

TH/SP515: Soil, Roots, and Pathways: The Radical Ethos of Eastern Orthodoxy
Syllabus. Lectures & Conversation Themes

Vancouver School of Theology

July 11 – 15, 2022 2pm – 5pm (*available in person or via Zoom*)

Instructor Information

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Title

Soil, Roots, and Pathways: The Radical Ethos of Eastern Christian Tradition
The Joy of Spiritual Freedom

Course Description

This course offering begins our exploration of the soil, roots, and pathways of the Eastern Orthodox understanding of the spiritual life. We begin with the ethos of the Orthodox tradition, its particular way of understanding the human condition, its theological particularity, and the spiritual disciplines intended to lead to a life of holiness. The intimate relationship between spiritual discipline, Gospel narrative, and Holy Tradition (including doctrinal genius) is nimbly held together as befits Orthodox ways of learning. A careful reading of primary patristic texts and of contemporary literary sources along with ample opportunity for thinking together will be central to each session.

Course Resources

Required works: Please pre-read/watch before course begins

-*The Island* [Ostrov], a Russian film directed by Pavel Lungin (2006):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wz-vegualMg>

-*Light Through Darkness, An Orthodox Tradition*, John Chryssavgis (2004)

-*The Holy Fire, The Story of the Fathers of the Eastern Church*, Robert Payne (1980)

Literary & Primary Texts for Class Consideration:

[Selected portions will be posted on the Student Portal]

-Auden, W.H. *For the Time Being* (1942).

-Clement, Olivier. *The Roots of Christian Mysticism: Texts from the Patristic Era with Commentary* (2nd ed.; New City, 1993).

-Genesis 1-4 from *The Five Books of Moses*, translated by Everett Fox

-“The Brother’s Get Acquainted”, “Rebellion”, and “The Grand Inquisitor”, in *The Brothers Karamazov*, Fyodor Dostoevsky, (Alfred A. Knopf, 1990).

-Lossky, Vladimir. *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (SVS, 2002).

-“The Monk”, in *The Boundless Garden*, Alexandros Papadiamandis, (Denise Harvey, 2007).

-“The Great Letter” and “Homily 12”, *Pseudo-Macarius, The Fifty Spiritual Homilies and the Great Letter* (Paulist, 1992).

-*The Gospel of John*. Francis J. Moloney’s translation and commentary in the series *Sacra Pagina* (1998) is suggested.

Course Learning Objectives/Outcomes

Students successfully completing this course will be able to demonstrate the following learning outcomes:

(A) In Respect to General Academic Skills

- To work with primary and secondary sources and to gather, analyze, and prepare for reflections, written assignments and engage in class presentations and class discussion
- To write a preliminary paper on the tasks of the Orthodox Church in our time
- To prepare and deliver a recapitulation of a previous class including the readings that anchored the class
- To prepare a revision of the preliminary paper based on class learning
- To prepare a major paper developing a theme that was particularly compelling in the course using course learning, discussions with the professors, and additional research

(B) In Respect of the Understanding of the Content of Theological and Spiritual Discipline

- The spiritual and theological tradition of the Christian East is an ocean of meaning. Often theological ideas and positions have been highlighted and contrasted. Our approach will provide students with an understanding of how such ideas are rooted in spiritual practice: *lex orandi, lex credendi*. As Saint Athanasius said, “he [or she] who prays is a theologian. . . .”
- Students will gain an appreciation and understanding of how the theology of the spiritual life rooted in the deep soil of the Christian East informs the faithful’s engagement with the great human questions
- What is learned about the soil, roots, and pathways of Holy Tradition will provide students with a life-long interest in the faith and understanding of the Christian East and sharpen their sense of its evangelical vision

(C) In Respect of Personal and Spiritual Formation

- All study has the capacity to deepen a person’s spiritual life and theological understanding, and none so much as the study of the Eastern Christian tradition’s understanding of theology and the spiritual life
- We will bring the best thinking of the Christian East into conversation with contemporary theological and literary works
- This class will endeavor to meet each student on their current ground and help them mature both in their understanding of the Christian East’s understanding of the spiritual life and the gifts of contemporary literary works to animate the faithful’s life “for the sake of the world”
- The surest ground for the engagement with the life of the world is the deep soil of the tradition one holds dear

