

CHRISTIAN FORMATION IN FAMILIES

Louisville Seminary: CE 316-3
Spring Semester, 2009 (3 credit hours)
Wednesday/Friday 11-12:20, Gardencourt, room 213

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This online syllabus should be used to gain a better understanding of the content and focus of a course. The syllabus given out in the class may differ from this online version and its content supersedes that of the online syllabus.

Course Description

This course explores home and family life in relation to the church and its educational ministries. We will engage insights from a variety of sources such as the human arts and sciences, as well as students' own experiences, as we seek wisdom through theological and biblical reflection. We will examine general contextual and cultural issues that impact home and congregational life as well as the particularities of each family and each community. Throughout the course we will be exploring ways family life intersects with a larger formational ecology for the Christian life. The hope then is to better understand families in all their beauty, misery, power, and mystery.

Students will have the opportunity to reflect upon and design ways in which congregations and their leaders can encourage educational ministry with and within families. How can churches be a resource for families and vice versa? How does a younger generation learn the ways and practices of faith? How do families teach moral and theological concern to one another in their words, loves, hates, lifestyles, and activities? What can a teaching ministry do?

Primary Bibliography (in order of our reading)

- McBride, James. *The Color of Water: A Black Man's Tribute to His White Mother*. New York, Riverhead, 1996.
- Carlson, Paula J., and Hawkins, Peter S., eds. *Listening for God (Volume 2)*. Minneapolis, Augsburg Fortress, 1996.
- Wigger, J. Bradley. *The Power of God at Home: Nurturing Our Children in Love and Grace*. San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 2003. (provided)
- Bass, Dorothy C. ed., *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People*. San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 1997.
- Cahill, Lisa Sowle. *Family: A Christian Social Perspective*. Minneapolis, Augsburg Fortress, 2000.
- Marian Wright Edelman. *The Sea is so Wide and My Boat is so Small: Charting a Course for the*

Next Generation. New York, Hyperion, 2008.

Requirements

This seminar course is designed primarily around class discussions of readings, reflective exercises, students= writing, and some audio-visual materials. Accordingly, class participation and preparation are crucial. Additional guidance for weekly assignments, the “attending” exercises, a “practices” paper and the final project will be given in class. Presence and active participation in the course are assumed. In all written work, graduate level grammar, spelling, and composition are expected, including proper citation of quoted materials. Late work will be accepted only if excused before their due dates. If they are excused, the grade will be lowered at the teacher=s discretion.

Course Engagement and Weekly assignments

Every week students will be assigned tasks in relation to course readings, for example, designing discussion questions or writing summaries of key ideas. The goal is for each student to be in a good position to lead and participate in a discussion of the materials. These will be the rough equivalent of one page of writing (300 words).

Attending exercises

The attending assignments are designed to encourage students to pay special attention to a family, a home situation, or the way a family is depicted in the culture around us (e.g. in a movie, a song, a novel a student is already reading, or on a television show). Ordinarily students will write their reflections in 1-2 pages (300-500 words). However, if you prefer, you may use another medium for expression—draw a picture, or write a poem or song for example. Or you may combine media—for example, take a picture, bring in an artifact or piece of music, and write a paragraph explaining its significance in relation to families. Use your imagination—anything that helps you see, or helps the class see, families in a deeper way.

Students are encouraged to make some connection to reading or other class material, as well as show evidence of reflection. Some examples of attending exercises you could do:

- observe a particular family in a park, restaurant, church, neighborhood, sports event etc.
- reflect on a significant moment in your own family’s history (current or family of origin)—perhaps a turning point, a time of a big decision, a typical day, a special meal, a time at church, a family story, a time of change in family configuration
- reflect upon on a movie, a television or radio show, novel you are already reading, and what it reveals, assumes, or how it describes a particular family
- talk to someone who works regularly with families professionally—pastor, therapist, divorce lawyer, habitat for humanity worker; see what new angles on family life you can discover
- ask a child to draw their favorite Bible stories, their family, or church and tell you about it

In all, choose a variety of exercises and pay particular attention to situations that reflect themes and issues brought up in the course work.

Practices Report

There will be a 5 page (1500 word) report in relation to the book *Practicing Our Faith*. More

guidance will be given in class.

Final project

Students will need to have a congregation with which to work (e.g., field placement, where you worship, home church, a friend=s church). All students will provide a *curriculum inventory* of their congregations, with reflections regarding its educational implications, especially in relation to formation in homes and families.

Students then have a choice of projects. You are asked to choose a project least similar to anything you have done before:

- *Family Interview* (most students will do this)
- *Curriculum Design—practicing faith at home*
- *Other.* Ordinarily students will do one of the first two options, but a student may be given permission to write a traditional research paper or design a different educational program instead, at the teacher=s discretion and relevant to the main themes of the course.

All projects should represent the time and effort that a 15-20 page research paper and *must integrate the readings and discussions from the whole semester.* (Note: this is what makes or breaks most final projects in relation to the grade!) A proposal for the topic and a list of potential resources (if doing a research paper) will be submitted by Research and Study Week.

Grading

Engagement/Weekly assignments	30%
Attending exercises	15%
Practices report	15%
Final project	40%

School Policies

Plagiarism and Documentation Policy

From the Dean’s Office:

“According to the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, plagiarism is defined as using ‘another person’s ideas or expressions in your writing without acknowledging the source’ (Gibaldi, MLA Handbook, Fourth ed., p. 26). Students in this course are required to abide by the Seminary’s academic honesty policy and are directed to observe the guidelines cited in the above-mentioned MLA Handbook which include matters of proper documentation and citation, use of work from a previous course, and collaborative work.”

