



# Course Syllabus Wycliffe College Sto School of Theology

CONTEMPLATING GOD

Winter Term 2019

This syllabus is subject to change according to the needs of the class and circumstances that might arise.

## ***Course Identification***

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Course Number: WYP2215  
Course Name: Contemplating God: Classics of the Christian Contemplative Tradition  
Location: Wycliffe College  
Time and Dates: Saturdays 9:30 am – 4:30 pm  
Jan 12, Feb 2, March 2, March 16, March 30

## ***Instructor Information***

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Instructor: Rev. Dr. Sister Constance Joanna Gefvert  
E-mail: [cj@ssjd.ca](mailto:cj@ssjd.ca)  
Office Hours: Before and after class

## ***Course Prerequisites or Requisites***

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None.

## ***Course Description***

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Recent decades have seen a renewal of interest in the Christian contemplative tradition, and thousands of writers – good, bad, and mediocre – are writing books on how to pray, anthologies with tidbits on the great writers, and blogs and tweets on writers from St. Benedict to Henri Nouwen. Since the 1960s there have also been an increasing number of people in North American society who claim to be “spiritual but not religious,” and who have no idea that Christianity has as rich a contemplative tradition as any of the eastern religions.

This course will give students the opportunity to delve more deeply into the writers and traditions that have formed our Christian contemplative tradition, and consider how those writers may deepen their own discipleship as well as provide a depth of understanding that may help to renew our church.

We will begin by looking at the contemplative Jesus as shown in the gospels, the influence of Paul on early Christian devotion, and the desert fathers and mothers who sought a spiritual life free of the consumerism and politics of the 4<sup>th</sup> century. We will proceed through the monastic and mystical traditions of the western and eastern church, the Reformation and following, and consider a few contemporary writers of the 20 and 21st centuries.

The course will include reading selected primary texts, as well as in-depth reading on two writers of the student’s choice, and a class presentation on those writers.

## ***Course Methodology***

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Lectures, video presentations, small group and class discussion, and student-led presentations on selected writers.

## Course Outcomes

COURSE OUTCOMES	COURSE ELEMENT	PROGRAM OUTCOMES
<b>By the end of this course, students:</b>	<b>Achieved through these course elements:</b>	<b>Corresponding Wycliffe statements of outcomes (MTS, MDiv):</b>
§ Understand the origins and development of the Christian contemplative tradition	Historical overview; class readings	<b>MTS: 1.4</b> <b>MDiv: 1.4</b>
§ Understand contemplation as an attitude toward Christian discipleship and service, not only a form of private prayer	Analysis of individual writers; instructor lectures; student presentations and research	<b>MTS: 1.5</b> <b>MDiv: 1.5</b>
§ Understand mysticism as an experience of union with God which may result from contemplative practice or a contemplative attitude toward life	Reading of a variety of writers with different perspectives on mysticism in the Christian tradition; student research; instructor lectures	<b>MTS: 1.5</b> <b>MDiv: 1.5</b>
§ Be able to incorporate Christian contemplative teaching into discipleship and formation programs in their ministry	Sharing of student ministry experiences; final paper which will require concrete application of the course learnings to specific ministry situations	<b>MTS: 1.6</b> <b>MDiv: 1.6</b>
§ Enjoy reading some writers enough that they will want to pursue their reading as a form of personal spiritual growth	Experience of reading class assignments, research, other students' presentations	<b>MTS: 2.1</b> <b>MDiv: 2.1</b>
§ Write clear and effective prose and present a clear and engaging powerpoint presentation for class	Research paper and class presentation	<b>MTS: 2.2, 2.3</b> <b>MDiv: 2.2</b>

## Course Resources

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### Course Website

- This course uses Quercus for its course website. To access it, go to the UofT Quercus login page at <https://q.utoronto.ca/> and login using your UTORid and password. Once you have logged in to Quercus using your UTORid and password, look for the **My Courses** module, where you'll find the link to the website for all your Quercus-based courses. (Your course registration with ACORN gives you access to the course website in Quercus.) Information for students about using Quercus can be found at: <https://community.canvaslms.com/docs/DOC-10701>. Students who have trouble accessing Quercus should ask the assistant registrar for further help. [jhocking@wycliffe.utoronto.ca](mailto:jhocking@wycliffe.utoronto.ca)

## Required Course Texts (available at U of T bookstore)

### TO BE READ BEFORE THE START OF CLASSES:

*Rule of St. Benedict in English* SHORT EDITION (Liturgical Press, 1981)

### SEE DATES IN CALENDAR BELOW FOR BRIEF READINGS IN THESE TEXTS:

Louis Dupres and James Wiseman, *Light from Light*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Paulist, 2001) – an anthology of contemplative writers.

