

Personal Evaluation

This essay looks at one way in which this module has challenged my thinking, two new spiritual disciplines I have found beneficial and three ways in which my inner life has been edified. I also make a small comment about possible changes to the module.

This module challenged my view that certain denominations have little true spiritual life in them. After reading chapter nine of the course notes, I was greatly impressed with the Eastern Orthodox Church and appreciate their Bible centred and holistic approach in seeking after God. I have had very little to do with the Eastern Orthodox Church. Based on brief exposures to it I surmised that it was empty and ritualistic, possibly because of seeing a great emphasis on icons and orthodox priests looking rather serious with long robes and beards. The fact that they place such an importance on the Bible greatly impressed me. They place the Bible on the altar during the service, read through the whole New Testament in a year and sing the beatitudes.[\[1\]](#) I also respect the way they seek after intimacy with God through many different spiritual disciplines including repetition of the Jesus prayer.[\[2\]](#)

A practical method of meditation I found useful was lectio divina.[\[3\]](#) I particularly found the meditatio step helpful and refreshing. Connecting biblical texts with past memories is not something I have tried much. For me, this discipline makes spiritual truths seem more real. For instance, if I read that God is love (1 John 4:8) yet cannot bring to mind any instance in my life where God has demonstrated his love to me then I find it hard to believe. The same holds for all other spiritual truths. Connecting the Bible with past experience in a way proves to me that the Bible is true and helps me believe it. The course notes recommend following a pattern of biblical readings that are progressive and ordered. I now practise lectio divina on a daily basis by taking a small verse or

phrase from the lectionary readings. I also use calligraphy to help absorb the chosen phrase.

Another method of meditation I found helpful was the Ignatian meditation in front of a crucifix where we consider what we have done for God, what we are currently doing for him, and what we will do for him in the future.^[4] I have found looking back over what I have done for God helpful. I am often very hard on myself and if I can detect any pride or apathy in any of my actions then I consider that whatever I did counted for nothing. In this way I often feel that I have done little of value in my life and feel dejected and weary. If nothing I do is of value, what is the point of trying? Looking back over my life and realising that, despite having many faults, God has used me in many situations is encouraging, and helps me to face the future with confidence. Looking back at what I have done for God also gives me a realistic picture of where I am so I can aim higher. Looking forward to what I will do for God encourages me to be more like St Paul who said "By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care" (1 Corinthians 3:10). This exercise really helps me see the bigger picture for my life and build deliberately and with care.

A subject I would like to see introduced into this module is the holiness of God. It would be interesting to look at how Christians down the centuries have approached God's perfection, his infinite wisdom, power and strength, and the coming judgement and renewal of all things. When the focus is just on love it is sometimes hard to think of God clearly. Many different people claim to have found the way of love, each by following mutually exclusive paths. The subject of God's holiness would help to draw a clear line between God's love and the 'love' of others. It may also be interesting to look at various believer's confrontations with the holiness of God, for example, Daniel (Daniel 10:4-9), the Apostle John

(Revelation 1:10-18) and Pascal.[\[5\]](#) It may also be good to add a week's retreat to the module with suggestions of how to spend one hour a day for a week, where each day's meditation builds on what went before.

This module has helped my spiritual life by giving me new tools to aid in meditation, introducing me to new friends and giving me a better vision of the church. The different methods of meditation in this module have given me a set of tools with which I can spend time with God in a more focussed and fulfilling way. I have become familiar with lectio divina, which I now use on a daily basis. I also appreciate the instruction in lesson 16 on practising Ignatian contemplation, though I find visualising events quite difficult – this is something I need to practise. The reading of the Prodigal Son[\[6\]](#) has given me a deeper insight into that parable so that I can spend much time meditating on it, considering the many different aspects to it. I can also look at other parables and use a similar approach to draw out deeper meanings.

This module has introduced me to a lot of new friends throughout history who have followed hard after God like the merchant looking for fine pearls (Matthew 13:45-46). I have discovered a lot of new people that I want to find out more about and read their work: Augustine, Crysostom, Nouwen, Teresa of Avila, St John of the Cross and many others.

Finally this module has given me a better vision of the church. Rather than focusing on arguments and divisions between denominations this module has given a view of a church with members from across the centuries and across the denominations united in seeking hard after God. This vision helps me to think of the Church as truly being a body – with a focus, and united, every part working together.

Bibliography

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[\[1\]](#) Dewerse, R., *Christian Spirituality*, p. 35.

[\[2\]](#) Dewerse, R., *Christian Spirituality*, p. 35, 36.

[\[3\]](#) Dewerse, R., *Christian Spirituality*, p. 57.

[\[4\]](#) Maas, R. and G. O'Donnell, *Spiritual Traditions for the Contemporary Church*, p. 177.

[\[5\]](#) Byrne, J.M., *Religion and the Enlightenment: From Descartes to Kant*, p. 78.

[\[6\]](#) Nouwen, H.J.M., *The Return of the Prodigal Son*.