The Long-Awaited Launch of Lectio: Guided Bible Reading

September 27 was a banner day for SPU’s Center for Biblical and Theological Education (CBTE) and School of Theology — not just because it was the first day of Autumn Quarter theology classes in a year of record enrollment, but because it marked the much-anticipated launch of a weekly online Scripture-reading program we are calling Lectio: Guided Bible Reading.

Launched by a generous grant from the Mundock Charitable Trust, Lectio allows students, faculty, staff, and the outside community anywhere in the world to explore the Christian Scriptures under the guidance of SPU School of Theology professors. According to SPU President Phillip Eaton, “Lectio is intended to soak us in the reading and understanding of Scripture, because — as N.T. Wright has so eloquently argued — this is central to the formation of Christian character and community.” Each quarter focuses on a particular book or section of Scripture. Over the course of four years, Lectio will cover the majority of the Bible.

Lectio offers expert commentary available nowhere else: the CBTE commissioned SOT professors to write the weekly commentaries — professors who are not only outstanding biblical scholars with particular expertise in the Scripture they cover, but also devoted Christians. In addition, readers who wish to engage with the text on a deeper level can sign up to receive free access to “Going Deeper” resources — including Oxford Biblical Studies Online — which provide access to further commentaries, scholarly, authoritative texts, and reference tools that facilitate research into Scriptural background, context, and issues. Recordings of each week’s reading, read by the author, are also available for free download.

To date, more than 2,900 people have signed up to receive weekly notifications of new readings — by email, RSS, and podcast. Response to Autumn Quarter’s Lectio, led by Professor of Old Testament and Biblical Theology Frank S旷, has been overwhelmingly positive: “Frank’s writing style is so delightful,” writes Lectio reader Joy Hammarsland. “He pulls us in — makes us feel we are right there watching Abraham sell on the ground in laughter or Noah gather food for the ark — being astonished at the turns of the tale, or pondering who the mysterious visitors are.”

“We are beginning to see the fruit of our prayers,” says CBTE Director Celeste Cranton, and “we continue to pray that Lectio will be a valuable tool to draw people into the biblical story and into a deeper walk with God.”

For more information, including the 2010–11 schedule of readings, and to sign up for free weekly notifications via email, visit www.spu.edu/lectio (you can jump in anytime).

Seattle Presbytery Meets on the SPU Campus

On July 20, 2010, the Seattle Presbytery, which comprises 65 congregations and fellowships in the Greater Seattle area, engaged in its first-ever meeting on the Seattle Pacific University campus. Nearly 70 ministers and elders from the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. — known as PCUSA — were present, representing nearly 50 PCUSA churches.

The meeting was significant not only because it contributed to the continued building up of a relationship between the Methodist traditions of Seattle Pacific University and the PCUSA, but also because it marked a special occasion for the SOT’s very own Sara Koons, assistant professor of biblical studies. During the meeting, the Seattle Presbytery affirmed that Dr. Koons would be ordained as a minister of word and sacrament in fulfillment of her calling as a professor at Seattle Pacific. (Her ordination took place on September 25.) The SOT looks forward to future collaborations with the Seattle Presbytery.

About the name: Kingswood Chronicle is named after the first school established by John Wesley, in Bristol, England, in 1742. For its dedication, John’s brother, Charles, wrote a hymn for the occasion, with this line: “Unite the pair so long disunited, knowledge and vital piety.” Our hope is that the Center for Biblical and Theological Education, the undergraduate and graduate programs, the entire School of Theology, and this publication will unite our academic study of theology with a profound, meaningful faith in Jesus Christ — one that goes deeper every day.
From The Dean

One of the blessings of being the dean of the School of Theology (SOT) is that, in addition to my administrative responsibilities, I am a faculty colleague who instructs both undergraduates and graduate students. For our undergraduates, I co-teach the Christian Theology Capstone, a small, seminar-style course that SOT majors take in their senior year. What an amazing group of young men and women — eager to graduate, yet anxious about the future, thoughtful and confident about their recently acquired knowledge, yet appropriately humbled by all that they don’t yet know, prayerfully trusting in God’s grace that they’ve experienced so beautifully at SPU, while also cognizant of the enormity, seemingly intractable social and spiritual challenges that face them in the world.

