2HT508 Classics of Personal Devotion

Reformed Theological Seminary - Orlando
Summer Semester, 2007
June 11-15 – 9:00am – 12:00pm
Instructor: Rev. Chuck DeGroat, ABD
Office Hours: By appointment
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E-mail for Chuck DeGroat: cdegroat@rts.edu

PURPOSE

A balanced seminary curriculum fosters a clear exegesis of Scripture (normative), a relevant exegesis of culture (situational), and a deep exegesis of the soul (existential). The three represent faith, hope and love. In this hermeneutical circle of revelation, we are invited to a lived theology. This course is an introduction to the writings and practices of some of the deepest soul exegetes throughout church history. The purpose of this course is to invite the student in to an oft-neglected aspect of exegetical and hermeneutical work, and perhaps more deeply in to his/her soul and communion with God.

OBJECTIVES

At the completion of this course, students will:

1. Be able to show increased familiarity and readability in classical spiritual and devotional writings.
2. Be aware of both the benefits and pitfalls of classical devotional (and mystical) literature.
3. Be able to interact honestly about their own experiences of God in writing and dialogue.
4. Be more attuned to their spiritual need for rest, silence, solitude and the classical spiritual disciplines.
5. Have tools to practice the spiritual disciplines in ways that are wise and biblical.

FORMAT

Teaching will include lecture, discussion, video and visual aids where applicable, and some student presentation.

REQUIRED TEXTS

1. Foster, R. Devotional Classics
2. Nouwen, H. In the Name of Jesus
3. Rutherford, S. Letters
4. Webber, R. The Divine Embrace
SUGGESTED READINGS
(those with no books mentioned have a variety of great writings)

- Some of the classics below are available free of charge at www.ccel.org.

1. Anderson and Reese. *Spiritual Mentoring*.
3. Assisi, Francis of.
4. Augustine, St.
5. Avila, Theresa of. *Interior Castle*.
9. Bonaventure. *The Soul’s Journey into God*
18. DeSales, Francis. *Introduction to the Devout Life*.
22. Foster, Richard.
23. Fox, George.
24. Guyon, Madame.
27. Ignatius. *Spiritual Exercises*.
30. a Kempis, Thomas. *The Imitation of Christ*.
33. L’Engle, Madeline.
34. Lawrence, Brother. *The Practice of the Presence of God*.
35. MacDonald, George. *Diary of an Old Soul*.
36. Manning, Brennan.
38. May, Gerald. *Addiction and Grace*, *Dark Night of the Soul*, etc.
40. Merton, Thomas.
42. Nouwen, Henri.
44. Owen, John. *Communion with God.*
45. Packer, J.I.
46. Pascal. *Pensees.*
47. Payne, Leanne.
48. Peterson, Eugene.
49. Postema, Don. *Space for God* (a great Reformed resource from someone who studied under Nouwen)
51. Shults, F. LeRon. *Transforming Spirituality*
52. Sienna, Catherine of.
53. Spurgeon, Charles.
54. Tozer, A.W.
55. Vanier, Jean.
56. Voetius, Gisbertus. *Spiritual Desertion (Reformed work now translated)*
58. Willard, Dallas.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

1. **PRESENCE** – Come to class. Plan to engage and participate.

2. **READING** - There will be no “schedule” of readings, though they are necessary to answer the *Essay* questions. Allow yourself the time and the presence of spirit to enjoy these readings devotionally. Please tell me what percentage of the readings you completed at the top of your *Essays.*

3. **RETREAT** – Take an overnight retreat to Canterbury (Oviedo), San Pedro (Winter Springs), St. Leo Monastery, or another place of your own choosing. Use it as a time to engage in contemplative prayer, lectio divina, meditative reading, or something else nourishing to your soul. You are asked to share the value of this experience with the class if you desire to (especially if you chose to receive spiritual direction during that time), but you will not be asked to write on it. Please tell me where you went at the top of your *Essays.*

4. **ESSAYS** – In no more than 8 pages total (not each!), answer these questions. You may combine personal reflections with academic reflections. The “sub-questions” in each do not have to be answered separately, but try to answer as a complete response. Responses can be emailed to me at cdegroat@rts.edu.

   a. Webber describes the inherent relationship between *spirituality* and *theology* among the ancients, and particularly during the development of orthodox creedral theology. Several factors served to fraction this relationship (e.g. Platonism,
Scholasticism, heresy). What would be the importance/relevance of seeing these re-connected for the church today? How might it impact your church and philosophy of ministry?

b. Webber notes the inter-connection between God’s story and my story for biblical spirituality. What does he mean? What are the dangers of choosing one over the other (or, perhaps better said, the idolatrous form of one or the other)? In what ways do intellectualism and emotionalism manifest in your faith tradition? Why does both God’s story and my story need to be retained?

c. Using your text Devotional Classics or the assigned books, provide an example of a devotional writing that, in your estimation, models biblical theology and spirituality. God’s story and my story. How does it accomplish this?

d. How does Henri Nouwen’s understanding of biblical leadership resonate with you? How does it speak to the contemporary church and your own experiences of leading and being led?

e. What is distinctive about Samuel Rutherford’s spirituality? Describe your own personal reflections on it.

f. How do the contemporary demands of pastoral life work against a deep biblical spirituality? Does the structure of seminary life help or hinder your intimacy with Christ?

On a personal and reflective level, what is your own devotional life like? Through this class and your readings, is there a way in which you might be deepened in your intimacy with God? Did the readings expose any personal tendencies toward intellectualism or emotionalism? Feel free to expand on this question with other personal reflections…

GRADING SCALE

Listed below are the assignments that will determine your final course grade.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>35</td>
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<tr>
<td>Essays</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Readings (%)</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Retreat Participation</td>
<td>10</td>
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</tbody>
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A (97-100), A- (94-96), B+ (91-93), B (88-90), B- (86-87), C+ (83-85), C (80-82), C- (78-79), D+ (75-77), D (72-74), D- (70-71), F (below 70)

ACADEMIC STANDARDS

If you should miss a class, you are expected to contact another student regarding the information covered.

The reflection paper is due on the last day of finals. It should be double-spaced. For each day a paper is late, 2 points will be deducted from the score of the assignment. Papers may be emailed to me at cdegroat@rts.edu.
For the paper, all sources should be referenced. Plagiarism/cheating will result in the failure of the course.