

**The Journey into Christ:
An Exploration of Augustine's Spiritual Thought**
MIN6309ag
Austin Graduate School of Theology
Spring 2017

Professor: Daniel Napier
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Class Time: Mondays 7-9:40pm
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Course Description:

This course in spiritual theology will be composed of lecture and seminar sessions, both aimed at introducing Augustine's core insights concerning and practical advice for person growth into Christlikeness.

Preparatory lectures will introduce key themes in Augustine's thought that form a framework for his spiritual vision and will provide an overview of his stages of spiritual maturation. Once the basic stages are in view, we will devote time to closely examining each stage in terms of understandings, practices, and challenges to be faced.

We will intersperse seminar discussions of key texts with our lectures on these stages. The lectures and discussions will aim to make each stage clear for contemporary disciples of Jesus. Students will be asked to apply Augustine's insights in diagnosing their own walk with God.

Seminar participants will present short papers to start the conversation on various books of the *Confessions* and *On the Trinity*. Full participation in every seminar will be expected of each student regardless of whether (s)he is presenting that day.

Learning Objectives:

- Students will develop a capacity to summarize Augustine's model of spiritual growth.
- Students will use Augustine's paradigm to assess their own stage of spiritual growth and thoughtfully experiment with practices appropriate to that stage.
- Students will gain an appreciation for the scriptural saturation and spiritual profundity of Augustine's thought.
- Students will wrestle with central claims of Augustine's theology in the light of biblical faithfulness and personal experience.
- Students will develop the capacity to read two classic spiritual texts, the *Confessions* and *On the Trinity*, with some skill and comprehension.
- Students will be able to describe the basic strategies employed by the church fathers to interpret their pre-Christian cultural inheritance and Augustine's innovative use of those strategies to interpret his personal past.

- Students will learn how to prepare seminar papers and appropriately participate in a focused discussion on spiritual matters.

Course Requirements and Evaluation:

- **Full preparation for and participation** in all sessions, including the seminars, are mandatory and **will comprise 33% of your final grade**. Minimally, *preparation means having read the text* to be discussed for the day *and having a few intelligent questions concerning it* to prompt discussion. Read the attached page on 'Ground Rules of Theological Conversation' to aid preparation.
- Each student will present at least **one seminar paper** to initiate conversation on Augustine's text. This written presentation **will comprise 33% of your final grade**. The date of each student's presentation will be determined during the first class period.
- Since this is a course in *spiritual* theology, lived practice is essential to understanding. Augustine envisions six distinguishable stages or moments in spiritual maturation. To test his insights, each student will conduct a lived experiment by attentively practicing specific exercises that Augustine prescribed for persons at one's level of spiritual maturation. At the end of the course, **an experiential report in essay form will be submitted. This paper will be due on 8 May 2017 and will comprise the remaining 34% of your final grade.**

Required Reading:

- Chadwick, Henry. 2001. *Augustine: A Very Short Introduction*. Very Short Introductions. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Napier, Daniel. 2016. "Becoming a Limb of the *Totus Christus*: St. Augustine's Mystagogy in *Confessiones* 13 as Trans-Identification." Chap. 32 In *Seeing through the Eyes of Faith: New Approaches to the Mystagogy of the Church Fathers*, edited by Paul van Geest. Late Antique History and Religion, 547-64. Leuven: Peeters.
- Augustine. 1997. *The Confessions*. Translated by Maria Boulding. The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century. Edited by John E. Rotelle. Vol. 1/1, Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City Press.
- Augustine. 1991. *The Trinity*. Translated by Edmund Hill. The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century. Edited by John E. Rotelle Vol. 1/5, Brooklyn, N.Y.: New City Press. (Selections)
- Various short selections from Augustine's writings, as well as articles and secondary sources, will be offered as needed throughout the course. These will vary depending on student interests and how our conversation develops.
- A bibliography will be distributed separately.

Recommended Texts:

- Napier, Daniel Austin. 2013. *En Route to the Confessions: The Roots and Development of Augustine's Philosophical Anthropology*. Late Antique History and Religion. Edited by Paul van Geest Leuven: Peeters.
- Kolbet, Paul R. 2010. *Augustine and the Cure of Souls: Revising a Classical Ideal*. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press.

- James J. O'Donnell. 1992. *Confessions*. Oxford.
(Three volumes containing an introduction, critical edition of the Latin text, and detailed commentary. Available for free online at http://www.stoa.org/hippo/frame_entry.html)

Course Schematic:

Introductory Lectures:

- Key Themes in Augustine's Thought: From Self-centeredness to Christ-centered Living
- The Creation-Conversion-Formation Dynamic
 - Chadwick, *Augustine: A Very Short Introduction*, pp. 10-67
- Spiritual 'Ladders': Schematics of Growth in Augustine
 - Chadwick, *Augustine: A Very Short Introduction*, pp. 68-128
- A Bird's Eye View of Augustine's Approach to Spiritual Growth: Three Thematic Growth Challenges in Order

Digging Deeper:

- Augustine's Mind
 - *Confessions* Book 10
- Understanding our Creatureliness: Augustine on Temporality and Bodies
 - *Confessions* Book 11
 - *Confessions* Book 12
- The End in the Beginning: The Six Days of Creation in *Confessions* 13 and the Literary Structure of the *Confessions*
 - Napier. 2016. 'Limb of Totus Christus'
 - *Confessions* Book 13
- Growth Moment One: Obedient Deeds at the Word of Competent Guides
- Growth Moment Two: Humbling My Mind beneath the Scriptures
 - *Confessions* Book 1
- Growth Moment Three: Acting in Care from the Long View
 - *Confessions* Book 2
- Growth Moment Four: Cognitive Compassion and Reading in Love
 - *Confessions* Book 3
- Growth Moment Five: Acting on Christ's Behalf
 - *Confessions* Books 4-5
- Growth Moment Six: Trinitarian Insight and Becoming Extensions of Jesus Together
 - *Confessions* Books 6-7
 - *Trinity* Books 9-15
- Transformative Conversion
 - *Confessions* Book 8
 - *Confessions* Book 9