Aim of the Course

The aim of this course is to foster spiritual formation drawing on historic perspectives, and in particular those of the Anglican tradition. Ascetical theology, or spiritual theology, is “that part of theology that, proceeding from the truths of divine revelation and the religious experience of individual persons, defines the nature of the supernatural life, formulates directives for its growth and development, and explains the process by which souls advance from the beginning of the spiritual life to its full perfection.” (Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, p. 18) MC506 most directly addresses Articles 3, 4, and 6 of the seminary’s mission statement and touches on others.

Goals of the Course

1. Students in this course will become acquainted with major figures in the history of Christian spirituality, and consider their application for contemporary spiritual formation and pastoral care.

2. Students will practice a selection of classical spiritual disciplines (thus building a foundation for future growth and ministry), gain a sense of in which disciplines they may want to go deeper, and begin preparing to teach spiritual practices to others. This course is above all an experience to be prayed; what doth it profit a man if he do all the required reading and lose his time with God?

3. Students will consider how Scripture and Christian doctrine do shape, should shape, and have shaped the spiritual life (“spiritual life” meaning the whole of life viewed from a Christian spiritual perspective).

4. Students will be able to articulate both a “relational” and a “cultivation” understanding of grace’s operation in the believer, and know how they plan to draw on the insights of each in their own lives and in ministry.

5. Students will be able to distinguish between discipling, pastoral counseling, mentoring, confession, and spiritual direction, and identify appropriate settings for each.

6. Students will become familiar with some of the distinctives of Anglican spiritual traditions, including Anglicanism’s emphasis on the corporate over the individual. (Students who are not Anglican may make modifications in some of the material with permission of the instructor.)
Required Course Texts

Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (self-scoring)


Martin Thornton *English Spirituality: An Outline of Ascetical Theology According to the English Pastoral Tradition* (Wipf & Stock custom reprint). A presentation of great spiritual writers and trends that shaped the Anglican spirit (from an English perspective) along with pragmatic wisdom on living and applying them pastorally, from an unsentimental physician of the soul. (Thornton)

Robin Maas & Gabriel O’Donnell (1990) *Spiritual Traditions for the Contemporary Church*, Nashville: Abingdon Press. This is an intellectual and experiential introduction to some key modalities of Christian spirituality. Each chapter is followed by a *practicum*. Not all of these will be useful to us in this class (some of them you will encounter adequately elsewhere in seminary, and others you will likely wish to critique), but all provide useful reference material. (STCC)

Highly Recommended

Adele Ahlberg Calhoun (2005) *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us*, Downers Grove IL: IVP. A comprehensive catalog of spiritual practices, paired with the holy desires that undergird them. You can find clear information, Scriptural references, and context on all the practices from this course in Calhoun. A practical, accessible goldmine. (Calhoun)

Rowell, Stevenson, and Williams (2001) *Love’s Redeeming Work: The Anglican Quest for Holiness*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. A major anthology of excerpts from Anglican spiritual writers of all styles, eras, and outlooks. You should have this in your library if you do not already. Good source for figures to profile in your papers. (LRW)

Course Assignments

1. Well-prepared attendance and class participation, including leading Compline, are indispensible to benefiting from this course. (Approximately 10% of your grade)

2. Demonstrate serious engagement with the practices we are studying, in class and/or in your journal (see below). In other words, I want to see that you are praying and not just reading about praying. NOTE: You will often need to finish assigned *reading early in the week* in order to have time to complete its associated *practice* adequately before class. (Approximately 10% of your grade)

3. You will choose two figures in the history of spirituality (approved by the instructor) on which to report. If you are an Anglican, one of them must be Anglican. Depending on class size, we anticipate that one will be a written report (c. 5-7 pp; due the last day of class) and the other an oral report (you will present for 12-15 minutes, followed by either discussion, or guiding us all in a practice based on the writer’s work). Both reports should cover the person’s biography, summarize their most influential spiritual insights, and offer some thoughts on how and where their work/ethos
might be applied in the lives of Christians today. (About 30% of your grade)

4. Keep a spiritual journal. The first part should introduce your spiritual journey so far. (e.g. When did you come to know God? Which specific traditions or faith communities have shaped your spirituality? What do you see as their strengths/weaknesses? What practices of the Christian faith ground you and why? In what areas of spiritual life would you like to grow?) Then, you will “process” the class/readings and your reaction—emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually. As well, you might regularly answer “spiritual direction” type questions such as “How are you praying these days? How has God recently connected with you? Where do you struggle to find God?” Describe experiences you have had this semester with self-denial, corporate worship, spiritual practices, etc. Your final entry should show you working to integrate and draw conclusions/next steps from what we’ve covered. (Turned in throughout the semester; about 30% of grade)

5. EITHER participate in the Pierce Center Soul Sabbath during Reading Week, OR participate during the semester in some other professionally led Quiet Day or silent retreat approved by the instructor (investigate this early!), OR watch both the entire BBC series “The Monastery 2005” on YouTube (in 18 parts beginning at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0uX4HXQDFcE) and the followup webcast with Abbot Jamieson on “Monastic Spiritual Practices” from Boston College’s site (search that title at http://www.bc.edu/church21/webcast.html.) Report on and respond to the event in your spiritual journal. (Approximately 20% of grade)

Schedule

**Sep 17** Personal introductions. Syllabus, assignments. What this course isn’t. What is ascetical/spiritual theology? Some vocabulary. Some practice.

