Syllabus

HI 585 The History of Christian Spirituality: Beginnings to 1500
Winter/Spring, 2015
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Instructor can be contacted by phone or email between classes.

“We tend to discover the past we set out to find. This is not because the past is a willfully imagined fiction but because it is such a complicated and multifaceted reality.”

Norman Cantor, Inventing the Middle Ages

“A meaningful connection to the past demands, above all, active engagement. It demands imagination and empathy, so that we can fathom worlds unlike our own, contexts far from those we know, ways of thinking and feeling that are alien to us. We must enter past worlds with curiosity and respect. When we do this, the rewards are considerable. . . . We live our lives; we tell our stories. The dead continue to live by way of the resurrection we give them in telling their stories. The past becomes part of our present and thereby part of our future.”

Gerda Lerner, Why History Matters. Life and Thought

Course Description

In an age of religious and historical illiteracy, this course invites students to delve into the lives, contexts, beliefs, texts, and spiritual practices of notable Christian men and women during the first 1500 years of Christianity. We will read and discuss in an open yet critical way a range of classic Christian spiritual texts from the Bible to Julian of Norwich (14th century). Goals of the course include a) knowledge and appreciation of the general contours of Christian spirituality during this period; b) an understanding of the range of methodological issues related to the study of the history of Christian spirituality; substantive knowledge about how to read select primary texts; c) an understanding of how social, ecclesial, political, and economic contexts affected spirituality in each era; d) the ability to discern the strengths and weaknesses of this tradition and to identify which elements are no longer relevant (or even harmful) and which should be creatively and critically appropriated for our own time. A secondary goal is to allow students to reflect on their own spiritual paths in light of this tradition.

Intentions

This course aspires to:

- encounter the broad and complex story of Christian spirituality, from origins to 1500;
- understand the complexities involved in “doing” historical study, attending to what it means to encounter and engage patristic and medieval sources, and how perspective and identity shape judgments about the past;
- articulate basic developments of the church’s theological spirituality as these emerge during this period;
- engage the formative power of such traditions, and how these reflect both patterns of consensus, selections and exclusions, diversities of view, etc.;
• explore the margins, tensions, and silences that make up this portrait and influence how this tradition might be read faithfully and critically;
• identify the role of historical understanding in our varied vocations as pastoral and prophetic leaders in church and society

It is expected that students will:

• develop a basic familiarity with the history of Christian spirituality from its origins to 1500;
• understand biblical, spiritual and theological patterns of Christian faith and life in their varied expressions;
• be able to interpret primary texts with insight and confidence;
• be able to discern problematic stances of exclusion and marginalization, as well as identify elements of the tradition that do and do not speak to contemporary spiritual needs and contexts;
• appropriate in a critical way strands from this common tradition into their personal religious story, affiliations, and ecclesial responsibilities.

Requirements

Required Texts:

Many primary sources can be found on-line, though these are almost always drawn from publications in the common domain, meaning that they are exempt from copyright. In most cases, this means that they are dated and often use antiquated language. There are also marvelous web sites which include, alongside texts, non-textual materials (images of paintings, icons, architectural sites, sculpture, etc.). Students are encouraged to use and share their findings with class colleagues.


Selected readings provided by instructor.
There will be a number of books on reserve in the library. For those students who would like to do some background reading prior to the course, the following might be helpful.


**Recommended:**

**Method**

**Essay Collections**


**Bible**

**Desert**
[Sayings began to be collected and written in fifth century. First organized alphabetically according to name of abba. A supplementary collection, the *Anonymous Apophthegmata* followed later. Then both collections were combined and arranged systematically between 500 and 575. Later went through a couple of major revisions, the second of which appeared sometime before 970. This second revision was published in new critical ed. in French in 1993. Now this translation in English based on Greek text.]


*Becoming Fire: Through the Year with the Desert Fathers and Mothers*. Ed. Tim Vivian.


*Words To Live By: Journeys in Ancient and Modern Egyptian Monasticism*. Tim Vivian.


Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1987

*Patristics*


**Assessment Expectations**

1. Attendance at all classes; evidence of careful preparation of assignments; occasional leadership of class discussion; willingness to contribute in significant ways to the general conversation. **Since this class is text based, it is imperative that you have a copy of the text under consideration with you in class.** 30%

2. Four “critical analysis” papers of primary texts/topics covered in class (each ca. 800 words). 10% each -- 40%.
   a) Paper #1 Due February 5
   b) Paper #2 Due February 26
   c) Paper #3 Due March 19
   d) Paper #4 Due April 9

3. Final essay/paper (approximately 10-12 pages – font 12; double spaced with one inch margins). Paper topic should be shaped in consultation with instructor. Thesis statement due. Outline due. Final paper is to be handed in on or before the date scheduled for the final exam for this class. 30%

**Attendance policy**

Attendance in class is required. Given the format of this course, it is imperative to attend all five sessions. Only one missed class will be allowed and only for a grave reason. Alternate
assignments to make up for missing a class will be assigned. Should an absence be necessary, please inform the professor in a timely fashion.