Mark Aquilina and Christopher Bailey, *Mothers of the Church* (Our Sunday Visitor, 2012)

Additional excerpts or articles will be distributed in class by the instructor or students in preparation for the following day's presentation. **Choice of Additional Readings (students need to access these on their own)**

### BEFORE THE START OF CLASSES:

In consultation with the instructor, students will choose **two** of the following primary sources as a focus for their reading – one ancient or “classic” (from Group One) and one modern or contemporary (From Group Two). (The bold-faced titles below are also represented in Dupres and Wiseman’s anthology, *Light from Light*).

The books chosen will be presented roughly in chronological order, beginning with the second class. A more specific schedule will be set at the first class when it is clear which books have been chosen by the students.

The older works will have many different modern editions. Please check with the instructor if you’re not sure which one to use.

If there is only an author listed and not a specific text, please consult with the instructor about the specific texts to use.

### THE FOLLOWING WILL BE COVERED ON DAY ONE BY THE INSTRUCTOR:

Texts from Jesus, John and Paul

The Alexandrians: Clement, **Origen** (late 2<sup>nd</sup> & early 3<sup>rd</sup> century)

The Cappadocians: Basil, **Gregory of Nyssa**, Gregory of Nazianzan (4<sup>th</sup> century)

*The Sayings* of the Desert Fathers and Mothers (4<sup>th</sup> century)

Pachomius, Antony, Athanasius, Basil, Evagrius (4<sup>th</sup> century)

John Cassian, *The Conferences* ( early 5th century)

**Augustine of Hippo, *The Confessions* (early 5th century)**

Benedict of Nursia, *The Rule* (6<sup>th</sup> century)

### GROUP ONE CHOICES:

Hildegard of Bingen, from *Scivias* and *The Book of Divine Works* (12<sup>th</sup> century)

**Bernard of Clairvaux (12<sup>th</sup> century)**

**Meister Eckhart (13<sup>th</sup> century)**  
**Francis of Assisi, *Early Documents* (early 13<sup>th</sup> century)**  
**Catherine of Siena (14<sup>th</sup> century)**  
***The Cloud of Unknowing* (late 14<sup>th</sup> century)**  
**Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love* (late 14<sup>th</sup> century)**  
 Martin Luther, *Letters of Spiritual Counsel* (16<sup>th</sup> century)  
 John Calvin, *On the Christian Life and Of Prayer* (16<sup>th</sup> century)  
**Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises* (16<sup>th</sup> century)**  
**Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle* (16<sup>th</sup> century)**  
**John of the Cross, *The Dark Night of the Soul* (16<sup>th</sup> century)**  
 Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection, *The Practice of the Presence of God*.  
 George Herbert, John Donne, and Thomas Traherne, poetry (17<sup>th</sup> century)  
 John Wesley, *Journal* (18<sup>th</sup> century)  
**Jonathan Edwards (18<sup>th</sup> century)**  
*The Philokalia* (1782)

**GROUP TWO CHOICES (BOOKS WRITTEN IN OR WITH SPECIAL INFLUENCE IN 20<sup>TH</sup> TO 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURIES:**

*The Way of a Pilgrim* (1881)  
 Gerard Manley Hopkins (late 19<sup>th</sup> century), *Hopkins: The Mystical Poets*  
***Thérèse of Lisieux, The Story of a Soul* (1898); many editions available**  
 Edith Stein, *Essential Writings* (early 20<sup>th</sup> century)  
 William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1907)  
 Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu* (1928); many editions available  
**Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism* (1930)**  
 Dorothy Day, *The Duty of Delight* (diaries from 1930-1980; published 2011)  
 ETTY HILLESUM, *An Interrupted Life* (1943)  
 Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace* (1947) or *Waiting for God* (1951)  
**Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (1961) and other books**  
 John Main, *Word into Silence* (1970s; newly published 2006))  
 Thomas Keating, *Open Mind, Open Heart* (1986)  
 Cynthia Bourgeault, *The Wisdom Jesus* (2011)  
 Henri Nouwen, *Return of the Prodigal Son* (1992) and other books  
 Richard Foster, *Prayer* (2002) and other books  
 Richard Rohr, *The Naked Now: Learning to See as the Mystics See* (2009)  
 Ronald Rohlheiser, *The Holy Longing* (2014)  
 T. S. Eliot, *The Four Quartets* (1943) and other poems – many editions available  
 W. H. Auden, *For the Time Being* (1944) and other poems – many editions available  
 R.S. Thomas (1913-2000), *Collected Poems and/or Selected Poems* (Phoenix, 2003)

## ***CLASS SCHEDULE***

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The instructor reserves the right to change the discussion topics and schedule in response to the evolving needs and interest of the class.