**Sep 24** Knowing ourselves, knowing God. Sin and grace.
Read Chan ch 1-5.
Take the Myers-Briggs, score, and come to class prepared to discuss.

Read STCC Introduction, Ch 1 and practicum 1. Do the individual practicum at least three times the week before class.
Read Chan Ch 8. (reference: Calhoun part 5)
First journal due.

**Oct 8** Intro to Anglican spiritual distinctives. The Office.
Read STCC Ch 9 and practicum 9; ch 10 and practicum 10. Pray Noonday Prayer or Compline (or a longer office if you so choose) every day for the week preceding class.
Read Thornton Ch 1-4.
Student report

**Oct 15 (reading week)**

**Oct 22** The life of prayer. Silence and other useful contexts.
Read STCC Ch 2-4 and practicums. Do at least one exercise from the individual practicum 2, and the individual exercise in practicum 3, before class.
Read Chan Ch 6. Student report
(reference: Calhoun on Retreat, Simplicity, Slowing, Unplugging, Silence, Solitude)

**Second journal due.**

**Oct 29**  Patristic and Medieval influences on the “English School”
Read Thornton, Part 2.  Student report

**Nov 5**  The “English School” itself.
Read Thornton, Part 3 through ch 21. (We’ll read 22 later.)
Student report
(ref: LRW)

**Third journal due.**

**Nov 12 (reading week)**

**Nov 19**  Ignatian models. Self-examination. Discernment.
Read STCC Ch 6 and practicum 6.  Do an individual examen at least 3 evenings in the week before class.
Read Chan Ch 7 and 11.
Student report.
(ref: Calhoun on Examen, Meditation, Care of the Earth, Compassion)

**Nov 26 (no class; Thanksgiving)**

**Dec 3**  Carmelite spirituality. Contemplation.  Rule of Life.
Read STCC Ch 8 and 13, and practicums.  Do the individual practicum in 8 before class. Read Chan Ch 9-10.
Student report
(ref: Calhoun on Rule for Life, Centering Prayer, Contemplative Prayer)

**Fourth journal due.**

**Dec 10**  Summary.  Spiritual guidance and direction.
Read Chan Ch 12.
Read Thornton Ch 22.
(Reference: Calhoun on Spiritual Direction)

**Paper due.**

**Last day for written work: Final journal due.**
Further Reading and Bibliography
(based on, and with grateful thanks to, the bibliography prepared by the Rev. Dean Borgman for the first iteration of this course. A few especially recommended texts are highlighted.)

Anonymous, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, any edition. This English classic is an example of 14th-century mysticism and the *via negativa* path to knowing God. It is also at the root of modern writing on “centering” prayer, despite anything else you hear about “centering” prayer. (See Meninger, below)


William A. Barry & William J. Connolly (1982) *The Practice of Spiritual Direction*, Seabury, 209pp. Many feel this to be one of the most clear and practical explanations of current spiritual direction.

Anthony Bloom/Metropolitan Anthony (1970) *Beginning to Pray*, NY: Paulist Press, 114pp. Physician, French Resistance fighter in WWII, then a Russian bishop, his lectures and writings have helped many. “The realm of God is dangerous. You must enter into it and not just seek information…. The day that God is absent, when He is silent—that is the beginning of prayer.”


Louis Bouyer (1969) *Orthodox Spirituality and Protestant and Anglican Spirituality*, (A History of Spirituality, Vol. III) Seabury Press. Bouyer, a Lutheran pastor who converted to Catholicism, was active as a consultant at Vatican II and a great writer on spirituality. This volume supplies excellent background and insights for this course.


Joan Chittister (1992, 1999) *The Rule of Benedict: Insights for the Ages*, NY: Crossroad, 180pp. Any student of ascetical theology recognizes the great wisdom and balance brought to this tradition by Benedict of Nursia. This commentary applies the Rule to contemporary issues such as relationships, the environment, authority, community, balance, work, simplicity.


Tilden Edwards (1980) *Spiritual Friend: Reclaiming the Gift of Spiritual Direction*, NY: Paulist Press, 264pp. The theology of this work may be broad and vague, but its practical insights on therapy and direction, finding a director, and using small groups for spiritual direction offer valuable wisdom.


Mary Margaret Funk (2003) *Thoughts Matter: The Practice of the Spiritual Life*, NY: Continuum. Presents the teaching of desert father John Cassian on how to form thoughts for the Christian life; the “eight thoughts” named by Cassian eventually became the “seven deadly sins.”


Walter Hilton, *The Scale of Perfection*, any edition. This work is a rich study of love.

