

AT 1: Introduction to Ascetical Theology/Spirituality
Easter 2017
Monday 8 AM-1215 PM
General Theological Seminary

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In this foundational course, the classical texts and tools of Christian spirituality are explored, with lectures and discussions grounded in biblical, historical and theological perspectives, and experiences in meditation and prayer based on the readings. Integrating theory and praxis, both critical thought and spiritual growth are pursued. The syllabus includes integral works— in short selections— by such Christian writers as Ignatius of Antioch, Irenaeus, the Cappadocians, the Latin Fathers (and Mothers) and the Desert Dwellers, the medieval mystics and teachers, Ignatius of Loyola, Teresa of Avila, through to modern searchers such as T. S. Eliot. There will also be frequent reference to the expression of spirituality through the arts of poetry, visual art, and music.

Course Objectives:

1. Become acquainted with the methodology and tools of classic Christian spiritual practice, for personal discipleship and for counsel, direction, and guidance of others
2. Discover the dynamics of the history of Christian spirituality.
3. Experience Spirituality as a synthesizing, integrating facet of theological education.
4. Initiate or fine-tune a personal praxis.

Required Readings:

(In each case, students have a choice: the preferred edition of the work, available from Amazon, or an online version. The latter are often by necessity a little creaky with age, but I have read them all and approve them. *New Advent* and *Monachos* are two sites you should get to know anyway, as is the *Perseus Project* (<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/>) for Classics, and for many things early Christian and medieval. If you happen to know Latin or Greek, and even if you don't, this site is invaluable: <http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/> . Go straight to

“Conspectus Rerum Auctorumque.” Both *Perseus* and *Omnia* contain plenty of English translations of many, many works.)

One required reference work: Jones, Wainwright, Yarnold, *The Study of Liturgy*.

NB: In addition to this list, there will be texts available on CAMs with translations by CMcP of various texts).

Plato, *The Symposium* (Penguin, ..., *The Last Days of Socrates*, tr H. Tarrant (Penguin: rev ed 1993) or <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/phaedo.html>

Michael Alexander, *The Earliest Christian Poems* (Penguin: 1991) <http://www.oepoetry.ca/>

T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*

Early Christian Writings, tr Staniforth (Penguin: rev ed 11987) or <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/> and go to Ignatius of Antioch, Clement of Rome 1st Epistle

Robert M. Grant, *Irenaeus of Lyons* (Routledge:1997) or <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103.htm>

Anthony Meredith, *Gregory of Nyssa* (Routledge: 1999) or <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf205.xi.ii.ii.html>

Benedicta Ward, *The Desert Fathers: Sayings of the Early Christian Monks* (Penguin:2003) or <http://www.vitae-patrum.org.uk/page2.html>

Augustine, *The Trinity* (New City Press: 1991) or <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1301.htm>
..., *Confessions*

Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works* tr Colm Luibheid (Paulist: 1987) <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/rolt/dionysius.html>

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<http://www.esoteric.msu.edu/VolumeII/CelestialHierarchy.html>

The complete set, in French:
<http://babel.hathitrust.org/>

Michael Alexander, *The Earliest Christian Poems* (Penguin: 1991) <http://www.oepoetry.ca/>

Bernard of Clairvaux, *Selected Works* (Paulist: 1987) or
<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3407.htm>

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<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3401.htm>

Hildegard of Bingen, *Selected Writings* (Penguin: 2001) or
<http://home.infionline.net/~ddisse/hildegard.html>

The Cloud of Unknowing (Image: 2005) or
<http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/cloud.htm>

Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, ed. A Spearing (Penguin: 1998)

John of the Cross, *Ascent of Mount Carmel* (Paraclete: 2002)

Teresa of Avila, *The Life of St. Teresa by Herself* (Penguin: 1988)

Jeremy Taylor, *Selected Works* (Paulist: 1990)

John Keble, *The Christian Year* (IndyPublish, 2002)

