

2PT5400 Classics of Personal Devotion

Fall 2023: Thursday 11 – noon

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Office Hours: 9 am – 4 pm (most weekdays)

Overview

Devotional writings from different periods of the history of the church are read and discussed to deepen the student's knowledge of and love for God.

Goals

This course exposes students to some of the most famous books in the Christian tradition authored by people on a quest for holiness. By discussing a cluster of popular texts and authors on the subject of godliness, students learn to read with discernment as they set their own devotion to God on a firm foundation.

Requirements

- **Digests**

Students are to write digests on the assigned texts, and to come to class prepared to discuss each of the texts under consideration. They will read (in any edition, print or online) and write a 300-word digest (1 page). What I am looking for in these responses is *not* a summary of the book but rather, how the author has challenged your notion of the Christian life. Digests express and assess ideas in your own words. Do more than supply extended quotations. Please submit good prose (in double-spaced, Times New Roman 12-point font).

1. Augustine, *Confessions* (Oxford Classics ed. recommended, books 1-8).
2. Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ* (books 1-2).
3. John Calvin, *The Golden Booklet of the Christian Life* (all).
4. Jeremiah Burroughs, *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment* (ch. 1).
5. Thomas Brooks, *Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices* (chs. 1-2 ["Proof of the Point" and "Satan's Devices to Draw the Soul into Sin"])
6. Jonathan Edwards, *Heaven, A World of Love* (all).
7. Geerhardus Vos, "Heavenly-mindedness" from *Grace and Glory*.
8. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Costly Grace," in *Discipleship* (ch. 1).

- **Confession/Catechism Assignment**

Students are to read daily (for at least one month) one of these catechisms or confessions: Heidelberg Catechism, Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion, Westminster Shorter Catechism, Westminster Confession of Faith, or London Baptist Confession, and write a 300-word summary of the experience of reading it *devotionally*.

- **Book Review**

Students are to read an additional Christian devotional classic and submit a longer (4-5 page) review of book, including a summary of its most beneficial (if any) and most problematic (if any) aspects, with a particular focus on the way in which the book has shaped your understanding of the Christian life. The reading choice is yours, but (1) it must total at least 200 pages (if less, you must supplement with some additional reading); (2) it must be a book that you have not already read and which – to your knowledge – is not required in another RTS course.

Assessment

1. Reading Digests: 60%.
2. Confession Reading: 10%
3. Book Review: 20%.
4. Participation in Class Discussion: 10%.

A Final Word from Herman Bavinck

“[In current literature] the spiritual understanding of the soul is missing. It seems that we no longer know what sin and grace, guilt and forgiveness, regeneration and conversion are. In theory we know them well, but we no longer know them in the majestic reality of life. For this reason, the devotional literature of previous times always leaves a different impression than that of the present. Because, although we stand at some distance from it and its form is antiquated, it is and remains natural, in the true sense of the word, while that of the present, when it deals with the soul, seems unnatural and artificial. We feel, when we read the old writers, that we are offered a piece of life; it is reality itself, that we are privileged to view.”

Course Objectives Related to MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes

Course: Classics of Personal Devotion

Professor: Muether

Campus: Orlando

Date: Fall 2023

MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes <i>In order to measure the success of the MDiv curriculum, RTS has defined the following as the intended outcomes of the student learning process. Each course contributes to these overall outcomes. This rubric shows the contribution of this course to the MDiv outcomes.</i> <i>*As the MDiv is the core degree at RTS, the MDiv rubric will be used in this syllabus.</i>		Rubric ➤ Strong ➤ Moderate ➤ Minimal ➤ None	Mini-Justification
Articulation (oral & written)	Broadly understands and articulates knowledge, both oral and written, of essential biblical, theological, historical, and cultural/global information, including details, concepts, and frameworks.	Strong	Participation in class discussions.
Scripture	Significant knowledge of the original meaning of Scripture. Also, the concepts for and skill to research further into the original meaning of Scripture and to apply Scripture to a variety of modern circumstances. (Includes appropriate use of original languages and hermeneutics; and integrates theological, historical, and cultural/global perspectives.)	Minimal	Prerequisite for, but not the main focus of the class.
Reformed Theology	Significant knowledge of Reformed theology and practice, with emphasis on the Westminster Standards.	Moderate	Necessary to interact with other models of spiritual growth.
Sanctification	Demonstrates a love for the Triune God that aids the student's sanctification.	Strong	Point of the class is to learn from voices in the past that model our growth in sanctification.
Desire for Worldview	Burning desire to conform all of life to the Word of God.	Moderate	Learning to love God in all circumstances of life.
Winsomely Reformed	Embraces a winsomely Reformed ethos. (Includes an appropriate ecumenical spirit with other Christians, especially Evangelicals; a concern to present the Gospel in a God-honoring manner to non-Christians; and a truth-in-love attitude in disagreements.)	Strong	Exposure to difference voices in different ages calls for humility and discernment in learning from other traditions.
Preach	Ability to preach and teach the meaning of Scripture to both heart and mind with clarity and enthusiasm.	Minimal	Personal devotional life should influence pulpit ministry
Worship	Knowledgeable of historic and modern Christian-worship forms; and ability to construct and skill to lead a worship service.	Minimal	Private worship shapes public worship
Shepherd	Ability to shepherd the local congregation: aiding in spiritual maturity; promoting use of gifts and callings; and encouraging a concern for non-Christians, both in America and worldwide.	Minimal	
Church/World	Ability to interact within a denominational context, within the broader worldwide church, and with significant public issues.	Minimal	