(D) In Respect of Ministerial and Public Leadership

- Many artists, theologians, and leaders within Christian communities have pointed to the deep pluralism of the modern world including Canada. To engage the life of God's world requires both knowledge and the capacity to be attentive to the various communities of faithfulness who are seeking to navigate and speak to our particular cultural context

- To be faithful to the Gospel in this moment in history we are invited to redouble our capacity for the ministry of healing across various ideological and religious boundaries including those within the Christian East

- Leadership in this context needs to learn the art of engaging difference with an eye toward healing enmity and turning enmity into empathy, moving away from glib universalisms to a profound regard for what stands behind the gifts of the Christian East's theology of the spiritual life and how it illuminates what is life-giving across boundaries without abandoning the centre of the Christian revelation

- Learning how to speak, teach, and minister out of the best of our spiritual tradition and doing so without fear or pride or other appetites and with confidence in the Holy Spirit deepens the best of human aspiration free of the diseases of ambition

Assignments: (Further details to be provided at the class)

Reading and class participation: All Students including auditors are expected to do all the required readings and participate in class discussions. 100% attendance is encouraged for all and required of Certificate and Degree students.

Certificate students: Certificate students are required to hand in 4-6 pages of writing that demonstrates the ability to thoughtfully engage the material and reading for the class and gives a personal reflection on the reading and material covered. **(Due no later than Aug 31)**

Basic degree students (Diploma; MA; MDiv): are required to do any required oral assignments during the course itself and submit any combination of written assignments totaling approximately 1800-2400 words/6-8 pages. **(Due no later than August 31)**

Course Schedule

Each day will begin with shared reading of one portion of *For the Time Being*, A Christmas Oratorio, W.H. Auden. Other primary and literary text will be available for class discussion.

—Session 1: The Problem of Sin and Death

- *Prayer of Saint Ephrem* [posted on Student Portal]
- Spiritual ancestors: Saints Athanasius (c.293-373; +2 May), Antony the Great (c.257-Jan. 7?, 357), Mary of Egypt (344-421; +5th Sunday of Lent)
- The Desert Christians on *hesychia*, stillness
- Mortality, Finitude, Dying and Death, Time and the Eternal
- The Garden and the Kingdom

Required Readings [posted on the Student Portal]

-Genesis 1-4 from *The Five Books of Moses*, translated by Everett Fox

-Clement, "Quest, Encounter and Decision," (in *The Roots of Christian Mysticism*)

- “The Death of Ivan Ilych”, (in *The Short Novels of Tolstoy*)

Recommended Readings

-Pelikan, *The Shape of Death: Life, Death, and Immortality in the Early Fathers*.

—**Session 2: The Temptations of the Mind**

- *Psalm 77*
- Spiritual ancestors: Saints Macrina (c.330-379; +19 July) & Basil the Great (329-379; +1 Jan)
- The Desert Christians on the manifestation of thoughts, *logismoi*
- Self-forgetfulness, Memory, Imagination, disobedience
- The Presence of the Kingdom, The Fulness of the Kingdom

Required Readings [posted on the Student Portal]

-Clement, “God, Hidden and Universal,” (in *The Roots of Christian Mysticism*)

-Pseudo-Macarius, “Homily 12” and “The Great Letter”

-Lossky, “The Divine Darkness” (in *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*)

Recommended Readings

-*The Life of Saint Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus*, Athanasius

-*O Death Where is Thy Sting*, Alexander Schmemmann

—**Session 3: Jesus Christ of the Gospels**

- *The Akathist Hymn to the Most Holy Theotokos* [posted on the Student Portal]
- Spiritual ancestors: Saint Gregory of Nyssa (c.335-c.394; +10 Jan)
- Son of Man, Second Adam, Model & Teacher, Anointed One
- Nativity, Paths of Galilee and Streets of Jerusalem, Gethsemane, Golgotha, Emmaus