Academic Honesty

In all assignments, it is assumed that what is submitted is the student’s own work. All material from other sources, whether direct citations in quotation marks, or paraphrase, is to be thoroughly and accurately documented. Students are accountable to Harford Seminary’s General Guidelines for a Research Paper. It is also not acceptable to submit a paper written for another course. The minimum penalty for any plagiarism is failure for that assignment with no opportunity to rewrite. If you have questions about plagiarism consult a Writing Consultant. To make an appointment, contact Robin Roth, Student Services Manager, at rroth@hartsem.edu or 860-509-9552. For further information: http://www.hartsem.edu/student/writingassistance.htm.

SCHEDULE

N.B. The first paper will be due on the first day of class. Please read Philip Sheldrake’s Spirituality and History. Write a four-page, double spaced paper that includes the following: a) an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of this book; b) the three most important ideas that you appropriated from the book for your own scholarly theological work and explain why; c) design a brief curriculum for a course in the history of Christian spirituality that identifies and explains five themes that you judge to be central, including your rational for each chosen theme.

February 5
- Introductions
- Orientation to the Course
- Ways to Organize and Approach the Topic/Themes
- Paper Presentations: Method and History/Sheldrake
- Biblical Roots of Christian Spirituality
- Neo-Plaontism: Neo-Platonism/dualism; asceticism/David Brooks op ed piece.
- Sample Text: Close Reading

Readings:
- Philip Sheldrake, Spirituality and History.
- Rowan Williams, pp. 11-24.
- Holder, II/2: Old Testament.

Themes:
Method/hermeneutics
Biblical themes
History
Context

February 26: Bible, Patristics, Desert
- Body/soul; matter/spirit tensions.
- Challenges of the Early Church
- Empire vs. desert.
- Slides - Cappadocia
- Slides: Apophatic/Kataphatic.
• Paper Presentations
• Sayings
• Mystical Theology

Readings:
- Rowan Williams, Wound of Knowledge, Chapter 2: Gnosticism.
- Rowan Williams, Wound of Knowledge, Chapter 3: Arianism
- Holder, III/4 Columba Stewart.

Recommended:

Themes:
Origen
Gregory of Nyssa
The Desert Fathers and Mothers
Augustine
Pseudo-Dionysius
Maximus the Confessor

Neo-Platonism
Allegory
Progress
Presence/absence
Neo-Platonism/dualism
Kataphatic spirituality
Prophetic spirituality

March 19: Denys and Twelfth Century
• Pseudo-Dionysius
• Twelfth-century Context
• Affect/Intellect
• Eros of the Spirit
• Paper Presentations
• Song
• Bernard
Readings:

- Pseudo-Dionysius. *Mystical Theology*
- Holder, III/6 Wiethaus
- Rowan Williams, *Wound of Knowledge*, Chapter 4: Clamor of the Heart
- Rowan Williams, *Wound of Knowledge*, Chapter 5: Acrobat and Jugglers

Themes:

- Bernard of Clairvaux
- Hildegard of Bingen
- Richard and Hugh of St. Victor
- Anselm of Canterbury
- Abelard

April 9: Thirteenth Century

- Context
- Sacramental Consciousness
- Ecology/Nature/Creation
- Paper Presentations
- Asceticism
- Christocentric Spirituality
- Francis and Clare

Readings:

  - Francis: Introduction, *Admonitions, Canticle of Brother Sun, Letter to the Entire Order, Second Version of the Letter to all the Faithful, Office of the Passion, Parchment Given to Brother Leo, Praises To Be Said at All the Hours, Prayer Before the Crucifix*.
- Rowan Williams, *Wound of Knowledge*, Chapter 6: Ecstasy and Understanding
- Holder, IV/11 Thompson-Uberuaga or IV/15, Loades.

Recommended

Themes:

- Francis of Assisi
- Bonaventure
- Thomas Aquinas
- Gertrude of Helfta
- Meister Eckhart
- Marguerite Porete
- Mechthild of Magdeburg
- Hadewijch of Brabant
April 30: Fourteenth Century

- Context
- Women authors
- Julian
- Student Reports: Holder
- Progress reports on final papers
- Wrap-up/assessment

Readings:
- Sign up to read and report on one chapter in Holder:
  - Section III/5.
  - Section IV/12, 13, 14, 16.
  - Section V/17-23.
  - Section VI/24-30.

Themes:

- Cloud of Unknowing
- Julian of Norwich
- Catherine of Siena
- Angela of Foligno
- Bridget of Sweden
- Walter Hilton
- Richard Rolle
- Margery Kempe
- Trinity