

**VARIETIES OF CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY; THEORY AND PRACTICE**  
**Toronto School of Theology Course EMP2205HF Tues.6-8 p.m. Chapel**

**ABSTRACT**

An academic and experiential exploration of five approaches to Christian spirituality: (1) interiorizing scripture and contemplating an icon with Henri Nouwen (2) exploring bodily-resonating spirituality with Don Evans (3) expressing Divine love in sound and covenant with the Wesleys, (4) continuing Jesus' incarnation of God in our own bodies with St. Francis and St. Clare (5) deepening participation in Divine love during holocaust with Etty Hillesum. Evaluation: a weekly discussion-opener in response to guide-questions on readings, participation in seminar discussion and in spiritual practices, final 1500-word essay.

**INSTRUCTOR: DON EVANS (416-924-3943) [donald.evans@utoronto.ca](mailto:donald.evans@utoronto.ca)**

Emeritus Professor of Philosophy, Victoria College, U of T.

Retired Minister, United Church of Canada

Degrees: B.A. (Toronto), B.D, (McGill), B.Phil. (Oxford), D.Phil. (Oxford), D. D. (Huntington).

Author of six books, including *Spirituality and Human Nature* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press: 1993) and *Struggle & Fulfillment* (Toronto: Collins: 1983).

**REQUIRED READINGS**

1. Henri Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming* (New York: Doubleday, 1992). **THREE** sessions.

2. Donald Evans, essays on his webpage ("Life after Death", "Jesus' Resurrection" and "Completing the Incarnation") reproduced and sold at cost to students. **ONE** session.  
 webpage: <http://individual.utoronto.ca/devans>

3. Frank Whaling, ed. *John and Charles Wesley: Selected Writings* (New York: Paulist, 1981). This book is in the series "The Classics of Western Spirituality". **TWO** sessions.

4. Sister Frances Teresa OSC, *Living the Incarnation: Praying with Francis and Clare of Assisi* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd 1993). This book is out of print and will be reproduced and sold at cost plus royalties to students. **THREE** sessions.

5. *An Interrupted Life: The Diaries of Etty Hillesum, 1941-1943*. Introduced by J.G.Gaarlandt, translated from the Dutch by Arno Pomerans, Pantheon Books, New York, 1983, Introduction and pages 1-196. This book is out of print and will be reproduced and sold at cost plus royalties to students. **TWO** sessions

## **GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE COURSE**

### **(1) Typical Format of each Class;**

**Seminar Discussion:** written and oral responses to guide-questions concerning common readings assigned for the particular class (about 80 minutes),

**Practicum:** experiential practice of a closely-related form of prayer, meditation or bible study (about 30 minutes).

**STUDENTS SHOULD REALIZE IN ADVANCE THAT ALTHOUGH SOME PRACTICUM PRACTICES ARE DISTINCTIVELY CHRISTIAN, SOME ARE UNIVERSAL AND A FEW HAVE NON-CHRISTIAN ORIGINS (E.G. THE HINDU CHANTING THROUGH THE CHAKRAS OR THE SHAMANIC “TREE” MEDITATION). IF THIS IS LIKELY TO CREATE A PROBLEM FOR YOU, THE COURSE IS PROBABLY NOT APPROPRIATE FOR YOU.**

### **(2) Selection of the Five Books**

The course does not purport to provide an overall survey of Christian spirituality. Some very significant Christian approaches have been omitted because they are already available on campus, e.g. spiritual discernment in the Ignatian tradition and biblical studies in the Reformed tradition. One criterion in selecting the books is that each book can be explored experientially through closely related spiritual practices that are feasible in the classroom and in private.

In so far as the course has a particular theological emphasis it is the Wesleyan and Franciscan invitation, in this human, embodied life, to partake of the divine nature, i.e. divine Love. Nevertheless alternative emphases are welcome, and each student is encouraged to discover which combination of approaches seems most appropriate to him or her.

