Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology

Institute of Salesian Studies - Spring 2014

**SP4295 Devoted to God and Neighbor (The Spiritual Teaching of St Francis de Sales)**

3.0 units (5 ECTS) - Tuesday/Friday: 9.40-11.00, DSPT 1

Instructor: Joseph Boenzi, SDB
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**Course Description**

Beginning with a general survey of the life and work of St Francis de Sales (missionary, bishop, founder and doctor of the Church), students analyze the major themes of his spiritual teaching as found in his masterpiece, *Introduction to the Devout Life* – purification, prayer, virtues to learn, dangers to avoid, spiritual journey.

In a second moment, students approach Francis de Sales’s second great writing, *Treatise on the Love of God* to explore how this apostolic pastor and spiritual guide developed a spirituality of daily life from the experience of the vast majority of committed Christian laity. Students will examine the major themes of his spiritual teaching: devotion, love of and union with God. They will explore (1) the repercussions of the personal experience of God in the spirituality of Francis de Sales; (2) the idea of the love of God; (3) means for progressing in the love of God; (4) the images of the Church and the World in Francis de Sales’s experience, and their implications for his pastoral choices.

The special role of St Jane de Chantal is highlighted in synthesizing the impact of Salesian thought on the spirituality and pastoral life of the Church.

**Format:** Lecture/discussion. **Evaluation:** group work, mid-term exam, reflection papers [3.0 units]. **Schedule:** Spring, Tue/Fri: 8:10-9:30.

**Course Outline**

Introduction to the Life and Works of St Francis de Sales

1. Overview of content and thrust of the course
2. The written works of Saint Francis de Sales
3. Historical and political context
His life in broad strokes

1. Family life, Education and Vocation
2. Missionary: evangelization and reconciliation
3. Lenten preacher and director of souls

Bishop of Geneva

1. Shepherd, Reformer, Teacher

Introducing the Baroness de Chantal

1. Daughter of a president, wife of a soldier
2. Motherhood and widowhood
3. Searching to understand God’s will in her life…

Salesian Spiritual Direction

1. Direction as spiritual accompaniment
2. Baroness de Chantal: a new challenge for spiritual direction
3. Theme of “spiritual friendship” in Francis de Sales thought and praxis

Christian relationships: overview of Bond of Perfection

1. Genuine “Devotion”
2. Different styles but one call to “Devotion”
3. Personalities of Francis de Sales and Jane de Chantal

Ingredients for a spirituality of daily life

1. Journeying in a spiritual direction
2. Genuine devotion and genuine sweetness

Salesian Direction and Friendship

1. The Letters of Spiritual Direction
2. Salesian spiritual direction and accompaniment.
3. Francis de Sales prayer style and its accessibility in reference to his times

Learning and Living God’s Will

1. Opening the heart in responsiveness to God
2. The expressed will of God
2. God’s will “of good pleasure”

Conferences of Francis de Sales
1. The “true” spiritual conferences as gatherings, sharings, formative experiences that respect the listeners as well as transmit the tradition
2. Conversation and dialogue that promotes growth

Francis de Sales and Spiritual Theology

1. Premises for a Salesian Theology
   a) Learning climate in Paris
   b) Theological concerns in Padua
2. Historical Sources
   a) Rhineland mystics (devotio moderna)
   b) Golden Spain (Juan de Avila, Teresa la Grande, Ignacio de Loyola)
   c) Italian (Francesco d’Assisi, Caterina da Siena, Filippo Neri)
   d) French (Circle of Madame Acarie and beginnings of French School)
3. The Object of Francis de Sales’ Theological Study
   a) Francis de Sales’ Theology Notes
   b) Settling a theological controversy for the Vatican
   c) Theological Sources for the *Treatise On the Love of God*
4. An Accessible Theology
5. Studying spiritual lives rather than scholarly books

Devotion builds community

1. The Visitation of Holy Mary.
3. Salesian groups and movements in the Church

The Space of Interior Life

1. Spiritual Topography
   a) The “Space” and “Structure” of Interior Life
   b) Dynamic but Ambiguous Terminology
2. On Prayer
   a) Spirituality for everyone
   b) Simplicity and Intensity in Prayer

Towards a spirituality of Ordinary Life: Growing in the love of God

1. Degrees or stages in Loving God
   First Stage: Young Love, Weak but True
   Second Stage: Loving God among Many Others
   Third Stage: Loving God along with Many Others
   Fourth Stage: God is the One and Only Love
2. Gradual growth, continuous journey
   a) Journeying in a Spiritual Direction
   b) Practice of virtue
   c) The Ministry of the Word: Encouragement to Virtue

Francis de Sales as Preacher
1. Biblical preparation for preaching God’s Word
2. Patristic tradition in the mystic style of Francis de Sales
3. Advent and Lenten series

“Holy Mary” in the Teaching of “the Salesius”:
1. The Annunciation
2. The Visitation

Marian spirituality rooted in the experience of the Visitation
1. Hidden in the hidden Jesus
2. Living in the Heart of Christ
3. Live Jesus: Perspectives on Francis de Sales, Jane-Frances de Chantal

Recognition of Virtues and Influence
1. Death of Francis de Sales:
   a) Early Biographies
   b) Biographies in the 19th and 20th Centuries
2. The Process of Beatification and Canonization
3. Doctor of the Church:
   a) Salesian Teaching treated as “Suspect”
   b) 19th-century Enthusiasm and Reawakening
   c) Steps and maneuvers for a “doctorate”
4. Francis de Sales and the Universal Call to Holiness
   a) Pius XI, Rerum Ominum Pertubationem (Encyclical, 1923)
   b) Vatican II, Lumen Gentium 39-42 (Dogmatic Constitution, 1964)
   c) Paul VI, Sabaudiae Gemma (Apostolic Letter, 1967)
   d) John Paul II, Fountain of Life (Discourse, 1988).
   e) Benedict XVI, God of the Human Heart: Francis de Sales (General Audience, 2 March 2011)

Francis de Sales and “the Salesians”
1. Don Bosco’s connection with Francis de Sales
2. How Salesians (SDB) have understood Francis de Sales’ teaching on Religious Life

Required reading:


Instructor’s supplemental notes: ©Salesian Society, Berkeley: 2014. [estimated cost: $20.00]
Recommended reading:


Tools for assessment

In addition to attending lectures and actively participating in class discussions, your progress in this course will be assessed on the basis of four (4) short research papers. The reflection papers grow out of the reading of primary sources and small-group discussions; due dates are distributed throughout the semester.

Scheduling

SP4295 is slated to meet on Tuesdays and Fridays during 2nd Period (9.40-11.00). During the first class meeting, we will firm up the instruction calendar and due dates for assignments; lecture schedules and reading deadlines will be finalized during the second week of class.

Joseph Boenzi SDB

Selected Bibliography

Sources in English Translation


**Sources anthologized**


**Studies**