Required Readings [posted on the Student Portal]

-*The Gospel of John*

-Clement, “The God-Man” (in *The Roots of Christian Mysticism*)

—**Session 4: “Who Do You Say that I am?”**

- *O Heavenly King* [posted on the Student Portal]
- Spiritual ancestors: Saint Gregory Nazianzen, “the Theologian” (c.330-c.389; +1 Jan)
- Christ’s Presence, Rescue, and Healing
- Being Called by Name, Restoration

Required Readings [posted on the Student Portal]

-Clement, “God: Unity and Difference” (in *The Roots of Christian Mysticism*)

-Lossky, “The Economy of the Son” (in *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*)

—Session 5: Incarnation: Fully God & Fully Human

- *The Lord's Prayer* [posted on the Student Portal]
- Spiritual ancestors: Saint John Chrysostom (347-407; +13 Nov)
- Responding to the Beautiful Call of the Good; Eschatological Icons
- Grace and Necessity: “Imagining” and the unfolding of Our Own Vocation

Required Readings [posted on the Student Portal]

- “The Brother’s Get Acquainted”, “Rebellion” and “The Grand Inquisitor”, Book Five in Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*
- Clement, “The Human Vocation” (in *The Roots of Christian Mysticism*)
- *The Island* [Ostrov], a Russian film directed by Pavel Lungin (2006)

Selected Bibliography:

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- The Life of Saint Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus*, Athanasius (1980).
- Bresson, Robert. *Bresson on Bresson: Interviews 1943-1983* (2013).
- Bolshakoff, Sergius and M. Basil Pennington. *In Search of True Wisdom: Visits to Eastern Spiritual Fathers* (1979).
- Bunge, Gabriel. *Dragon’s Wine and Angel’s Bread: the Teaching of Evagrius Ponticus on Anger and Meekness* (2009).
- _____. *Despondency: the Teaching of Evagrius Ponticus on Acedia* (2011).
- The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology* (2008).
- Chryssavgis, John. *Soul Mending: the Art of Spiritual Direction* (2002).
- _____. *Love, Sexuality and the Sacrament of Marriage* (2005).
- _____. *In the Heart of the Desert, The Spirituality of the Desert Fathers and Mothers* (2008).
- _____. *Three Perspectives on the Sacred, Healing Wisdom from the Desert, the Mountain, and the Cosmos* (2014).
- Clement, Olivier. *Three Prayers* (2000).
- _____. *On Human Being, A Spiritual Anthropology* (2000).
- Demacopoulos, George E. *Five Models of Spiritual Direction in the Early Church* (2007).
- Felch, Susan M. And Paul J. Contino. *Bakhtin and Religion: A Feeling for Faith* (2001).
- Forest, Jim. *Confession: Doorway to Forgiveness* (2002).
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- _____. *Truth and Method* (2nd rev. ed., 1999).
- Girard, Rene. *Resurrection from the Underground* (2012).
- Goa, David J. *A Regard for Creation: Collected Essays* (2008).
- _____. *In the Presence of Good Company: A Memoire with Andrew Bingham* (2019)
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- _____. *The Christian Responsibility to Muslims* (2015).
- _____. *Working in the Fields of Meaning: Cultural Communities, Museums, and the New Pluralism* (2013).
- Gombrowicz, Witold. *Diary* (2012).
- _____. *A Kind of Testament* (2007).

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- _____. *Prosaics and Other Provocations: Empathy, Open Time, and the Novel* (2013).
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- _____. *Twilight of the Idols* (in *The Portable Nietzsche*).
- _____. *Writings from the Late Notebooks* (Cambridge, 2003).
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- Russell, Norman. *Fellow Workers with God: Orthodox Thinking on Theosis* (2009).
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- _____. *O Death Where is Thy Sting* (2003).
- _____. *The Eucharist* (2003).
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- Writings from the Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart* (1979).
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