The spiritual practices explored in the Practicum are diverse, for the instructor is convinced that there is no one practice that is the best for every person; indeed, what is best for each individual often varies as life-contexts change.

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

### **(1) Discussion –Openers ( 200-250 words – 50% of the final mark)**

Each discussion-opener is due at the class for which is had been assigned; no later submissions are accepted. Each discussion-opener is a mini-essay response to a guide-question.

A total of TEN discussion-openers are required, each worth 5% of the overall final mark for the course. If a student submits more than ten, the BEST 10 will be considered in calculating the final mark. If a student submits less than ten, this will greatly reduce the mark overall for the discussion-openers’ aspect of the course. For example, if you submit only eight essays, each graded as “80”, I multiply 80 by 8 but I divide by 10, and this makes only 64!

### **(2) Final Essay (1500 words - 15 % of the final mark)**

**(A) “Personal-reflection”** essay, outlining any changes in your own understanding of Christian spirituality in response to the course.

**(B) “ Topic-focused”** essay, exploring a particular book or issue in the course more extensively than in your mini-essays.

**Submit (A) OR (B).**

**(3) Seminar Discussion (20% of the final mark)**

This will be evaluated less on the quantity than on the quality of a student's contributions to discussion. The quality involves many elements: clarity, brevity, originality, insight into the text or the issues or silence in class reduces the overall mark for class discussion.

If in addition to having prepared a written mini-essay you speak from notes in response to another guide-question, this could improve your grade for class discussion. But speaking from notes is not required

**(4) Practicum Participation (15% of the final mark)**

Because of the difficulty in assigning a mark to someone's meditation or prayer, students will receive an automatic mark of 1% for each practicum session they attend (possible total of 12 classes).

**A Note Concerning Regular Attendance and Writing of Mini-Essays:**

If you suspect in advance that you cannot count on regular preparation and regular attendance you would be unwise to take this course. A last-minute flurry of activity at the end of term is unlikely to salvage your mark, as it might in some courses.

Nevertheless, if towards the end of term you find that you will not be able to submit the required TEN mini-essays and have missed more than a few classes, you can gamble on writing a high-mark final essay (Topic (B)) that is twice as long (3000 words) and having it count for 30% of the final overall course mark, reducing the weighting for the mini-essays to 40% and for the seminar discussion to 15%. If your longer final essay is first-class, this could raise your overall final mark by 4 to 5 marks; but it is better not to gamble on this possible option in advance.

A more prudent policy would be to write TWO mini-essays for at least one of the earlier sessions in the course as your "insurance" against emergencies that may arise later in the course (illness, crises in the pastorate, etc). **NOTE THAT YOU CAN SUBMIT MORE THAN ONE ESSAY AT ONLY TWO SEMINARS AT MOST**, though the option applies to all seminars.

**Some Information Concerning Discussion-Opener Mini-Essays:**

1. Notes do not count as a mini-essay. Your whole answer should be legible and ready to hand in at the end of class.
2. **GUIDE-QUESTION ANSWERS ARE NOT ACCEPTED AFTER THE CLASS**, even on the same day; if you are going to have to miss a class, you can send it in advance to the instructor by email.
3. Focus on the assigned guide-question. If you want to raise a different issue, do so orally in class discussion.
4. Assume that everyone has read the assigned text, so that you need only summarize or explain to the extent that this is necessary in making your point. Try to provide a clear and stimulating initial basis for class discussion rather than a

- comprehensive survey. Avoid long introductions; plunge right in instead. Answers do not have to “settle” an issue; they can be exploratory probes.
5. Supplementary reading is not required and is, indeed discouraged. Devote your time instead to REFLECTION in response to the assigned readings and to WRITING the answers to guide-questions. The course Bibliography is for possible follow-up AFTER the course.
  6. Do not discard your marked answers. Keep them to check the instructor’s tally later on.
  7. Although you should be as accurate and fair as possible in presenting the views of an author, at times (where interpretation is very difficult) you can resort to saying, “IF this is what s/he means, then I agree – or disagree – for the following reasons”.

