

Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology (DSPT)
Syllabus for CEFT 2000 – Confessional Ministry
Fall Semester 2020 • Friday, 11:10 -12:30 second mtg to be determined

Fr. Luke Buckles, OP (DSPT),
Remote Course via Moodle and Zoom, due to COVID-19 pandemic
(in person for students residing at St. Albert Priory only, when instructor arrives in
November as safety allows)
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Introduction and Theological Pastoral Context of the Class

Acknowledgement

Pre-Requisites

Requirements

Class Plan: order of presentations and specific content

Bibliography

DSPT Institutional Goals

M. Div. Program Outcomes

Christ Jesus is given by his own words in the Gospel, the title of Good Shepherd and in the ancient tradition he was also seen as the Divine Physician and the sacraments which he initiated and of which he is the principal minister are the gift of his healing divine medicine in the Church. In the pilgrimage of faith our Good Shepherd has become the way, the truth, and the life through the sacraments by which he continues his Risen ministry of Shepherd and Physician of our souls. This pilgrimage of faith is initiated through the gift and reception of the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Eucharist. He truly gives us the waters of eternal life, the power of the Holy Spirit, and the Bread of Life for the pilgrimage of faith. In our humanity he lovingly brings forgiveness and physical strengthening through his sacraments of healing: Reconciliation/Penance, and Anointing of the Sick.

This class is a practicum to assist the candidate for the priesthood in the Catholic Church to become prepared to be a minister of Christ's healing specifically in the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation/Penance. In order to serve the People of God in strengthening them in times of weakness and encouraging them in their pilgrimage of faith, the minister of this sacrament has been invited by so many saints and spiritual writers to be strong, loving, and wise, and compassionate to those who come to him, many times finding themselves feeling very fragile, weak, and sinful. It is in their limitations that the Risen Christ wants to offer them his forgiveness, strength, and hope.

For a priest to serve the People of God well in this sacrament he needs to pray for an ever-deeper compassion for he too lives in the limitations of his weakness. (Scripture quotation) he also needs

to continuously grow in his knowledge of the principles of moral theology, the teaching of the canon law of the Church, aspects of the growth of our spiritual life in Christ, and integrating all of this in his actual pastoral experience and consultation with other priests and spiritual directors. The specific goal of this course is to provide before his ordination this theological knowledge of the Tradition of the Church integrating the principles of moral theology, the teaching of the Canons of the Church, and the tradition of Catholic spiritual theology: the reality and growth of the spiritual life.

Acknowledgement: I wish to thank and acknowledge the previous professor of the material of this course: Fr. Edward Krasevac, OP, I appreciate building upon his methodology and insights especially as has taught for so many years as professor of Christology and moral theology at the Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology.

Pre-Requisites

This course has been specifically designed for Roman Catholic candidates who will be receiving ordination to the priesthood. It is taken at this time in their academic/pastoral/and spiritual lives because it presumes a thorough practical knowledge of the fundamental principles of moral theology, various pastoral ministerial experiences, a knowledge of essential principles of the spiritual life which would then include sacramental theology. Finally, in the confessional pastoral ministry besides needing immediate practical knowledge from these areas of theology there is also the immediate need to be able to apply essential principles from the Canon Law of the Church. Therefore in order to most enhance the learned experience of the weekly gatherings where the participants serve as “confessors” to hear the “confession” of the professor, or guest professor which are prepared from actual pastoral confessional ministerial experiences it is absolutely necessary that the participants engage in a continuous review and deepening of these areas of knowledge. This review should begin immediately and be throughout the semester.

Sources could be the essential bibliography attached to this syllabus as well as the students’ class notes and syllabi from the above-mentioned classes.

Requirements.

Given the nature and purpose of this course unlike other lecture courses which has a prepared academic content before each lecture is given from which the student could receive after the designated lecture if one is unavoidably absent from the regular class time. The content of this course brings to each meeting the theological knowledge and pastoral experiences of the individual participant when he is the “confessor” from which the other participants learn from the role-play responses the “confessor” offers to the “penitent”. However apart from the prepared hand-outs it is clear that there are not prepared lectures from the regular gatherings. Weekly attendance is absolutely paramount. If an unavoidable absence is foreseen then the professor will as much as possible summarize the essential nature of the “confessions” in terms of the various principles from the different disciplines of Theology, Canon Law, and the pastoral responses given which illustrate the particular areas of knowledge to be taken by the student from listening to this particular “confession” and discussion-response from the “confessor” into his future confessional ministry.

Class Plan

Content of Each Session of the Course

This seminar class will be reviewing some of the most challenging cases that I have experienced or about which I have been in confidential conversations with priests who were seeking my advice for their penitents. [Naturally only the bare essentials with permission of the penitent were shared with me, not knowing the state of life or even the gender of the person if not relevant to the case, or when or where the sacramental conversation happened]

Before each class a summary of several cases would be written on individual index cards which would be a general outline for the “penitent” to include in the “confession” that would be spoken to the particular “confessor” who had randomly draw the case. Each of these sacramental ministry cases would illustrate in the content of the “confession” particular issues in moral theology, canon law, the growth of the Christian spiritual life or the times of crisis that come into every person’s life challenging faith and hope or charity. The “confessions” are spoken in this random way because I wanted each student to perceived that the different “confessions” while naturally differing in complexity, were there to be drawn in a random way by each of the participants and also to further guard the seal of confession as these cases were from real pastoral situations that had come to the confessional.

