

MS 3XA3      Contemporary Approaches to Christian Spirituality

Class session:    Friday, October 13; Saturday, October 14

Location:        **TBA**

Online:          September 11–October 12; October 15–December 13

Facilitator:     M. Knowles

DC 214

(905) 525-9140 x27088

knowlesm@mcmaster.ca



---

### Course Statement

What does it mean to be human in the presence of God?

What are the goals of the spiritual life?

What does spiritual maturation consist of, and how is it fostered?

What difference does spiritual temperament make to pilgrimage?

Whereas Christian theology and education typically focus on the relationship between “knowing” and “doing,” spirituality concerns ways of “being.” Not reducible either to intellect or to agency, spirituality speaks of our *identity* in the presence of God, as a precondition that provides the context for Christian understanding and undergirds faithful action. Accordingly, this course will examine our largely pre-reflective assumptions about what it means to be “Christian,” describe alternative models of Christian identity, and explore ways in which spirituality shapes our research, ministry, and mission in relation to the life of the church.

### Programme Specializations:

PS    Pastoral Studies

CC    Church and Culture

CW    Christian Worldview

CT    Christian Thought and History

---

## Course Objectives

### KNOWING

- ▶ To understand the nature of Christian spirituality in its various expressions
- ▶ To gain a basic understanding of the history of Christian spirituality
- ▶ To define the goals of Christian discipleship

### BEING

- ▶ To identify, appropriate, and validate a model of personal spiritual identity
- ▶ To reflect in personal terms on ministry and ministry leadership as expressions of Christian identity

### DOING

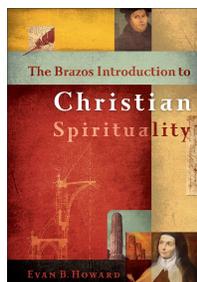
- ▶ To practise (and assess) various forms of spiritual discipline
  - ▶ To formulate an approach to ministry that takes spiritual identity into consideration
  - ▶ To design and assess a programme of personal and/or congregational spiritual development
- 

## Course Texts and Resources

Howard, Evan B. *The Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2008.

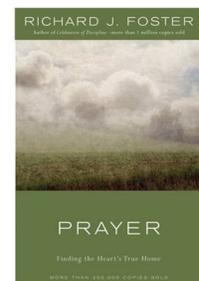
Foster, Richard J. *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*. New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992.

All required textbooks for this class are available from the College's book service, READ On Bookstore, Room 145, McMaster Divinity College. Texts may be purchased on the first day of class. Other book services may also carry the texts. For advance purchase, you may contact:



READ On Bookstore  
5 International Blvd  
Etobicoke, ON  
M9W 6H3

E-mail: [books@readon.ca](mailto:books@readon.ca)  
<http://www.readon.ca>  
Tel: (416) 620-2934  
FAX: (416) 622-2308



Also available on Reserve in Mills Library:

Foster, Richard J. *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978. [ON ORDER]

Foster, Richard J. *Streams of Living Water: Celebrating the Great Traditions of Christian Faith*. New York: HarperCollins, 1998. [ON ORDER]

---

## Schedule and Assignments

Offered in an online hybrid format, this course consists of one module to be completed prior to Reading Week; an in-class module scheduled for Friday, October 13, and Saturday, October 14; and three modules thereafter. Participation in the face-to-face class sessions (in their entirety) is a course requirement.

### 1. Module One Christian Spirituality: What is it?

- a. Online: **TBA**
- b. Reading: Howard, *Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality*, 9–75
- c. Research: *Spiritual Inventory; Spiritual Identity*

Complete three spiritual inventories: what do they tell you about yourself? Since none of these alternatives is (remotely!) definitive, feel free to substitute another inventory of your choice for one of the three.

- i. Gary Thomas, *Sacred Pathways*
  - (1) Gary Thomas, *Sacred Pathways: Discover Your Soul's Path to God. Updated and Expanded* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010).
  - (2) [www.garythomas.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/sacredpathways.pdf](http://www.garythomas.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/sacredpathways.pdf)
- ii. "Spiritual Types" exercise
  - (1) Richard Foster, *Streams of Living Water: The Great Traditions of the Christian Faith* [New York: Harper San Francisco, 1998]).
  - (2) On the A2L website (PDF)

iii. "The Spirituality Wheel"

(1) Corinne Ware, *Discover Your Spiritual Type: A Guide to Individual and Congregational Growth* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014).

(2) <http://www.episcowhat.org/ware-spirituality-type-indicator.html>

d. Writing: *Pilgrimage: A Journal of the Journey*

Throughout the semester, maintain a journal that records aspects of your spiritual journey. Whereas prayer journals typically record requests and answers to prayer, the purpose of this journal is to reflect on your own experience of seeking, fleeing, abiding in, and/or practising the presence of God, as the case may be. This is not simply a devotional exercise, but more specifically a process of *reflection on spiritual identity and practice*, as you consider such questions as, "Who am I/who are we in the presence of God?"; "How do I draw near to, evade, or rest in God's presence?"; "Where or in what ways are the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit present or at work in my life and the life of my community?"; and, "In what ways does God seem to pursue or evade us?"