Helen Gardner, *The Metaphysical Poets* (Penguin, 1960)

Simon Tugwell, *Ways of Imperfection*

Assignments

1. **Personal Expectations:** having read the course description, schedule, and other materials in this syllabus, all students will write a one-page description of their personal goals, or “what I would like to get from this course.” (This counts as first reflection paper, see below).
2. **Class Participation:** for the course to be a genuine exploration, this is mandatory. All students should plan to participate vocally every session.
3. **Weekly Reflection:** each week, every student will submit an **informal**, non-graded reflection paper about 1 page in length. These are due every week **by Friday noon. THIS ASSIGNMENT IS VERY IMPORTANT**
4. **Term project (10-20 pages):** each student will develop a term project/paper exploring some aspect of Christian Spirituality. This may take any of several forms (e.g., besides a conventional research paper, an adult education series) but must meet the 10-20 page criterion. The project must evince research beyond the required readings and original thought. (Most students in the past have found the weekly reflection papers a perfect way to discover what they want to do for the project). Project due 12 Dec; Rough

outline and thesis statement (or other indication of what project is intended to be) due 27 Nov **(or earlier)**.

5. **(Optional) Class Presentation:** any student who wishes may share a 30-minute presentation of her/his term project (or other material relevant to this course) at any point during the term; see Professor ASAP to schedule and for assistance.

Evaluation

Grade: will be based on the volume and, especially, the quality of work evinced throughout the semester. Requirements for each grade:

C/auditor:

1. required reading (3 books).
2. Participation and attendance every session.

B:

1. all of the above plus:
2. weekly reflection papers
3. term project 10-15 pages, evincing intelligent research.

A:

1. all of the above plus:
2. term project 15-20 pages, evincing creative research.

GTS regulations stipulate that any student wishing to take this course Credit/No Credit must declare that intention at the beginning of the semester; send an e mail to Professor regarding this before the add/drop deadline. All others will receive a letter grade.

Course Policies

Laptops may be used for note-taking and for instant reference, but not for anything irrelevant to this course. Cell phones should be turned off.

Any student needing an accommodation because of disability or for any other reason should speak with Professor or e mail during first week, and provide some sort of documentation.

Schedule

1/30

Introduction: the Characteristics and Contours of Spirituality

- 1. Invocation**
- 2. A Visual Catalyst for Prayer**
- 3. What is Spirituality?**
- 4. The Elements of Religion**
- 5. The Character of Spirituality**
- 6. Examples of the Facets of Spirituality**
- 7. Our procedures (= course "covenant")**

2/6-2/13

The Two Foundations for Christian Spirituality: Hebraic and Hellenic

Assigned Reading: Genesis 1-3; Psalm 104 ; Plato, *Symposium*; Sappho, "Come Here!"; Philippians 2, "Magnificat" (trans CMcP); supplementary: Jones etc, pp. 90-101

- 1. Invocation**
- 2. Visual Catalyst for Prayer and Meditation**
- 3. Archaic Greek Prayer: strategies for talking to a god**
- 4. Genesis 1 as *mythos***
- 5. Genesis 2-3: Meditative Interpretation**
- 6. Mystics in the Bible?**
- 7. A Third Creation Story**
- 8. The Magnificat as Catalyst for Prayer**

Historical background:

Moses Finley, *The Ancient Greeks: an Introduction to their Life and Thought* (clear, businesslike and intelligent intro by one of the best Classicists of the last century);

H. D. F. Kitto, *The Greeks* (impressionistic, emotional and brilliant intro by another great 20th century Classicist; Yang to Finley's Yin)

Charles Freeman, *The Greek Achievement* (more recent, an appreciative and intelligent overview);

Bernard Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament* the fairly recent updating remains true to the original: a balanced, rich, unpretentious introduction to the OT.

