

## COURSE SYLLABUS

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# SF403: Spiritual and Ethical Formation: Theology and Practice

Course Lecturers: Richard E. Averbeck, Ph.D. and James Grier, Th.D.  
Professor of Old Testament and Semitic Languages at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and Distinguished Professor of Philosophical Theology at Grand Rapids Theological Seminary

### About This Course

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**This course was originally created through the Institute of Theological Studies in association with the Evangelical Seminary Deans' Council. There are nearly 100 evangelical seminaries of various denominations represented within the council and many continue to use the ITS courses to supplement their curriculum. The lecturers were selected primarily by the Deans' Council as highly recognized scholars in their particular fields of study.**

### Course Description

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Spiritual and ethical formation is a topic of discussion in many circles. We all long for intimacy with God, but how is spiritual growth and maturity developed? What are the dynamics in which God most often works in the heart of believers to make them like His Son, Jesus Christ? In this seminar, Richard Averbeck and James Grier address these and other questions in order to lay a biblical, theological foundation for proper Christian thought. In addition, they identify and describe specific practices that the listener can apply immediately to his/her life of faith.

### Course Objectives

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Upon completion of the course, the student should be able to do the following:

- Understand the biblical foundations for spiritual and ethical formation.
- Evaluate his/her life for areas to become more intentional and open to the work of the Spirit.
- Analyze the ways individuals make decisions in order to identify habits and values that are contrary to the moral will of God.
- Think critically about how to approach life in light of the biblical foundations for spiritual and ethical formation.

- Apply the three dimensions of Christian spiritual formation to his/her life of faith.
- Apply a biblical model for decision-making that will enhance his/her moral and spiritual formation.
- Value both spiritual and ethical formation as important aspects of the Christian life (both individual and corporate).

## Accessibility

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If you have particular accessibility needs, please contact the CUGN Registrar at the beginning of the course. This will allow us to work directly with you to make efforts to accommodate your situation and ensure as full as possible accessibility to the course.

## Course Lecturers

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At Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Dr. Richard Averbeck has specialized in the culture of the Old Testament where he influences students with his expertise in the Old Testament Law, Near Eastern Studies, and Semitic languages. In addition to teaching, Dr. Averbeck is a member of the Evangelical Theological Society, the Institute for Biblical Research, the American Oriental Society, and the Society of Biblical Literature. Furthermore, he serves as the Director of the Spiritual Formation Forum. He has also been a licensed therapist in Wisconsin since 1989, having studied under his friend and colleague, the world renowned counselor and Christian psychologist, Dr. Larry Crabb.

### Education:

- Calvary Bible College, B.A.
- Grace Theological Seminary, M.A.
- Grace Theological Seminary, M.Div.
- Annenberg Research Institute (formerly Dropsie University), Ph.D.



Dr. James Grier, who has served as a professor at Grand Rapids Theological Seminary since 1982, has influenced many with his courses in ethics and moral theology, gaining a reputation as one of the finest scholars on a Christian worldview in evangelicalism. In addition to teaching, Dr. Grier served for 15 years as Executive Vice President and Academic Dean at Grand Rapids Theological Seminary. He also served two years as the Acting Academic Dean of Grand Rapids Bible College (Cornerstone University) from 1985–1986. He was also the Chairman of the Evangelical Seminary Dean's Council (ESDC) 1993–1998. Moreover, he has pastored on and off for more than 50 years while advising numerous hospital boards on medical ethics. When not teaching in the United States or abroad, he is sought after as a conference speaker on philosophical theology and worldview at churches across the globe.

### Education:

- Baptist Bible College, B.Th.
- Grace Theological Seminary, M.Div.
- Westminster Theological Seminary, Th.M.
- Grace Theological Seminary, Th.D.

## Online Professor

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If you are taking this course for credit, CUGN will assign one of its faculty members as the online professor for this course. This professor will contact you upon enrollment in the course and will guide your study. Your online professor will be available to you by email and, at set times, by chat room or other real-time technology. Your online professor will do the following in order to stimulate student involvement and facilitate effective learning:

- Evaluate and assign grades to all coursework.
- Provide assistance with technological problems that may occur.
- Answer questions that may arise.
- Issue your final grades.

## Academic Honesty

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At CUGN, we believe all we do is “as unto the Lord” and we thus hold to a high academic standard of honesty; we do not tolerate plagiarism and cheating. Students found guilty of any form of academic dishonesty face consequences ranging from interaction with the Academic Dean to expulsion from CUGN.

