

Classics in the Catholic Tradition

LSHV 455-01

Wednesdays, 6:30 – 9:25 pm, beginning January 18, 2017

William J. O'Brien, Ph.D.

obrienw@georgetown.edu (301) 588-3287

This seminar introduces participants to classic texts in the Christian tradition. In this class, the meaning of “classic” is taken from theologian David Tracy, who observes: “Certain expressions of the human spirit so disclose a compelling truth about our lives that we cannot deny them some kind of normative status. . . . Classics . . . surprise, provoke, challenge, shock and transform us.” Though we will proceed chronologically through the centuries, our approach will be systematic, as successive texts are approached as classic realizations of Christianity’s foundational religious event. The realization of foundational events is integrally related to the broader learning goals of the Graduate Liberal Studies Program at Georgetown University.

General Learning Goals and Outcomes

The Graduate Liberal Studies Program at Georgetown University offers a course of study which engages students in reading, research, reflection, discussion, and writing. In the pursuit of the degree, students are to discern and wrestle with the content generally associated with the “liberal” arts in the root meaning of that term, namely, what it means for human beings to be endowed with freedom and what ennobles and enhances human freedom. The two general goals of the program, therefore, are to analyze and assess human values (who are we and what ought we to do?) and to undertake such study in an interdisciplinary fashion. The program thus draws from the social sciences as well as from those fields generally defined as the humanities (e.g., theology, philosophy, literature, and art), recognizing that the moral dimension of human life embraces social, political, and economic relationships as well as personal choices. The program is to culminate in a thesis that successfully analyzes a question of value related to a student’s chosen curricular field of study.

The goal of this seminar is to engage the student in examining one or more of the following topics:

- What it means to be human
- How human beings are related to nature and creation as a whole
- What gives ultimate meaning to human life
- What contributes to human flourishing
- What enables genuine community
- Elements of personal ethics
- Principles of social justice and social ethics

Required Readings (***Please note: we proceed at the pace of one book per week**)

****Please Note: only the editions and translations noted below should be purchased for this course.*

Henri Nouwen’s *The Return of the Prodigal Son* (Doubleday Image soft cover)—**please come to the first class prepared to discuss this work.**

The Gospel of Mark (any Bible)

St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans (any Bible)

Early Christian Writings, selections (Penguin Classics edition)

The Desert Fathers, selections (Ann Arbor, Basil Pennington preface)

St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Lectures on the Christian Sacraments*

St. Augustine’s *Confessions* (Penguin edition, tr. R.S. Pine-Coffin)

St. Augustine’s *Confessions*

Dante’s *Hell*, (Penguin edition, tr. Dorothy Sayres)

Dante's *Purgatory* (Penguin edition, tr. Dorothy Sayres)
Dante's *Paradise* (Penguin edition, tr. Dorothy Sayres)
Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love* (Penguin Classics, tr. Spearing)
Pascal's *Pensees* (Penguin Classics, tr. A.J. Krailsheimer)
Teilhard de Chardin's *Divine Milieu*

Required Writing: Three short (3-4 pages, double spaced) papers on assigned topics related to the following week's readings. (Participants are free to decide which weeks to write them.) In addition, participants may choose either to write a comprehensive take-home examination or to submit a research paper on an approved topic (due date one week after last class for both). Late papers will be accepted, but will be subject to a letter grade penalty.

Academic Standards: MALS and DLS students are responsible for upholding the Georgetown University Honor System and adhering to the academic standards included in the Honor Code Pledge stated below:

In the pursuit of the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life, I commit myself to respect and uphold the Georgetown University Honor System: To be honest in any academic endeavor; and to conduct myself honorably, as a responsible member of the Georgetown community, as we live and work together.

Disability Notice: If you believe you have a disability, you should contact the Academic Resource Center—Suite 335, Leavey Center (arc@georgetown.edu) –for further information. This office is responsible for reviewing documentation provided by students with disabilities and for determining reasonable accommodations in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and University policies.