

THEO 60240 Contemplation and Action
Instructor: Prof. Matthew Ashley
Location: Redemptorist Renewal Center, Tucson, Arizona

Dates: December 27, 2009-January 8, 2010

COURSE DESCRIPTION

What is the relationship between contemplative prayer and action on behalf of others? The tendency in the Christian tradition has been to see prayer as superior to action, since it is there that one experiences, however fleetingly, that union with God that is our ultimate beatitude and destiny. However, there have been innovative attempts in the history of Christian spirituality to break down overly rigid barriers between these two essential components of the Christian life. This course will look at a cross-section of views on this question. We begin with scriptural loci for considering the relationship between prayer and action, and then move to Greek thought, with the distinction between *theoria* and *praxis*. We then consider how this conceptual pair was taken over in the history of Christian spirituality in some classic understandings of the relationship between the *vita contemplativa* and the *vita activa*. We will focus in particular on patristic and medieval homilies on Martha and Mary (Lk 10: 38-42). Figures in this section include Augustine, Bernard of Clairvaux, Thomas Aquinas, and Meister Eckhart. In the next section of the course we consider the late-Medieval and Reformation spiritualities of Catherine of Siena, Ignatius of Loyola and John of the Cross. We conclude with three contemporary figures who have attempted to interrelate contemplation and action: Thomas Merton, Dorothy Day, and Gustavo Gutiérrez.

Our discussions will take place in the beautiful Redemptorist Renewal Center in Tucson Arizona (<http://www.desertrenewal.org/>). We will have optional morning prayer, in which we will try out different kinds of prayer: from the Liturgy of the Hours to Lectio Divina, to centering prayer to Ignatian meditation.

COURSE GOALS:

On completing the course a student will be able to:

- 1) describe the history of Christian attempts to integrate prayer and action through the Middle Ages in terms of the sources in Scripture and the influence of the Greek categories of “theory” and “praxis”;
- 2) develop a “typology” of approaches and use it to compare and contrast different approaches to the *vita contemplativa* and the *vita activa* in the patristic and medieval periods;
- 3) describe how the context within which an author writes is relevant for understanding how he or she approaches the relationship between prayer and action;
- 4) discuss the relative merits of a given approach for his or her own context.

COURSE EVALUATION

- 1) An in-class exam on material covered up through Meister Eckhart. The principal purpose of the exam is to evaluate progress toward goals one and two. [20% of final grade]
- 2) A take-home exam, distributed to students on the final day of class, the answers to which shall be emailed to the instructor within one week's time (by January 16). [30% of final grade]
- 3) A ten to fifteen page paper, to be done over the next two months, on a topic discussed with the instructor. [40% of final grade]
- 4) Class participation. [10% of final grade]

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Students should acquire the following texts and read the pages indicated. They are available in a photocopy packet which may be obtained for the theology department offices:

- (1) *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius: A Translation and Commentary*, translated and edited by George Ganss, SJ (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1992) – we will read paragraphs 1-237; 313-336. These paragraph numbers are at the beginnings of each paragraph in the text.
- (2) *Catherine of Siena: The Dialogue*, translated and edited, Suzanne Noffke, OP (Mahwah: N.J.: Paulist Press, Press, 1980) – we will read pp. 23-160
- (3) Gustavo Gutiérrez, *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis. 1987). We will read the entire book.
- (4) Dorothy Day, *Selected Writings*, edited with an introduction by Robert Ellsberg (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2005) – we will read pp. 1-48, 98-184, 205-258, 319-364.
- (5) Thomas Merton, *Contemplation in a World of Action*, with a foreword by Robert Coles (Notre Dame, In.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998) – we will read pages 5-83; 141-176, 215-66.

OTHER READINGS:

The following readings are given in the photocopy packet:

1. Nicholas Lobkowitz, *Theory and Practice: A History of a Concept from Aristotle to Marx* (Notre Dame, 1967), 3-58
2. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons* 103 and 104; from *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* (New City Press, 1990-), vol III, part 5: 76-87
3. Augustine of Hippo, *Tractate 124: On John 21:19-25*, from *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, translated by John W. Rettig. (Catholic University Press, 1988), vol. 5, 82-94.
4. Bernard of Clairvaux, Sermon 50 on the Song of Songs, in *Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works*, trans. G.R. Evans (Paulist Press, 1987), 241-245.
Sermons 3 and 5 on the Assumption, from *St. Bernard's Sermons on the Blessed Virgin Mary*, trans. by a Priest of Mount Melleray (Devon, EN: Augustine Publishing, 1984), 184-193, 206-228
5. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II.II: Q 179, Q 180.1-5, 8; QQ 181.

