THEOLOGY OF CHRISTIAN PRAYER
THEO 380-01
T & R 4:00-5:15
ST. LOUIS UNIVERSITY
SPRING, 2008
FR. DAVID VINCENT MECONI, S.J.

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XAVIER HALL #218

COURSE DESCRIPTION: What happens when someone prays? How have Christianity’s saints and theologians understood conversing with God? This course examines the history of Christian prayer as well as the various ways of praying found therein. We shall examine such questions about human and divine interaction in prayer, divine foreknowledge, and human collaboration.

In order to do this, the course shall proceed, more or less, historically. We begin however with an overview of prayer by an Orthodox Bishop and then take up prayer in the earliest of Christians, the Church Fathers. From there we shall examine the silence and stillness required for all forms of prayer: beginning with Catherine Doherty’s work on the “desert” and then going into two classics, The Cloud of Unknowing and Saint John of the Cross’s The Dark Night of the Soul. The first of these works will set the ontological conditions of the ineffability of God, while the second explores the psychological effects of the divine absence. Following these texts, we shall have a guest lecture on praying both the Office / Liturgy of the Hours, an ancient way of consecrating each hour of the day, as well as the Rosary, a form of prayer with much in common with other prayer practices of other faiths. To conclude the course, we take up two texts on praying: one from a contemporary American woman and the other from a European priest from the last century. The two amazingly overlap yet in very different idioms.

A course on prayer cries out to be “practical”, inviting you to try out different prayer styles and experiences in your own life. We shall therefore spend the first day of class on the examination of conscience, a staple of Jesuit life and spirituality. So as to compel you to develop this practice in your own life, I am going to ask you to journal your examination, entering at least two prayer periods per week. I will be collecting your journals from time to time, so if there is anything you do not want me to read, simply underline that date with a red (or some other obvious color) and I promise that I will not read that entry. This is simply a way for you to be accountable to the practice.

The majority of your grade will be based on academic essays. Two weeks or so before the paper is due, I shall give you some questions from your readings to answer. Further guidelines will be provided as that time nears. You will also have an in-class (no note, no book) final exam. Finally, part of your grade will be based on your theological clarity when presenting a reading for the day and on your overall participation in class. I understand that some people are quieter by nature but I do expect each of you to be able to (1) summarize the readings for the day and on the day you are assigned, to be able to synthesize the reading and offer a question or two for our class discussion; and (2) to be engaged in each class period, asking questions, making good comments, etc...
TEXTS
Amy Welborn, *Prayer* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2002)

COURSE EXPECTATIONS
1. Class Participation [50 points]
   a. one opening précis
   b. overall level of participation
2. 3 Papers [3 x 100 points]
   #1 due on Feb 29th
   #2 due on Apr 11th
   #3 due on May 3rd
3. Prayer/Examen Journal [50 points]
4. Final Exam: Tuesday, May 6th from 4-5:50 [100 points]

CRITERIA FOR GRADING:

A range [500-450] = *Superior, exceptional, outstanding*. The assignment demonstrates critical, informed, and creative theological inquiry that reflects superior understanding of essential theological/historical concepts. This means the student demonstrates depth of insight beyond what is normally expected. Carefully nuanced reasoning and writing, free from material, structural and grammatical error are presupposed in this grade.

B range [449-400] = *Good*. The assignment demonstrates ready command of full range of concepts and shows some critical, informed, and creative inquiry that reflects above average understanding of essential theological/historical concepts. This means the student has produced an assignment that is free from material, structural and grammatical errors.

C range [399-350] = *Acceptable*. The assignment demonstrates satisfactory ability to describe overall picture and essential concepts. This means the student has completed the assignment in a manner involving no significant errors. Material may not be free from structural and grammatical errors. Nuanced reasoning is not demonstrated.
D range [349-300] = Below average. The assignment demonstrates reasoning that is neither carefully nuanced nor coherently presented; writing is insufficient in depth of insight and/or use of texts; presentation is not free from material error in structure, spelling and grammar. This means that the student failed to respond adequately to the assignment and its intentions.

F [299 and below] = Unsatisfactory. In one or more of the following ways the student: 1) failed to turn in the assignment; 2) did not respond to the assignment as given; 3) submitted work so thoroughly flawed as to indicate that the student did not make a serious effort, 4) was involved in plagiarism or cheating.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY STATEMENT
“Students are expected to be honest in their academic work. The University reserves the right to penalize any student whose academic conduct is, in its judgment, detrimental to the University. Such conduct shall include cases of plagiarism, collusion, cheating, giving or receiving or offering or soliciting information on examinations, or the use of previously prepared material in examinations or quizzes. Violations should be reported to your course instructor, who will investigate and adjudicate them according to the Policy on Academic Honesty of the College of Arts and Sciences. If the charges are found to be true, the student may be liable for academic or disciplinary probation, suspension or expulsion from the university.”

ACADEMIC ASSISTANCE
Any student who feels that he/she may need academic accommodations in order to meet the requirements of this course – as outlined in the syllabus, due to presence of a disability, should contact the Office of Disabilities Services. Please telephone the office at 314-977-2930, or visit Room 131 in the Academic Resources Center, 3840 Lindell Blvd. Confidentiality will be observed in all inquiries.”

WRITING ASSISTANCE
“The Writing Center helps students with writing projects, multimedia projects, and oral presentations. They offer one-on-one consultations that address everything from brainstorming and developing ideas to crafting strong sentences and documenting sources. Take advantage of this learning opportunity. For information and making appointments call 977-2930 or visit http://www.slu.edu/departments/sesc/writing.html.”

