

Reformed Theological Seminary – Washington DC

Classics of Personal Devotion (6HT508)

1 credit

Summer 2011

Instructor: Geoffrey M. Sackett
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Class meets at McLean Presbyterian Church (McLean, VA)

June 1, 2 (Wednesday, Thursday)

9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

1. Office Hours

By appointment. I am delighted to meet with you – please feel free to contact me.

2. Course Description

This course introduces students to select devotional texts from patristic, medieval, reformation, and contemporary periods. In addition to exploring our authors and their texts, we will pay attention to the theological and cultural milieu that gave rise to these devotional classics.

3. Course Objective

Our purpose is to discern aspects of devotional life from the past and present that can assist in our personal devotion to God as well as facilitating personal devotion in those to whom we minister. Crucial to our task is thoughtful analysis of our texts, their assumptions and the claims they make about the Christian life, and how they might stimulate us to a deeper love for, obedience to, and trust in our Lord.

4. Required Texts

N. B. Don't be discouraged by the number of required texts; most are short (some very short) and each one is an enjoyable read. Some of the texts may be available online (try ccel.org).

Augustine, *Confessions* [circa 195 pp]

Teresa de Avila, *The Interior Castle* [circa 150 pp]

John Calvin, *Writings on Pastoral Piety* (ed Elise Anne McKee) [180 pp are required – see schedule below]

Bernard de Clairvaux, *On Loving God* [circa 50 pp]

Henri Nouwen, *Making All Things New: an Invitation to the Spiritual Life* [circa 90 pp]

Henry Scougal, *The Life of God in the Soul of Man* [circa 100 pp]

Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Religious Life of Seminary Student* [15 pp]

5. Recommended Text (not required)

Christian Spirituality: Five Views (ed. Alexander)

6. Assignments and Evaluation

A. 3 reading reports (20% each=60%). Due on **June 9, June 16, and June 23.**

Reports will cover Augustine, Calvin (pages 65-246 only), and Avila and should be 5-7 pages each.¹ Address the following points in your report²:

- How would you classify the genre of the text (philosophical, theological, sermonic)? Give concrete examples.
- Summarize the text's main point(s) or thesis (theses).
- Writing style. Describe some of the devices the author uses in order to make his or her points (e.g., narrative, argument, metaphors, word pictures, special terms or phrases). Give specific examples.
- Name one aspect of the author's views you find particularly helpful in encouraging devotedness to God. Demonstrate using scripture and theological reasoning.
- Name one aspect you find to be "out of touch" or unhelpful with respect to promoting devotion. Demonstrate using scripture and theological reasoning.

B. Project or Paper (40%). Due: July 11. Your choice; write **either**:

A 9-10 page paper in which you compare and contrast Clairvaux's *On Loving God*, Scougal's *The Life of God*, and Nouwen's *Making All Things New*. Include equal parts description and evaluation. Feel free to appreciate and criticize.

or

A lesson plan for a Sunday school class, small group bible study, or discipleship program, focusing on Clairvaux's *On Loving God*, Scougal's *The Life of God*, and Nouwen's *Making All Things New*. Plan must: name your intended audience, demonstrate a logical sequence of lessons, and demonstrate sufficient familiarity with the texts by indicating how the content of each will contribute to and be featured in your lessons.

More details about the assignments will be discussed in class.

7. Reading and Schedule:

Day 1: June 1 (Wednesday)

¹ It is not required, but you may wish to consult *Christian Spirituality: Five Views* for helpful background on Christian theologies of sanctification.

² Adapted from Jose E. Idler, *History of Philosophy and Christian Thought* syllabus, 2005.

Lectures (morning):

- The religious life of the seminary student: academics and godliness.
- The early church. Cultural and theological milieu. Devotional life and works. Augustine

Readings: Warfield, *The Religious Life of The Seminary Student*; Augustine, *Confessions*

Lectures (afternoon):

- The medieval period: cultural and theological background. Clairvaux.

Readings: Bernard de Clairvaux, *On Loving God*

Day 2: June 2 (Thursday)

Lectures (morning):

- Reformation emphases and distinctive features: Calvin. Mysticism: Teresa de Avila.

Readings (morning): John Calvin, *Writings on Pastoral Piety* [pp 65-246 only]; Teresa de Avila, *The Interior Castle*

Lectures (afternoon):

- Puritan spirituality: Scougal
- Contemporary devotion: Nouwen
- Fostering personal devotion

Readings (afternoon): Henry Scougal, *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*; Nouwen, *Making all Things New*

8. Grading Policy

The standard RTS grading scale will be used.

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)	.66
F	(below 70)	0.00