

RTS

O R L A N D O



HYBRID COURSE SYLLABUS

PT5400 CLASSICS OF PERSONAL DEVOTION

John Muether

Winter Term 2024

PROFESSOR'S CONTACT INFORMATION

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COURSE DATES

COURSE DATES: November 27, 2023 – February 3, 2024

IN CLASS DATES: January 10 – January 12, 2024

COURSE COMPLETION DATE: February 4, 2024

SUMMARY OF DUE DATES:

- December 1 at 9 am
 - Submit digest 1 (Augustine)
- December 8 at 9 am
 - Submit digest 2 (Thomas À Kempis)
- December 8 at 9 am
 - Discussion Post 1
- December 15 at 9 am
 - Submit digest 3 (John Calvin)
- December 22 at 9 am
 - Submit digest 4 (Jeremiah Burroughs)
- December 22 at 9 am
 - Discussion Post 2
- December 29 at 9 am
 - Submit digest 5 (Thomas Brooks)
- January 5 at 9 am
 - Submit digest 6 (Jonathan Edwards)
- January 5 at 9 am
 - Discussion Post 3
- January 10 at 9 am
 - Readings 1-6 are to be completed
- January 19 at 9 am
 - Submit digest 7 (Geerhardus Vos)
- January 26 at 9 am
 - Submit digest 8 (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)
- February 3 at 9am
 - Confession/Catechism reflection summary due
 - Book review due

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.

PURPOSE:

Herman Bavinck once wrote: "[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."

This class offers student the privilege to view the perspective of older writers on the devotional life, with the hope of developing habits of experiencing what C.S. Lewis called "the fresh breezes of the past."

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.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

READING

This course requires **a lot** of reading over a very short period of time. Moreover, as devotional literature, these works demand our slow, careful, and reflective reading. Students will find it a challenge to complete this reading in a timely way. I urge you to set aside a particular day and time of the week to devote to this class. The Lord's Day would be and especially fitting occasion to engage in a profitable study of these writers and subjects.

BOOK DIGESTS

Students are to read and write digests on the assigned texts (see note below on editions), and to come to class prepared to discuss each of the texts under consideration. Digests should be 300-word responses (ca. one 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).

A NOTE ON EDITIONS OF TEXTS

Students can read any edition of these texts, print or electronic. For the Calvin reading, you can substitute the *Golden Booklet on the True Christian Life* or simply read the *Institutes*, Book III, chapters 6–10. But I strongly recommend that you read *A Little Book on the Christian Life* (Reformation Trust, 2017). For Jeremiah Burroughs and Thomas Brooks, my recommendation is that you purchase the Puritan Paperback editions of the books published by Banner of Truth. The reading for Vos will be provided electronically in the “files” section of Canvas.

CONFESSION/CATECHISM ASSIGNMENT

Students are to read daily, over the course of one month, from one of these six catechisms or confessions: Heidelberg Catechism, Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion, Westminster Shorter Catechism, Westminster Larger Catechism, Westminster Confession of Faith, or London Baptist Confession, and write a 300-word summary of their experience of reading a confession *devotionally*.

BOOK REVIEW

Students are to read an additional Christian devotional classic and submit a longer (3–5 page) book review of the book, focusing on the most beneficial (if any) and most problematic (if any) aspects of the book. The reading choice is yours, but (1) it must total at least 150 pages; (2) it must be a book that you have not already read and which – to your knowledge – is not required in another RTS course; and (3) it is recommended – but not required – that you choose from among the titles on the list below. (*Please ask if you want to read a text that is not on this list.*)

DISCUSSION POSTS

Students are to participate in three class discussions on the Canvas discussion board. For each topic, you are to respond to the question posed and then interact with at least one other student's response.

ASSESSMENT

- Reading Digests: 60%
- Book Review: 20%
- Confession Reading: 10%
- Discussion Posts and Class Participation: 10%

GRADING POLICY

- Late work will be penalized one letter grade per day, unless prior permission for late submission is granted.
- The RTS grading scale used in this course can be found by consulting the RTS Catalog, page 47.

COURSE SCHEDULE

ONLINE SCHEDULE

Week of November 27

- Augustine, *Confessions*
- To be read: Books 1–2, 6–9
- Submit digest 1

Week of December 4

- Thomas À Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*
- To be read: books 1-2
- Submit digest 2

Week of December 11

- Topic: John Calvin, *A Little Book on the Christian Life*
- To be read: all
- Submit digest 3

Week of December 18

- Topic: Jeremiah Burroughs, *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*
- To be read: chapter 1
- Submit digest 4

Week of December 25

- Topic: Thomas Brooks, *Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices*
- To be read: Epistle Dedicatory, Ch 1 (Proof of the Point), Ch 2 (Devices to Draw the Soul to Sin), and Conclusion
- Submit digest 5

Week of January 1

- Topic: Jonathan Edwards, *Heaven, A World of Love*
- To be read: all
- Submit digest 6

Week of January 15

- Topic: Geerhardus Vos, "Heavenly-mindedness"
- To be read: all
- Submit digest 7

Week of January 22

- Topic: Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*
- To be read: chapter 1 ("Cheap Grace")
- Submit digest 8

Week of January 28

- To be read: Christian devotional classic of student's choosing
- Submit 3–5 page book review
- Submit Confession/Catechism reflection summary

IN CLASS SCHEDULE

January 10

- Introduction

January 11

- Survey of Augustine, Thomas, and Calvin

January 12

- Survey of Burroughs, Brooks, Edwards, and Vos

SUGGESTED TITLES FOR FURTHER READING

Alleine, Joseph. *Sure Guide to Heaven*

Ames, William, *The Marrow of Theology*.

Baxter, Richard. *Dying Thoughts*

Brainerd, David. *The Diary of David Brainerd*

Bunyan, John. *Pilgrim's Progress* (any non-children's version, original is recommended)

Edwards, Jonathan. *The Religious Affections*

Flavel, John. *Christ Altogether Lovely*

Goodwin, Thomas. *The Vanity of Thoughts*

Gurnall, William. *The Christian in Complete Armor* (abridged version is fine)

Hodge, Charles, *The Way of Life*

Law, William. *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*

Lewis C. S. *Mere Christianity*

M'Cheyne, Robert Murray. *A Basket of Fragments*

Murray, Andrew. *Humility*

Owen, John. *Communion with God*

Owen, John. *The Mortification of Sin*

Packer, J.I. *Knowing God*

Peterson, Eugene. *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*

Rutherford, Samuel. *The Loveliness of Christ*

Scougal, Henry. *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*

Sibbes, Richard. *Bruised Reed*

Spener, Philipp. *Pia Desideria*

Tozer, A. W., *The Knowledge of the Holy*

Watson, Thomas. *The Doctrine of Repentance*

Course Objectives Related to MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes

Course: Classics of Personal Devotion

Professor: Muether

Campus: Orlando

Date: Winter 2024

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> <small>*As the MDiv is the core degree at RTS, the MDiv rubric will be used in this syllabus.</small>		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	Important to see how Reformed theology relates to Reformed spirituality.
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.	Minimal	A familiarity with devotional literature helps a pastor to commend titles to his flock.