Study Guide

1. What Theology does Genesis 1 (G1) express; or, what do we learn about God in G1?
2. What is its Cosmology? Its Anthropology?
3. What in fact is the story contained in G2-3 all about?
4. Ps. 104 is yet another Creation Myth. How is it like, and unlike the ones in Genesis?
5. What Theologies does Plato include in his *Symposium*? What is the Dialogue about?
6. Which explanation/eulogy of Eros/Love do you like best (You don't have to prefer the one Socrates comes up with; it has its own problems, as several recent scholars have been suggesting).
7. Can this Dialogue be translated into Christianity? If so, how would we do so?
8. In Sappho's poem "Come here!", whom is the speaker addressing? ("Copperhead" is a nickname: to what does it refer?)
9. I have tried (tried hard in this case!) to reproduce in English some of the effects or techniques of the original. What do you see or hear in terms of sound, choice of images, rhythm and tempo, repetition of patterns? Most importantly, what is the general strategy of this poem—what is it trying to do to the one to whom it is ostensibly addressed?
10. What by contrast is the strategy of the Song of Mary?
11. What do you think was its original function—was it really meant to be sung in the liturgy? Note the various effects in the Song—irony, wordplay, stanzaic form. It may help if you compare the various translations I have provided: how are they different, and why?
12. Philippians 2 is, most scholars agree, an original poem Paul incorporated into his letter. What was its original function, then?

2/20-

Ascesis ; Martyrdom and Spirituality in the Earliest Church/ Fasting and Vigil

Historical background:

Derwas Chitty, *The Desert a City*. Classic study of early Monasticism

Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity*. The modern work that more than any other established Late Antiquity as a separate subject for study; this is crucial for us because Late Antiquity saw the origin of our peculiar faith.

W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity*. Standard one-volume history of the early Church.

H. Chadwick, *The Early Church*. Handy shorter introduction.

Alternate trans. of Ignatius in Michael Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers in English* or Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*

Greek Philosophy:

F. M. Cornford, *Before and After Socrates*. A little creaky, but do not miss this brilliant brief intro---the most ingenious to Greek thought.

Guthrie, w. K. C., *The Greek Philosophers from Thales to Aristotle* A fine straightforward intro.

Coen, Curd, and Reeve, eds., *Readings in Ancient Greek Philosophy*. Very well-chosen and well-presented anthology.

Assignment: read Plato, *Phaedo*; using a Concordance, trace the word *to fast* (in the ascetical sense) in Scripture. Read also the Letters of Ignatius, esp. the Letter to the Trallians, and any good selection of the Sayings of the Desert Dwellers (e.g., that of Benedicta Ward). Supp: Jones etc pp.102-108

Study Guide:

1. Why fast? What good does it do? (Offer at least 3 answers—either your own answers, or answers others have given with which you may not agree).
2. What patterns, principles, precepts concerning fasting did you find in the Old Testament?
3. How does Jesus view fasting?
4. What are contemporary attitudes—ethical, medical, political, religious?
5. What spiritual vision do the letters of Ignatius express?
6. Describe Ignatius' ecclesiology, especially his view of Orders.
7. What is Ignatius' understanding of the Trinity?
8. What ascetical practices are mentioned in the Sayings of the Desert Dwellers?
9. Summarize Socrates' argument for the ascetical life as he limns it in *Phaedo*.
10. Summarize also his argument for immortality, and explain how this differs from Resurrection.
11. What is the tone of the *Phaedo*?
12. What is the character of Socrates in this dialogue?
13. Compare Socrates with Ignatius.
14. Compare Socrates in the *Phaedo* with Christ as he is depicted before the Passion.

2/27-3/13

Meditation, Contemplation and Prayer Spirituality in the Patristic Era/ Psalm Ruminations

Cassian; Evagrius; Macarius

Readings: the Sayings of the Desert Dwellers (CAMs or Benedicta Ward);

Fortunatus, "Vexilla Regis" (trans McP); Ignatius Loyola, "Composition of Place" of Place (<http://ryanrallankasi.blogspot.com/2009/03/on-prayer-composition-of-place.html>) ; William Johnston, *Christian Zen*.