N.B. Using pastoral cases from previous actual confessional ministry while preserving the absolute inviolability of the Seal of Confession.

It will be mentioned at the first gathering of the class that it is common knowledge that I have served the People of God in the sacrament of the confessional in almost all of our parishes and Newman Centers during summer ministry as well as giving retreats to seminarians and priests from different diocese that I could with respect speak about the essential moral, canonical, and spiritual theological issues of the particular case.

To offer further respect to the persons whose confessions are being reviewed from a theological and pastoral perspective for the good preparation of future candidates to the priesthood and to absolutely guard the seal of confession there would only be the necessary minimum of information (young person, adult, state in life) and sometimes to exercise an abundance of caution the gender and station of life of the person was made up in the roll play. This would be especially true if the particular gender or station in life of the penitent in question had no relevant significance on the substance of the sins confessed.

Schedule of Seminar Meetings and Content.

At the first meeting as scheduled those present will kindly also determine the day and time of an additional meeting during the week

Given the approach to the sacramental ministerial cases, as they are chosen randomly by the participating “confessors” I could not give a preplanned outline for each session because that would disrupt the random approach. However, the following major theological issues (moral, and spiritual) and canonical and pastoral will be eventually dealt with during the regular class seminar times before the completion of the semester. The principal goal is to provide the occasion as a “confessor” during this seminar and listening to the conversations with the other “confessors” and “penitents” to at least be presented with not only some of the most challenging pastoral cases they could be hearing in their own confessional ministry, but also to hear examples of more “ordinary” confessions of devotion as well as young persons’ the typical first confessions of young persons. The various topics of the semester are summarized in general headings below:

THE ABSOLUTE INVIABILITY OF THE SEAL OF CONFESSION

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE SACRAMENT OF CONFESSION AND SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

DEGREES OF CULPABILITY: SERIOUS/SLIGHT SIN / ASSESSING RESPONSIBILITY

Discussion of the classical distinction / sins of weakness versus sins of malice / discussion of issues surrounding "modifiers of responsibility" that diminish subjective responsibility (including awareness of psychological and sociological factors) / finding balance between rigorism and denial of freedom/responsibility / how to supportively and compassionately push "people" forward and recognize the degree to which they are capable of being pushed / the dynamics of habit and vice, and pastoral response to freely rejected habits

PARTICULAR CHALLENGES OF THE CONFESSOR: Psychological or unconscious:

1. Pelagianism: an inordinate emphasis upon the will power and the effort of the confessor to bring resolution to problems and peace to the penitent
2. Gnosticism: an over-reliance on the confessor’s knowledge of principles of theology: moral, spiritual, canon law or his own pastoral experiences and knowledge, or the chronic fear that he does not have sufficient knowledge to serve penitents with the care he perceives that they deserve.
3. Agnosticism: in confessional ministerial situations when not only does there not seem to be an answer the situation could be (or has been) long going and no resolution seems in sight or available in the immediate future. The penitent is simply spiritually at the Cross and asks, as does the confessor in his heart: why? Where is God in this situation?

QUESTIONS OF SCRUPULOSITY, COMPULSION, AND DEPENDENCE

How to recognize and approach these patterns of behavior / how to differentiate psychological pathology from religious scrupulosity, and deal with both / the irony of the exercise of unquestioned authority in these situations. The larger context of the grace/nature relationship and the effects of personality and pathology on responsibility.

THE PROCESS OF MORAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE GRADUAL NATURE OF CONVERSION / CULTURAL INFLUENCES OF PENITENTS / Grace-nature relation and limitation inherent in nature.

AUTHORITY, CONSCIENCE AND THE ROLE OF THE CONFESSOR / CULTURAL FACTORS

The role of the confessor with regard to the formation of conscience / caution with regard to confessors imposing their personal views, theologies, interpretations or spiritualities on others in the name of Church / invincible ignorance as an aspect of contemporary secular culture / how to approach penitents who disagree with the teaching of the Church / levels of authority and the hierarchy of truths / Examination of conscience in light of virtues or Decalogue?

MORAL PRINCIPLES USEFUL TO THE CONFESSOR

The indirectly voluntary / the appropriateness of traditional "reflex principles" / principles of toleration, cooperation and appropriation / discussion of counseling the "lesser evil

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PENANCES AND THEIR APPLICATION

The role of penances / how should the penance "fit" the sin? / understanding and acceptance of penances / prayer as a "penance"? / the "temporal punishment due to sin"

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Catechism of the Catholic Church. London: Burns & Oates. 1999.

Most especially review the following Parts: II, III, IV.

