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CH 751 Readings in Western Spirituality

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Readings in Western Spirituality  
CH 751 Dr. Collins  
Three Credit Hours

I. Texts:


II. Course Description:

This course will explore the nature of spirituality and its relevance to contemporary life and ministry by means of a critical examination of classic Western spiritual literature, ranging from *The Rule of St. Benedict* to contemporary formulations. Special attention will be given to the work of John Wesley as that which exemplifies the leading themes of both spiritual literature and spiritual formation. In addition, the course
will explore the nature and definition of spirituality in terms of a) the nature of human beings, b) human experience, c) as an academic discipline. Beyond this, the course will be attentive to the methodology of the discipline of spirituality. Indeed, attention to methodological concerns should equip students with the wherewithal to assess in a critical fashion the particular kinds of spiritualities represented in the readings.

Five major questions will inform the course: First, how is God conceived or revealed in this literature, and how does this depiction compare with other traditions? Are there any similarities or differences? Second, what is the nature of a human being according to the greatest saints of the church and how does this compare with modern conceptions? Third, what is the basic problem with humanity according to this literature and what is its solution? Fourth, what are the psychological dynamics, the human components of religious experience, present in this material? Are there any recurring elements in these spiritual trajectories? Fifth, what are the epistemological (pertaining to knowledge) and metaphysical assumptions (pertaining to what is real) of this material and what is their status in the modern world? Are questions of meaning and purpose handled differently in these writings than in contemporary literature and culture? If so, why does this difference exist, and what is its larger significance?

III. Course Objectives:

1. To appreciate the Christian Spiritual Tradition so students will understand that our generation lives on the growing edge of a vast Christian heritage.
2. To explore various models or paradigms that describe the nature of spirituality
3. To examine not only the diversity of spiritualities present today, but also to consider what such diversity means for the promulgation of the Christian faith and the promise of apologetics.
4. To understand the discipline of spirituality, on some level, as a humanistic discipline that explores common human experience.
5. To acquire basic factual knowledge of the persons, places, dates, events, and movements that shaped the spirituality of the Christian Church.
6. To understand the evolution of spirituality and its relation to Christian doctrine, and to learn to discern between form and content.
7. To appreciate the importance of primary sources and the nature and effects of historical interpretation.
8. To view contemporary spirituality in the light of the prior beliefs and actions of the Christian community.
9. To evaluate one’s Christian vocation in the light of the historical, theological, and spiritual currents of the Christian tradition.
10. To gain insight into the nature of Christian ministry through a consideration of spiritual classics.
11. To participate in the task of developing capable and effective Christian leadership for the contemporary church by being attentive to spiritual formation.
12. To develop a greater appreciation for the importance of spiritual disciplines in the ministries of the Church.

IV. Requirements:
Students are required to read all ten selections listed above. Many of these texts are small, and only parts of others will be read (Exploring Christian Spirituality, for instance), so students should have little difficulty completing the assignments.

A major research paper (15-20 pages) which explores some aspect of the discipline of spirituality will be due no later than one week before the last day of class. It is to be typed, 12 or 13 point Times New Roman (or similar font), double-spaced, with one inch margins.

Since this is a seminar course, class participation by students is crucial. Therefore, absenteeism is most strongly discouraged. Students will not be permitted to miss more than two classes without grade reduction.

V. Grading:

Course grade will be determined by these factors: the paper (33%), completion of the readings (33%), seminar participation (33%).

An incomplete will be given if the student fails to complete all of the assigned readings.

VI. Course Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Western Spirituality</th>
<th>Reading Schedule</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week</td>
<td>Book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 4, 2001</td>
<td>Introductory Lectures</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 10, 2001</td>
<td>What is Spirituality?* Sheldrake</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Toward Defining Spirituality* Principe</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 17, 2001</td>
<td>Spirit and Spirituality* Macquarrie</td>
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<td></td>
<td>A Model for Describing Spirituality*</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 24, 2001</td>
<td>Spirituality in the Academy* Schneiders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Practical Trinity* LaCugna</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 1, 2001</td>
<td>St. Benedict</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The Rule of St. Benedict.</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 8, 2001</td>
<td>Serge Hughes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Catherine of Genoa: Purgation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 15, 2001</td>
<td>Thomas a Kempis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Author/Title</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 22, 2001</td>
<td>Martin Luther: <em>The Imitation of Christ</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 29, 2001</td>
<td>John Wesley: <em>The Theologia Germanica</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 5, 2001</td>
<td>Jean-Pierre Caussade: <em>Abandonment to Divine Providence</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 12, 2001</td>
<td>Brother Lawrence: <em>The Practice of the Presence of God</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| November 19-23, 2001 | Reading Week  
No Classes |
| November 26, 2001  | Therese of Lisieux: *The Autobiography of a Soul* |
| December 3, 2001   | Kenneth J. Collins: *Soul Care*             |
| December 11, 2001  | Final Exams                                 |

*These chapters are found in *Exploring Christian Spirituality: An Ecumenical Reader*. Students may earn extra credit by reading all the selections of this book.

VII. **Note:**

This syllabus may be altered from time to time, for academic reasons, as the professor sees fit.

VIII. **Bibliography:**

**I. Books**


Aubert, Roger. *Sacralization & Secularization*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, --.


Hall, Mary. *The Impossible Dream: The Spirituality of Dom Helder Camara.* Ann Arbor, Michigan: Books Demand, --.


Newhouse, Flower A. *Travel with Inner Perceptiveness.* Escondido, California: Christward, 1979.


## II. Articles


Moore, Robert L. "Revisioning Spiritual Theology: the Next Agenda." *Chicago Theological Seminary Register* 72, no. 3 (Fall 1982): 1-9.

Morrison, Truman A. "Readings in Spirituality [bibliog essay]." *Chicago Theological Seminary Register* 72, no. 3 (Fall 1982): 40-43.


Schneiders, Sandra M. "Theology and Spirituality: Strangers, Rivals, or Partners?" *Horizons* 13, no. 2 (Fall 1986): 253-74.


