

**RGP 3206-6206HF (2008)**  
**CLASSICS OF CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY**  
(cross-listed to the Theology Department)

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office hours: Thursday, 10am-12.  
or by appointment

Monday 4:30- 6:30, #B  
Margaret Brennan Classroom  
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**Course Description**

The course develops major themes in the history of Christian spirituality, through a close reading of selections by Plato, Origen, Pseudo-Dionysius, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, St. Gregory of Palamas, Julian of Norwich, St. Ignatius of Loyola, and Dorothy Day. Special attention will be given to ideas of “love”.

**Course Objectives**

Students will be able to describe, analyse, and critically evaluate various general themes in Christian spirituality, as these developed historically. See the course syllabus on pp. 5-6 for the list of readings within which these themes will be more specifically contextualized (the writings of Plato, Origen, Pseudo-Dionysius, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, St. Gregory of Palamas, Julian of Norwich, St. Ignatius of Loyola, and Dorothy Day). For specific details, see the various class handouts, “Possible Discussion Questions”, distributed for many of the readings. Also, students will be able to articulate and appreciate the significance of these themes in Christian Spirituality for various pastoral settings.

**Required Books** (available at the Crux Bookshop, Wycliffe College)

Plato, *The Symposium*, Christopher Gill, tr., Penguin, 1999.

Julian of Norwich, *Revelation of Love*, John Skinner, tr. and ed., New York: Doubleday, Anchor Books, Image Books, 1996.

Gregory Palamas, *Gregory Palamas: The Triads*, John Meyendorff, ed., New York: Paulist Press, 1983.

Dorothy Day, *The Long Loneliness: The Autobiography of Dorothy Day*, San Francisco: Harper, 1997.

Also, for Advanced Degree Students only: Grace Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

Some required reading selections will be available on Reserve in the Regis College Library. See the Reserve Reading list on p. 6 of the course outline. The required readings focus on the writings of specific individuals. For those who are interested in a survey background of Christian Spirituality, see Gordon Mursell, ed., *The Story of Christian Spirituality: Two Thousand years from east to West* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001). There is a copy on Reserve.

**Grading:** A numerical mark will be given for each course requirement, according to the percentage-weight of the assignment. At the end of the course, a letter grade will be assigned on the following number and letter grade scheme:

A+	= 100-90	B	= 76-73
A	= 89-85	B-	= 72-70
A-	= 84-80	FZ	= 69-0
B+	= 79-77		

### **Graded Assignments:**

#### **For Basic Degree Students:**

90% **Two critical-reflection papers**, each about 1800 words (7-8 typed pages or so). See details below on p. 3.

**(due: Friday, October 10 (40%), Wednesday, December 10 (50%))**

10% **Class Participation**: attendance; evidence that you are keeping up with the readings; class discussion; **two** pastoral reflections (**due: Monday, December 15**), see details below on this page.

#### **For Advanced Degree Students:**

35% **One** critical-reflection paper on Grace Jantzen's book, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism*, about 1600 words (6-7 typed pages), and **participation in the AD seminars**. Two Advanced Degree seminars will be scheduled the week of **October 13-17** separate from regular classes. Students will do a paper on one chapter from Grace Jantzen's book and be prepared to discuss this paper in the seminars. See details below on pp. 3-4.

55% **One** critical-reflection paper, about 3100 words (12-14 typed pages or so). The topic is to focus on a theme from one of the figures studied in the course, chosen in consultation with me.

**(due: Wednesday, December 10)**

10% **Class Participation**: attendance; evidence that you are keeping up with the readings; class discussion; **two** pastoral reflections (**due: December 18**), one of them on *The Symposium*. See the following details.

**Pastoral Reflections on the Readings:** In class there will be some small group discussions on the pastoral significance of the various readings. Students need to focus on two of these writers for whom they have not written a critical-reflection paper. A.D. students need to write one of their Pastoral Reflection on a subject(s) from *The Symposium*.

Students are to reflect personally and intelligently (two pages or so each) on the following points, and submit these reflections by **December 18**:

- 1) Summarize very briefly key elements of the reading.
- 2) Reflect on your attractions/resistance/aversions to aspects of the readings, and what might cause these.
- 3) In what ways (or not) might the writer speak to a contemporary reader's sense of spiritual well-being and development?
- 3) What are the questions or issues that the writer raises for you?
- 4) What is the possible pastoral significance (or limitations) of the readings?