Historical Background:

(Frend, *The Early Church*)

Simon Tugwell, *Ways of Imperfection*

Study Guide:

1. What is *meditation*? (your concept)
2. Find at least 3 definitions of *meditation*.
3. What is *contemplation*? (note that there is no single "correct" answer to these questions; what you are looking for is a definition that works for you in your life and ministry)
4. ...3 definitions.
5. How are meditation and prayer related? (Again, in your view).
6. What is Evagrius' teaching on prayer?
7. Macarius?
8. What approach to prayer do we find in the Desert Dwellers?
9. Why, do you think, did meditation become so well-systematized in the post-Reformation era?
10. Try the Ignatian "Composition of Place" for lessons from the Daily Office today.:
11. What elements do Christian meditation and Zen practice have in common?
12. How do they differ?
13. Try meditating with an object, such as a bowl.

3/20

Pneumatology: Who is the Holy Spirit?

Assignment: using a Concordance, trace the phrases *Spirit of God* and *Holy Spirit* (or their equivalents) through Scripture. Read Basil, *On the Holy Spirit*

<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/>; Gregory Nazianzen, *On the Holy Spirit*

<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/310231.htm>

Study Guide:

1. How would you explain "the Holy Spirit" to an enquirer?

2. What do we mean when we say, following the Councils, that God is one being, and three persons?
3. What was the *filioque* controversy all about, and where do you stand on it?
4. How have you experienced the Spirit in your own life?
5. What does the Ecumenical ("Nicene") Creed assert concerning the Spirit?
6. What does our Catechism (*An Outline of the Faith*) say about the Spirit?
7. At what points in various Sacraments is the Spirit invoked?
8. What does this mean? Why?
9. What is Montanism?
10. Who was Joahim of Fiore?
11. *Are you a Spirit, or do you have a Spirit? Or neither, if you are a strict Materialist?*
12. What is the difference between Soul and Spirit (or is there one)? How did Plato answer that? St. Paul? Aquinas? You?

3/27

The Anglican Synthesis/ Poetry and Art as Prayer / Counter Reformation Spirituality

Donne: <http://www.poemhunter.com/john-donne/> Read: "The Canonization," "Batter My Heart," "What if this Present"

Herbert: <http://www.poemhunter.com/george-herbert/> Read: "The Altar," "The Collar," "Prayer," "Easter Wings"

John of the Cross, *The Dark Night*:

http://www.ccel.org/ccel/john_cross/dark_night.html

Historical Background

G. Elton, *Reformation Europe*. Standard historical introduction.

4/3

Regula and Texture Spirituality in the Early Middle Ages/Your Rule of Life

Assignment:

Some Rules:

The Book of Leviticus 10-19

The Sermon on the Mount

The Didache (tr CMcP; CAMs)

The Rule of Basil (Library Reserve)

The Rule of Benedict <http://www.osb.org/rb/text/toc.html>

A Chivalric Rule (Templars): http://www.the-orb.net/encyclop/religion/monastic/t_rule.html

The *Carta Caritatis* <http://www.osb.org/cist/charta.html> ; also “Chivalry,” art by CMcP in CAMs

Your personal Rule of Life

Study Guide:

1. Most Rules cover many facets of life, especially the areas we specified as elements of the Theological Life: Ethics, Spirituality, Liturgy. As you examine these various Rules, note the *proportions* of those three.
2. An interesting response paper might be simply to take one of these—the Sermon on the Mount, for example, or the *RB*—and *identify* these aspects, verse by verse.
3. What elements do (all, or most of) these *Regulae* have in common?
4. What are some major differences between them, and why?
5. Leviticus is a *comprehensive* Rule, comparable in some ways to the Analects of Confucius. Does this appeal to you?
6. Could the *Didache* work as a Rule today? Could it have worked in the mid-20th Century?
7. Compare the Rules of Basil and Benedict. Which do you prefer?
8. Most historians have said that the Chivalric Orders (such as the one linked above) are “like” Religious Orders. Is this a valid statement?
9. Make up a Rule for: lawyers. Physicians. Professional athletes. GTS. Schoolchildren.
10. Some people say that any Rule of life is a restrictive, authoritarian device, and that it prevents spontaneity, and cuts off access for the Spirit. What do you think?

