

Evan B. Howard
The Practice of Worship
Fuller Theological Seminary
Fall, 2015

Solitude Retreat Assignments

Retreat #1

- First Directed Retreat (4 hour retreat plus preparation and reflection)

This is the first of your Directed Disciplines (Solitude) assignments. As with the other practice assignments, this assignment is designed to improve your capacity to engage in activities and exercises related to Christian spiritual disciplines and practices of worship. More particularly, our aim is that students will participate in directed practices and disciplines over the course of the quarter. In IS501 the discipline of focus is the discipline of solitude. In this class on the Practice of Christian Worship you are going to learn how to be alone with God. The aim in these assignments is to give you an increasing familiarity with, comfort in, and ministry through, the discipline of solitude.

Your assignment here (as with all your directed discipline retreats) will be tied closely to the reading associated with the assignment. For this assignment your reading is a "Treasure from the Desert: A Brief Guide to Personal, Private, Retreats with the Lord" ([Treasure from the Desert: A Brief Guide to Private, Personal Retreats with the Lord](#)) which I wrote a while ago to assist people in taking private, personal retreats. Your assignment is simply to prepare for, to take, and then to reflect upon, one half-day retreat (four hours in retreat) as directed in this guide.

When you are finished with this retreat you will write a report describing the following:

- General information - what, where, when, how
- Preparation - What did you do and why did you do it: body, location, what you took with you, spiritual preparations?
- Distractions - What did you experience and what did you do about it (see the guide for an outline of this)?
- Presence and Rest - how (if at all) did you experience rest and the presence of God with you in this retreat?
- Time with the Lord - Was this more of an "agenda" or a "non-agenda" retreat? What did you do (or NOT do) on this retreat? What did you experience? What did you notice regarding your relationship with God in the midst of this retreat? (tensions, healings, questions, feelings, or the like)
- Closing - What were your "take aways" from this retreat? What are the implications for your future practice of worship living? What invitations did you sense (if any) and what responses might be appropriate? Did you share any content of the retreat with someone else? If so, what was that like?

Your 500 word report from this retreat is due on Friday, October 16 before 11:55pm PDT.

Fuller Theological Seminary
IS501, Fall 2015
Evan B. Howard

Student name:
Assignment: Directed Retreat #1
Submission date:
Total Score:

Directed Retreat #1 Evaluation

This retreat is worth 4% of your total class grade and I will evaluate it (using a scale of 40 with 40 being highest) according to the criteria in the evaluation section below. I will work from a base score of 35. If you provide the basic content of everything that I have mentioned above you will receive a 35 for this assignment. If some elements are missing or are poorly communicated I will subtract from this base. If you include every element and as you demonstrate theological or spiritual reflection "above and beyond" the requirements (for example, you clearly stretched your boundaries as you did this retreat, or you brilliantly describe your distractions and how you dealt with them, you explored solitude in other literature and integrated this into your reflections), I will give you a score increasingly nearing 40 for this assignment. Late assignments will be penalized 1.5 points for every day late (which really means 1 point for one day late and 3 points for 2 days late and so on).

Comments:

Note - I will make brief comments below. When I refer to your assignment, I will make reference to the page number and starting phrase like this: (3.6) "Jesus loves me" -. Go to page three, six tenths of the way down the page and look for the phrase "Jesus loves me." There you will find the section regarding which I will be commenting. If I am referring to a page or section in general, I will not add .6 or "Jesus loves me".

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Evaluation:

I will not repeat the assignment instructions here. Yet my evaluation will reflect those instructions as interpreted by the evaluation criteria described along with your assignment instructions.

Sincere and engaged performance

- Is the submission complete, on time, an appropriate word count? -
- Preparation (location, physical stuff)? -
- Spiritual planning? -
- Allotment of time for preparation, retreat, reflection? -

Christian *worship* event/experience

- Encounters with distractions? -
- Rest and presence? -
- Summary of time with the Lord (what kind of retreat, etc.)? -
- Any comment about *worship*? -

Integrative Reflection

- Adequate summary of the whole experience? -
- "Take aways" or application?