### **Critical-Reflection Papers for B.D. Students.**

- 1) You may refer to secondary sources in your development, but the main focus is the elucidation of the views of the writer in question and your critical reflections on her or him. Note the marking criteria listed below.
- 2) Critical-Reflection paper #1 is **due Monday, October 30**. A 10% reduction of the grade will be applied to late papers each week or part week they are late. **Length:** approximately 1800 words (7-8 typed pages or so).
- 3) For Critical-Reflection Paper #1, choose one of the following topics:
  - a) Choose two (or more) views of love given by characters in Plato's *Symposium*, which you find most interesting. Develop and compare the views in a critical and creative way. Discuss and evaluate the relevance of these views for a contemporary audience.

OR

b) Critically explore the nature and significance of three of the myths given in Plato's *Symposium*. Compare where appropriate, focusing on the significance of myths and on the implications of these myths for ideas of love.

OR

c) Rowan A. Greer notes how Origen espouses an embodied spirituality, at least in the sense that it provides "a remedial way to direct the soul back to God". Origen, Greer writes, provides a "providential use of the body". Discuss and evaluate the significance of the body in Origen's spirituality. Would you judge him to be a reliable spiritual guide for persons today in that regard?

OR

d) Explore in a creative and critical way significant correspondences and differences between ideas expressed in *Symposium* and that of Origen's spiritual theology.

(Questions for Paper #2 will be distributed later in the course.)

### **Seminar Presentation on Grace Jantzen's Book** (for A.D. students' seminar):

- 1) Choose one of the following chapters from Grace Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism*:

First Seminar: Chapter 2, "Mystics, martyrs and honorary males"; Chapter 3, "The mystical meaning of scripture"; Chapter 4, "Mystical theology and the erotic other"; Chapter 5, "Cry out and write: mysticism and the struggle for authority";

Second Seminar: Chapter 6, "The visions of the virgins: spirituality and sexual control"; Chapter 7, "Heretics and witches"; Chapter 8, "The language of ineffability"; Chapter 9, "Conclusion: mysticism and modernity".

- 2) The paper should be about 1600 words (6-7 typed pages).

- 3) Carefully and clearly outline the main elements of the assigned section. Contextualize it in terms of the overall thrust of the book and relate it to what you take to be one or two of the more significant related sections of the book. Reflect creatively and critically on them.
- 4) Each paper must include at the end **questions and issues appropriate for class discussion.**
- 5) Students will bring copies of the paper for all seminar-participants. Papers will be handed in for evaluation immediately following the seminar in which it is presented.

### **Format and marking criteria for the critical-reflection papers**

The essays need to show significant thought and effort. They should be well-developed and polished.

Format: papers must be **double spaced**, have a **title page**, **page numbers**, and appropriate **margin spacing**. **Footnotes** are necessary if you quote passages or are dependent for your ideas on another writer. Neglect of appropriate notation will result in a significant reduction of your grade, possibly even an 'F'. Papers are usually more legible if typed, but hand-written papers are acceptable if they are legible and **double spaced**.

Academic Honesty: Documentation for footnotes is necessary, when quoting writers or referring to secondary sources. All material which you quote directly should be noted, as well as any judgments, arguments, and data that you draw from other sources.

- i.** Plagiarism will result in a grade of F for the course, and the notification of the Dean of your College.
- ii.** In order to deter plagiarism, I might require an oral defense of papers. Failure to attend the defense will result in an "F" on the paper.
- iii.** Failure to document properly the sources of your research will involve a significant reduction in your grade, possibly even an "F". This includes the failure to cite the appropriate books or page numbers of books from which you have quoted.
- iv.** If the paper makes any major use of work done in another course, submit the work along with the paper. If there is not a significant amount of new work, the grade may be reduced. See me if you have any questions on this.

### Marking Criteria:

- i. Clarity** of the paper, in grammatical detail and expression, and in the overall structure. Be sure your paper is drawn together coherently; a strong introduction stating what you will do and how you will do it, and conclusion summarizing what you have done, are essential in this regard.
- ii. Substance** of the paper, whether it is significant or superficial, rigorous or sloppy. You must take an appropriate objective and scholarly approach, and show some significant understanding of the material and relevant research issues.
- iii. Accuracy** of the paper, where it involves an exposition or explanation of information from books or lecture notes.
- iv. Scope** of the paper: that is, significant or relevant issues and implications that arise from the

problems, issues or themes of the material in question.

