

Pietas and Paideia: Gleanings From Pre-Reformation Spirituality

Professor Michael Hughes, Michaelmas Term 2021

Course Description:

For all the attention given as Protestants to practical Christian living and formation, often we tend to throw out the proverbial baby with the bath water when considering many of the spiritual practices, disciplines, and monastic movements of the pre-Reformation period. While we certainly must be discerning, there are many grains of great value for our spiritual health and formation in Christ that Calvin and others recognized and sought to redeem while at the same time getting rid of the chaff. Calvin and other Reformers sought to address the problem of access for common people to the means of formation and growth in Christ and the question of which communities in which formation was to occur. In his work *Life in God*, Bolton writes:

Indeed, just as reformers rejected the idea that a priestly class properly mediated between the rest of humanity and God, they likewise rejected the idea that a 'religious' class properly had exclusive access to the paraphernalia and practices of living a life in God. In Calvin's view, the key formative principles of the church's padeutic tradition are indispensable to ordinary discipleship, and so should be available to all (Life in God, p. 58).

In the first half of the course we will take a look at pre-Reformation spirituality and monasticism through a historic overview and exploration of various primary sources. Through this we will seek to rediscover and retrieve some of the riches of the piety (lived-out obedience as a relational response to God as our Father, enabled by the Spirit with Christ as our perfect example) and paideia (formative education, discipleship, formation in Christlikeness) that informed the Reformer's spirituality and successive generations of Christians to the present day. We will acknowledge and identify some errors, extremes, and abuses, but the emphasis will be on the positive aspects of what we can and should gain from what we are learning. The second half will be a deeper examination of Calvin's *Institutes* as primarily aimed at piety toward our loving and gracious Father through a thoroughly Christian paideia. In effect, we'll seek to recover the baby, clean off the dirt, clothe it in appropriate theological attire, and feed it with the choice food of the Word so it may grow in us to bear the formative fruits proper to one whose life is "hidden with Christ in God."

Course Objectives:

1. Discuss pre-Reformation spirituality and monasticism, examining the goals, values, practice and piety in the wide range of ways it varied in form, developed in thought, and in some quarters degenerated in quality of practice or theological rootedness up to the time of the Reformation.
2. Examine primary sources from before the Reformation to discern between valuable gleanings and unhelpful (or even perhaps biblically unsound) excesses and distractions. At the same time we will seek to temper stereotypes and wisely discern the degree to which they are a true and fair assessment.
3. With the help of Calvin in particular and input from others, to view the perspective of the Reformers on the subject, focusing much of our attention on the *Institutes* as an effort by Calvin to inform believers in what is proper piety and paideia for the disciple of Christ.
4. Ultimately, the main objective is a greater understanding and living out of proper piety, spiritual disciplines, and Christian paideia (formative education) from a historic Christian perspective for the sake of its application to each of our own lives for our discipleship and formation in Christlikeness in the calling He has for us and for the teaching of it to others.

Course Format:

The format will primarily be mini-lectures and guided discussion. The instructor will be doing much of the talking during class time but with interactive discussion throughout. Throughout each class period there will be the expectation that you will be engaging with the reading from the week with classmates and the instructor, responding to particular things being drawn out of the readings for the week and pursuing the main objectives of the class together through these conversations. So reading the required reading for the week prior to participation in class will be crucial, and engagement in the discussion board with questions will also help drive the discussion to deeper levels. Classes will meet via Zoom for two hours per week (at a time agreed upon by a survey prior to the semester start) and will be recorded for later viewing by students who are unable to participate.

Course Requirements:

1. Weekly interaction in live class sessions. Attentive and sustained participation in class and engagement with the readings will be the primary requirement. For credit students may have one excused absence.
2. Weekly readings (due before the meeting each week). Class attendance assumes you have done the reading before class and can be called upon at any time to demonstrate so.
3. Weekly participation in the online forum engaging with questions posted by the instructor on the readings and with questions/comments from other students. Instructor will not be looking for a certain number of words or posts, but rather a thoughtful engagement that exhibits clear desire to learn and to contribute to the learning of others.
4. Final Essay (Required of For-Credit Students Only). Topic to be approved by instructor in advance for a 3000-5000 word paper engaging with the course materials, combining thoughtful analysis and historical/theological engagement with practical application of these gleanings for the church today. More details and direction to be given in class.