"Above and Beyond"

- Stretch yourself in time or elements of retreat? -
- Exceptionally deep discussion about the spiritual dynamics of the retreat? Reflections on why you might have experienced what you experienced? -
- Draw material on solitude from other readings, lectures, other students, and so on? Incorporate theology, history, culture, experience in the reflections? -

Other Evaluative Comments:

Score:

Retreat #2

This is the second of your Directed Disciplines (Solitude) assignments. As with the other practice assignments, this assignment is designed to improve your capacity to engage in activities and exercises related to Christian spiritual disciplines and practices of worship. More particularly, our aim is that students will participate in directed practices and disciplines over the course of the quarter. In IS501 the discipline of focus is the discipline of solitude. In this class on the Practice of Christian Worship you are going to learn how to be alone with God. The aim in these assignments is to give you an increasing familiarity with, comfort in, and ministry through, the discipline of solitude.

Your assignment here (as with all your directed discipline retreats) will be tied closely to the reading associated with the assignment. For this assignment your reading is Thomas Merton's chapters on "Solitude" and "The Cell" from his *Contemplation in a World of Action*, 237-159 of the (found in your eReserves - this is the Garden City/Doubleday edition of the book. Your chapters are not to be found in the 1998 edition of the book). Your assignment will build upon what you learned in your previous retreat and take you deeper into reflection on the role of solitude more generally in your life.

First, a brief word about Merton's articles. They were published in 1965 and written earlier. During these years Thomas Merton was exploring--and then promoting--the legitimacy of vowed solitaries (people committing themselves to be "hermits") within the context of monastic orders. As you will see, Merton is concerned with what he perceives as a kind of superficiality present within the monastic communities of his day. In the midst of this context he argues that some should be given the freedom to live separate from their community in semi-isolation pursuing God within a more private setting, yet not without some connection to the monastic community. Merton is writing not about how to take a *retreat* of solitude, but rather about the value of a *vocation* of solitude.

Now I suspect that there are few of you in this class who might sense a calling to a life of solitude, though I confess I myself wondered if I had such a calling for a few years of my life. Nevertheless, each and every one of us lives within a blend of solitude and community, of inward and outward. The question then is this -- what place does solitude have in my life? I may not be called to be a hermit, but I am called to *some* level or practice of solitude. And when you read Merton's chapters you will realize that a calling to solitude is not just about spending time alone (although it does include this). What might this look like?

So then, your assignment will be to take a six-hour retreat with all the preparations, treatment of distractions, and such like your previous retreat. Part of your preparation will be to read Merton's chapters in advance and to give preliminary thought to the questions. Perhaps your reflection on these questions might require that you bring a journal or something to your retreat. I could imagine that some of your time on this retreat will be just like the previous: just spending time with God (you have a full six hours). But some of your time on retreat will also be used to reflect on the following questions in view of your reading for this retreat. The point is to take your time with these and really go deep:

- 1) Where are the places of loneliness, risk or helplessness that surround you? How does your society name them? Where are your personal places of isolation? How do you feel about these places? How do you relate to them? How do you compare my understanding of "solitude" with the thought of dwelling for significant periods of time in places of loneliness, risk or helplessness?
- 2) Thomas Merton discusses "distractions" in a fresh way from what you considered in your last retreat. Merton speaks of distractions in terms of the multiplication of useless acts in life. He also speaks of

"fictitious roles" we play in society. These distractions and fictitious roles are often social or personal behaviors we perpetuate in order to maintain membership in society. They keep us from being fully ourselves, the self that is naked before God when we are really alone. These useless acts prevent you from authentic life-solitude, just as little mental distractions can keep you from having a fruitful solitude retreat. So just what are these distractions in your life? How do they keep you from being fully present to God? How might a practice of solitude help you face these?

3) How do you face boredom or unfulfillment? Are there any "happiness machines" that you turn to? Again, the point here is not to get you to confess your deep dark sins, but simply to reflect deeply on your own experience of solitude--deep solitude, which invariably will bring up boredom and unfulfillment. Solitude is frequently perceived as a waste of time. How do you feel about wasting time? In this assignment you are being required to waste six hours of time. What does that feel like?

4) Merton talks about a freedom and permission given by the Church to have a vocation of solitude for the sake of the Church, to contribute to the Church from this place of solitude. What might you gain in solitude that you could offer back to your own faith community? What level of vocation to solitude could you imagine and what gift might you bring from living out this vocation of whatever level of solitude you sense is appropriate? What might living into such a calling cost you?