## SOME BACKGROUND INFORMATION CONCERNING THE INSTRUCTOR

### (1) Brief Curriculum Vitae

Don Evans is Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at Victoria College, University of Toronto. He is also a retired minister in the United Church of Canada. Born in Fort William (now Thunder Bay) Ontario in 1927, he graduated in Philosophy and English from the University of Toronto in 1950.

He studied philosophy and philosophy of religion at Oxford University for five years and received two graduate degrees there (B.Phil. and D.Phil.).

He also studied theology at McGill University (B.D. 1955), was ordained as a minister in the United Church of Canada and served a congregation at Grand Forks, B.C. 1955-58. During the 1960s he was active in the national Committees on International Affairs (writing on South Africa) and on Christian Faith (helping to write the new United Church Creed).

Having taught in the McGill Faculty of Divinity 1960-64, he moved to the Department of Philosophy at University of Toronto where he taught until official retirement in 1993 (philosophy of religion, of mysticism, of human nature, of social issues, of existentialism, and of ethics). Since then he has been regularly teaching a first-year seminar course, “Human Nature in Great Literature” at Victoria College. More recently he has also been teaching courses on Christian Spirituality and Christian Spiritual Healing for Toronto School of Theology at Emmanuel College. (The course this fall is likely to be his last one at Emmanuel College, mainly because it is time for Don Evans to retire; he turns 80 soon!)

### (2) Writings and Workshops on Spirituality

Since 1958 he has presented over a hundred papers at various conferences and universities and he has published over fifty essays and six books, including *Peace, Power and Protest: Ethics and International Affairs* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1967), *Communist Faith and Christian Faith* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1964).

**Spirituality** became a central focus in most of his presentations and essays from about 1982 onwards. His studies through the 1980s culminated in *Spirituality and Human Nature* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1993).

**Workshops** on varieties of meditation also started to be frequent in the mid-1980s. He has led hundreds of introductory and advanced sessions in diverse settings, which have included Christian centres such as:

- \* Toronto School of Theology, Continuing Education (15 workshops)
- Five Oaks Retreat Centre and Cedar Glen Retreat Centre
- Ignatius College, Guelph (co-led with John Veltri, S.J.)
- Metropolitan Community Church, Toronto
- Huntington University, Sudbury (5 workshops)

**Spiritual healing** has become especially important for Don Evans in recent years. Recently he helped initiate and co-led a Sunday evening healing service at Aurora United Church. He has also offered a workshop on “Transformative Meditations for Spiritual Healers” six times: twice at TST Continuing Education; at a hospice in Devon, England; at Huntington College, Sudbury; for interested people in Stratford, Ontario; for the patients of a cancer psychotherapist and as a volunteer visitor for Spiritual Care at Bridgepoint Health Centre, Toronto. A more recent personal emphasis in spiritual healing has been exploring the contribution of sexual energies to the process.

### **(3) Personal Spiritual Path**

For over thirty years he has been involved continuously in intensive processes of personal change, exploring many varieties of meditation and prayer. While open to learning from non-Christian paths (Buddhist, Hindu, Sufi, Shamanic) his path is centrally Christian. Indeed, the core is a continuous openness to the bodily indwelling of the crucified and resurrected Christ. A special emphasis for 25 years has been participating in processes towards healing the rifts between men and women and between the masculine and feminine within all of us.

### **WHAT HAPPENS AT THE FIRST (INTRODUCTORY) SESSION**

No prior preparation is required.

- The instructor will explain the course and respond to questions concerning the course outline.
- The students will introduce themselves briefly or at length, in relation to their hopes and apprehensions concerning the course.
- \* The instructor will outline four kinds of spirituality.
- The instructor will introduce students to some varieties of concentrative contemplation, including “Christian mantra”.

### **WHAT HAPPENS BEFORE AND DURING EACH SUBSEQUENT SESSION**

In PREPARATION for the session, students read the assigned pages and write a discussion-opener to present at class; students also engage in the spiritual practice assigned for the week leading up to the session.