January 12	Reading:	<i>The Rule of St. Benedict</i>
	Topics:	The Contemplative Jesus, John, and Paul Alexandrians (Clement and Origen) Cappadocians (Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus, Macrina) The Desert Tradition Early Monastics (incl. Pachomius, Antony, Athanasius, Basil, Evagrius) Augustine, Cassian, and Benedict
February 2	Reading:	<i>Light from Light</i> , Introduction and Chapters 1-3 <i>Mothers of the Church</i> Photocopied pages handed out June 26 for student presentations
	Topics:	Middle Ages
February 16	Paper One due (by email)	
March 2	Reading:	<i>Light from Light</i> , Chapters 5-8, 11-13 Photocopied pages handed out June 27 for student presentations
	Topics:	Renaissance, Reformation, Counter-Reformation
March 16	Paper Two due (by email)	
March 16	Reading:	<i>Light from Light</i> , Chapters 14-16 Photocopied pages handed out June 28 for student presentations
	Topics:	Modern
March 30	Reading:	<i>Light from Light</i> , Chapters 20-21 Photocopied pages handed out June 29 for student presentations
	Topics:	Contemporary
April 13	Final Paper due	

## ***Evaluation***

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### **Requirements**

- Two class presentations on the student's chosen writers (10% each)
- Two brief theological reflection papers on each of the writers you present, due after the course is over (10% each)
- Building on one or both of the writers chosen, a research paper that explores the influence of the chosen writer or tradition and its potential for influencing the renewal of the contemporary church (50%)
- Brief written responses in class to questions about the day's readings (5%)
- Class participation (5%)

## **Class Presentations**

**GOALS:** to provide an overview of a particular writer or group of writers; to explore the writer's contribution to the contemplative tradition; to nurture the contemplative prayer and action of members of the class; and to entice other class members to want to read more.

### **GUIDELINES:**

- Include background to situate your author/book/tradition in its historical context (in terms of the culture, development of the church, and spirituality)
- Give a brief summary of the work or writings
- Include some sample passages for reflection for the class if your writer is not represented in one of the textbooks
- Allow time for class questions and discussion
- Include personal reflection – what does this author/tradition have to with your real life?
- Include bibliography (your sources as well as additional reading)
- Use visuals/audio if you like (not required, but Power Point can be helpful)
- Some handouts will be necessary if you don't use a slide show

Aim for **30 minutes** including class participation

Those who use slide shows: Please give me a print-out and bring a memory stick so I can transfer the file and post on Blackboard.

## **Theological Reflection Papers (2 pages long)**

**GOALS:** to reflect theologically on the writers you are presenting in class, in the context of their time and culture and your own.

### **QUESTIONS TO GUIDE YOUR REFLECTION:**

- What do the writers say to you? to your culture?
- How does your own experience help you find meaning in their writing?
- Are they relevant to your experience and to the culture in which you live? How?
- How are they relevant to the Christian church of the twenty-first century?
- What is an image or metaphor that might illuminate your experience?

For more guidance, see handout on Theological Reflection Papers which will be distributed in class and posted on Blackboard.

## **Final Research Paper (10-15 pages long excluding footnotes and bibliography)**

**GOALS:** to explore the influence of your writer(s) on the Christian contemplative tradition; to consider the potential of that writer or tradition for influencing the renewal of the contemporary church; to enhance your own understanding of the contemplative tradition and help to ground your own contemplative practice

### **GUIDELINES:**

- Start with material from one of your class presentations
- Include other material from that writer or tradition, sources that have influenced your writer, and people and events your writer has influenced.
- Be sure to have a thesis (what is the main point you want to prove?), a clear development of that thesis, and a conclusion that ties it all together for you and the reader.
- Use a standard research paper format, with end-notes and a bibliography.

