

## Foundations of Christian Spirituality II: The Ascetical Tradition SP 205

### **Instructor: Shiella Fodchuk**

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### **Purpose**

This course will examine the core of spiritual life as a sacred tradition of vital spiritual and mystical experience. We will trace the development of major spiritual themes through the study of seminal spiritual thinkers and mystics from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century of the Early Church to the Early Medieval period. Themes include Renunciation and Martyrdom; Desert Asceticism and Spiritual Direction, the Cerebral Spirituality of Origen, the Foundations of Monasticism, the Classical Christian Synthesis, the Soul Psychology of St. Augustine, the Mystical Theology of Gregory of Nyssa and Pseudo-Dionysius the Aereopagite, the Byzantine Hesychast Tradition of Prayer of the Heart. We will focus on S. Perpetua, Origen, the Desert Mothers and Fathers and Evagrius Ponticus, the Cappadocians, St. Augustine of Hippo.

### **Format**

One three-hour class per week and 4-6 hours per week of reading. This course will integrate academic and experiential learning, with lectures, group discussion of primary sources and, when appropriate, personal appropriation of material through contemplative reading or journalling.

### **Competence Objectives**

Students are expected to identify contributions made by major spiritual writers to particular spiritual traditions. They must also be able to trace the development of spiritual themes over time, together with reactions against a tradition. They must be able to assess the strengths and limitations of various spiritual themes and traditions.

### **Expectations of the Student**

All students will be expected to participate in class discussions, and to prepare for each class by doing the assigned readings. A minimum of 80% class attendance is required.

In order to receive credit for the course, degree students will write a 20 page academic paper (5000 words), to be negotiated with the professor. Papers will demonstrate an understanding of one of the themes covered in the course, reflecting on the Christian spiritual tradition, together with its historical and cultural contexts.

Paper writing style: Consult a handbook, such as the *MLA Handbook for Writers*, or the *Kate Turabian Handbook*. Use standard documentation and academic tone. Essays are to be well organized, coherent, with a well-developed and supported thesis. They must be proofread for mechanical errors that interfere with clarity of expression. Marks will be based on the following criteria: thoroughness, thoughtfulness, and freshness of approach, clarity of expression, organization. Plagiarism, of course, will not be tolerated.

### **Grading:**

Grading is Approved or Not-approved. In exceptional cases, a student may receive a grade of Very Good. The grade of Very Good with Distinction is reserved for papers of a publishable quality.

### **Required Course Texts:**

Augustine, Aurelius. Confessions; R.S. Pine-Coffin, trans. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1961. ISBN 0-14-044114-X.

Clement, Olivier. The Roots of Christian Mysticism; New City Press, 1995. ISBN 1-56548-029 5

Evagrius Ponticus. The Praktikos and Chapters On Prayer; Trans. John Eudes Bamberger. Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1981.

Bernard McGinn, John Meyendorff, Jean Leclercq, Editors. Christian Spirituality I: Origins to the Twelfth Century; New York: CrossRoad, 1987. *\*If Christian Spirituality I is unavailable, please substitute with the following: Jones, Cheslyn; Wainwright, Geoffrey; and Yarnold, Edward, SJ. The Study of Spirituality; Oxford University Press, 1986. ISBN 0-19-504169-0*

Origen. The Classics of Western Spirituality Series; New York: Paulist Press, 1979

Selected photocopied articles to be distributed in class

### **Recommended Reading:**

Athanasius. The Life of Antony; The Classics of Western Spirituality Series. Robert Gregg, Translator. New York: Paulist Press, 1980

Benedicta Ward, Editor and Translator. The Sayings of the Desert Fathers. London: Mowbray, 1981.

Perpetua, St. The Passion of The Holy Martyrs Perpetua and Felicitas; Ante-Nicene Fathers Volume 3, Latin Christianity. Ed. Tertullian. Eerdmans Publishers 1989. 697-706.

## Syllabus

Tuesday, September 14

*Introduction to the course, purpose, description, methods of presentation, evaluation.*

*Topic: The Climate of Opposition to Christianity: Persecution, Renunciation, Martyrdom*

*Discussion groups: The diary of SS. Perpetua and Felicitas*

*Readings:*

*The Passion of The Holy Martyrs Perpetua and Felicitas,  
An Exhortation to Martyrdom, Tertullian (Photocopied articles)*

Tuesday, September 21

*Topic: The Christian Martyrs Continued*

*Discussion groups: Renunciation of the body and the world*

*Readings:*

*The Passion of The Holy Martyrs Perpetua and Felicitas  
"The Martyrdom of Polycarp;" and "The Persecution at Lyons," Eusebius (optional)*

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Tuesday, September 28

*Topic: The Systematic, Cerebral Spirituality of Origen of Alexandria: Sources of Thought, Cosmology, The Doctrine of Eternal Salvation, Logos and Logokoi*

*Discussion Groups*

Tuesday, October 5

*Topic: Origen's Spirituality Continued: Allegorical Interpretation and the Three Levels of Meaning in Reading Scripture, The Three Classical Stages of Spiritual Progress*

*Class Praxis: Lectio Divina*

*Readings:*

*Origen: On First Principles, pp. 178-188 (three levels of meaning in reading Scripture)*

*Commentary on the Song of Songs, 230-236 (for Classical Stages of spiritual progress)*

**Tuesday, October 12**

***Topic: Origen's Spirituality Continued: The Soul's Senses, Unceasing Spiritual Progress***

***Class Exercise: Journalling Spiritual Progress; Discussion:***

***Readings:***

***Origen. Homily 27 on Numbers***

***Commentary on the Song of Songs***

**Tuesday, October 19**

***Topic: Desert Spirituality and Spiritual Direction***

***Discussion Groups: Reading of the Sayings of the Desert Mothers and Fathers***

***Reading:***

***Photocopied excerpts from Life of Antony***

**Tuesday, November 2**

***Topic: Desert Spirituality continued: Evagrius Ponticus – Asceticism and Prayer; the ermetical and cenobitic ways***

***Discussion Groups: Reading of the Sayings of Evagrius***

***Reading:***

***The Praktikos and Prayer, Evagrius Ponticus***

**Tuesday, November 9**

***The Cappadocians: The early shaping of monasticism: SS. Macrina and Basil of Caesarea***

***Discussion Groups: A Rule of Life***

**Tuesday, November 16**

***Topic: The Mystical Theology of Gregory of Nyssa and Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite.***

***Discussion Groups: Divine Darkness and Incomprehensibility***

***Readings:***

***The Mystical Theology of Pseudo-Dionysius, The Areopagite. pp. 134-141***  
***(photocopied article)***

***Selected readings from Gregory of Nyssa***

**Tuesday, November 23**

***Topic: St. Aurelius Augustine: Autobiography, Confession, Ontology, Body/Soul Dualism, Evil, Free Will, Grace***

***Discussion Groups:***

***Reading:***

***Confessions, Books I-IX; (read Book VII carefully)***

**Tuesday, November 30; Academic papers due**

***Topic: St. Augustine continued: Soul Psychology; Illumination Theory; Memory; Categories of Mystical Vision***

***Readings:***

***Confessions, Book X (on the nature of memory)***

***The Greatness of the soul, pp. 98 - 109 (the seven levels of the soul) Photocopied article***

***The Teacher (Illumination theory) pp. 175-186 photocopied article***

**Tuesday, December 7, Last day of class**

***Topic: The Byzantine Hesychast tradition***

***Audio tape On the Hesychast tradition of Prayer of the Heart, by Kallistos Ware***

***Instructor's Contact numbers:***

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***Office hours: to be announced in class***