5) Merton encourages his readers to transcend mere "plausible identities" in thinking about the role of solitude in life. It is easy to label "those people" over there as "hermits." But what might a real identity of a rich and vibrant solitude look like for us? What are the possible identities for the place of solitude in our lives, whether or not we are called to full-time solitude? What may be possible for vocations of "solitude" at various levels of commitment in the church today?

I think my ideal would be for you to spend some of your retreat thinking about these things, and then taking a few days more playing with them, experimenting with what the role of solitude in your own life and identity might look like in the context of the real responsibilities of your life. I'm not sure that this would really take much more real time in those days. It would just be a matter of looking at them (and perhaps arranging them) slightly differently.

In any case, your assignment is to take the six-hour retreat and then to write a report, just as with your previous retreat (see your assignment instructions for the previous retreat). Your report should briefly summarize general information, preparation, and just what went on in the retreat generally (distractions, presence and rest, time with the Lord, closing . . .). Spend a little time comparing this retreat with the last. You need not go into detail with all this. Just let me know how this experience was for you and how you grew in the practice of personal, private retreats generally.

But then you must spend some time writing about each of the five questions I gave you above. Your retreat this time is not just about taking some time with God, but it is also about you reflecting on the place of solitude and aloneness in your life more fundamentally. Your report should summarize both your retreat experience and your reflections on each of the solitude questions stimulated by your reading of Merton. Feel free to integrate material from other readings if appropriate.

Your 600 word report is due Friday, November 6 before 11:55pm PDT

Fuller Theological Seminary
IS501, Fall 2015
Evan B. Howard

Student name:
Assignment: Directed Retreat #2
Submission date:
Total Score:

Directed Retreat #2 Evaluation

Summary of the assignment instructions regarding the retreat report -

"Your report should briefly summarize general information, preparation, and just what went on in the retreat generally (distractions, presence and rest, time with the Lord, closing . . .). Spend a little time comparing this retreat with the last. . . . But then you must spend some time writing about each of the five questions I gave you above. Your retreat this time is not just about taking some time with God, but it is also about you reflecting on the place of solitude and aloneness in your life more fundamentally. Your report should summarize both your retreat experience and your reflections on each of the solitude questions stimulated by your reading of Merton."

This retreat is worth 5% of your total class grade and I will evaluate it (using a scale of 50 with 50 being highest) according to the criteria in the evaluation section below. I will work from a base score of 43. If you provide the basic content of everything that I have mentioned above you will receive a 43 for this assignment. If some elements are missing or are poorly communicated I will subtract from this base. If you include every element and as you demonstrate theological or spiritual reflection "above and beyond" the requirements (for example, you clearly actually did your retreat in your personal place of loneliness, you brilliantly described your social setting's useless acts of life and how you are tempted to live out those expectations, or you integrated in other literature or experimented with the practice of solitude after the retreat), I will give you a score increasingly nearing 50 for this assignment. Late assignments will be penalized 2 points for every day late.

Comments:

Note - I will make brief comments below. When I refer to your assignment, I will make reference to the page number and starting phrase like this: (3.6) "Jesus loves me" -. Go to page three, six tenths of the way down the page and look for the phrase "Jesus loves me." There you will find the section regarding which I will be commenting. If I am referring to a page or section in general, I will not add .6 or "Jesus loves me".

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Evaluation:

I will not repeat the assignment instructions here. Yet my evaluation will reflect those instructions as interpreted by the evaluation criteria described along with your assignment instructions.

Sincere and engaged performance

- Is the submission complete, on time, an appropriate word count? -
- Preparation - location, regular retreat preparation (physical, spiritual). -
- Did the student read Merton in advance and show evidence of preliminary thought to the questions? -
- Do I see evidence of engaged reflection in the report-writing after the retreat? (general reflections on the retreat, reflections on each of the questions) -

Christian *worship* event/experience (was the student attentive to the dynamics of their relationship with God in the midst of this exercise and in reflection on their relationship with God more generally with regard to their life of solitude?)

