



McMaster Divinity College

Christian Spirituality: The History and Practice of Divine Encounter in the Christian Tradition

MS 3P1350/MS 5P1310

Winter 2026

Specializations: CC, PS

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Office # 237

Class begins Tuesday, Jan. 6, at 9:00 am ET.

This course is available in-person or via. livestream. The class meets weekly at the appointed time until Apr. 7. The class will not meet the week of Feb. 17 (Reading week).

Instructor Biography

Dr. Lee Beach is the Associate Professor of Christian Ministry, the Garbutt F. Smith Chair in Ministry Formation and the Director of Ministry Formation at McMaster Divinity College in Hamilton, Ontario. He teaches courses on the church in culture, pastoral ministry and Christian spirituality. Prior to coming to MDC Lee pastored for over 20 years with the Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada serving churches in Peterborough, Cobourg and Scarborough, Ontario. He is deeply involved in Ancaster Village church in Ancaster, ON where he now lives. He is the author of the book, *The Church in Exile: Living in Hope after Christendom* (IVP) and co-author (With Dr. Franklin Pyles) of the book *The Whole Gospel for the Whole World: Experiencing the Four-Fold Gospel Today* (Wipf and Stock).

Course Description

Spirituality is our response to God. It flows from a hunger to know God more. Christian spirituality is a distinct response to God that is rooted in the person of Jesus Christ and the work of his Spirit. This course will consider the many ways that Christians have embodied their response to God over the centuries of Church history. We will explore a variety of movements within Christianity that have shaped how Christians respond to God, we will engage in spiritual

practices that have emerged throughout history to help Christians encounter God and we will think about how the historic development of Christian spirituality has implications on our lives as spiritual seekers today.

Learning Goals:

Knowing:

1. Upon completion of this course students will be able to articulate a basic understanding of Spirituality as an aspect of human existence in general and Christian spirituality as distinct expression of spirituality.
2. Upon completion of this course students will be able to explain many of the key movements in the development of Christian spirituality throughout the history of the church.
3. Upon completion of this course students will be able to identify and describe many of the key figures in the development of Christian spirituality.

Being

1. As a result of this course students will be able to identify and incorporate new spiritual disciplines into their lives.

Doing

1. Upon completion of this course students will be equipped to help other people consider and put into practice new spiritual disciplines in their lives.
2. Upon completion of this course students will be able to identify specific cultural and contextual issues that affect the practice of spirituality and how Christian spirituality is a key element in the church's ministry in a post-Christian culture.

Working together as a learning community

A core value of our class is that it is a "learning community," designed to be a place where each member of the community can grow through positive affirmation and constructive input. We should all come to the community as people in process, open to be deconstructed and formed through our mutual learning experience.

As a responsible member of our learning community, you will be expected to commit yourself to the class throughout the semester that we are together. This means that in our class

interactions you will endeavor to treat all members of our class with respect and dignity. Your presence is necessary for our community (that is our class) to function at an optimal level, therefore it is expected that each student will be present in the weekly class gatherings.

Assignments should be handed in on time and in good order as an attachment to an email sent to the professor. Assignments should be sent in on or before the due date specified in this syllabus. All assignments handed in after the due date will be subject to a penalty of 3% for each day (including weekends) that they are late.

Instructor's role and availability

As professor it is my responsibility to empower each class member as a learner by treating each student with respect and dignity. I come to position myself as a fellow learner in the community and to offer information, reflection, experience, and questions for us to reflect on together. Further, it is my responsibility to give good evaluation and feedback to your thinking, both as you offer it to the class in our discussions and through written work so that your growth through this class can be maximized as a result of our collaboration.

I will do my best to answer any email enquiries within 24 hours during weekdays (Mon.-Fri). I do not generally answer emails Saturdays or Sunday. If an email is sent later in the afternoon on a Friday it will probably not be answered until Sunday evening or Monday morning. I will do my very best to grade assignments within three weeks of submission.

I am not only available but also welcome and enjoy connections with each of you outside formal class time. If you would like to meet together via zoom or in person, please feel free to email me in order to make an appointment with me for a time that works for both of us.

Required Reading

Sittser, Gerald L. *Water from a Deep Well: Christian Spirituality from Early Martyrs to Modern Missionaries*. Downers Grove, Mi: Intervarsity, 2007.

Haley-Barton, Ruth. *Sacred Rhythms. Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation*. Downers Grove, Mi: Intervarsity, 2006.

Bloom, Anthony. *Beginning to Pray*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1970.

Smith, Gordon T. *Evangelical, Sacramental, and Pentecostal: Why the Church Should be all Three*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2017.

Recommended Text

Scorgie, Glen G. (editor). *The Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011.