CIVILITY OF THIS CLASSROOM CLAUSE
[1] In-Class Technology: the science of theology demands critical engagement with the text, and in turn demands your undivided attention. I am of the personal opinion that this is best done without immediate access to electronic assistance (besides lighting and perhaps some heating!). If you think your laptop is an absolute necessity, please see me. Furthermore, be sure your phone is turned off when you come into class;
if you are expecting an emergency call, let me know beforehand and place your phone on vibrate.

[2] Dress: A primary component of a Saint Louis University education is to form society’s future leaders. Please dress accordingly. Much of this will be left to your discretion but I simply ask that 1. no snow or ball caps be worn during class and 2. you dress respectfully toward others.

[3] Food and Drink: You may bring food and drink to class as long as you consume whatever it is you bring without being a distraction to others. You may forfeit this right if abused.

[4] Respect: This should go without saying but please try to respect all others in the class, especially as they are sharing their perspectives and opinions. Ideas should be able to be shared freely in a university classroom and this requires mutual reverence for the dignity of others. Punctuality is also another way of showing mutual respect. Thank you!

**COURSE SCHEDULE**

**The Foundations of Prayer: Infants Learning to Speak**

22 Jan (T) Introduction to THEO 380
  Opening Lecture on Acedia
  Introduction to the Ignatian *Examination of Conscience*

24 Jan (R) Anthony Bloom, *Beginning to Pray*: 3-51
  Opening Comments: ____________________________

29 Jan (T) Anthony Bloom, *Beginning to Pray*: 55-95
  Opening Comments: ____________________________

31 Jan (R) Anthony Bloom, *Beginning to Pray*: 99-114
  Opening Comments: ____________________________

**Attaining the Divine Image: Striving for Wholeness**

5 Feb (T) John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*: 73-84; 91-120; 132-35
  Opening Comments: ____________________________

7 Feb (R) John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*: 146-90
  Opening Comments: ____________________________
+DeLubac Lecture delivered by Prof. Catherine Hilkert of Notre Dame on Thursday, February 7th at 7:00pm in the St. Louis Room, (BSC): Creation in Image of God: Does Gender Matter?

12 Feb (T)  John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*: 201-13; 229-55  
Opening Comments: ____________________________

Opening Comments: ____________________________

**The Call to Stillness: Stepping Within**

19 Feb (T)  Catherine Doherty, *Poustinia*: 3-11; 21-40; 55; 173-82  
Opening Comments: ____________________________

21 Feb (R)  Catherine Doherty, *Poustinia*: 75-109  
Opening Comments: ____________________________

26 Feb (T)  Catherine Doherty, *Poustinia*: 111-48  
Opening Comments: ____________________________

28 Feb (R)  Introduction to Ignatius of Loyola’s “Rules” for the *Spiritual Exercises*; to be distributed

**29 FEB: PAPER #1**

**The Ineffable God: The Apophatic Way**

4 Mar (T)  *The Cloud of Unknowing*: 11-12; 20-41  
Opening Comments: ____________________________

6 Mar (R)  *The Cloud of Unknowing*: 41-73  
Opening Comments: ____________________________

11 Mar (T)  *The Cloud of Unknowing*: 73-101  
Opening Comments: ____________________________
13 Mar (R) “The Book of Privy Counseling” and “An Epistle on Prayer”, *The Cloud of Unknowing*: 103-42
Opening Comments: ____________________________

**Ineluctable Yearning: The Soul Called to Trust**
25 Mar (T) John of the Cross, *The Dark Night of the Soul*: 33-57
Opening Comments: ____________________________

27 Mar (R) John of the Cross, *The Dark Night of the Soul*: 58-86
Discussion led by Sarah Sparks
Opening Comments: ____________________________

1 Apr (T) John of the Cross, *The Dark Night of the Soul*: 89-116
Opening Comments: ____________________________

3 Apr (R) John of the Cross, *The Dark Night of the Soul*: 117-45
Opening Comments: ____________________________

8 Apr (T) John of the Cross, *The Dark Night of the Soul*: 146-84
Opening Comments: ____________________________

10 Apr (R) **Guest Lecture: Dominican Sisters on the Theology of Praying:**
1. The Liturgy of the Hours [Reading: *Introduction to the Office*; to be distributed]
2. The Rosary [Reading: John Paul II’s *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* §9-19; 39-43; to be distributed]

**11 APRIL PAPER #2**

**Guides to Deepening Prayer: A Modern Blogger and An Old Classic**
15 Apr (T) Amy Welborn, *Prayer*: 7-37
Opening Comments: ____________________________

17 Apr (R) Amy Welborn, *Prayer*: 63-100
Opening Comments: ____________________________
22 Apr (T)  Romano Guardini, *The Art of Praying*: 35-96; to be distributed
Opening Comments: ____________________________

24 Apr (R)  Romano Guardini, *The Art of Praying*: 97-148; to be distributed
Opening Comments: ____________________________

29 Apr (T)  Romano Guardini, *The Art of Praying*: 149-82; to be distributed
Opening Comments: ____________________________

1 May (R)  Course Overview and Review for the Final Exam
Prayer/Examen Journals are to be handed in at this time

3 MAY: PAPER #3

FINAL EXAM: Tuesday, May 6th, 4-5:50 p.m.