Grade Breakdown:

- 50% Class Attendance/Participation and Discussion Forum Participation
- 50% Final Essay

Course Texts in Addition to Scripture:

Boulton, Matthew Myer (2011). *Life In God: John Calvin, Practical Formation, and the Future of Protestant Theology*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI. (Required purchase)

Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Selections only (I encourage you to purchase a print edition if you do not have one, but it is also available online. I will quote from the McNeill-Battles edition)

Sittser, Gerald L. (2007). *Water From a Deep Well: Christian Spirituality from Early Christian Martyrs to Modern Missionaries*, IVP, Downers Grove, IL. (Required purchase)

St. Benedict, *The Rule of St. Benedict*. Selections only (Public Domain, link will be provided)

St. Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God*. (Public Domain, link will be provided)

Links/excerpts of a few other short readings may be provided by the instructor to fuel interactive conversation and dialogue on the discussion board. These will include excerpts of primary sources such as Luther, Bernard, or Ursinus, and secondary sources that interact with the primary ones, like Dreher's *The Benedict Option* or Peters' *Reforming the Monastery* or *The Story of Monasticism*.

Course Schedule:

Week	Dates	Discussion Topics	Scripture and Primary Source Readings	Other Readings
1	9/27-10/2	Crucified With Christ: Early Church Witness, Martyrdom, Community Life In the Body of Christ	Galatians 2:20 Acts 21:10-14 Selection from Augustine	Sittser, <i>Water From a Deep Well</i> , Intro-Ch. 2 (p. 15-72)
2	10/4-10/9	I Pummel My Body to Make it a Slave: Asceticism, Discipline, Rhythm	1 Corinthians 9:24-27 2 Timothy 2:1-26 Selections from <i>Rule of St Benedict</i> , Prologue, Chapters 1, 16-20, 48, 63	Sittser, <i>Water From a Deep Well</i> , Ch. 3-4 (p. 73-117)
3	10/11-10/16	That I May Know Him and the Power of His Resurrection: Transformation, Incarnation, and Union with Christ	Philippians 3:1-21 St. Bernard of Clairvaux, <i>On Loving God</i>	Sittser, <i>Water From a Deep Well</i> , Ch. 5-7 (p. 118-186)
4	10/18-10/23	Strength to Comprehend: Discipleship for Ordinary Believers and Access to God's Word For All	Ephesians 3:1-21 Selection from Luther	Sittser, <i>Water From a Deep Well</i> , Ch. 8-9 (p. 187-230) Bolton, <i>Life in God</i> , Intro and Ch. 1 (p. 1-28)
5	10/25-10/30	Conversion and Holiness: Whole Life Transformation and Piety	Romans 12:1-13:14 Selection from Ursinus' <i>Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism</i>	Sittser, <i>Water From a Deep Well</i> , Ch. 10 (p. 231-255) Bolton, <i>Life in God</i> , Ch. 2-3 (p. 29-58)
6	11/1-11/6	Knowledge of God, Love of God	Romans 1:26-32 Calvin's <i>Institutes</i> , Book 1 Ch. 1-5	Bolton, <i>Life in God</i> , Ch. 4-5 (p. 61-95)
7	11/8-11/13	Paideia and Piety: God's Word Written and Incarnate, Participation in Christ	2 Timothy 3:10-17 Calvin's <i>Institutes</i> , Book 1 Ch. 6-10	Bolton, <i>Life in God</i> , Ch. 6-7 (p. 96-137)
8	11/15-11/20	The Beginning of Paideia and Piety in God's Work of Salvation and Prayer as Paideia	2 Corinthians 4:1-18 Calvin's <i>Institutes</i> , Book 3 Ch. 20.1-20.20	Bolton, <i>Life in God</i> , Ch. 8-9 (p. 138-188)
9	11/29-12/4	Potential Ditches and Opportunities in the Path Ahead	Ephesians 4:1-16	Bolton, <i>Life in God</i> , Ch. 10-11 (p. 189-232) Selection from Dreher, <i>The Benedict Option</i>
10	12/6-12/11	Discerning Application: Paideia and Piety in Your Calling	2 Corinthians 2:14-3:18	Sittser, <i>Water From a Deep Well</i> , Ch. 11-Conclusion (p. 256-295)

*Other than Sittser and Bolton (which will certainly remain the same), other readings are subject to minor changes or substitutions that will be provided to you no less than a full week prior to due date, as will the selections not specified.