Assignments

1. Learning from a Historical Practitioner of Christian Spirituality

Throughout history there have been many people who have become known for their unique contribution to the practice of Christian faith and spirituality. These are people whose lives reflected intentionality in their cultivation of their relationship with Christ and whose practices left a legacy in the ongoing development of the way that people responded to God in a distinctly Christian way. Many of these people, or groups of people, are chronicled in our course text *Water from a Deep Well*. For this assignment, please choose a historical Christian figure who embodies an intentional and authentic approach to Christian spirituality and write a paper that describes their journey and their approach to Christian spirituality. Offer an overview of their lives and spiritual practices, any appropriate critiques that you think are worth noting and ultimately consider what their example has to offer to sincere spiritual seekers today. This assignment is designed to address learning goals #2&3 under “knowing,” and #1 under “doing.”

This paper should be 10-12 pages in length and is due Feb. 24, 2026 and will constitute 30% of the course grade.

2. Practicing a New Spiritual Discipline Paper and Presentation

Choose a classical spiritual discipline (see appendix in this syllabus for a list of possibilities. If you want to engage in a discipline not listed in the appendix, please clear it with the instructor early in the semester) that you have not engaged in regularly throughout your life and begin practicing it on a regular basis. Write a paper that explores the history and practice of this discipline in Christian spirituality and also chronicles your experience of practicing it in your own life. The paper should be part research on the discipline and part personal reflection on your own practice of it throughout the semester. Thus, provide some referenced research (at least five sources) into the background of the specific discipline that you have chosen and provide reflection on your experience of practicing it over the course of the semester. This paper is designed to help students address learning goal #1 under “being.”

The paper should be 8 -10 pages (double spaced) in length and is due Mar. 24, 2026 . It will constitute 20% of the course grade.

2A. Presentation: Practicing a New Spiritual Discipline

Also, as part of this assignment you will offer a class presentation of your experience. Mar. 24, 2026. The presentation should be 10 minutes in length. The presentation should be oriented toward explaining your spiritual discipline to someone who may be curious about how to practice the discipline themselves. Thus, you should give an overview of the discipline you chose, some insight into why you chose it and a reflection on your practice of it thus far, with some thoughts on how others might approach incorporating this discipline into their own lives.

The presentation should be no more than 10 minutes long. The presentation will be evaluated on clarity, creativity, the presenter's demonstration of a familiarity with their subject and adherence to the time limit (going over 10 minutes will adversely affect your grade on the assignment). It should be conversational in nature (reading from a script will also adversely affect your grade). Approach this presentation as if you were having coffee with someone who genuinely wanted you to explain your new spiritual discipline to them so that they could understand it as a historical part of Christian spirituality and how they could incorporate it into their own lives. This assignment is designed to help students address learning goal # 1 under "doing."

Presentations will be due Mar. 24, 2026. The presentation is worth 10% of the course grade.

3. Final Paper and Specialization Reflection: Christian Spirituality in a Post-Christian Age

For this paper students will interact with the question of how Christian spirituality relates to contemporary culture and how it can function in a way that aids the church's mission. Often our society is described as being "spiritual, but not religious." That is, we are living in a time when traditional religious views, like Christianity, are not embraced but the concept of "Spirituality" is welcomed. How does this reality present an opportunity to the church and its mission? This paper should include four main sections; what are the challenges to Christian spirituality in the contemporary culture that we live in? What resources/ideas/practices from the history of Christian spirituality might be useful in engaging the contemporary interest in spirituality? How can Christians respond to these challenges in a positive and winsome way so that the church can offer these ideas and practices to contemporary spiritual seekers so that they may encounter Jesus Christ and the spiritual fulfillment that only he provides? Finally, reflection on your specialization as it relates to these questions. This assignment is designed to help students address learning goal #1 under "knowing and #2 under "doing."

Church in Culture – Those taking this course as partial fulfillment for your specialization in the Church in culture should offer at some point in the paper a 1-2 page reflection (included as part of the page count) on how contemporary North American culture can be utilized to support and enhance Christian spirituality.

Pastoral Studies - Those taking this course as partial fulfillment for your specialization in the Pastoral Studies should offer at some point in the paper a 1-2 page description (included as part of the page count) on how you would cast a vision for people in your congregation to pursue a deeper spirituality by engaging with some of the practices and/or historical figures we have studied in the course.

*****If you are not taking this course as a specialization you are free to write the paper without attention to these specialization requirements.***

The paper is due Apr. 7, 2026 and should be approximately 12-13 pages in length (double spaced) it will constitute 40% of the course grade.

Course Outline and Expectations

Section One: Human Spirituality, Christian Spirituality and Spirituality in Biblical Perspective

Jan. 6 – Course introduction.

The weeks of Jan. 6 & 13. We will consider the concept of “spirituality” and the distinctiveness of Christian spirituality. Also, we will consider how spirituality is presented in the Old and New Testaments.

****The key course text for this early part of the course is *Water from Deep Wells*.**

Section Two: The Beginning of Christian Spirituality

- The Weeks of Jan. 20, 27 & Feb. 3, we will explore early Christian spirituality including the development of Christian community, martyrdom, asceticism, monasticism and mysticism.

