

John of the Cross:  
An Inquiry into Prayer, Contemplation, and Union with God  
TESP 150-01, Winter Semester, 2009  
3:40 – 5:25 T/Th  
Office Hours: Th: 10-11:00 or by appointment  
Michael J. Buckley, S.J.

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

[Revised]

An analysis of the major works of John of the Cross to determine the nature, conditions, and origins of contemplation and its development into perfect union with God. The course brings inquiry to bear upon the issues raised by these writings and by their application to the lives of the students. The poetry, counsels, and theology of John of the Cross will be supplemented by concordant and contrasting readings: Ernest Becker, The Denial of Death, Dorothy Day, Selected Writings (edited by Robert Ellsberg), and Guigo the Carthusian The Ladder of Monks.

Every two weeks, each student will be expected to submit a paper of some two to three pages of her/his reflections upon the issues raised by the textual analysis of John of the Cross. These papers should employ one's own experience as their fundamental evidence, with the thought of John of the Cross serving only to interpret and to broaden the understanding of that experience.

Though the course will contain an occasional lecture, the usual manner of conducting the class will be through questioning the students upon a previously assigned text and through general discussion of issues it raises.

The student is responsible for contributions to this analysis and discussion carried on during the class, a brief semi-monthly reflection paper, a mid-term examination [oral] and a final examination [written].

Office Hours: The instructor can be consulted in his office [Kenna Hall] on every Thursday 2:30 - 5:00 or at another time by appointment. Even when coming during the regular office hours, the students are encouraged to make an appointment so that they will not be kept waiting.

INITIAL SCHEDULE

DATE	CONTENT	PAGES
1-6	Introductory Lecture: The Nature of this Inquiry	
1-8	The Living Flame of Love	Prologue and Poem Commentary #1 638-640
	The Spiritual Canticle "Introduction"	Prologue 633-637 469-471
1-13	The Living Flame of Love "General Introduction"	Stanza I. #2 - 17 641-647 9-28
1-15	The Living Flame of Love	Stanza I. #18 - 28 648-653
1-20	The Living Flame of Love	Stanza I. #29-36 653-657
1-22	The Living Flame of Love	Stanza II. #1-22 657-666
1-27	The Living Flame of Love	Stanza II. #23-36 666-672
1-29	The Living Flame of Love	Stanza III. #1-26 673-683
2-3	The Living Flame of Love	Stanza III. #27-67 683-701
2-5	The Living Flame of Love	Stanza III. #27-67 683-701
2-10	The Living Flame of Love	Stanza III. #68-85 701-708
2-12	The Living Flame of Love	Stanza IV. 708-715
2-17	Mid-Term Examination	

2-19	Ascent of Mount Carmel	Sketch, Theme, Poem Prologue. I. 1-2	101--121
2-24	Ascent of Mount Carmel	I. 3-6	121-133
2-26	Ascent of Mount Carmel	I. 7-12	133-146
3-3	Ascent of Mount Carmel	I. 13-14	147-153
3-5	Ascent of Mount Carmel	II. 1 - 5	154-166
3-10	Ascent of Mount Carmel	II. 12 - 15	185-199
3-12	Final Review		
3-17/19	Final Exam Week		

Addition readings: The additional readings by Ernst Becker, Dorothy Day, and Guigo the Carthusian have been assigned for the members of the class to supplement the writings of John of the Cross, and are to be read by a date yet to be determined.

## LIBERAL ARTS OBJECTIVES

### I. Skills:

1. Ability to read a classic and contemporary texts in Spirituality with appreciation and understanding: both poetry and prose [grammar];
2. Ability to follow and criticize diverse kinds of argument and methods in theology or theological reflection [rhetoric];
3. Ability to reflect methodologically upon one's own religious experience, both descriptively and with insight into the issues it raises [dialectic]
4. Abilities to express oneself with sense and argument, both orally and in writing.

### II. Knowledge:

1. A basic grasp of the poetry and the scholastic theology of John of the Cross as well of his analysis of the development into contemplation and union with God.
2. Some understanding both of the complementary and contrasting spirituality of Dorothy Day and of the cultural critique of Ernest Becker.

## COURSE METHODOLOGY

#1. Explication de texte: The text under inquiry will be assigned for the private study of the student and then for the analysis of the group during the regular class period. This analysis will be conducted by the questions of the instructor, and each student is expected to contribute to this process of interpreting the meaning and the argument of the text. One third of the final grade will be calculated from the student's contribution to the class analysis and discussion (under #1 and #2).

#2. Discussion: This analysis should be supplemented by the questions of the students and by more general discussions during the class period. The initial part of the course will focus upon the understanding of the text and its argument. After this stage has been satisfactorily completed and other works entered as contrasts, the students will be expected to engage questions of truth and falsity, adequacy or inadequacy, about the doctrine analyzed.

#3. Reflection Papers: In order to encourage a meditative and personal assimilation of the material of the course, each student will be expected to submit a paper of some two or three pages every two weeks. These papers should focus upon the issues raised by the reading and should employ one's own experience as their fundamental evidence -- with the thought of John of the Cross serving only to interpret and to broaden the understanding of that experience. Sometimes the instructor will select a question for the group; other times, he will leave it to individual preference.

#4. Schedule and Examinations: The schedule as above must be termed emphatically "initial"; it will become more evident in the course of the semester what pace is appropriate for the class. The two written examinations -- mid-term and final -- are to foster a synthetic knowledge of the materials that have been the object of analysis, discussion, and personal reflection.

[#5. Personal Prayer: It is obvious that an academic course as such should not and cannot inquire into or supervise the personal religious life of the student. It is equally obvious that to read John of the Cross without serious engagement in prayer is to address his writings as a spectator rather than as a participant. The best way to read John of the Cross is to read him for the same purpose that he wrote, namely to guide one through prayer to contemplation and union with God. The student is, therefore, strongly advised to adopt the discipline of a period of prayer each day and to keep a personal journal which records the inclinations, desires, images, ideas, etc. that emerge in prayer. This entire matter remains, of course, completely private to the student, and cannot enter into the assignments of the class or the assessments by the instructor.]

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross, edited and translated by Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez. Washington, D.C.: Institute of Carmelites Studies, 1992.

The Denial of Death by Ernest Becker. New York: Free Press, 1973. [paper]

Dorothy Day, Selected Writings, edited by Robert Ellsberg. Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis, 1992  
[paper]

Guigo the Carthusian The Ladder of Monks

[A complete bibliography of the secondary literature on John of the Cross will be given to the students.]