- general - What went on in the student's time with the Lord? How does the student describe the experience and what they received from it? And what did they discover about the place of solitude in their life? (How deep is this described?) -
- More specific to the questions - Does the student offer any comments on loneliness and boredom in life and how these affect their relationship with God? (Q. 1, 3) -
- Is the student aware of any "life distractions" and how to deal with them? (Q.2) -
- does the student reflect on the vocation of solitude or identity? (Q. 4, 5) -

Integrative Reflection

- Does the student make reference to Merton's chapters either through quotes or through dialogue with the concepts? How deeply is this reflection -
- Is there any personal or ministry application (how this practice can be used, abused, danger zones . . .) -

"Above and Beyond"

- Did the student clearly and intentionally choose a place of loneliness to do this retreat? -
- Is there any evidence of the student's exploration of this practice as an experiment of *worship*, any connection with their own understanding of worship? -
- Did the student brilliantly describe their social setting's useless acts of life and how they are tempted to live out those expectations? -
- Does the student draw from other readings, lectures, other students, and so on? Do they perhaps incorporate theology, history, culture, experience in their own reflections? -
- Did the student "play with" their reflections on the questions later in the week? -
- Does the student, perhaps, ask "Why"? -

Other Evaluative Comments:

Score:

Retreat #3

This is the third and final of your Directed Disciplines (Solitude) assignments. As with the other practice assignments, this assignment is designed to improve your capacity to engage in activities and exercises related to Christian spiritual disciplines and practices of worship. More particularly, our aim is that students will participate in directed practices and disciplines over the course of the quarter. In IS501 the discipline of focus is the discipline of solitude. In this class on the Practice of Christian Worship you are going to learn how to be alone with God. The aim in these assignments is to give you an increasing familiarity with, comfort in, and ministry through, the discipline of solitude.

Your assignment here (as with all your directed discipline retreats) will be tied closely to the reading associated with the assignment. For this assignment your reading is my [Getting Away to It All: The Place of Withdrawal in Fourth-Century Monasticism and Postmodern Christianity](#) (found in your eReserves). Your assignment will build upon what you have learned in your previous retreats and prepare you to express your own approach to solitude in theory and in practice.

First, a little bit of background to this essay. By the time I wrote this essay I had long appreciated solitude at some level. Decades prior I had read the excellent chapter on solitude from Richard Foster's *Celebration of Discipline*. I frequently taken periodic retreats. But in 1996 I took an involuntary step further into solitude, moving from the San Francisco Bay area to barren land outside Montrose, Colorado for family reasons just as I was finishing my Ph.D. "What in the world am I going to with a Ph.D in Christian Spirituality in a town of 10,000 people?" I asked my wife. She told me to dream and in a few months I had a vision for praying, manual labour, study, and ministry. Cheri informed me that this plan looked something like the Benedictine Rule of life. Perhaps I wanted to be a monk? And so began my so-far twenty year exploration into semi-monastic life. Frankly, it has been a mixed experience.

Part way through this I found myself asking just what kind of monk I was. I wasn't a Franciscan (not living among the poor) and I wasn't really a Benedictine either (not in a community). So what was I? Well, after a bit of study I concluded that I probably was closest to some kind of semi-hermit person, a big surprise for an extroverted evangelical like me who had always wanted to "do something" for Jesus. Now it was a different story. I knew. I could not live here any longer feeling "stuck." I needed to choose into this in a new way.

Somewhere in this season I had begun "reading my way through" the history of monastic life. I discovered that there were all kinds of misunderstandings about monasticism and solitude, particularly with regard to the fourth century monks in Egypt, who many considered to be the foundational movement of Christian monasticism. So I decided to explore this aspect of early monasticism further: their practice and in particular their motives. Why did those early monks leave relatives, possessions, security and such? Indeed, why would anyone (why would *I*) choose into a life of relative solitude for the sake of the kingdom?

The essay you have is my answer to that question, and my response to what I consider to be some of the wrong-headed thinking about solitude and early monasticism. In the end, I dropped the word "hermit" from my sense of identity. Just not true. At the same time I know that much of what I am called to do (in prayer, in manual labour, in study, and now even in online ministry) I do alone. I also discovered that all Christians--not just nuns and monks--have solitude in life. And we choose our place and level of solitude for the same kinds of reasons (either mistaken or authentic) as the early monastics.

