

Foundations of Christian Spirituality II: Ascetical Tradition: The Patristic Age to the Late Medieval Period (SP 215)

Shiella Fodchuk

Spring, 2008 Tuesday afternoons 2:00-5:00 pm

November 27, 2007

Course Description and Purpose:

Foundations in Christian Spirituality II is a required course for students in the M.A.T.S. Program with a specialization in Christian Spirituality and Spiritual Direction; and it is recommended for students in the GSDS.

This course will examine the core of spiritual life as a sacred tradition of vital spiritual and mystical experience. This course will trace the development of major spiritual themes through the study of selected seminal spiritual thinkers and mystics from the 2nd century of the Early Church to the Late Medieval period. The content of this course will include: themes of martyrdom and renunciation, the systematic cerebral spirituality of Origen; desert asceticism and spiritual direction; early roots of monasticism; the soul psychology of St. Augustine; the Mystical Theology of Gregory of Nyssa and Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite; the Byzantine Hesychast tradition of Prayer of the Heart; the Carmelite Systematization of the Interior Life. We will focus on St. Perpetua, Origen, the Desert Mothers and Fathers and Evagrius Ponticus, the Cappadocians, St. Augustine of Hippo, SS. Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross.

Competence Objectives:

- An ability to describe Martyrdom as a form of spirituality
- An ability to articulate Origen's three-fold reading of scripture, his classical three-fold pattern of the spiritual life, with an ability to describe each stage of spiritual maturation
- An ability to describe early desert monasticism's division of the spiritual life into two aspects: ascetical practice, praktike, and contemplative knowledge; and to describe the unique character of desert spiritual direction and discernment of spirits.
- An ability to articulate the Mystical Theology of Gregory of Nyssa and Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and to differentiate and describe cataphatic and apophatic prayer
- An ability to describe St. Augustine's psychology of the human soul
- An ability to describe the "heart" in the Hesychast tradition
- An ability to describe St. Teresa's doctrine of the spiritual life as progressive interiority; her psychology of spiritual growth, and the stages of ordinary and infused mystical prayer
- An ability to describe St. John of the Cross' Dark Night of Sense and Dark Night of Faith
- An ability to use the specialized language of Christian Spirituality

Course Format and Content:

- One three-hour class per week, which will integrate academic and experiential learning, with lectures, group discussion of primary sources and personal appropriation of material through contemplative reading and prayer.
- Approximately four hours of reading each week occasional journaling and daily practice of prayer in the style of the tradition we are studying

Expectations of the Student

Students are expected to attend at least 80% of all classes, to arrive on time for class, to complete all assigned readings on time and to complete assigned papers by the due date.

Evaluation

Evaluation is based on full, respectful class participation and written assignments. The written assignment is 20 pages for M.A.T.S. students.

Required Reading

Athanasius. The Life of Antony. Robert Gregg, trans. New York: Paulist Press, 1980. ISBN 08091-2295-2.

Augustine, Aurelius. Confessions. R.S. Pine-Coffin, trans. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1961. ISBN 0-14-044114-X.

Evagrius Ponticus. The Practikos and Chapters On Prayer; Trans. John Eudes Bamberger. Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1981.

Bernard McGinn, John Meyendorff, Jean Leclercq, Editors. Christian Spirituality I: Origins to the Twelfth Century; New York: CrossRoad, 1987. ISBN0-8245-0847-5

Photocopied article: Pseudo-Dionysius. The Aereopagite. The Mystical Theology. Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works. New York: Paulist Press, 1987. 134-141.

Photocopied articles from Origen's writings

Recommended Reading:

Perpetua. The Passion of The Holy Martyrs Perpetua and Felicitas. Ante-Nicene Fathers Volume 3, Latin Christianity. Ed. Tertullian Eerdmans Publishers 1989. 697-706.

Clement, Olivier. The Roots of Christian Mysticism; New City Press, 1995. ISBN 1-56548-029 5
The Sayings of the Desert Fathers. Trans. Benedicta Ward. London: Mowbray, 1981.