DURING the session (usually at the end) the instructor introduces a new spiritual practice, that is, a new "Practicum".

### **A NOTE CONCERNING PAGE REFERENCES IN THIS COURSE OUTLINE**

Each page is divided into four parts: a, b, c, d. So "43c" means "the third quarter of page 43", and "89b" means "the second quarter of page 89".

### **A SUGGESTION CONCERNING THE HILLESUM READINGS**

The Hillesum readings differs from others in that one needs to have read all of it for the first session on them. Hence it would be prudent to read some of her prior to that first week on her - perhaps during reading week.

### **SECOND SESSION (On Henri Nouwen's *The Return of the Prodigal Son*)**

#### **Preparation for Class Discussion, including Written Responses to Guide-Questions**

Read pages 1-23 and chapters 1, 2 and 3. Reflect concerning all the following questions. Prepare a written discussion-opener to submit at class in response to either #1 or #2 (Or, if you're keen, do this for both #1 and #2):

1. Read pages 11-23. Having read thus far, with which of the following characters in Rembrandt's painting do you identify yourself MOST and LEAST? Why?
  - (i) one of the four bystanders
  - (ii) the younger son
  - (iii) the elder son
  - (iv) the father.
  
2. Read chapters 1,2 and 3 concerning the younger son. Explain and discuss ONE of the following, in its context:
  - (i) "Leaving home is living as though I do not yet have a home and must look far and wide to find one...The addicted life can aptly be designated a life lived 'in a distant country'." (37d, 43b)
  - (ii) "When finally the friendship broke down completely I had to choose between destroying myself or trusting that the love I was looking for did, in fact, exist...back home! ...A voice, weak as it seemed, whispered that no human being would ever be able to give me the love I craved." (49d, 51a)
  - (iii) "There is repentance, but not a repentance in the light of the immense love of a forgiving God...One of the greatest challenge of the spiritual life is to receive God's forgiveness." (52d, 53a)

**Preparation for the Second Session Through Daily Practicum**

Practice your chosen form of concentrative meditation at least once a day.

**New Practicum during the Second Session**

The instructor will introduce the practice of contemplating an icon, making available a variety of spiritually-significant works of art, including reproductions of Rembrant's "Prodigal Son" and frescoes by Fra Angelica.

**THIRD SESSION (second of three on Nouwen)**

**Preparation for Class Discussion, including Written Responses to Guide-Questions**

Read Nouwen, chapters 4 through 9. Reflect concerning all the following questions. Prepare a written discussion-opener to submit at class in response to #1 or #2 (or both).

1. Read chapters 4, 5 and 6 and pages 103d-107a. Explain and discuss ONE of the following, in its context:
  - (i) "The lostness of the resentful 'saint' is so hard to reach precisely because it is so closely wedded to the desire to be good and virtuous." (71d)
  - (ii) "All of my inner complaints about not being accepted, liked and loved surged up in me, and I left the room, slamming the door behind me. I was completely incapacitated – unable to receive and participate in the joy that was there". (73d)
  - (iii) "Although we are incapable of liberating ourselves from frozen anger, we can allow ourselves to be found by God and healed by his love through the concrete and daily practice of trust and gratitude". (84a, my italics)
  - (iv) "God looks at his people as children of a family who are happy that those who have done only a little bit are as much loved as those who accomplish most... Do I believe that there is a real desire in God to simply be with me?" (104c, 107b)
  
2. Read chapters 7,8 and 9, focusing mainly on pages 107d-119b. Explain and discuss ONE of the following, in its context:
  - (i) "For a long time I considered low self-esteem to be some kind of virtue... But now I realize that the real sin is to deny God's love for me, to ignore my original goodness." (107d)
  - (ii) "The Father dresses his son with the signs of freedom, the freedom of the children of God. He does not want any of them to be hired servants or slaves. He wants them to wear the robe of honour, the ring of inheritance, and the footwear of prestige...As the returned child of God, living in the Father's house, God's joy is mine to claim...My Father has already dressed me with a cloak, ring and sandals" (111d-112a, 118d)
  - (iii) "When Jesus speaks about the world, he is very realistic. He speaks about wars and revolutions, earthquakes, plagues and famines,

persecution and imprisonment, betrayal, hatred and assassinations. There is no suggestion at all that these signs of the world's darkness will ever be absent. But still, God's joy can be ours in the midst of it all...People who have come to know the joy of God do not deny the darkness, but they choose not to live in it...Every choice for joy in turn reveals more joy." (116d, 117d, 118a). (But see also 128d-129b concerning grief.)