Meanwhile, I’m also privileged to teach our graduate students in their first seminar-level class — a five-day retreat-based, intensive course held at beautiful Casey Conference Center on Whidbey Island. There, together in community, students study and practice historic spiritual disciplines as a grounding for their graduate school experience. The change that takes place over our five days together is remarkable: 25 strangers become a close-knit group of Christian brothers and sisters; feelings of anticipation and nervousness about beginning a graduate program are transformed into the first insights of theological learning; and their unfamiliarity with ancient Christian patterns of spirituality is changed into a deep appreciation for the ways these patterns are able to assist them in being renewed more and more into the image of Christ.

By the grace of God, both our undergraduates and our graduate students are learning and growing to be devoted disciples of Jesus — loving God with all their minds and hearts, and their neighbors as themselves. What an honor we have as faculty to be allowed to be a part of that process of sanctification.

Together in Christ’s service.

Doug Strong
Dean, School of Theology

Gender and Christianity: Lilly Fellows Faculty Seminar

After their finals were given and papers graded, 13 professors from around the U.S. gathered for a summer class of their own at SPU.

In the monthlong “Gender and Christianity” seminar, sponsored by the Lilly Fellows Program in the Arts and Humanities, professors discussed a range of perspectives about gender in Christian traditions.

“It was a meeting of the minds and hearts of people who are trying to do more to promote discussion of gender issues on their respective campuses,” says Priscilla Pope-Levison, SPU professor of theology and associate director of women’s studies, who co-led the program with Jack Levison, SPU professor of New Testament.

Professors from disciplines including English, Sociology, Theology, and Psychology read and discussed four books on the topic of gender and Christianity. They also listened to guest presentations by scholars from around the Northwest, including Tina Schemer Sellers, director of Seattle Pacific’s Marriage and Family Therapy Program.

During the month, seminar participants also worked on scholarly articles in their disciplines. The articles will ultimately be collected in a book that Pope-Levison and Levison are currently editing, to be published by Wipf and Stock Publishers.

Caryn Rios-Wold, associate professor of religion and chair of gender and women’s studies at Illinois College, says that, in leading the seminar, the two SPU professors showed “radical hospitality” to her and the other professors who traveled from across the U.S. to participate. “They created an atmosphere that facilitated honest, challenging, and exciting conversation, as well as produced some top-notch scholarship,” she says.

But, Pope-Levison adds, the results of the seminar are not just for conversation among scholars. “It’s pedagogical and community and campus formation,” she says. “There’s a lot of mentoring going on between generations of faculty.”

She’s also enthusiastic about resources that seminar participants developed — a video and PowerPoint presentation — that could be used as a basis for discussions on gender and Christianity in settings ranging from residence halls to classrooms. “These issues are so highly debated,” she says. “Are there biblical gender roles?” She hopes faculty will help create an environment in which students will consider important questions such as this in an environment where knowledgeable faculty can support them.

The Asian-American Ministry Program: A Vision for Church Partnership

Central to the heart and vision of the Asian-American Ministry Program (AAMP) in the School of Theology are church partnerships, rooted in the belief that both the graduate program and local churches will be strengthened by the gifts and wisdom they can offer one another. Asian-American churches are filled with highly educated laypersons seriously interested in learning about their faith, and SOT faculty members are already helping to support these needs. Likewise, local churches are filled with seasoned Asian-American pastors innovatively leading their congregations, and our graduate students are already benefiting from their wisdom and experience, while also cultivating the multicultural sensitivities essential for ministry in the 21st century.

This fall, the AAMP took another step toward this vision by organizing — together with Lighthouse Christian Church, a prominent Asian-American church in Bellevue — a five-week course on Christian Formation and Mission. The course included reflections from biblical studies, church history, and missiology. Ds. Bo Lim, Doug Strong, and David Leong lectured on the Mission of God (Minye Dei), offering practical strategies on how the Church can engage in mission in today’s complex world.

The class included a tour of Rainier Avenue Church and Urban Impact, a nonprofit organization in the Rainier Valley dedicated to Christian community development. Thirty-five lay-leaders, elders, and pastors from six local churches gathered weekly and were challenged to consider the implications of the Incarnation as a model for ministry, and how the Church could once again be at the forefront of social reform like many of the outstanding 18th- and 19th-century evangelical leaders.

Dr. David Leong and AAMP Director Billy Vo concluded the course by providing an opportunity for QA/QA and engaging in a pastoral discussion with participants. Both spoke from their personal experiences of living and engaging in ministry in the culturally diverse, mixed-income Rainier Valley community, and provided an opportunity for attendees to reflect on personal applications.

Tonight is already being born in the lives of many who attended, and we look forward to more.