Part Two: The Celebration of the Christian Mystery: Section One: The Sacramental Economy; Section Two: The Seven Sacraments of the Church: Chapter Two: The Sacraments of Healing: Article Four: The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation; Article Five: The Anointing of the Sick; Chapter Three: The Sacraments at the Service of Communion: Article Six: The Sacrament of Holy Order, Article Seven: The Sacrament of Matrimony.

Part Three: Life in Christ: Section One: Man's Vocation: Life in the Holy Spirit. (please review all chapters): human person made in the image of God, freedom, morality of human acts, the passions, moral conscience, the virtues, sin.

Part Four: Christian Prayer (please read all chapters): revelation of prayer, tradition, life of prayer, battle of prayer, prayer of the hour of Jesus.

- Code of Canon Law: Latin-English Edition.* Translated from *Codex Iuris Canonici*
Vatican City: Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 1983.
(please review especially): Book IV: The Office of Sanctifying in the Church, Part I: The Sacraments: Title IV: the Sacrament of Penance: Canons 959-997, Title V: The Sacrament of Anointing the Sick: Canons 998-1007, Title VI: Orders: 1008-1054, Title VII: Marriage: Canons 1055-1165
- Thomas Aquinas. *Summa theologiae*. 3 vols. Trans. by Fathers of the English.
Dominican Province. New York: Benziger Bros., 1946
(please review especially): 1a2ae: 1-5 The Ultimate End of Human Life,
1a2ae: 6-21 Acts Proper to Humans, 1a2ae: 22-48 The Passions,
1a2ae: 49-89, Habits, 1a2ae:90-140 Law and Grace
2a2ae: 1-46, The Theological Virtues, 2a2ae: 47-122 The Cardinal Virtues,
Prudence and Justice, 2a2ae: 123-170 Fortitude and Temperance
- Thomas Aquinas. *Summa theologiae*. (continued)
2a2ae: 171-189 Special Gifts and States, 3a: 60-83 The Sacraments in General, 3a: 66-71, The Sacraments of Initiation: Baptism, 3a: 72 Confirmation, 3a: 73-83 Eucharist,
The following references are from the supplementary texts compiled by his students from notes and lectures:
3a:1-68 Suppl for the following: Sacraments of Healing: Penance 1-28,
Extreme Unction 29-33, Sacraments of Vocation and Communion
Holy Orders 34-40, Holy Matrimony 41-68.
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New York: Alba House, Society of Paul, 1985.
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- Martin, Ralph. *The Fulfillment of All Desire. A Guidebook for the Journey to God Based on the Wisdom of the Saints*. Stuebenville, Ohio: Emmaus Road, 2006
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DSPT Institutional Goals and MDiv Program Outcomes

DSPT Institutional Goals

Pedagogical Goal: Deep Learning

Motivated by a thirst for truth, the disciplined inquirer is a life-long learner who recognizes fundamental principles in a given field of inquiry and applies them in creative or innovative ways to broader contemporary issues which are of importance to Church, the academy, and/or society. Disciplined inquiry includes the following characteristics:

1. *Integrative Thinking*: the ability to recognize, understand, retain, integrate, and apply the fundamental principles operative in a field of inquiry, and use them to make synthetic judgments.
2. *Intellectual Humility*: an orientation of mind and heart that fosters intellectual collaboration, precludes both rigidity and passivity of mind, and recognizes that contrary opinions are not a threat, but provide the opportunity to test and deepen one's own grasp of the truth.
3. *Self-Direction*: the disposition to take primary responsibility for one's own education, manifested in a keen intellectual interest in the topic of studies, and the ability to teach oneself through a habit of skilled and responsible research and resilient exploration.

Vocational Goal: Collaborative Leadership

A collaborative leader inspires within others the desire to realize the common good by articulating to academy or society a coherent vision rooted in the mission of the Church, all the while leading by example.

4. *Ability to Collaborate*: expressed in good listening and communication skills which foster decisions stemming from and leading to an open, transparent, and mutually enriching dialog with others in order that the gifts of all can be appropriately acknowledged and utilized.

DSPT MDiv Program Outcomes

By the end of the program, students will demonstrate ministerial and pastoral competency through the ability:

1. to communicate simply, accurately, and effectively the theological tradition of the Roman Catholic Church through preaching, teaching, and writing;
2. to preach in a manner that is grounded in scholarly methods of biblical interpretation, and is doctrinally sound, pastorally focused, and rhetorically effective;
3. to analyze, assess, and critique theological perspectives through scriptural, historical, and systematic theological methods, and to assist others in doing the same;
4. to fulfill their responsibilities with the moral, intellectual, psychological, and emotional maturity that grounds vigorous discipleship of Christ and priestly service to others;
5. to lead a faith community in prayer, worship and theological reflection, centered on the Eucharist, respecting both the liturgical tradition of the Church and the pastoral needs of the local community;
6. to apply the principles of the moral theology of St. Thomas Aquinas to pastoral situations in general and confessional situations in particular;
7. to both lead and work collaboratively with others in a just, charitable, and generous manner, respecting the relevant cultural, social, and ecclesial circumstances, all the while maintaining professional, ethical boundaries;
8. to foster Church communion, demonstrated through personal and liturgical prayer, regular observance, and life in community.

