts?

Depending on the time, you can have them share their responses to questions one question at a time, or you can have them pick one of their answers from the questions to share.

Close with any of the key points that they might not have addressed in their own sharing/discussion.

At this point, you may choose to hand out the “Key Points” summary page for this lesson.