Paul Hinnebusch OP, ed (1986) *Contemplation and the Charismatic Renewal*, Paulist Press. Essays on the integration of charismatic spirituality, which has been important within Anglicanism since the early 70s, with classical contemplative paradigms of spiritual growth. (For seminal Anglican charismatic authors themselves, research Dennis Bennett, David Watson, David Pytches, Mike Flynn, Graham Pullingham, and the New Wine network in the UK.)

St. Ignatius, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola*, any edition. If you will be reading this book alone apart from a directed retreat, it is best to buy an edition with introduction, instructions, or commentary.


Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright & Edward Yarnold, eds. (1986) *The Study of Spirituality*, NY: Oxford Univ. Press. Like their *Study of Liturgy*, this text is meant to be a broad coverage of some sixty writers on the nature and form of Christian devotion from Anglican, Roman Catholic, Free Church, and Orthodox traditions.


William Law, *On Christian Perfection* (1726) and *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* (1728), any edition.


Kenneth Leech (1995) *Experiencing God: Theology as Spirituality*, Harper & Row. This book has been described as a spiritual pilgrimage through our Judeo-Christian experience. It marks out the
broad vistas of spirituality from its biblical roots, historical expressions and current possibilities—
including a spirituality of justice and peace.


Its descriptions of saints on their appointed day, along with the Propers (i.e. the proper Collect, 
Readings for the day, and instructions as to the proper Eucharistic Preface).

Robert Llewelyn, Kalistos Ware, Mary Clare SLG (1987) *Praying Home: The Contemplative Journey*, 
Cambridge MA: Cowley Publications. Anglican and Orthodox spiritual masters pool resources in 
this little essay collection to discuss the prayer of the heart, distractions, psychological concerns.

Univ. Press

teaching of *The Cloud of Unknowing* in more accessible terms.

**Thomas Merton** -- is somewhere near the summit of late 20th century Christian writers, and one could 
recommend several of his works. Let’s content ourselves with *The Seven Storey Mountain* (his 
autobiography), *A Thomas Merton Reader* (an anthology), *The Sign of Jonas* (from his journals) 
and *Contemplative Prayer* (a monograph.) One of his charisms seems to be sparking deep personal 
identifications in readers, so you might begin with the autobiography, which incidentally was a key 
factor in your instructor’s conversion to Jesus Christ.

for Different Personality Types*, Charlottesville VA, The Open Door. A good place to follow up 
once you learn your MBTI type.


M. Robert Mulholland, Jr. (1985) *Shaped by the Word: The Power of Scripture in Spiritual Formation*, 
Wesleyan tradition might be a bit of a stray from our principle focus except that it is about facing 
Scripture imaginatively and spiritually—about praying the Scriptures.

Andrew Newberg MD and Mark Robert Waldman (2009) *How God Changes Your Brain: 
Breakthrough Findings from A Leading Neuroscientist*, Ballantine Books. Fascinating research on 
objective, longitudinal effects on the brain of practicing contemplative disciplines.

Ave Maria Press, 80pp.

Image Books, 165pp. With his beautiful style, Nouwen traces three movements: “Reaching out to 
our Innermost Self (a suffocating loneliness, a receptive attitude, a creative response, Reaching out 
to our Fellow Human Beings (creating space for strangers, forms of hospitality, hospitality and the 
host), Reaching out to our God (prayer and mortality, prayer of the heart, community and prayer)”


A book soaked in prayer and love of God’s Word, it is also an antidote to sentimental or 
consumeristic use of the Bible under an ambiguous, ungrounded rubric of “spirituality.”

**Eugene H. Peterson** (1992) *Under the Unpredictable Plant: An Exploration in Vocational 
Holiness*, Eerdmans. Clear wisdom on what commitments, temptations, and structures 
support a life of holiness amidst the realities of the actual life of an actual parish pastor.

Several other books by Peterson could be cited here as well; these are merely 2 items from a feast. 
*Philokalia*, any edition. Classic writings on prayer from the Orthodox tradition. (see also Ware below) 
*St. Augustine’s Prayer Book: a Book of Devotion for members of the Episcopal Church*, West Park, 
manual.

Thomas Nelson, 227pp. Looks at “emotionally unhealthy spirituality, and the radical
antidote: emotional health and contemplative spirituality.” A GCTS grad, and another modern, independent church leader (New Life Fellowship in Queens, NY) finding ancient practices—combined with current therapeutic understanding.


Phyllis Tickle (2000-2006) *The Divine Hours, multiple volumes and editions*. NY: Doubleday. A bestselling re-packaging of the Daily Office taken largely from the BCP, designed to make fixed-hour prayer accessible to Protestants. A Vineyard church puts each day online at http://www.annarborvineyard.org/tdh/tdh.cfm (FYI, the BCP office is also online at http://www.missionstclare.com/english/index.html)


Corinne Ware (1995) *Discover Your Spiritual Type*, NY: The Alban Institute. An easy self-scoring test to help congregants and others sort themselves out on a head—heart polarity and an apophatic—kataphatic one.


Dallas Willard (2002) *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ*, Navpress. How are the mind, will, body, and soul transformed?