6. Meister Eckhart, Sermon 2, from *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises and Defense*, trans. with introductions by Edmund Colledge, O.S.A. and Bernard McGinn (Paulist, 1981), 177-81.
 7. _____, Sermon 86, from *Meister Eckhart: Teacher and Preacher*, ed. Bernard McGinn (Paulist, 1986), 338-45.
 8. Bernard McGinn, "The God Beyond God: Theology and Mysticism in the Thought of Meister Eckhart," *Journal of Religion* 61 (1981): 1-19.
 9. John O'Malley, "Some Distinctive Characteristics of Jesuit Spirituality in the Sixteenth Century" in John O'Malley, John Padberg & Vincent O'Keefe, *Jesuit Spirituality: A Now and Future Resource* (Chicago, IL: Loyola University Press, 1990), 1-20.
 10. John of the Cross: selections from *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh & Otilio Rodriguez (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1991), 50-53, 113-18, 469-71, 583-95, 610-615.
 11. John of the Cross: selections from "The Living Flame of Love," in *John of the Cross: Selected Writing*, edited with an introduction by Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D. (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1987), 287-316.
 12. Gustavo Gutiérrez, "John of the Cross: A Latin American View," trans. James Nickoloff, in *Density of the Present: Selected Writings* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1999), 137-146.
 13. Dorothy Day, *The Long Loneliness* (New York: Harper & Row, 1952), 243-62
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COURSE SCHEDULE:

For each weekday we will use the following schedule. Weekends are free.

Morning

- 8:30 – 9:00: optional group prayer
- Meeting 1: 9:00-10:15
- 10:15 - 10:30: break
- Meeting 2: 10:30-11:45 session two

Afternoon

- Meeting 3. 1:00 - 2:15: session three
 - 3:00 - 4:00: instructor available for meetings
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Week One

Monday, December 28: sources for Christian spirituality: Athens & Jerusalem

1. Introduction to course & Lobkowitz [session 1]
2. Lobkowitz (cont.) [session 2]
3. Lobkowitz (concluded), Scriptural pairs & early attempts (Origin, Cappadocians, etc.) [session 3]

Tuesday, December 29: Patristic & Early Medieval Reflections

1. Augustine: Sermons on Marthy/Mary [session 4]
2. Augustine: Tractate on John; conclusions [session 5]
3. Bernard of Clairvaux [session 6]

Wednesday, December 30: The High and Late Middle Ages I

1. Thomas Aquinas I [session 7]
2. Thomas Aquinas (concluded) & intro to Eckhart [session 8]
3. Meister Eckhart: the framework [McGinn essay] [session 9]

Thursday, December 31: High and Late Middle Ages II

1. Eckhart, Sermons on Martha & Mary [session 10]
2. Catherine of Siena I [session 11]
3. Catherine of Siena II [session 12]

Friday, January 1

No morning sessions. Happy New Year!

- Afternoon: Exam over parts I & II of course [session 13]

Week Two

Monday, January 4: Reformation Spiritualities I: Ignatius of Loyola

1. Ignatius of Loyola: background and context [session 14]
2. Ignatius of Loyola: *Spiritual Exercises* [session 15]
3. Ignatius (concl); intro to John of the Cross [session 16]

Tuesday, January 5: Reformation Spirituality II

1. John of the Cross I [session 17]
2. John of the Cross II [session 18]
3. context for 20th century spirituality [session 19]

Wednesday, January 6: Modern Figures: Dorothy Day and Thomas Merton

1. Dorothy Day [session 20]
2. Dorothy Day [session 21]
3. Thomas Merton (view film) [session 22]

Thursday, January 7: Modern Figures: Thomas Merton

1. Merton I [session 23]
2. Merton II [session 24]

Afternoon: No class; meetings with instructor to discuss paper topics

Friday, January 8: Modern Figures: Gustavo Gutiérrez

1. Gustavo Gutiérrez I [session 25]
2. Gustavo Gutiérrez II [session 26]
3. Concluding Discussions [session 27]