Attendance

Also from the Dean’s Office:

“According to the Seminary catalog, students are expected to attend class meetings regularly. In case of illness or emergency, students are asked to notify the instructor of

their planned absence from class, either prior to the session or within 24 hours of the class session. Six or more absences (1/4 of the course) may result in a low or failing grade in the course.”

Inclusive Language

Good writing has aesthetic appeal and ethical sensitivity. Good writing for the church in the 21st century employs inclusive language for humanity and expansive metaphors for God, and seeks to do so with grace. A helpful resource can be found at:

http://www.lpts.edu/Academic_Resources/ASC/avoidinggenderbiasinlanguage.asp.

Master of Theology/Doctor of Ministry Students

For students taking this course for Th.M. or D.Min. credit, required is an additional 500 pages of reading, or an additional 300 pages plus an additional project to be negotiated with the instructor. This project could be extra writing each week, a classroom presentation, or an additional dimension to the final project. The instructor will have some suggestions for extra reading. A plan is to be submitted within the first month of the course.

Calendar and Assignments

February 6

Introduction

Course overview and requirements
Hopes and expectations
Attention and Imagination

February 11 (Wednesday)

Seeing

Definitions

The power of place

(Inspired by Norris, come ready to tell your own *seeing* story; and your own *place* story)

Start Reading McBride (1-128) for Friday

Read Norris (*Listening for God*), ch. 7

2 stories in mind

February 13 (Friday)

Family Stories

The art of listening

Where worlds collide—ethnicity, class, religion, family

Love and color

McBride, 1-128

weekly assignment

February 18-20

The Power to Bless and Curse

Family Power

Blessing and curse in family living

Everyday learning

McBride, 129-291

assignment (due Wednesday)

February 25-27

Biblical/Theological Perspectives

Home and family in the Bible

Good and evil

Mystery and meaning in families

Short Easter

Read Wigger, xvii-76; *Listening* ch. 1
assignment (due Wednesday)

*1st attending assignment (Friday)

March 4-6

The Eyes to See

Courage

Everyday Grace

Sacred Connections

Read Wigger, 77-163

assignment (due Wednesday)

March 11-13

Spiritual Hunger

Practices and seeing

An Intermediate Stop/After the Baptism

March 18-20

Bass, chs. 1 and 14 (if not more)

*2nd Attending

Listening, 5 and 6

Bass, all

Practices of the Heart

Community practice

Meals

Places in the Heart

March 25-27 **Research and Study Week**

April 1

Discussion of Papers

5 pages on Practices

April 3

Advocacy

Special Guest: Shannon Daley-Harris

Edelman, ix-49

April 8

Children in Community

Raising Kids in Queer Community presentation

Edelman, remainder
*3rd attending—tie to Edelman

April 15-17

Family, Church, Society

Is the family church?

When people gather

Cahill, chs. 1 and 3
Wigger, FM, Summer 02
weekly assignment

April 22-24

Formation and Transformation

Dubus= *A Father=s Story*

The ties that bind

Ethical vision

Saved

Read Cahill, chs. 5 and 6
Listening, ch. 3, 8
reflection paper (Wednesday)

April 29-May 1

Present summaries of interviews

TBA

May 6-8

Present summaries of interviews

What can a teaching ministry do?

TBA

May 13: Final Project Due

Sample of an Attending Exercise

(400 words)

Movie

Over the weekend, I watched again one of my favorite movies, Robert Redford's version of Norman Maclean's book, *A River Runs Through It*, a book I read many years ago. In light of the *Christian Formation in Families* course, especially Lisa Cahill's emphasis upon the role of parents, historically, in formation, as well as her discussion of sin and grace, this time I saw the story in a new way.

On the surface, the film is about fly fishing, and as I watched, I was taken back in my mind to the first church I served in the mountains of Colorado (where I learned to fly fish from an elder in the church). But also as I watched this time, I was struck by how integral religion and family are to this story. Norman Maclean, the son of a Presbyterian minister in Montana, says, "In my family there was no clear line between religion and fly fishing." He describes the role of the church in their lives—rehearsing weekly the Westminster Catechism, morning and evening Sunday services, Christian Endeavor and his father's sermons.

As a Scot and a Presbyterian, my father believed that [humanity] by nature was a mess and had fallen from an original state of grace....I never knew whether he believed God was a mathematician but he certainly believed God could count and that only by picking up God's rhythms were we able to regain power and beauty.

The next line, then, is key:

*Unlike many Presbyterians, he would often use the word, "beautiful."**

Set in what might be considered some golden era of the family and church (the first part of the 20th century), the family nonetheless has its problems, dysfunctional by most clinical standards—frozen communication, adult siblings fist fighting, alcoholism and compulsive gambling, to mention a few things. But the power of the story for me was, that even in the midst of these struggles and eventually a tragic death, there is a tremendous recognition of the "beauty" of life: the art of fly fishing, relationships, rivers, families, words, love, and the beauty of each person—even the most flawed. My hunch is that this awareness of the beautiful even in the midst of ugliness is deeply connected to the father's notion of "picking up God's rhythms," and knowing our "chief end" in the words of the catechism is to glorify and enjoy God forever.

*Maclean, Norman. *A River Runs Through It and Other Stories*. New York: Pocket Books, 1992, pp. 1-2.