

CLASSICS OF PERSONAL DEVOTION HT508
Summer 2007, Reformed Theological Seminary, Washington/Baltimore

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McLean Presbyterian Church
June 18 & 19, 8:30 am – 5:00 pm

I. Course Description

This course analyzes select historical texts of personal devotion, spanning from the early church to the twentieth century. The course will also discuss different models of spirituality of both past and present as presented in these texts.

II. Texts

Required Texts:

Augustine, *Confessions*. Available online and in numerous in print editions. We will only be looking at Book IX.

Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God*. Available online at: www.ccel.org.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (New York: Harper, 1978).

Didache. Available online at: www.earlychristianwritings.com.

Elsie Anne McKee, ed., *John Calvin: Writings on Pastoral Piety* (New York: Paulist Press, 2002).

B.B. Warfield, *The Religious Life of Theological Students* (Phillipsburg: P&R).

Recommended Texts:

For those with no prior exposure to church history or historical theology, I recommend the following texts. We will not refer to these texts in class, nor will I have any expectations that you would have read these texts. These are only mentioned for those who personally feel the need to shore up their understanding of church history.

Stephen J. Nichols, *Pages from Church History: A Guided Tour of Christian Classics* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2006).

Mark A. Noll, *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity*, 2nd edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000).

III. Evaluation

1. Examination: essay questions, 50%.

You will be given a set of essay questions in a take-home format that cover the reading and class discussions.

Due: Monday, July 9

2. Project: classics of personal devotion class, sermon series, or book proposal, 50%.

This project allows you to think of how you would develop a series of lessons or sermons or even how you would write a potential book on classic devotional texts. You will need to write a prospectus, tailored to one of these options, that includes an overview, rationale, list of goals and objectives, schedule, and outlines. I will supply more details during the class.

Due: Monday, July 23

IV. Course Schedule

Day One:

Lectures and Discussions:

- introduction to the course
- spirituality & seminary studies
- the early church and personal devotion
- the medieval church and personal devotion

Reading:

- Warfield, *The Religious Life of Theological Students*. Warfield's booklet, first given as a lecture at Princeton in 1911, addresses, as he puts it, "The most important subject which can engage our thought."
- *Didache*. This brief text gives us some insight into the corporate worship and devotional practices of the early church.
- Augustine, *Confessions*, Book IX. Augustine's conversion comes in Book VIII, in section 12 at the very end. Book IX is largely a hymn of praise in response, but in it he also deals with his mother's passing.
- Bernard of Clairvaux, "On Loving God." Bernard of Clairvaux was one of the few medieval figures Luther actually enjoyed reading. This is his classic devotional text.

Day Two:

Lectures and Discussions:

- the Reformation and personal devotion
- the modern age and personal devotion
- assignment review

Reading:

- *John Calvin: Writings on Pastoral Piety*. This is a long book of readings from various places in Calvin. Do the best you can in getting through it. I'd rather have you read portions of it carefully, then skim through it just to get it done. Be sure to read Part Five, pages 247 – 332.
- Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*. This grows out of Bonhoeffer's experience with the underground seminary at Finkenwalde from 1935 until its close in 1937 by the Gestapo. It's not a very long book, so please read all of it.

Grading Scale

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|----|----------------|------|
| A | (97-100) | 4.00 |
| A- | (94-96) | 3.66 |
| B+ | (91-93) | 3.33 |
| B | (88-90) | 3.00 |
| B- | (86-87) | 2.66 |
| C+ | (83-85) | 2.33 |
| C | (80-82) | 2.00 |
| C- | (78-79) | 1.66 |
| D+ | (75-77) | 1.33 |
| D | (72-74) | 1.00 |
| D- | (70-71) | 0.66 |
| F | (below 70) | 0.00 |
| I | (incomplete) | - |
| W | (withdraw) | - |
| S | (satisfactory) | - |
| P | (passing) | - |