### **Preparation for the Third Session through Daily Practicum**

Concerning the Prodigal Son and/or the Transfiguration and/or another Gospel story: (i) meditate in preparation (ii) read aloud to yourself (iii) Identify yourself with each character in turn and be open to any disclosures concerning yourself. (Use an icon if this is available and seems appropriate to you.)

### **New Practicum during the Third Session**

The instructor will introduce Dr. John Rossiter-Thornton's "Prayer Wheel", which helps us to grow in attitudes that are spiritually positive such as gratitude, forgiveness, trust and love.

### **FOURTH SESSION (last of three on Nouwen)**

#### **Preparation for Class Discussion, including Written Responses to Guide-Questions:**

Read Ryan, pages 89-end. Reflect concerning all the following questions. Prepare a written discussion-opener to submit at class in response to either #1 or #2 (or , if you're keen, to both).

1. Read pages 89-end, focusing especially on pages 119-132. Explain and discuss ONE of the following, in its context:
  - (i) "As the returned child of God who is invited to resume my place in my Father's home, the challenge now, yes the call, is to become the Father myself... Do I want to be like the father? Do I want to be not just the one who is being forgiven, but also the one who forgives; not just the one who is being welcomed home, but also the one who welcomes home; not just the one who receives compassion, but the one who offers it as well? ... 'Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate.'" (119, 122c, 123a)
  - (ii) "Grief, forgiveness and generosity are, then, the three ways by which the image of the Father can grow in me. They are three aspects of the Father's call to be home ...As a self-rejecting person always in search of affirmation and affection, I find it impossible to love consistently without asking for something in return. But the discipline is precisely to give up wanting to accomplish this myself as a heroic feat (rather than receiving the 'unconditional, forgiving love that the Father offers me')." (132b, 133c)
2. Read pages 89-end, focusing especially on pages 92-102. Consider the instructor's reflections and then respond to one or both of the questions that he raises.



1. **Reflections:** First I note that Nouwen says, “What gives Rembrandt’s portrayal of the father such an irresistible power is that the most divine is captured in the most human ... The spiritual truth is completely enfleshed.” I agree that it is wondrously enfleshed but I question whether any image can be complete that is exclusively MALE. Rembrandt depicts the compassion of God as a man. In addition, the deep life-experiences that both Rembrandt and Nouwen bring to the painting are male. And, most controversially, I note that the story originated from and is exemplified by Jesus, a man. It seems obvious to me that there are distinctive ways in which God’s “feminine side” i.e. experienced and manifested BODILY through a woman in contrast with a man. For example, Rembrandt’s father-figure does not have a WOMB. Nouwen speaks of a welcome into the “womb of God (54d, 100d, cf. 4d) but in the story and the painting the welcome is from a father. Don’t women typically have more direct experiential access to such welcoming, in contrast with the modes of compassionate welcoming typically available for men? (In raising such issues I am not criticizing Nouwen for being sexist. Indeed, the male authority-figure whom he sees in the story and the painting is one whose authority is based, not on patriarchal power, but on compassion. Moreover, Nouwen discerns strongly feminine and motherly qualities in the father and thereby in Father-God. Obviously Nouwen himself manifests a compassionate authority and a sensitive feminine side.)
2. **Questions:**
  - (i) Can any man, even a man who has a sensitive feminine side, adequately manifest the feminine dimension of the Divine Mystery bodily? Does this not require, as well, a bodily manifestation by a woman? (A related, and also controversial, question is whether there are masculine dimensions that cannot be adequately manifested bodily by any woman.)
  - (ii) A related but also different question arises concerning our longing for an intimate at-homeness with God, loving and being loved and eventually sharing in divine compassion, as Nouwen sets forth. Is this longing partly shaped by differences in sexual orientation and by differences in personal history? Does what we long for in intimacy with another human being affect what we long for in God?