So why am I assigning this essay for you, most of whom will never live a semi-monastic life? I am having you read this essay because I think it clarifies the meaning of the practice of solitude. On your first retreat you were simply introduced to the basic practice of solitude: preparation, agenda and non-agenda, retreat sleep and so on. Most of you had a very pleasant time of largely noon-agenda being with God. Then, in the second retreat you were stretched further. Merton looks at a life of solitude, not just a practice. Distractions are not just what gets in the way of your moment of prayer, but the entire system of our culture that prevents us from whole-hearted devotion to Christ. And so on. I had you reflect on the place of solitude, loneliness and such more generally in your life. Now in this retreat I want to you to "put it all together a bit" with a larger sense of the meaning(s) of solitude. And that, I think, is what my essay provides.

So then, after you read the essay (please read the essay first) what are you to *do* on this retreat? I have two answers to this question: (1) as little as possible, (2) whatever you want. Let me explain.

(1) I want this final retreat to be as "pure" as possible. Absolute aloneness with God. What this means is the following:

- no cell phone, social media and such except availability for emergencies (I am aware that the baby sitter may need to call)
- no music
- no books aside from the Bible. Furthermore, the point of the retreat is not to read your way through the book of Leviticus. At the same time I am aware that prayerful reading of Scripture and periodic "looking a few things up" are often valuable parts of this kind of retreat.
- As little food as possible. I am not requiring you to "fast." You know your own body. I am simply asking you to minimize your intake of food.
- As little people-contact as possible. Each of you has to find your own setting for the retreat. I understand the difficulties of the logistics. But as much as possible it would be wonderful if you never saw a soul the whole time of the retreat.
- You may need paper and pencil to write a few notes. If you feel you can resist the temptations of bringing a computer along for the sake of writing notes (and *only* if you feel you can resist those temptations), you have permission to bring a computer or pad.
- As little activity as possible. There are times when you may need to walk, or to weave leaves into baskets (one student tried this on the last retreat!). But this is not the time for recreational activities.

I am just trying to facilitate a particular environment for you. Recreational activities, music, delightful foods and such are perfectly acceptable in Christian retreat. But in *this* retreat, I want you to pretend as much as possible that you are a fourth century nun/monk. Just for the day. Just *be* absolutely alone with Jesus.

(2) I have no agenda for you on this retreat. I do have an agenda for *after* the retreat. But that is *after*, and I truly do not want your mind during the retreat to be cluttered thinking about the report portion of this assignment. I want you simply to have a nearly-full day totally devoted to solitude with God. You can structure it any way you want. Some of you have already structured distinct hours for praise, confession, intercession, and so on. Others of you have just let things happen as the wind blows. I am OK with any of this. This is your time to plan and execute your own retreat. Go, and have a wonderful day.

Then, when you are done with the retreat, I want you to write a report. This report will summarize your preparation, activities, experiences and learnings from this third retreat, just as you have done with the

previous retreats. But you will also write a final, synthetic reflection on the practice of solitude. In this synthetic reflection, which must draw from all your readings and all your retreats (and perhaps more) you will address the following:

- Just what *is* solitude? What place has it had in Scripture and the history of the Church (no need for a dissertation here, just a few thoughts; but if you wanted to . . .)
- What is the meaning(s) of solitude? What is it about? What is it for? Here you might want to address the various motives and functions of the practice of solitude as you see them.
- More particularly, what relationship does *solitude* have with *worship*?
- How has it been practiced, and more particularly, how do you see yourself practicing solitude in this next season of your life (or beyond)?

Your 800 word report is due Friday, November 27 before 11:55pm PDT

This retreat is worth 6% of your total class grade and I will evaluate it (using a scale of 60 with 60 being highest) according to the following criteria:

Sincere and engaged performance

- Is the submission complete, on time, an appropriate word count?
- Did the student follow the instructions in the guide describing both their retreat and responding to each of the questions posed regarding your synthesis?
- Do I see evidence of informed and conscientious preparation by the student?
- Did the student read the material in advance and make any appropriate adjustments to the retreat preparations or the retreat schedule?
- Give appropriate time for preparation, retreat, and reflection, (or perhaps even stretch themselves in time or style of the experiment).

Christian worship event/experience

- Was the student attentive to the dynamics of their relationship with God in the midst of this exercise and in reflection on their relationship with God more generally with regard to their life of solitude?
- aware of their own spiritual experience of solitude in this retreat and in general.
- What went on in the student's time with the Lord? How does the student describe the experience and what they received from it? And what did they discover about the place of solitude in their life? (How deep is this described?)