**Quizzes and Exams:** Any student found guilty of cheating on a quiz or exam will automatically receive a score of zero for that quiz or exam. A second offense will result in automatic course failure and possible disciplinary action and/or expulsion from CUGN. Please view the [CUGN Academic Catalog](#) for a full definition and examples of cheating.

**Plagiarism:** If a student’s work is found to be plagiarized, consequences will vary depending on the nature of the plagiarism.

If an offense is deemed unintentional, the student will have an opportunity to resubmit the work. A second offense will result in an automatic score of zero for that assignment, which may also result in failure of that course.

More serious plagiarism offenses could result in automatic course failure, disciplinary action, or expulsion from CUGN. Please view the [CUGN Academic Catalog](#) for a full definition and examples of plagiarism. If you have questions about plagiarism, or would like to request resources for learning how to avoid plagiarism, please contact our Registrar’s Office at [registrar@cugn.org](mailto:registrar@cugn.org) or toll free at (888) 487-5376 ext. 3.

## Course Requirements

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1. **Time:** The student is required to spend a minimum of 120 hours in this course. All course requirements must be completed within 6 months of enrolling in the course.
2. **Recorded Lectures:** The student is required to listen to all 12 audio lectures recorded by Dr. Richard E. Averbeck and Dr. James M. Grier.

3. **Lecture Outlines:** The outlines that accompany each lecture (found in the Study Guide) provide reinforcement for what you hear in the lectures and also offer space to take notes.
4. **Study Guide Questions:** The questions in the Study Guide that accompany each lecture are vital to the learning process. *Do not skip over them.* They will guide you in interacting with the material and formulating the concepts in your mind in a way that you can communicate to others and more readily apply to your life. There are two types of questions:

a. **Preparation:** Before each lecture outline there are a few questions that are intended to prepare you to interact with the content of the lecture. They require you to begin thinking about the concepts of the lecture in order to identify your current views or practices. Having considered these ahead of time, you will be able to evaluate them in light of the lecture content.

b. **Reflection:** After each lecture outline there are a few more questions that are intended to ensure your understanding of the main concepts and guide you in applying them to your life.

With all of these questions, it is recommended that you take the time to write your answers as best you can. The process of formulating answers (even incomplete ones) from original thought is vital for learning, and your answers will serve as a valuable journal or record of your development through the series. You will be required to submit your answers to all questions to your instructor at the end of the course.

## 5. Spiritual Formation Project

**RATIONALE:** Ministry preparation and the Christian life require more than academic exercises. Learners also need personal, spiritual formation, which involves theological reflection and critical thinking on their current practices and assumptions. This process occurs as learners engage in self-reflection and interaction in a community of learning. With this in mind, CUGN includes in all courses a capstone project addressing these issues and facilitating interaction beyond the formal learning environment (ATS schools, note Standards 3.2.1.3; 4.1.1; 10.3.3.3).

Write a **five-to-six page reflective essay** and **interview a mentor**, discussing the spiritual impact of this course on your life. Identify your mentor early in the course, and submit the essay to your grader when you take the final exam. This last project should not be a summary of course content, but an application of course principles. Complete the following:

**A. Personal Reflection and Evaluation:** Reflect on the course – To integrate your academic studies with your walk of faith, reflect on the content of the course and evaluate your life in light of what you learned.

- i. Follow these steps in your reflection:

Step 1: What one theme, principle, or concept in the course is the most significant to you personally? Why is it significant?

Step 2: What portion(s) of the course brought this theme/principle/concept to light?

Step 3: Think about your past. Why is it vital now for you to deal with and apply this theme/principle/concept?

Step 4: How should this affect your thoughts and actions, and what specific steps should you take to concretely apply what you have learned?

- ii. Write your answers to the above questions in full paragraph form. (Recommended length for this reflection: approximately three pages)
- iii. Give a copy of this reflection to your mentor (see #2).

**B. Community Reflection and Interaction:** Interview a mentor – Since the Holy Spirit uses the input of others to guide and form His people, interview a mentor according to the following guidelines:

- i. Who should you interview? (1-3 are required; 4-6 are recommended)
  1. Someone with whom you have a reasonably close relationship.
  2. Someone who is a mature Christian ministry leader (i.e. a pastor).
  3. Someone who is not your grader or a family member.
  4. Someone who values the spiritual formation process.
  5. Someone who is familiar with and values the subject of the course.
  6. Someone who has experience using the content of the course in ministry.

**NOTE:** Identify your mentor early in the course, and give him/her the page entitled “Guidelines for Mentors.”

- ii. Focus of the interview – Your interview should focus on the issues and questions you raise in your essay. For example:
  - What feedback can your mentor give in response to your essay?
  - In light of the course content, are the conclusions you made appropriate? Why or why not?
  - What additional advice, deeper insights or broader applications might he/she suggest from his/her own life and ministry?

