



Christian Spirituality
Spring 2019
Michael J. Christensen, Ph. D

Reading Henri Nouwen with his Sources: Exploring Classical Christian Spirituality

Course Description: Henri J. M. Nouwen (1932-1996)—Roman Catholic priest, psychologist and professor—taught and wrote at the intersection of theology and psychology, which he called spirituality. Author of over 40 books on the spiritual life, this course covers his contributions to the field of pastoral psychology, including spiritual direction, Christian formation and discernment. The posthumous “Nouwen Trilogy”, developed from his documented life and works, forms the context for the course and guidance for the required reading. Online lectures focus on Nouwen’s unique approach to spiritual transformation, sustained by classical disciplines and Christian community. Weekly discussions on Moodle focus on classical sources in the history of Christian spirituality that informed Nouwen’s approach to spiritual formation, as well as selected spiritual practices to increase one’s capacity to *live the questions, follow the movements and read the signs* of daily life.

Class Sessions:

- Class Meets for presentation and discussion on Saturdays, 3:30-5:30pm, from January 12 - April 13, 2019 (except on 2/2 and 3/2) at the Episcopal Church Center.
- Content Lectures available online through Northwind Institute during semester.
Register at www.NorthwindInstitute.org to access lectures and online discussion Forum

Texts:

- *Spiritual Direction: Wisdom for the Long Walk of Faith*
- *Spiritual Formation: Following the Movements of the Spirit*
- *Discernment: Reading the Signs of Daily Life*
- *Nouwen Through the Anglican/Episcopal Lens* (Available from instructor)
- *Invitation to Christian Spirituality: An Ecumenical Anthology*, John Tyson, ed.
- *Following the Mystics Through the Narrow Gate* by Richard Rohr, James Finley and Cynthia Bourgeault [9 CD set produced by Center for Action and Contemplation, distributed by Sounds True]

<https://www.soundstrue.com/store/following-the-mystics-through-the-narrow-gate-3260.html>

Course Materials:

- Micro-Lectures posted from professor's Youtube channel available through www.NorthwindInstitute.org
- Study Guides provided by HarperOne Publishers
<http://www.smallgroupguides.com/tag/spirituality/>
- Professor's PPTx presentations on Nouwen Trilogy
- Documentary: "Journey to the Heart" (Windward Productions)
[Link: <https://vimeo.com/henrinouwen/journeyoftheheart>] PW: JOTH_95pfh
- Nouwen's Sermon on "We are the Beloved" at The Crystal Cathedral (google it)
- "Timeline of Shaping Influences" by Michael J. Christensen

Course Design, Goals, Outcomes, and Requirements

Design:

This course introduces seminal figures, texts and practices in classical and contemporary Christian Spirituality *through the lens of* priest/psychologist/professor Henri Nouwen. Twelve F2F class sessions are focused on: 1) Scriptural reflection; 2) spiritual practices; 3) and individual presentations and discussion on selected classical texts and figures. Twelve micro-lectures are offered by Professor on the life and teachings of Henri Nouwen—presented online in three parts following the sequence of the Nouwen Trilogy: 1) Spiritual Direction, 2) Spiritual Formation, and 3) Discernment. Weekly reading assignments, journal exercises, forum discussions, and *Study Guide* Questions are required for evaluation.

Learning Goals:

1. Become familiar with the life, works and spiritual theology of Henri Nouwen and with the classical spiritual writers who informed his teaching and direction.
2. Understand the ancient and contemporary art of spiritual direction, spiritual formation, and discernment of spirits as taught by Nouwen.
3. Gain greater personal wisdom on how to live life's persistence questions, follow the movements of the heart, and interpret the "signs of the times."
4. Assess the theology and spirituality of Nouwen through the *Anglican/Episcopal Lens* in conversation with contemporary spiritual guides

Course Outcomes:

1. Master the Nouwen Trilogy ("vintage Henri") as evidenced by completing Study Guides
2. Be able to articulate the distinctive contributions of leading figures who influenced Henri Nouwen, including: Augustine, Origen, John Climacus, Psydeo-Dyonisus, Gregory of Nyssa, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, Julian of Norwich, Jean-Pierre de Caussade, Madame Guyon, Brother Lawrence, Thomas Merton, Elizabeth O'Conner, Mother Teresa, Dorothy Day, Jean Vanier, and Richard Rohr.
3. Come to know and understand both the text and historical context of selected writings in the classical Christian Tradition referred to in books by Henri Nouwen,