**Preparation for the Fourth Session through Daily Practicum:**

Use the “Prayer Wheel” daily.

**New Practicum During the Fourth Session:**

The instructor will introduce some of the experiential rudiments of “energy-work” in spiritual healing.

**FIFTH SESSION( Don Evans on Embodied Spirituality)**

**Preparation for Class Discussion, including Written Responses to Guide-Questions**

Read the following essays by Don Evans:

- (i) “Jesus’ Resurrection: Living Reality or Inspiring Symbol?”
- (ii) “Life After Death: Reflections on Experiences”

(iii) “Completing the Incarnation: Women, Gay Men and Non-Christians”.

Prepare a written discussion-opener to be read in class in response to Guide-Question #1 or #2 (or to both, if you’re keen).

**Guide-Question#1:** In response to essays (i) and (ii) discuss the strengths and weaknesses of Evans’ bodily-resonating, experiential approach

- (a) to the risen Jesus, and/or
- (b) to connections with deceased loved ones and/or
- (c) to everyday interactions with other people.

**Guide Question #2:** In response to essay (iii), set forth some of your reflections concerning the following question: Is it possible to maintain the uniqueness of God’s incarnation in Jesus while welcoming additional and distinctive possible incarnational contributions from diverse individuals and groups?

#### Preparation for the Fifth Session through Daily Practicum

Practice some of the rudiments of spiritual healing “energy-work” with someone who is willing to receive it.

#### New Practicum during the Fifth Session

The instructor will introduce a meditation in which we chant “OM” (the universal sound) through the seven “chakras” (energy-centres) in the body.

### SIXTH SESSION (first of two on *John and Charles Wesley*)

#### Preparation for Class Discussion, including Written Responses to Guide-Questions

First skim the Foreword and Introduction of the *Wesley* book to page 26. Then study pages 27 to 64 and 99-107. Reflect concerning all the following questions. Prepare a written discussion-opener to either #1(Assurance) or #2 (Christian Perfection in Love) or to both, if you’re keen.

#### 1. Assurance.

Study pages 99-107 and 27-64, especially 42cd and 44c-47c. Then consider these quotations: “About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given *me* that he had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death... Now I was always conqueror.”(107b,d) “The Wesleys recognized the centrality of justification by faith, which involved basically ‘pardon, the forgiveness of sins’. Their originality lay in linking justification with a more positive spiritual sensation that they described in terms of spiritual birth, or new birth. Faith was not merely a passive acceptance of what God has done for us in Christ, it was also a ‘spiritual sensation’.... Feeling was for them no mere emotional state, but analogous to the sense of *touch*. It was not a physical or human attribute but a spiritual attribute, comparable perhaps to our outward feelings yet an inward not an outward sensation. They were pointing to an inner, invisible realm that

cannot be seen but whose reality, when activated by faith, is more certain than so-called rational or empirical evidences”(44b-d) This inward assurance was not essential, but plainly it was desirable.... It was not an assurance about oneself, but an assurance about God conveyed by God. It was not a permanent state but an assurance about one’s present situation. As such, it was a joyful experience.” (46d, 47a)

The Wesley thus claimed that a spiritual sensation, analogous to touch, could bring an assurance, more certain than rational or empirical evidences, of the reality of God within oneself. What are YOUR reflections concerning such an alleged way of knowing, so directly experiential and analogous to touch?

