

INTRODUCTION TO CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

August 15 – September 23, 2011

SYLLABUS

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Course Description and Goals

We are all familiar with the expression “I am spiritual, but not religious.” Without a doubt, interest in spirituality and things spiritual has increased over the past thirty years. Yet, there is confusion over what we mean by the term “spiritual” and “spirituality.” If we ask people to define these terms we will have as many definitions as people. For some the topic refers to a sense of well being, to self-realization, a religious tradition or a rejection of that tradition’s institution. The notions of spirituality may or may not be part of the Christian tradition. There is Buddhist, Islamic and Native American spiritualities. Although a consensus on a clear definition has not been achieved, the notions of “spiritual” and “spirituality” continue to captivate the interest and curiosity of many today.

In this intensive six-week period, we will focus on the meaning of spirituality within a Christian context, specifically the Catholic tradition, and the distinguishing elements between spirituality in general and specific spiritualities, such as Franciscan spirituality or the Spirituality of the Cross, in particular. Within the Christian tradition, there is no ambiguity as to the meaning of spirituality. St. Augustine’s Confessions, the first spiritual autobiography, will be the basis for understanding a spiritual classic. We will also consider a variety of texts, or spiritual classics of the mystics, how to read them, and how to discern their importance for contemporary times.

This course will emphasize reflection on personal experience along with theoretical principles. Keeping a journal is required for recording these experiences. Through the use of web sites, biographical data, and bibliographical resources we will explore a variety of perspectives on spirituality as well as guide for the learner’s own reflection. Our class discussions are an important way to share our ideas in chat rooms or other venues.

By the end of the course you will

- * have an understanding of Christian spirituality
- * know how it differs from other spiritualities
- * be able to approach and evaluate the relevance of a spiritual text
- * know how to identify the contours of your own spirituality.

Grading

No grades will be assigned for this course. In lieu of grading, our goal is to form an online community through serious sharing of our ideas, experiences and reflections. The need for participation in the discussions cannot be overstated. Each participant is required to respond to two other classmates' post. For an online environment, "less is more." Focus on your most important concepts. Be concise and strategic in your posts. Length does not equal insights.

Procedures

Each week read the materials I have posted under the "Lessons" tab, write your reflections in your journal, and answer the questions in the discussion forum. Each class (i.e., Monday to Friday) has three discussion questions, which will open on Saturday morning. The responses to the questions are due by midnight Tuesday, Thursday and Friday.

During the course you will be asked to do an online search on a particular person in the spiritual tradition. Present a reflection that contains biographical data, a portrait/photo, some original prayers and answer these two questions: 1) Why is this person important, and 2) What sort of gifts do they bring to build up the human community?

You will keep a journal during the course in which you will note your experiences, feelings, and thoughts on the readings, especially Augustine's Confessions. You are to share only what you are comfortable to share. The journal has always been an important tool in the spiritual tradition, for it is there where heart and mind talk to each other.

Required Texts

Downey, M. **Understanding Christian Spirituality**. New York/Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist, 1997.

(<http://goo.gl/3WDkd>).

Dueweke, R. "Spirituality and Christian Spirituality" (Chapter 1) in *The Augustinian Theme of Harmony: A Contribution of a Spiritual Tradition to a Better Understanding of the Self and Others*. A doctoral dissertation. 2005. ("Final thesis for publication.pdf at <http://goo.gl/Abu39>) .

The following three articles can be found on the Internet or will be scanned and sent to you by email:

E. Johnson, "God's Beloved Creation" at <http://goo.gl/CBUoZ> .

L. S. Cunningham, "On Reading Spiritual Texts" at <http://goo.gl/1O1Nt> .

Principe, W. "Toward defining spirituality." *Studies in Religion* 12/2 (Spring 1983): 127-141.

(<http://goo.gl/4PU9>)

P. Sheldrake, "Interpretation" in *Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, 547-550.

B. Swimme on "Awakening to the Universe Story" at <http://goo.gl/JnP65> .

Urs von Balthasar, H. "The Gospel as Norm and Test of all Spirituality in the Church." *Concilium* 9/1 (1965): 5-13.

Vandenbroucke, F. "Spirituality and Spiritualities." *Concilium* 1/9 (1965): 25-33.

Scanned handouts by Micheline Lague.

Each student is required to read St. Augustine's *Confessions*, Books I-IX, by New City Press (1997) as well as related articles on how to read spiritual texts.

Finally, a spiritual classic by an author of one's choice will be read and analyzed. Some authors might be Julian of Norwich, Ignatius of Loyola, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, Teilhard de Chardin, Madeleine Delbrel, Thomas Merton, and Thomas Berry. You will be sent an email regarding the selection of the person you want to research and the date when to present.

Course Schedule

Lesson 1: Introduction to Christian Spirituality (Week 1: August 15-19)

Discussion Question 1:

Before you do any reading, post your reflections to this question: "What do people say when they hear the word 'spirituality'?" Give the biographical data, etc., to the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

Read Dueweke, Chapter 1, "Spirituality and Christian Spirituality" in the PDF file marked "Final thesis for publication" . . . (scroll down the page on <http://goo.gl/Abu39>).

Read M. Downey, **Understanding Christian Spirituality**, Chapters 1, 2, and 7.

Begin an online research on the life and works of the person Augustine of Hippo (see <http://www.augnet.org/default.asp>).

Lesson 2: Identifying one's own spirituality (Week 2: August 22-26)

Read M. Downey, **Understanding Christian Spirituality**, Chapter 3.
H. Urs von Balthasar, "The Gospel as Norm and Test of all Spirituality in the Church."
Concilium 9/1 (1965): 5-13.

Articles by Micheline Lague on identifying one's spirituality.
Read Augustine's **Confessions**, Book I-II

Lesson 3: Christian spiritualities; Biblical themes and values (Week 3: August 29 - September 2)

Read W. Principe, "Toward defining spirituality." Studies in Religion 12/2 (Spring 1983):
127-141. (<http://goo.gl/4PU9>)

F. Vandebroucke, "Spirituality and Spiritualities." Concilium 1/9 (1965): 25-33.

Read **Confessions**, Books III-V.

Lesson 4: Reading Spiritual Classics (Week 4: September 5-9)

Read Confessions, Books VI-VII.
Read P. Sheldrake, "Interpretation" in Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality, 547-550.

Read L. S. Cunningham, "On Reading Spiritual Texts" at <http://goo.gl/1O1Nt>.
(Recommended reading: Belden Lane, "Backpacking with the Saints: The Risk-Taking
Character of Wilderness Reading" in <http://goo.gl/KcjsB> .)

Lesson 5: Science and Spirituality (Week 5: September 12-16)

Review the website <http://teiharddechardin.org/index.php> and read the biography
(<http://goo.gl/OUoqC>) and quotes (<http://goo.gl/McJKu>) on Teilhard de Chardin.

Read the interview with cosmologist Brian Swimme on "Awakening to the Universe
Story" at <http://goo.gl/JnP65> .

Read Elizabeth Johnson's article "God's Beloved Creation" in <http://goo.gl/CBUoZ> .

Read **Confessions**, Books VIII-IX.

Lesson 6: Spirituality of Vatican II (Week 6: September 19-23)

Give the biographical data, etc., to the person Pope John XXIII and his vision of the
Second Vatican Council.

Read M. Downey, Understanding Christian Spirituality, Chapter 4.

Read paragraph 1 of Sacrosanctum Concilium (<http://goo.gl/8NFro>) which sets the goals for the Council.

Read Lumen gentium (<http://goo.gl/et2T>) and Gaudium et spes (<http://goo.gl/g3SjT>) in www.vatican.va .

Conclusion

Technical Support

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Emergency

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