**NOTE:** Conduct this interview either in person (preferred) or over the phone. Do not use electronic communication (i.e. email, instant messenger, etc). Suggested length: 45 minutes.

**C. Synthesis and Application:** Draw your final conclusions – Having reflected on the course and the discussion with your mentor, synthesize what you have learned in these three sections:

- i. Section 1: Begin your essay with the personal reflection from #1 above. This should be exactly what you gave your mentor for the interview.
- ii. Section 2: Comment on your interview, explaining what you discussed and the insights you gained from your mentor. Include the following:
  - What were the mentor’s comments regarding your essay?

- What advice did he/she give?
- How did his/her comments expand or correct your application of the course?
- Include the person's name, occupation, and the length of the interview.

iii. Section 3: Conclude with a synthesis of what you have learned. Answer the following:

- If your mentor corrected any thoughts in your "Personal Reflection and Evaluation", how do you feel about these corrections? Do you agree or disagree? Why?
- Synthesizing your thoughts from section one and your mentor's insight in section two, what final conclusions have you reached? How is this different from section one?
- In light of the interview and further reflection, what additional, specific changes need to occur in your life and what concrete steps will you take to implement them?

**NOTE TO STUDENTS:** Your effort in this assignment will determine its benefit. If by the end of this course you have not yet reflected critically on your life in light of what you have studied, allow this assignment to guide you in that process. The instructor for this course will not score your essay based on the amount of spiritual fruit you describe; so do not exaggerate (or trivialize) what you have learned. The primary grading criteria is that you have thoughtfully considered the principles of the course and realistically sought to apply them to your life. If you have done this and met the minimal requirements (as noted above), you will earn the full points for this assignment.

Note on confidentiality: Perhaps the Holy Spirit is dealing with you in some very personal areas of your life. Because of this, your grader will keep your essay entirely confidential and either return or discard it.

Objective: to stimulate reflection and interaction on course principles in order to enhance personal spiritual formation.

**Above all**, perhaps the most important feature of this series is not part of the series at all—it is *your posture of prayer and meditation in openness to the Spirit of God as He speaks to you and moves you to respond to his leading*. It is recommended that before and after each lesson you spend time in prayer (either alone or with others), listening for the voice of God and aligning your heart with His purposes.

## Course Grading

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Your grade for the course will be determined as follows:

Recorded Lectures	10% of Course Grade
Study Guide Questions	45% of Course Grade
Spiritual Formation Project	45% of Course Grade
Total	100%

Grades will be issued within two weeks of the end of the course.



Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Course: \_\_\_\_\_ Interview Date/Time: \_\_\_\_\_

## Guidelines for Mentors

(Students, give this sheet to your mentor for the Spiritual Formation Project.)

Thank you for your involvement in this student's CUGN coursework. We believe the Christian life is more than an academic exercise, so we encourage students to critically reflect on their life in light of what they learn and then apply those insights to the daily life of faith.

Therefore, students taking CUGN courses are required to complete a final assignment called the "Spiritual Formation Project." This assignment involves two parts: an essay and an interview:

**The ESSAY:** After completing their coursework, students reflect on the content of the course, evaluate their lives, and discuss the one theme, principle or concept that is most significant to them and why. Students are to identify specific ways this theme/principle/concept should apply to their lives and what action steps they plan to take in order to make these changes a reality.

**The INTERVIEW:** After writing this reflection, students give a copy to their mentor and meet with him/her to discuss their thoughts and get feedback. The goal of this interview is to facilitate the student's growth through interaction with a mature believer.

### NOTES ON THE INTERVIEW:

- You do not need to be familiar with the course to participate in this interview. You will primarily respond to the thoughts of the student. (However, general knowledge of the subject matter of the course and/or experience applying it to ministry is valuable.)
- Prior to meeting with the student, read his/her "Personal Reflection and Evaluation" and prepare to discuss the following:
  1. What feedback can you give the student in response to his/her essay?
  2. Are the student's conclusions from the course appropriate? Why or why not?
  3. What additional advice, deeper insights or broader applications would you suggest from your own life and ministry?
- Meet with the student either in person (preferred) or over the phone. Do not use electronic communication (i.e. email, instant messenger, etc.).
- Suggested length of the interview: 45 minutes

Thanks again for participating in this project! You have a real opportunity to guide this student in the application process and to help him/her connect academics to life – *a valuable process for all who wish to grow in Christ.*

**NOTE: If the student's school makes any changes to this assignment, their requirements should replace those described here.**