Christian Spiritual Formation:
Reshaped into the Image of the Son
MIN 5350s
Spring 2015

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Course Methodology:
This course provides an applied introduction to the field and practice of Christian spirituality. As such we will utilize two complementary approaches:

1. Formal lectures, textbook readings, and seminar presentations are designed to provide the conceptual underpinnings of the Christian spiritual tradition.
2. Covenant group participation and personal disciplines will familiarize the student with the practice of prayer, spiritual reading, confession and communal accountability, thus fostering a greater communal integration of personality.

Lecture Content:
The lectures will begin with the basics of defining terms such as spirit, spirituality, and spiritual formation. We will proceed to offer a theological paradigm for Christian spiritual maturation and then theorize the three key elements of lasting personal transformation (ideas, everyday practices, and communal integration of personality). The remainder of the course will focus on providing spiritual guidance for each of the three elements in turn.

First, we will focus on the transformation of key ideas, with an eye toward both their conceptual content and the personal process of inhabiting new beliefs. This dimension of the Christian’s maturation involves ‘the demolition of fortresses, destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ’ (2 Cor. 10:4-5).

Second, we will introduce a range of specific spiritual disciplines, elucidating their functions and effects. At this point in the course we will examine the spiritual practices historically utilized in the Christian traditions for the purpose of solidifying Christ-like character.

Finally, we will examine the role of communal interactions – particularly those embedded in ecclesial practices – in the reshaping and stabilization of a person’s character. This segment will dovetail with the covenant group practices wherein communal integration of personal change can be initiated.

Learning Objectives:
• Students will acquire a familiarity and working understanding of the language, methods, and goals of Christian spiritual formation.
• Students will be capable of describing the key elements of lasting personal change and interpreting their theological significance.
• Students will acquire a theoretical grasp of the role of key spiritual exercises characteristic of historic Christianity while developing a personal, experiential appreciation of a few of these exercises.
• Students will develop a capacity for contemplative reading of scripture and classical spiritual texts.
• Students will interact with a broad range of seminal texts produced in the late 20th and early 21st century renaissance of evangelical interest in spiritual formation.

Required Reading: Our shared textbooks are below. Everyone taking the course for credit is required to read these books during the course of the lectures.

- The Bible (various translations available)

Recommended Reading:

Covenant Group Content: Beginning in the second week of the semester covenant groups (3-4 persons each) will meet weekly to engage in prayer and to discuss spiritual insights gained through lectures and readings.

- The groups are only asked to meet for 30-40 minutes at a time and an online option, via Skype or Google hangout, is an acceptable venue for covenant group interactions.
- Full participation in covenant groups is mandatory for successful completion of the course.

Reading Schedule for Covenant Group Discussions on the Week of:

- 2 February = Renovation of the Heart chapter 12
- 9 February = Renovation of the Heart chapter 1
- 16 February = Renovation of the Heart chapter 2
- 23 February = Renovation of the Heart chapter 3
- 2 March = Renovation of the Heart chapter 4
- 9 March = Renovation of the Heart chapter 5
23 March = *Renovation of the Heart* chapter 6
30 March = *Renovation of the Heart* chapter 7
6 April = *Renovation of the Heart* chapter 8
13 April = *Renovation of the Heart* chapter 9
20 April = *Renovation of the Heart* chapter 10
27 April = *Renovation of the Heart* chapter 11
4 May = *Renovation of the Heart* chapter 13

Written Project 1: Each student will prepare, compose, and present a seminar paper over one of the seminar readings.
- The student will also prepare questions to stimulate discussion and share leadership in guiding a class discussion over her or his assigned text.
- The student must provide enough copies of the seminar paper for each member of the class to have a copy.

Written Project 2: Each student will compose a **spiritual autobiography**. Thou shalt not exceed ten pages of typed (12 point) text.
- A spiritual autobiography is not simply one’s ‘testimony’. Please give an account of your early memories of interacting with God, turning points in your journey toward Christ and, from your conversion onward, your journey with Christ to the present day.
- May I point you to two examples of spiritual autobiography? Augustine of Hippo’s *Confessions* stands as the historical archetype in the West. A good contemporary model would be Lewis Smede, *My God and I*.
- Of course selectivity is essential to any historical writing. Prayerfully, meditatively decide what to tell and what to pass over for the sake of clarifying the specific shape of your life as a limb of Christ.

Means of Evaluation:
- Attendance and active participation in class and covenant group is mandatory. Excessive absences will result in a 10% reduction in the final grade.
- 33% Spiritual Autobiography (Due 18 November 2013)
- 34% Seminar Presentation (Due on the date of the reading assigned)
- 33% Final Exam

Tentative Lecture and Seminar Schematic:
- Orientation and Directions for Covenant Group Meetings
- Clarifying Key Terms: Spirit, Spirituality and Spiritual Formation
  - Personal Transformation: Towards Conceptual Clarity
  - The Christocentric Person: A Paradigm for Christian Spiritual Maturation
- Theorizing the Elements of the New Self: Three Aspects of Lasting Personal Change
  - Convictional Knowing: How the Ideas that Shape Us are Transformed
  - Spiritual Exercise: How the Practices that Shape Us are Transformed
o Communal Integration of New Character: How the Relationships that Shape Us are Transformed
• 9 February: Seminar Presentations on Chandler, ch. 2-7.
• A Quiet Power: The Holy Spirit’s Role in Integrating us with Christ’s Body
• Spiritual Autobiography: Re-Storying the Christocentric Self
• Transforming our Ideas: Taking Every Thought Captive
  o Christocentric Life and the Five Basic Questions
  o Obediential Knowledge: How to Grow Towards Convictional Knowledge by Co-Working with Jesus
  o Developing the Mind of Christ within the Body of Christ: How Love Integrates Mind and Spirit
• 9 March: Seminar Presentations on Chandler, ch. 8-11.
• Transforming our Daily Practices: An Introduction to the Spiritual Disciplines
  o Living beyond Reputation: Secrecy in Good, Simplicity in Speech and Confession
  o Getting Comfortable with God: An Invitation to Solitude and Silence
  o Writing on the Heart: Disciplines of Memorizing and Meditating upon Scripture
  o Practicing the Presence: Living through One Day with Jesus
• 6 April: Seminar Presentations on Webb.
• Transforming our Relationships: Strengthening the Limbs Connection to the Body
  o Anchored in Reality: Entering into the Practice of Communal Worship
  o Receiving and Giving: Inhabiting an Expanding Circle of Grace
  o ‘Strong’ and ‘Weak’ Personalities: Total Commitment to Christ when We Differ on the Details
  o Competing at Showing Honor: God’s Antidote to the ‘Who’s Better?’ Game