- including: *Life of St Anthony*, *Ladder of Divine Assent*, *Life of Moses*, *Way of a Pilgrim*, *Cloud of Unknowing*, *Practice of the Presence of God*, *Sacrament of the Present Moment*, *Sayings of the Desert Fathers (and Mothers)*, *Interior Castle*, *Dark Night of the Soul*, *Revelations of Divine Love*, *Contemplative Prayer (Merton)*, *Life Together (Bonhoeffer)*, *Prayers of Dorothy Day*.
4. Acquire a cursory knowledge of the depth and breadth of the 2000+ year sweep of Christian Spirituality by selective reading in an ecumenical anthology and by listening twice to CD presentations by Fr. Richard Rohr, James Finley and Cynthia Bourgeault: *Following the Mystics Through the Narrow Gate* by Richard Rohr et. al.

Requirements: Fulfill seven required tasks to receive a passing grade.

1. Listen carefully to micro-lectures offered by Professor on the life and teachings of Henri Nouwen and accompanying resources
2. Read assigned chapters and texts associated with each lecture.
3. Keep a Weekly Journal of reflections, insights and practices (use guidelines found at the end of assigned chapters)
4. Complete *Study Guide* Questions for assigned chapters and texts. Submit on Moodle to instructor.
5. Attend at least 10/12 classroom sessions.
6. Participate in all online forum discussions (post and respond to at least one other post)
7. Present on one figure and text from Tyson's anthology to your discussion group

Evaluation: 1000 points

Reading: (250 points)

- *Spiritual Direction: Wisdom for the Long Walk of Faith*
- *Spiritual Formation: Following the Movements of the Spirit*
- *Discernment: Reading the Signs of Daily Life*
- *Nouwen Through the Anglican/Episcopal Lens*
- *Invitation to Christian Spirituality* by John Tyson (anthology)

Listening: (250 points)

Listen twice to and experience some of the depth and breadth of the 2000+ year sweep of the mystical heritage of Christian spirituality through the teachings of Fr. Richard Rohr, James Finley and Cynthia Bourgeault: *Following the Mystics Through the Narrow Gate* by Richard Rohr et. al. [9 CD set produced by Center for Action and Contemplation]

<https://www.soundstrue.com/store/following-the-mystics-through-the-narrow-gate-3260.html>

Writing: (250 points)

- Complete and submit Study Guide questions for each assigned chapter each week (easy does it; don't over-write or obsess)
- Keep a Weekly Journal that reflects on: scriptural texts, spiritual practice, and application of insights, as guided by Journal Exercises at the end of each required chapter of the Trilogy

- Submit presentation notes after making text and figure presentation in class

Discussion: (250 points)

Follow weekly prompts. Post and respond to at least one other post.

Total Points: 1000

Course Calendar of Assignment

Part One: Spiritual Direction: Living Life's Persistence Questions

Jan 12: *Orthocardia*: The Way of the Heart

- View Lecture on Heart Religion
- Reading Assignment: Tyson, Introduction (pp. 1-52); *Spiritual Direction*, Chapters 1-2, pp 143-146, and Appendix One and Two; *Nouwen Through the Anglican/Episcopal Lens*
- Reflect and Journal: Read the Guidelines for Journal-Keeping at the end of Chapter 1, p. 14. Spend at least 20 minutes in your journal addressing two or three questions of your heart: *What do you love? What do you fear? What gives you joy? What brings you peace?* What does this say about what you truly believe and practice?
- Discussion: Given your religious tradition and experience, do you tend to trust or distrust the intuitions of the heart (yours or others)? Do you tend to look within or look outside yourself for the power and presence of God?
- Written Assignment: Complete Study Guide questions
- Presentation:

Jan 19: *Orthodoxy*: Who is Henri Nouwen and Why is He a Worthy Guide?