**v. Conciseness** of the paper, in contrast with being wordy or overly elaborate or needlessly repetitive.

**vi. Originality** of the paper: the analysis should show some critical reflection on the theme or question, whether it is your own or a synthesis of ideas connected to another course-reading or of ideas developed in class discussion. You must show some critical and creative development on your part.

### **Tentative Syllabus**

Sep. 8 **Course Introduction:** Defining spirituality, issues, introduction to The Symposium.  
-Readings: Walter Principe, "Toward Defining Spirituality" in Collins, ed., Exploring Christian Spirituality, pp. 43-59 (**R.R.**).

Sep. 15 **-Greek background**  
-Readings: Plato, *The Symposium* (all).

Sep. 22 **-Greek background; Hebrew background.**  
-Readings: Plato, *The Symposium* (continued); *Song of Songs*, handout.

Sep. 29 **-Church Fathers.**  
-Readings: Origen, *An Exhortation*, Greer's introduction (pp. 1-37), "The Prologue to the Commentary on the Song of Songs, (pp. 217-244, **R.R.**); Origen, *Contra Celsum* (pp. 274-282; 420-422, **R.R.**).

Oct. 6 **-Medieval Spirituality.**  
-Readings: Origen (continued); St. Bernard of Clairvaux, Jean Leclerc's Introduction (pp. 13-57), *On Loving God* (pp. 173-205), *Sermons on The Song of Songs* (pp. 209-278, **R.R.**);

**\*\*Critical-Reflection Paper #1 due on Friday, Oct. 10** (B. D. students).

Oct. 13 Thanksgiving Holiday. No Class.  
**Advanced Degree Seminar** presentations on Grace Jantzen's book, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism* (two seminars to be scheduled).

Oct. 20 Reading Week. No Class.

Oct 27 **-Medieval Spirituality.**  
-Readings: St. Bernard of Clairvaux (continued). Jantzen, handout.

Nov. 3 **-Medieval Spirituality.**  
-Readings: Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Mystical Theology* (pp. 135-141); Jantzen (pp. 95-108, **R.R.**); St. Gregory of Palamas, *The Triads* (pp. 1-22; 41-111).

- Nov. 10        **-Medieval Spirituality.**  
               -St, Gregory (continued) Julian of Norwich, *Revelation of Love* (all).  
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- Nov. 17        **-Reformation Spirituality.**  
               -Readings: Julian (continued);.
- Nov. 24        **-Reformation Spirituality.**  
               -Readings: St. Ignatius of Loyola, *The Autobiography* (Tylandam's introduction, Chapters 3, 11, pp. 7-27; 64-85; 179-188, **R.R.**).
- Dec. 1         **-Modern Spirituality**  
               -Readings: Dorothy Day, *The Long Loneliness: The Autobiography of Dorothy Day* (all).
- Dec. 8         **-Modern Spirituality (last class)**  
               -Readings: Day (continued)
- \*\*Critical-Reflection Paper due Wednesday, December 10** (B.D. and A.D. students).
- Dec. 15        **\*\*Pastoral Reflections due** (B.D. and A.D. students).

**Books on Reserve Reading for RGP 3206-6206 in Regis College Library**

- St. Bernard of Clairvaux, *Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works*, G. R. Evans (tr.), *The Classics of Western Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987).
- Kenneth J. Collins, *Exploring Christian Spirituality: An Ecumenical Reader* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2000).
- St. Ignatius of Loyola, *A Pilgrim's Journey: The Autobiography of Ignatius of Loyola*, rev. ed., Joseph Tylandam, S.J., tr. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2001).
- Grace Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
- Grace Jantzen, *Julian of Norwich: Mystic and Theologian* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987).
- Ursula King, *Christian Mystics: The Spiritual Heart of the Christian Tradition* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998).
- Bernard McGinn, *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*, Vols. 1-3, (New York: Crossroad, 1998).
- Gordon Mursell, ed., *The Story of Christian Spirituality: Two Thousand years from east to West* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001).
- Origen, *Origen: Contra Celsum*, Henry Chadwick, tr. (London: Cambridge University Press, 1980).
- Origen, *Origen: An exhortation to Martyrdom, Prayer, and Selected Works*, Rowan Greer (tr.), *The Classics of Western Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987).
- Catherine Osborne, *Eros Unveiled: Plato and the God of Love* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).
- Pseudo-Dionysius, *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, Colm Luibheid (tr.), *The Classics of Western Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987).
- Gregory Vlastos, *Plato: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1971).