****Continue reading the text *Water from Deep Wells*. The course text *Sacred Rhythms* is also helpful to be engaged with at this point.**

Section Three: The Ongoing Development of Christian Spirituality

- The weeks of Feb. 10, 24 & Mar. 3 we will explore the ways that the division of the church between East and West (the great schism of 1054) brought about new expressions and emphases in Christian spirituality.

****Continue reading the text *Sacred Rhythms* and also begin reading the course text *Beginning to Pray* during this section of the course.**

**** Note: There is no class meeting on Feb. 17 (Reading Week)**

Section Four: The Reformation, Protestantism, the Missionary Movement and Christian Spirituality

The weeks of Mar. 10 & Mar. 17 we will explore the impact of the Reformation on Christian spirituality as well as the distinctiveness of Protestant spirituality. Also, the unique contribution of the missionary movement in the late 19th and early 20th century.

Begin reading the textbook *Evangelical, Sacramental, and Pentecostal: Why the Church Should be all Three*.

Section Five: Christian Spirituality in a Post-Christian Age

The week of Mar. 24 we will engage in Student presentations on their new spiritual discipline.

The Week of Mar. 31 and Apr. 7 we will explore the role of Christian spirituality in a Post-Christian societies and how Christians can participate missionally in the conversation around contemporary spirituality.

Additional notes:

Academic Honesty

Academic dishonesty is not qualitatively different from other types of dishonesty. It consists of misrepresenting the ownership of written work by deception or by other fraudulent means. In an academic setting this may include any number of forms such as: copying or using unauthorized aids in tests, examinations; plagiarism, i.e., submitting work that is not one's own (regardless of the means of its production) but passing it off as if it is; submitting work for credit in a course for which credit is being or has already been given, unless the previously submitted work was presented as such to the instructor of the second course and has been deemed acceptable for credit by the instructor of that course; aiding and abetting another student's dishonesty; giving false information for the purposes of gaining admission or credit; giving false information for the purposes of obtaining deferred examinations or extension of deadlines; forging or falsifying McMaster University or McMaster Divinity College documents.

A special note about AI: You are expected to do your own thinking and to write your own papers, etc., and not to have AI do this work for you. There may be value in using an AI tool to help you locate and collate resources or to help you "tidy up" your English grammar, usage, and mechanics, especially if English is not your native language. However, using AI to create content for you and then submitting that content as if you created it is considered plagiarism (i.e., submitting work that is not one's own as if it is one's own) and is a violation of the academic honesty policy.

AODA

In accordance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), the content of this course is intended to be accessible to all students who are enrolled in the course, including those with disabilities. If a student requires accommodation to participate fully in this course, that student is to contact SAS at McMaster University, who will then work directly with the McMaster Divinity College Registrar to negotiate reasonably appropriate accommodation for the student. The MDC Registrar will communicate with faculty regarding necessary accommodations. Please note that an accommodation is not retroactive and must be requested in advance to allow sufficient time for implementation.

Gender Inclusive Language

McMaster Divinity College uses inclusive language for human beings in worship services, student written materials, and all its publications. It is expected that inclusive language will be used in chapel services and all MDC assignments. In reference to biblical texts, the integrity of the original expressions and the names of God should be respected, but you will need to use gender-inclusive language for humans, and you will need to quote from a gender-inclusive version such as, for example, the following: NRSVue (2022), TEV/GNB/GNT (1976), CEV (1995), NLT (1996), NIV (2011), and the CEB (2011).

Bookstore

All required textbooks for this class are available from the Hurlburt Family Bookstore located beside the entrance to the Nathaniel H. Parker Memorial Chapel of McMaster Divinity College. To purchase in advance, you may contact the bookstore manager, Bernice Quek, by phone at 416.620.2934 or 416.668.3434 (mobile); or by email at books@readon.ca. The Hurlburt Family Bookstore also carries other books and merchandise and is open throughout the academic year during posted hours.

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, <https://mcmasterdivinity.ca/resources-forms/mdc-style-guide/>. Failure to observe appropriate form will result in grade reductions.

Absence Due to Illness

If you must miss class due to an illness, you must contact me (via email) as soon as possible to let me know. Likewise, if I should become ill, I will communicate with you via A2L about how we will make up class sessions.

Although much of the course content will be made available via A2L, it would still be a good idea to have a friend take notes for you, if possible.

Inclement Weather

If on a class meeting day MDC closes due to inclement weather, I reserve the right to move the lessons and, where possible, class activities for the week to A2L (asynchronous format). This will help to ensure that we stay on target in the course.

Appendix : Classical Spiritual Disciplines

Disciplines of Abstinence

Solitude
Silence
Fasting
Frugality
Sacrifice
Sabbath

Disciplines of Engagement

Study
Worship
Service
Celebration
Prayer
Fellowship
Confession
Giving
lectio divina
centering/breath prayer
Ignatian examen

Resources

Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988. (Especially chapter 9)

Ruth Haley-Barton, *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging our lives for spiritual transformation*. Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2006.

**A Google search of any of these will provide you with definitions, descriptions and suggested practices.