At the conclusion of the semester, submit a 500 word summary that describes your spiritual pilgrimage during the period of this course and, in particular, ways in which the class has enriched or challenged you along the way.

Length: ~1,000 + 500 words

Due: December 13

2. Module Two     A Coat of Many Colours: Spirituality in Church and Ministry  
In-class session: October 13–14 (McMaster Divinity College)
3. Module Three   Where Are We Going? Defining the Goals of the Spiritual Life
  - a. Online:   **TBA**
  - b. Reading: Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home* (~260 pp.)
  - c. Writing: *Different Ways to Pray*

Since prayer is the most basic spiritual discipline, and a foundational expression of life lived in the presence of God, the primary goal of this assignment is to foster theological reflection on the practice of God's presence.

Of the 21 styles of prayer that Foster describes, select one style from each of Parts One (“Moving Inward”), Two (“Moving Upward”), and Three (“Moving Outward”), and practise each of them for a week at a time. At the end of each week, post a 250 word comment on the relevant discussion board, indicating what you have learned about each style. Feel free to respond (briefly) to the comments of others.

Length: 3 × 250 words

Due: October 25

4. Module Four How do we get there? Disciplines and practices for pilgrimage

- a. Online: **TBA**
- b. Reading: Howard, *Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality*, 145–298
- c. Writing: *Spiritual Disciplines: An Introduction*

Your task is to offer a theological and operational account of a specific spiritual discipline as practised within Christian tradition (broadly understood). Such disciplines may include (but are not limited to) those discussed by Richard J. Foster in *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978):

*Inward Disciplines*

- Meditation
- Prayer
- Fasting
- Study

*Outward Disciplines*

- Simplicity
- Solitude
- Submission
- Service

*Corporate Disciplines*

- Confession
- Worship
- Guidance
- Celebration

Complementing Foster’s list are the seven sacraments of Western ecclesiastical tradition (“holy mysteries” in Orthodox tradition):

*Sacraments of Initiation*

- Baptism
- Confirmation/  
Chrismation
- Eucharist/  
Lord’s Supper

*Sacraments of Healing*

- Reconciliation  
(Confession &  
Absolution)
- Anointing of  
the Sick (Healing)

*Sacraments of Service*

- Matrimony
- Ordination/  
Holy Orders

Of course, other, more specific practices or disciplines may capture your imagination. Among the innumerable possibilities are:

- Asceticism/  
Mortification
- Hospitality  
*Lectio divina*
- Pilgrimage  
etc.

Your contribution may incorporate written explanations; audio/video materials; web-based resources, examples, or illustrations; and practical exercises. Include, where appropriate, both *individual* and corporate or *congregational* practices (e.g. personal vis-à-vis corporate liturgical prayer).

- A. Select one spiritual discipline by signing up for it online. Describe the details of its practice (i.e., what does a practitioner actually “do”?), giving examples that illustrate when, where, and how this discipline has been practised in the course of church history.
- B. Explain how this discipline “works.” In what way does it convey spiritual benefit to the practitioner(s)? What resources, if any, does successful performance require? What is its relation to the work of the Spirit and the exercise of spiritual gifts that are cited in the New Testament?
- C. Explain why the intended benefit is necessary or important in the spiritual life. How does it contribute to spiritual “maturity,” whether in theory or in practice? Field test the discipline in question and report your findings.
- D. Indicate the relevance of this discipline to your field of specialization (i.e. Pastoral Studies; Church and Culture; Christian Worldview; or Christian Thought and History)
- E. Post your discussion (2,000 words) on the A2L course website.
- F. Comment (125 words max.) on the design and content of two submissions posted by other members of the class (each submission will provide space for two online comments).

Length: 2,000 words

Due: November 15

Comments: 2 × 125

Due: November 22

5. Module Five Integration: Spirituality and Ministry

- a. Reading: Howard, *Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality*, 299–437
- b. Writing *Spirituality and Ministry*

The concluding exercise is intended to help students explore the relevance of spirituality, spiritual identity, and spiritual disciplines to their individual fields of ministry. The written submissions consist of two sections:

- i. Briefly describe your current and/or (to the best of your knowledge) future field of ministry (e.g. church planting; congregational leadership; hospital chaplaincy, etc.).
- ii. Taking specific account of your field of specialization (Pastoral Studies; Church and Culture; Christian Worldview; Christian Thought and History), assess the place of spiritual identity and practice in relation to Christian ministry. In what ways could spiritual practices or disciplines form spiritual identity and contribute to spiritual maturity (both your own and that of the recipients of ministry)? In what way does it address the interplay of divine and human agency? How or where is God at work, and to what extent to do remain responsible for our own spiritual development?