## Requirements for All Papers

- should be double-spaced with 1" margins
- should use font Arial 11, Times New Roman 12, or Calibri 12 (or their equivalents)
- In all matters of documentation, should follow the most recent edition of Kate Turabian, *A Guide for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* (available at Crux bookstore);
- should have a cover page with title of the paper centered and in the lower right corner, student's name and college, course name and number, and date submitted
- pages should be numbered, with page one beginning with the text, not the title page
- should be stylistically appropriate for post-baccalaureate writing and free of errors in grammar and spelling
- should be submitted to the instructor as an e-mail attachment

## Course Website(s) Blackboard <https://weblogin.utoronto.ca/>

During the week of classes the instructor will use Blackboard for posting slide shows and other written materials (from the instructor and students alike), and for announcements. After the class week is over, students may want to use the Discussion Board to continue the class conversations while they are writing papers.

To access Blackboard, go to the U of T portal login page at <http://portal.utoronto.ca> and login using your UTORid and password. Once you have logged in, follow the link to the website for this course. Note also the information at <http://www.portalinfo.utoronto.ca/content/information-students>. Students who have trouble accessing Blackboard should ask Thomas Power for further help.

## Grading System

Letter Grade	Numerical Equivalents	Grade Point	Grasp of Subject Matter
A+	90–100%	4.0	Profound & Creative
A	85–89%	4.0	Outstanding
A-	80–84%	3.7	Excellent
B+	77–79%	3.3	Very Good
B	73–76%	3.0	Good
B-	70–72%	2.7	Satisfactory
FZ	0–69%	0	Failure

Grades without numerical equivalent:

CR	Designates credit; has no numerical equivalent or grade point value
NCR	Designates failure; has no numerical equivalent, but has a grade point value of 0 and is included in the GPA calculation
SDF	Standing deferred (a temporary extension)
INC	Permanent incomplete; has no numerical equivalent or grade point value
WDR	Withdrawal without academic penalty
AEG	May be given to a final year student who, because of illness, has completed at least 60% of the course, but not the whole course, and who would not otherwise be able to convocate; has no numerical equivalent and no grade point value

### ***Policy on Assignment Extensions***

Basic Degree students are expected to complete all course work by the end of the term in which they are registered. Under **exceptional circumstances**, with the written permission of the instructor, students may request an extension (SDF = “standing deferred”) beyond the term. An extension, when offered, will have a mutually agreed upon deadline that does not extend beyond the conclusion of the following term. An SDF must be requested no later than the last day of classes of the term in which the course is taken. The request form is available on the college website or from the Registrar’s office.

**One percentage point per day will be deducted on the course grade if an extension has not been requested by the stated deadline.**

**Course grades.** Consistently with the policy of the University of Toronto, course grades submitted by an instructor are reviewed by a committee of the instructor’s college before being posted. Course grades may be adjusted where they do not comply with the College or University grading policy (<http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/Assets/Governing+Council+Digital+Assets/Policies/PDF/grading.pdf>) or college grading policy.

### ***Policies***

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**Accessibility.** Students with a disability or health consideration are entitled to accommodation. Students must register at the University of Toronto’s Accessibility Services offices; information is available at <http://www.accessibility.utoronto.ca/>. The sooner a student seeks accommodation, the quicker we can assist.

**Plagiarism.** Students submitting written material in courses are expected to provide full documentation for sources of both words and ideas in footnotes or endnotes. Direct quotations should be placed within quotation marks. (If small changes are made in the quotation, they should be indicated by appropriate punctuation such as brackets and ellipses, but the quotation still counts as a direct quotation.) Failure to document borrowed material constitutes plagiarism, which is a serious breach of academic, professional, and Christian ethics. An instructor who discovers evidence of student plagiarism is not permitted to deal with the situation individually but is required to report it to his or her head of college or delegate according to the TST *Basic Degree Handbook*: <http://www.tst.edu/academic/resources-forms/handbooks> and the University of Toronto *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters*: <http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies/behaveac.htm>, a student who plagiarizes in this course. Students will be assumed to have read the document “Avoidance of plagiarism in theological writing” published by the Graham Library of Trinity and Wycliffe Colleges: [http://www.trinity.utoronto.ca/Library\\_Archives/Theological\\_Resources/Tools/Guides/plag.htm](http://www.trinity.utoronto.ca/Library_Archives/Theological_Resources/Tools/Guides/plag.htm).

**Turnitin.com.** Students may be required to submit their course essays to Turnitin.com for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University’s use of the Turnitin.com service are described on the Turnitin.com web site.

**Other academic offences.** TST students come under the jurisdiction of the University of Toronto Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters (<http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies/behaveac.htm>).