Integrative Reflection

- Did the student's synthesis describe their sense of both the definition and meaning of solitude
- Does the student draw from readings, lectures, other students, and so on? Do they incorporate theology, history, culture, experience in their own reflections?
- Is there any evidence of the student's exploration of this practice as an experiment of *worship*, any connection with their own understanding of worship?
- Does the student, perhaps, ask "Why"?
- Is there any personal or ministry application (how this practice can be used, abused, danger zones . . .); more particularly did the student describe both how solitude is practiced and how they themselves are approaching their own personal practice of solitude?

I will work from a base score of 52. If you provide the basic content of everything that I have mentioned above you will receive a 52 for this assignment. If some elements are missing or are poorly

communicated I will subtract from this base. If you include every element and as you demonstrate theological or spiritual reflection "above and beyond" the requirements (for example if you cleverly integrated elements from my outline of fourth-century practice into your own retreat structure, you integrated a wide range of material form within and without our class assignments into your report, or your reflections on solitude were exceptionally brilliant), I will give you a score increasingly nearing 50 for this assignment. Late assignments will be penalized 2 points for every day late.

Fuller Theological Seminary
IS501, Fall 2015
Evan B. Howard

Student name:
Assignment: Directed Retreat #3
Submission date:
Total Score:

Directed Retreat #3 Evaluation

Summary of the assignment instructions regarding the retreat report -

"This report will summarize your preparation, activities, experiences and learnings from this third retreat, just as you have done with the previous retreats. But you will also write a final, synthetic reflection on the practice of solitude. This synthetic reflection must draw from all your readings and all your retreats (and perhaps more)."

This retreat is worth 6% of your total class grade and I will evaluate it (using a scale of 60 with 60 being highest) according to the criteria in the evaluation section below. I will work from a base score of 52. If you provide the basic content of everything that I have mentioned above you will receive a 52 for this assignment. If some elements are missing or are poorly communicated I will subtract from this base. If you include every element and as you demonstrate theological or spiritual reflection "above and beyond" the requirements (for example if you cleverly integrated elements from my outline of fourth-century practice into your own retreat structure, you integrated a wide range of material from within and without our class assignments into your report, or your reflections on solitude were exceptionally brilliant), I will give you a score increasingly nearing 60 for this assignment. Late assignments will be penalized 2 points for every day late.

Comments:

Note - I will make brief comments below. When I refer to your assignment, I will make reference to the page number and starting phrase like this: (3.6) "Jesus loves me" -. Go to page three, six tenths of the way down the page and look for the phrase "Jesus loves me." There you will find the section regarding which I will be commenting. If I am referring to a page or section in general, I will not add .6 or "Jesus loves me".

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Evaluation:

I will not repeat the assignment instructions here. Yet my evaluation will reflect those instructions as interpreted by the evaluation criteria described along with your assignment instructions.

Sincere and engaged performance

- Is the submission complete, on time, an appropriate word count? -
- Preparation - location, regular retreat preparation (physical, spiritual). -
- Did the student read "Away to it All" in advance? -
- Did the student take concrete steps to make this retreat as pure as possible? -

- Do I see evidence of engaged reflection in the report-writing after the retreat? (general reflections on the retreat, reflections on each of the questions) -

Christian *worship* event/experience (was the student attentive to the dynamics of their relationship with God in the midst of this exercise and in reflection on their relationship with God more generally with regard to their life of solitude?)

- general - What went on in the student's time with the Lord? How does the student describe the experience and what they received from it? (How deep is this described?) -

Integrative Reflection (particularly with regard to the synthetic summary in this assignment)

- Does the student define solitude? -
- Does the student discuss the meaning of solitude? -
- Does the student discuss the relationship of solitude to worship? -
- Does the student make reference to previous readings or retreats? How deeply is this reflection? -
- Is there any personal or ministry application (how this practice can be used, abused, danger zones . . .) -

"Above and Beyond"

- Did the student go beyond in the act of withdrawing themselves from all input? -
- Did the student cleverly integrate elements from my outline of fourth-century practice into their own retreat structure? -
- Did the student integrate a wide range of material from within and without our class assignments into their report? -
- Were the student's reflections on solitude exceptionally brilliant? -
- Does the student, perhaps, ask "Why"? -

Other Evaluative Comments:

Score: