

SPIR 221 – HISTORY OF WESTERN CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

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Winter Quarter, 2023

COURSE SYLLABUS (*TENTATIVE*)



A note to the reader: this syllabus for SPIR 221 is a confident draft of what you can expect when the course begins in January, 2023. The dates are fixed and won't change; course assignments will remain largely unchanged, but **specific due dates** await another layer of editing.

Course Description: This fully online course is a survey of major themes, personalities, settings, and communities in the spiritual tradition of Catholic Christianity. As this is a course in the history of spirituality, we will read from a broad range of spiritual writings (original sources) along with representative theological reflections (secondary material). Our scope is considerable, examining spiritual currents from post-Apostolic times to the 21st century. As such, we need to be selective and to that end students will acquire a sampling of major spiritual movements and personalities in the **Christian West**—certainly enough to spark interest for further study beyond the confines of this course.

Meeting Schedule: the days and dates of our sessions are indicated below. Our timeframe for Tuesday nights will be **6:00 – 8:00 pm** and, on Saturdays, from **9:00 am to 3:00 pm**. My hope is to vary the format of our Saturday sessions in order to avoid six long hours on Zoom. These times are subject to change depending on the wishes of the class.

Course Goals and Objectives: One key learning goal is for students to develop an historical understanding of Christian spirituality, not only through its relatively more familiar European/Western framework, but as a global phenomenon of great diversity. Secondly, and

related to the first, is for students to discover and articulate their own developing spirituality in the historical and cultural materials explored.

We will pursue these goals through the following GPPM **learning objectives**:

LO 3 Students will become competent leaders dedicated to serving the Church and to creating community in parish and other pastoral settings (*leadership skill*).

Students will employ historically informed knowledge of the tradition to assess theological positions and pastoral issues (LO 3A).

LO 5 Students will become prepared ministry professionals able to function effectively in a diverse global religious environment (*diversity fluency*).

Students will demonstrate a critical appreciation of religious diversity (LO 5B).

Course requirements: these include especially **critical reading and thinking** illustrated in the discussion of texts, original and secondary. Our principal reading will come from Bradley Holt's *Thirsty for God: a Brief History of Christian Spirituality* (Fortress Press, 2017). This serves as a backdrop for the original readings of Christian spiritual writers in Richard Schmidt's *God Seekers: Twenty Centuries of Christian Spiritualities* (Eerdmans, 2008). Any other course materials and exercises will be provided to students through our course page on **Camino**.

Participation: presence is a spiritual experience; it's also a core necessity in any graduate course. So, participation in this course happens in four essential ways:

- **personal attendance** at every session is presumed. This course, which functions often as a seminar, depends on regular attendance and participation **by all members** of the course. **No Saturday session may be missed.**
- Along with attendance, student participation depends on **giving voice** to questions, comments, quandaries about our subject. Those kinds of exchanges in class discussions along with natural Q&A are vital for a positive learning experience.
- Each student will help initiate and support participation through **leading two class discussions** based on an original source of their choice on the syllabus (and from the Schmidt book).
- Finally, toward the end of the quarter one of our Wednesday night sessions will be devoted to **an online (Camino) discussion** based on a film.

Writing: will occur in a series of student **journals** (2-3 pages) submitted according to the schedule below. As you read the Holt text, you'll see that he ends every chapter with one or more suggested *spiritual practices*. Part of your work in this course will be **to put into action** one of those practices at the end of each chapter. The *experience* of that spiritual practice will be the basis for your journals and these can be written reflections from any perspective you choose. For example, why did you choose a particular practice among Holt's suggestions? What was the

experience of the practice like? What is the relationship between the practice you chose and the spiritual/historical content of the chapter? All journals are typically due by the **Thursday** following a class meeting.

Instructor feedback reaches students through written comments on papers, online discussions, and course projects, including presentation of a source and the final project. I'm also happy to meet students at any time. In anticipation of instructor feedback, students are encouraged to read carefully the 'scoring rubric' located in the Administration module at Camino.

Final Project: the course will end with a capstone project submitted in one of two possible forms: a **Pastoral Application** intended to encourage integration of historical material for the purpose of communicating it in some pastoral setting. Both historical topic and pastoral setting are the student's choice. Alternatively, the student may choose to write an **extended source study** based on the collection of spiritual writings in the Schmidt text.

Apportionment of Credit:

Participation:	25%	Journals:	35% (7 points each)
Discussion leadership:	10%	Online Discussion:	10%
Final project:	20%		

SCHEDULE OF CLASS SESSIONS

Tuesday

Jan 3

Introduction to the course: terminology; spirituality and theology; historical methods and analytical approaches; individual spirituality meets the tradition.

Reading: Holt, Ch 10
Course Syllabus

Saturday

Jan 7

What is *Christian Spirituality*? Topics include: historical overview; spirituality as a living tradition; historical periodization and spirituality; the watershed of Vatican II; from spirituality to *spiritualities*. **Spiritual writers:** Irenaeus and Origen.

Readings: Holt, Chs 1-3
Schmidt, Chs 1-2

Spirituality and Early Christianity, East and West. Topics include: Desert Fathers and Mothers; solitude and spiritual practice: asceticism; early monastic communities and spirituality; Celtic spirituality; foundations of Christian

mysticism. **Spiritual writers:** Anthony of the Desert, Gregory of Nyssa (the Cappadocian tradition), Augustine.

Readings: Holt, Ch 4
Schmidt, Chs 3-5

Journal 1 is due TBD

Tuesday

Jan 17

Monastic Spirituality. Topics include: monastic rules and the spatial nature of monastic spirituality; the *opus Dei* (prayer and labor); 'the love of learning and the desire for God'; Celtic spirituality and 'thin spaces.' Patrick and Benedict

Readings: Schmidt, Chs 6, 7
Watch: 'Into the Great Silence'

Journal 2 is due TBD

Tuesday

Jan 24

Mysticism, lay piety and devotion and the later Middle Ages. Topics include: religious reform and spirituality; mystics, religious and lay; late medieval currents in spirituality. **Spiritual writers:** Bernard of Clairvaux, Francis of Assisi, Gregory Palamas, and Julian of Norwich.

Readings: Holt, Ch 5
Schmidt, Chs 10-13

Journal 3 is due TBD

Saturday

Feb 4

Reformation Spiritualities. Topics include: continuity and change in theology and spirituality; the radical reformers; Anglican traditions; the Catholic response; Spain and its reformers. **Spiritual writers:** Martin Luther, Ignatius of Loyola, Jean Calvin, and Teresa of Avila.

Readings: Holt, Ch 6
Schmidt, Chs 14-17

The Modern Era. Topics include: the Enlightenment and spirituality; the new orthodoxy; the Oxford Movement; Jansenism; missionaries and their spirituality. **Spiritual writers:** Jean-Pierre de Caussade, John & Charles Wesley, Soren Kierkegaard, R. A. Torrey, Amy Carmichael, Therese of Lisieux.

Readings: Holt, Ch 7
Schmidt, Chs 20-25

Tuesday

Feb 14

No class meeting: Film & Online Discussion (details TBD)

Tuesday

Feb 21

The West in the 20th Century. Topics include: the Holiness Movement in the U.S.; biblical scholarship and spirituality; Karl Rahner; the ecumenical movement; Carl Jung, psychology, and spirituality; social change and new opportunities for spiritual transformation. **Spiritual writers:** Donald Gee, Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton, Madeleine L'Engle, and Rosemary Radford Ruether.

Readings: Holt, Ch 8
Schmidt, Chs 27-30; 32

Journal 4 is due TBD

Tuesday

Feb 28

The Non-Western 20th Century. Topics include: Latin American and liberation theologies; the African experience; Asia: its ancient churches and today; India. **Spiritual writers:** John Mbiti, Gustavo Gutiérrez.

Readings: Holt, Ch 9
Schmidt, Ch 31; G. Gutiérrez, *We Drink From Our Own Wells* (excerpt)

Journal 5 is due TBD

Saturday

Mar 11

Catholic spirituality today. Topics include: interdenominational and inter-religious spiritualities; "spiritual but not religious"; Pastoral Application projects or Extended Source studies (presented in summary form) for discussion.

Pastoral Application Project due on or before Wednesday, June 9