Length: 2,000 words

Due: December 6

Summary of Assignments and Due Dates	Length	Due	Weight
<i>Spiritual Inventory; Spiritual Identity</i>	n/a	n/a	n/a
<i>Pilgrimage: A Journal of the Journey</i>	[~1,000]	continuous	n/a
<i>Different Ways to Pray</i>	Assessments	3 × 250	October 25
	Commentary	optional	
<i>Spiritual Disciplines: An Introduction</i>		2,000	November 15
	Commentary	2 × 125	November 22
<i>Spirituality and Ministry</i>	2,000	December 6	35%
<i>Pilgrimage: A Journal of the Journey: Summary</i>	500	December 13	10%

## Academic Honesty

Academic dishonesty is a serious offence that may take any number of forms, including plagiarism, the submission of work that is not one's own or for which previous credit has been obtained, and/or unauthorized collaboration with other students. Academic dishonesty can result in severe consequences, e.g., failure of the assignment, failure of the course, a notation on one's academic transcript, and/or suspension or expulsion from the College. Students are responsible for understanding what constitutes academic dishonesty. Please refer to the Divinity College Statement on Academic Honesty: <http://www.mcmasterdivinity.ca/programs/rules-regulations>.

---

## Gender Inclusive Language

McMaster Divinity College is committed to employing inclusive language for human beings in worship services, written materials, and all publications. With regard to biblical texts, the integrity of original expressions (including references to God) should be respected. The NRSV and TNIV provide appropriate examples of the use of inclusive language for human subjects. With the exception of direct quotations from historical documents, inclusive language is to be used in all assignments submitted for academic credit.

---

## Style

All stylistic considerations (including but not limited to questions of formatting, footnotes, and bibliographic references) must conform to the McMaster Divinity College Style Guidelines for Essays and Theses: <http://www.mcmasterdivinity.ca/sites/default/files/documents/mdcstyleguide.pdf>. Failure to observe appropriate form will result in grade reductions; if departures from the required style are extensive, the assignment in question will be considered late and returned for revision prior to grading. To assist with prose composition, students are encouraged to make use of [grammarly.com](http://grammarly.com), which is funded by the university, along with the Writing Support Services provided by the McMaster Student Success Centre (<http://studentsuccess.mcmaster.ca/students/academic->

skills/writing-support-services.html). See also "CRITERIA FOR GRADING OF WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS," below.

---

### **Cell Phone/Computer Policy**

Students are to refrain from conducting cell phone conversations while class is in session. Should you need to maintain contact with family members and/or your church or ministry, please turn off the ringer so as to avoid disturbing others; upon receipt of an urgent call, you may discretely excuse yourself from the classroom. The same policy applies to all computer-generated sound schemes, pagers, or other electronic annunciation systems.

---

### **Deadlines and Late Submission Penalty**

Assignments are to be submitted to the course website on Avenue to Learn, and are due at noon on the date specified, after which they will be considered late and penalized 1% per calendar day (in whole or in part). The final date for submission of all course assignments is December 13. Assignments received after this date will not be accepted for grading or credit.

Once classes have concluded, graded assignments will be available for retrieval from the Student Records Office (Room 210) for 30 days after the end of the semester (calculated as the day on which grades are due), following which they will be discarded.

---

### **Disclaimer:**

This syllabus is the property of the instructor and is prepared with currently available information. The instructor reserves the right to make revisions up to and including the first day of class.

---

---

CRITERIA FOR GRADING OF WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

Grading of written materials will be based on the following general criteria

Grade Range	Content	Argument	Presentation
90–100 85–89 80–84	A+ A A– Mastery of subject matter; creativity and individualized integration of insights and their relationships; exceeds required elements	Clear, logical structure; comprehensive introduction, persuasive argumentation, and innovative conclusions	Detailed adherence to relevant style for formatting of text, notes, and bibliography; no errors of grammar or syntax; elegant presentation
77–79 73–76 70–72	B+ B B– Above-average grasp of principles and concepts, and their inter-relationship; completion of all required elements	Coherent structure and consistent argumentation; well-stated introduction and conclusion	General adherence to relevant style and format; few errors of grammar or syntax
67–69 63–66 60–62	C+ C C– Adequate understanding of theoretical foundations; minimal completion of required elements	Rudimentary structure; minimal introductory and concluding statements	Significant errors of grammar, syntax, or style
57–59 53–56 50–52	D+ D D– Low level of comprehension; required elements incomplete or missing	Lack of coherence or structure in argumentation; introduction or conclusion missing	Abundant grammatical, syntactical, and stylistic errors
0–49%	F Inability to grasp basic concepts; required elements missing	Incomprehensible or illogical structure and argumentation	Failure to follow stylistic guidelines; incomprehensible syntax