- View Lecture on biography
- View Documentary: "Journey to the Heart" in Moodle classroom
- Review Nouwen's "Timeline of Shaping Influences" and post your own
- Reading Assignment: *Spiritual Direction*, Chapters 3-4; continue reading Tyson, Part 1 (pp. 53-139)
- Reflect and Journal: Identify and name a persistent question at this time in your life. How are you "living the question?"
- Discussion: Post and respond to prompt questions
- Written Assignment: Complete Study Guide questions
- Presentation:

Jan 26: *Orthopraxis*: Practical Disciplines of Book, Church, and Heart

- View Lecture on Nouwen's three spiritual disciplines
- Reading Assignment: *Spiritual Direction*, Introduction, Chapters 5-7; continue reading Tyson, Part 1 (pp. 53-139)
- Reflect and Journal: Finding God in the Word. Read instructions on Centering Prayer, Lectio Divina and Spiritual Writing (*Spiritual Direction*, pp 102-104).

- Discussion: Given your religious tradition, which of Nouwen’s three sources of spiritual authority do you tend to prioritize—Book, Church, or Heart—and why? How do you allow the other disciplines to inform your spiritual life?
- Written Assignment: Complete Study Guide questions
- Presentation:

Feb 9: Vocation and Identity—first half of life

- View APU Lecture by Rebecca Laird on vocation
- View APU Lecture by Christensen on identity
- Reading Assignment: *Spiritual Direction*, Chapters 8-9 and Epilogue; continue reading Tyson, Part 1 (pp. 53-139)
- Reflect and Journal: In your journal, do the exercise “My History with God” in *SD*, p. 50-51. Also draw a wagon wheel of your life right now (including rim, spokes and hub). Add some details of your career and calling, personal identity and purpose. What do you think God is calling you to do now?
- Discussion: How would you distinguish your career and calling, profession and vocation in your first half of life?
- Written Assignment: Complete Study Guide questions
- Presentation:

Feb 2: No Class.

- Complete reading of Tyson, Part 1 (pp. 53-139)
- Listen to *Following the Mystics Through the Narrow Gate* by Richard Rohr

PART TWO: Spiritual Formation—Following the Movements of the Heart

Feb 16: Nouwen’s Approach to Spiritual Formation

- View Lecture on Nouwen’s unique approach
- Reading Assignment: *Spiritual Formation*, Preface, Introduction, Chapters 1-2, Epilogue, and Appendix A; Start reading Tyson, Part 2 (pp. 140-203)
- Reflect and Journal: Exercise 2, page 14.
- Discussion: Which medium of Christian meditation do you most resonate with: *lectio divina*, *visio divina*, or *audio divina* (p. xi)? Why do you think this is so?
- Written Assignment: Complete Study Guide questions
- Presentation:

Feb 23: The Movement From Resentment to Gratitude

- View Lecture on Movement from Resentment to Gratitude
- Reading Assignment: *Spiritual Formation*, Chapters 3-4; continue reading Tyson, Part 2 (pp. 140-203)
- Practice: *Lectio Divina*: Parable of the Lost Son (Luke 15:11-32). *Visio Divina*: The Graceful Dancer (between pp. 66 and 67). Instructions, pp. 70-71.

- Reflect and Journal: Can you name one difficult stepping stone that has brought you to where you are now, and reflect on it in the light of a loving God who guides your steps? (p. 69)
- Discussion: “Resentment is the curse of the faithful, the virtuous, the obedient, and the hardworking” (p. 60). Have you observed this statement to be true? Why can those in ministry be particularly susceptible to resentment?
- Written Assignment: Complete Study Guide questions
- Presentation:

Mar 9: The Movement From Fear to Love

- View Lecture on Movement from Fear to Love
- Reading Assignment: *Spiritual Formation*, Chapter 5-7; complete reading Tyson, Part 2 (pp. 140-203)
- Practice: Lectio Divina: Psalm 46 Pray short scripture verses on pp. 85-86. Visio Divina: Rublev’s Icon of the Holy Trinity (between pp. 66 and 67). Instructions, pp. 85-86.
- Reflect and Journal: Six questions on pp. 84-85
- Discussion: Nouwen thinks that many Christians apply Jesus’s teaching to their personal and family lives, but not to the social, economic, or political realities of the State. (p. 82) Do you agree? What changes might occur in our country and in our world if more Christians started living in the “house of love” and applying their faith to socio-economic and political spheres of influence?
- Written Assignment: Complete Study Guide questions
- Presentation:

