RS 100—FOUNDATIONS OF SPIRITUAL FORMATION
Spring 2009

Instructor: The Rev. William B. Nelson, Ph.D.
Professor of Religious Studies.

Office Hours: 12:35-1:35 Mon and Wed; 9:50-12:00 Thu.
Other times by appointment.
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Time and Place: 7:00-10:00 PM Tuesday; CO 1.

Textbooks: Required:
Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Life Together.
Richard Foster, Celebration of Discipline.
Thomas à Kempis, Of the Imitation of Christ.
Brother Lawrence, The Practice of the Presence of God.
Henri Nouwen, Reaching Out.
C. S. Lewis, Surprised by Joy.
C. S. Lewis, A Grief Observed.
Sheldon Vanauken, A Severe Mercy.

Requirements: 1. Do all the reading assignments. Read the study guides and answer the questions in a notebook. Come to class prepared to answer the questions and to discuss the books. Participate in class discussions. Quizzes?
2. Meet with the professor twice during the term. The first meeting will be early in the semester. At that time you will set a rule for yourself of spiritual exercises which you will follow for the semester. In the second meeting, toward the end of the semester, you will evaluate how well you kept it and how you might wish to amend it for your life after the course terminates.
3. Choose a “spiritual director” and meet with him/her at least once a week. This person must agree to read your journal and write a one page response. No member of the class may fill this role for more than one other member.
4. Keep a journal. There will be journal assignments in and out of class. You are expected to do more than the assignments. Your journal will be read by the professor and your “spiritual director.” You must put the day, date, start time, and end time on each journal entry. For example: Mon, Jan 14, 2008; Start: 7:05 PM. After that would follow your journal entry. When finished write the end time. For example: End: 7:35 PM. If it is an assigned journal entry, indicate this at the top of the entry by writing: “Assignment.”
5. Make a retreat of at least 24 hours in length. It should be off campus.
6. Write a spiritual autobiography. In the second part of the course we shall be reading the spiritual autobiographies of some past believers. Your main written assignment for the course will be to write your own; 8-10 pages, typed, double spaced.

7. Write a Final Examination. Part of this will be an essay exam over the content of the textbooks and part will be an exercise in self-evaluation.

Evaluation:
1. Your Rule (due Feb 10—typed, double spaced)—5%
2. Journal (due Apr 28)—20%
3. Class Participation and Quizzes—20%
4. Spiritual Autobiography (due Apr 28)—20%
5. Final Examination—35%

N.B.: You must do all the assignments in order to pass the course.

Grading Scale:

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<th>Grade</th>
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<td>95-100</td>
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<td>90-94</td>
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Academic Honesty: The penalty for cheating or plagiarism will be a grade of “F” for the course without possibility of withdrawal.

Attendance: Expected of all students. This is especially important in a course such as this 1) where missing one class is equivalent to missing a week of classes in another course and 2) where a high priority is given to class discussion. Unexcused absences will result in a lowered grade.

The Place of RS 100 Foundations of Spiritual Formation in the General Education Curriculum

In the GE Curriculum this course fulfills the requirement IV.1.B. “Integrating the Major Discipline.” It includes biblical studies for we read many passages from both the OT and the NT that focus on spirituality topics such as prayer, worship, and fasting. It includes history of Christianity for we study historical figures such as Augustine, Thomas à Kempis, and C. S. Lewis; we also discuss movements such as the Protestant reformation, pietism, and Pentecostalism. It includes theology for we consider theological themes as they emerge from the reading such as Catholicism, Calvinism, and Arminianism. It includes Christian mission for we talk about spiritual disciplines as they relate to the larger mission of the church. Occasionally we might even touch on spirituality in other religions, e.g. Manichaeism when we read Augustine; we might talk about Judaism in discussing how the faith of the OT developed into Judaism and Christianity.

Spirituality is a discipline situated within the humanities and more particularly within religious studies. It is possible to earn advanced degrees in this field. The Graduate Theological Union at Berkeley is one reputable school which offers an M.A., a Th.D., and a Ph.D. in Christian Spirituality. It can be taught from a historical perspective, for example one could teach a course on the history of Christian spirituality. It can be taught from a literary perspective, for instance at Harvard there is a course called, “The Literature of Christian Reflection.” In secular universities, spirituality is usually studied using descriptive and comparative approaches in the same way world religions are studied. In such cases the professor does not promote spirituality
and the students do not attempt to enter into the practice of spirituality. Rather the goal of the course is to describe, analyze, and critique the beliefs and practices of religious traditions considered in the course. Students should learn to describe, compare, and contrast Christian spirituality with that of other religions or to describe, compare, and contrast different Christian traditions of spirituality. At Christian colleges and theological seminaries, Christian spirituality is taught in the ways mentioned above, but with an added dimension: it is taught as a normative discipline. Students are encouraged to practice Christian traditions of spirituality; the professor endeavors to promote spiritual formation in the students taking the course. In RS 100 “Foundations of Spiritual Formation” we examine different Christian practices of meditation, prayer, worship, and service and encourage students to find those spiritual disciplines which most help them to become better disciples of Jesus Christ. In the first part of the course we read general works on spirituality such as Thomas à Kempis’ Of the Imitation of Christ and Richard Foster’s Celebration of Discipline. In the second half of the course we read spiritual autobiographies such as Augustine’s Confessions, and The Autobiography of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: The Story of a Soul. The student’s major paper for the course is to write his/her own spiritual autobiography. There is also a comprehensive final exam in essay format in which the students must show mastery of the books and themes of the course.