Discipleship in Community: Spiritual Formation and the Church

Course Lecturer: John R. Lillis, PhD
Dean and Executive Officer at Bethel Seminary (San Diego, CA)

Course Description

What is spirituality? How is it formed in private and in community? This course explores the meaning of Biblical Christianity and its relation to faith and practice within contemporary cultural contexts, giving special attention to the corporate dimensions of spirituality and spiritual formation as defined in the New Testament. The lectures analyze and discuss those historical and cultural factors that have led to the privatization of Christianity, and develop a paradigm of spiritual growth and maturity that focuses on the assembly rather than the individual.

Course Objectives

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

- Understand the basic, biblical concept of spirituality as contrasted to contemporary ideas.
- Understand the basic mystic teachings of Christian spirituality, which have developed through the history of the church.
- Recognize the influences of mystical spirituality in contemporary ideas relating to spiritual formation.
- Understand the basic theological foundations of evangelical spirituality as these have developed through the history of the church.
- Develop a functional definition of spiritual formation.
- Recognize the impact of psychology on contemporary culture and spiritual formation.
- Understand the biblical concepts of spiritual maturity, spiritual growth, and love.
- Appreciate the corporate and community aspects of spiritual formation.
- Apply basic biblical concepts to the process of spiritual formation within your own life.
- Distinguish between the main traditions of spiritual formation.
- Appreciate the need for the spiritual disciplines in the development of spirituality.
- Understand the role of theological education in the spiritual formation of ministry students.
- Recognize the need for a personal value set that reflects loyalty and commitment to Christ over the enticements of the world, flesh, and devil.
Course Lecturer

John R. Lillis, PhD

Education:
• Michigan State University, PhD
• Grand Rapids Baptist Seminary, MDiv
• Air Force Institute of Technology, MS
• University of Kentucky, BS

Teaching Career:
• Dean and Executive Officer, Bethel Seminary
• Multiple positions at Cornerstone University, including:
  • Provost and Executive Vice President
  • Taught Christian education and spiritual formation at the university’s seminary
  • Dean and Director of Continuing Education, Grand Rapids Theological Seminary (GRTS), the graduate seminary of Cornerstone University (1990s)
  • Professor of Christian Education and Missions, GRTS (1982-1990)
  • Impact Ministry Supervisor, GRTS (1978-1981)
• Various capacities including a stint as President, Asian Baptist Theological Seminary in Bangkok, Thailand and Manila, the Philippines (1982-1990)
• Visiting faculty member, Columbia International University and Marquette University
• Visiting professor of Comparative Religion, Mahidol University in Thailand (1982-1984)

Other Career Highlights:
• Pastor in the United States and abroad
• Major in the Michigan Air National Guard
• Captain in the United States Air Force as a nuclear research officer
• Educational consultant for the United African American Ministerial Action Council (UAAMAC)
• Blue Ribbon Committee Member for the American Red Cross in San Diego

Publications:
• Numerous scholarly articles and papers on various subjects from theology to nuclear physics to education to leadership, including “Preparation for Missionary Candidates,” “Teaching Electromagnetism: A Conceptual Approach for Developing Countries,” “Nontraditional Approaches to Theological Education,” and “Values for Leadership.”

Course Texts

Though not required, you may choose to read the textbooks shown below to supplement your learning.


Historical Backgrounds


Mysticism/Contemplative Spirituality


Philosophy, Psychology, and Sociology


Spiritual Disciplines


General Works


Textbooks can be ordered through our online store at CUGN.org, through your local bookstore, or through your preferred eReader when available.
Course Methods

The lecture content for each lesson is provided in two easy-to-use formats: audio and PDF text (if available). Students can choose the medium (or combination of media) that most closely aligns with their individual learning styles.