Mar 16: Nouwen’s Place in Spiritual Development Theory

- View Lecture: Henri Nouwen on Polarities and Movements in the Spiritual Journey”
- Reading Assignment: *Spiritual Formation*, Appendix B on “Nouwen’s Place in Spiritual Development Theory “ (pp. 126-137) in conversation with other Harvard theorists of human development: Jean Piaget’s theory of cognitive development; Lawrence Kohlberg’s stages of moral development; James Fowler on *Stages of Faith Development*; and Robert Kegan on *The Evolving Self*.
- Reflect and Journal: Psycho-social Stage Theories of Moral and Spiritual “*Spiritual formation, I have come to believe, is not about steps or stages on the way to perfection. It’s about the movements from the mind to the heart through prayer in its many forms that reunite us with God, each other, and our truest selves.*” (*Spiritual Formation*, p. xvi) What is your experience and theory of spiritual progress and faith development?
- Discussion: Critique Nouwen’s psycho-social theory of spiritual formation
- Presentation:
- Review Content: Professor’s PPTx on Spiritual Formation

PART THREE: DISCERNMENT—Reading the Signs of Daily Life

Mar 23: *Spiritual Senses: On Hearing a Deeper Beat*

- View Lecture on Spiritual Senses
- Reading Assignment: *Discernment*, Preface, Foreword, Introduction, and Chapters 1-2, and Appendix B; begin reading Tyson, Chapter 3 (204-268).
- Reflect and Journal: Chapter 1, p. 19, #4; and Ch. 2, page 36, number 4.
- Discussion: Respond to prompts
- Written Assignment: Complete Study Guide questions
- Presentation:

Mar 30: Discerning Guidance in Books, Nature, People and Events

- Listen to the *CenterQuest* webinar on “Discernment: Reading the Signs of Everyday Life.” (Link and instructions in Moodle Classroom). Pause, ponder and process each of the four parts in your journal.
- Reading Assignment: *Spiritual Discernment*, Chapter 3, 4, 5, 6; complete reading Tyson, Chapter 3 (204-268).
- Reflect and Journal: *Discernment*, p. 52 #2, p. 63 #3, p. 81 #1 and p. 93 #1
- Written Assignment: Complete Study Guide for each chapter
- Presentation:

April 6: Discerning Vocation and Identity—Second Half of Life

- Reading Assignment: *Discernment*, Ch. 7, 9; begin reading Tyson, Chapter 4 (269-375).
- Reflect and Journal: How would you distinguish your career and calling, profession and vocation, core identify and *persona* in your second half of life?
- Discussion: Respond to prompts
- Presentation:

April 13: Discerning Presence and Kairos

- Reading Assignment: *Discernment*, Chapter 8, 10, Epilogue, Appendix A & C; Complete reading Tyson, Chapter 4 (269-375).
- Reflect and Journal: Choose an exercise on pp. 162-163
- Assignment: Complete Study Guide questions
- Review Content: Professor’s PPTx on Discernment
- Listen again to *Following the Mystics Through the Narrow Gate* by Rohr
- Final Discussion: Ancient-Future Church?
- Presentation:

Bibliography

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Richard J. & Gayle D. Beebe. *Longing for God: Seven Paths of Christian Devotion*. 2009.^{[1][2]}_[SEP]

* Lewis, C.S. *Letters to Malcolm Chiefly on Prayer and Mere Christianity*.^{[1][2]}_[SEP]

*Merton, Thomas. (any two of his 50 books)
* Nouwen, Henri. (any two of his 40 books)
* Rohr, Richard. (any one of his 40+ books and tapes)
Rolheiser, Ronald. *The Holy Longing: The Search for a Christian Spirituality*. Doubleday, 1999.
* Thompson, Marjorie. *Soul Feast*
Webber, Robert E. *The Divine Embrace: Recovering the Passionate Spiritual Life* . Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006.
Willard, Dallas. *The Divine Conspiracy*

Reference Books:

Howard, Evan B. *The Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality* . Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2008. *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, Glen Scorgie, ed.
Exploring Christian Spirituality: An Ecumenical Reader
Ken Collins, ed.
* A Renovare Resource for Spiritual Renewal (Devotional Classics, Spiritual Classics, Spiritual Formation Workbook, or Streams of Living Water)