

CLASSICS OF PERSONAL DEVOTION HT508
Summer 2009, Reformed Theological Seminary, Washington DC

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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.

“Directory of Public Worship,” Westminster Standards

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

Note: Bring all of the readings and texts with you to class.

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

Examination/essay questions: Drawing upon the class lectures and discussion, required reading, and your own research, please answer three of the following six questions. Worth 50%.

1. How has thinking on the devotional life changed over the different eras of church history? Provide concrete examples for your observations.
2. According to Augustine, what role does praise play in the devotional life?

3. Compare and contrast Bernard of Clairvaux's "On Loving God" with any medieval mystical writing.
4. According to *The Directory of Public Worship* from the Westminster Standards, what is necessary for the devotional life?
5. According to John Calvin, what role does the devotional life play in the minister's life?
6. According to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, how does "life together" contribute to our personal devotional life?

Due: To be announced in class.

Project: classics of personal devotion class, sermon series, or book proposal. Worth 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: To be announced in class.

IV. Course Schedule

Day One:

Lectures and Discussions:

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

Reading:

- *Didache*. This brief text gives us some insight into the corporate worship and devotional practices of the early church. It's short, so you should be able to read it all.
- 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. Only read Book IX.
- 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. Just skim it, reading enough to become familiar with it.
- *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. At the very least read Part Five, pages 247 – 332. As for the rest of the book, just land on a few portions that catch your interest.

Day Two:

Lectures and Discussions:

- the modern age and personal devotion
- assignment review

Reading:

- 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.