Historical background:

J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Barbarian West*. Like *World of Late Antiquity*, this helped establish Early Medieval as a distinct discipline.

Roger Collins, *Early Medieval Europe*.

Christopher Dawson, *The Making of Europe*.

Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks*; Bede, *History of the English Church and People*; Jordanes, *History of the Goths*; Paul the Deacon, *History of the Lombards*. Four primary sources for early medieval history of any kind.

Optional Readings: Gregory the Great *Morals in Job* (Selected; trans CMcP); selected Old English Poems (trans CMcP); St Anselm, *Cur deus homo*; (optional): John Scotus Erigena, *On the Divisions of Nature* (selections; trans CmcP)

4/17

The Icon: Visual Art and Vocal (and Nonvocal) Prayer Orthodox Spirituality/ the Classic Icon

Readings: Maximus the Confessor *Mystagogy*; Gregory of Nyssa, *Catechetical Oration*; Gregory of Nazianzus, selected poems

Background: Timothy/Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Church*

Assignment:

1. Spend 20 minutes in prayer with the "Orthodox Icon" in CAMs, or with any other Orthodox icon you choose.
2. Spend 20 minutes in prayer using a western icon with the same subject matter as the Eastern.
3. Compare your experiences with the two Icons.
4. Choose a theological or Biblical theme (such as the Transfiguration) and using the Net collect for yourself 10 or so images. How do these various versions of your subject work, what is their strategy as catalysts for Prayer?
5. Are you by nature an Iconoclast or an Iconodule?
6. Give an argument for whichever you are **not**.
7. Spend a half hour or more in your own parish Church, using its visuals intentionally as Icons (instead of as décor).
8. Ditto, the Chapel of the Good Shepherd (GTS).
9. What are the characteristics of an Icon that work for you (whether Orthodox or Western, modern or ancient).
10. Try meditating with a "non-religious, secular" icon such as <http://www.instituto-picasso.com/learn-spanish/picasso3.jpg>.
11. Try meditating again using an object, such as a bowl.

Special feature:

John Chrysostom and Nilus of Ancyra: the Rhetoric of Spirituality

4/24

Mysticism; The Late Middle Ages

Reading: review the *Symposium*; browse Plotinus, *Enneads*; Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*; Origen, *On the Lord's Prayer*; *The Cloud of Unknowing*; Julian of Norwich, *Revelations*. Optional :
William Langland, *Piers Plowman*

Historical Background:

Jan Huizinga, *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*. This esteemed study by the 20th century Dutch medievalist Huizinga captures the spirit of the Late Medieval brilliantly. This is the background against which Julian and the *Cloud* should be read.

R. W. Southern, *The Making of the Middle Ages*. Brilliant, loosely-organized book with a "misleading title."

Conceptual background:

Andrew Louth, *Christian Mysticism*

Study Guide:

1. Construct your own definition of *Mysticism*.
2. What mystical experiences do we find in the Old Testament?
3. In the New Testament?
4. What does Plato's *Symposium*, which you have already read, imply about Mysticism?
5. Compare/contrast *The Life of Moses* with *On the Lord's Prayer*.
6. Return to Hildegard of Bingen: what makes her Mystical Vision unique?

Sample:

http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/apocalypse/primary/sci_vias.html

7. Describe Julian's mystic vision.
8. How does the *Cloud* reflect the classical Christian models of mysticism?
9. What are the dangers of Mysticism?
10. What do Mystics contribute to Christianity?
11. What is specifically Christian about Christian Mysticism?
12. Why is Mysticism currently a popular topic?

5/1, 5/8 A Visit to the Cloisters; conclusions