## 2 Christian Perfection in Love

Study pages 43-60, focusing especially on 53d-54b (quoted below) and also 55bottom-56a, 56b-57b, 60cd. “It was the conscious conviction in a present experience, of the reality of one’s utter love for God and man in response to God’s own love. It was a luminous experiential self-awareness of the fact of perfect love in one’s own life...It did not imply perfection in knowledge or freedom from infirmities or freedom from temptation. Nor did it imply an inability to grow further in grace, nor an inability to fall from grace. It was not perfection in the Latin sense of ‘faultless’, nor was it an absolute state; it was part of a dynamic ongoing process that would end in glorification with Christ.”

What for YOU are the pros and cons of the Wesleys’ teaching concerning Christian perfection in Love?

## Preparation for the Sixth Session through Daily Practicum

Practice chanting through the chakras daily.

### New Practicum During the Sixth Session

The instructor will introduce the “Tree” meditation as a way of learning how to resonate bodily with fellow creatures and with the uncreated energies of God.

## SEVENTH SESSION (second of two on *John and Charles Wesley*)

### Preparation for Class Discussion, including Written Responses to Guide-Questions

Read everything requested below under #1 (Hymns) and #2 (Spirituality in Social Action) and reflect concerning these. Prepare a written discussion-opener in relation to either #1 or #2 or to both.

1. Hymns. Prepare by re-reading pages 27-53 and also 61-62. Skim Charles Wesley’s hymns (pages 175 to 295) and select several from 27-53 and 175-295 for careful study.

Consider 43c: “The theology and the spirituality went together, and the theology was meaningful not so much in itself but according as it contributed to the deepening of Christian experience and practice. Again, Charles Wesley’s hymns exemplify the progression within this spirituality.” Ponder 43c in relation to 27d, 30b-32b, 37d-39c, 53bc.

Discuss the hymn “Oh, the depth of love Divine”(259) in relation to the themes in 43c etc. Also select several others from pages 27-53 and/or pages 175-295 for discussion.

**2. Spirituality in Social Action.** Prepare by re-reading pages 56d-64d. Also read Donald Evans' "Spirituality and Social Action" in his *Spirituality and Human Nature*, pp 221-230 (State University of New York Press: Albany, N. Y., 1993; photocopies will be provided).

Consider: "His motto, 'go to those who need you most' took him into areas of need... His approach to them was not sociological (Durkheim would come a hundred years later) but one of involvement and concern for all aspects of their lives." (57d) "He was aware that social involvement must remain part of an integral spirituality and not become an end in itself." (58d) "The Wesleys had stressed social concern but within the context of a wider spirituality." (61a)

Questions: How do you prioritize, in your love for human beings, their spiritual and their non-spiritual needs? And how do you prioritize one-on-one personal helping (like the Good Samaritan) and social activist reduction of injustice within social structures? (As far as we know, the Good Samaritan did not also "lobby City Hall" for more lighting and police-patrols on the Jericho road!)

### Preparation for Seventh Session through Daily Practicum

Each day: (i) pray the Covenant-surrender (387b: "I am no longer mine, but yours")  
and/or  
(ii) practice the "Tree" meditation and/or  
(iii) pray (or preferably sing) a Wesley hymn

### New Practicum during the Tenth Session

The instructor will introduce a meditation on self-healing and self-loving.

### EIGHTH SESSION (first of three on *Living the Incarnation*)

#### Preparation for Class Discussion, including Written Responses to Guide-Questions

Read *Living the Incarnation* pages 1-31. Reflect concerning all the following quotations. Prepare a written discussion-opener to submit at class in response to ONE (or more) of the following three questions:

#### 1. Glory: God-given or self-given?

Explain and discuss (after noting also 19b, 20a, 20cd, 26d-27a): "We do not sufficiently reflect upon the true nature of our glory. We seek glory, but we want to give it to ourselves, and we do not realize how trivial our own glory is, when compared with that which God has already bestowed on us" (12c) "An assurance...granted that we *have been* restored to grace—grace is not conditional upon good behavior but rather it is grace that makes 'good behavior' possible, if I a gift already freely given, we are already reconciled to God" (16b).

#### 2. In the Wilderness

Explain and discuss the following passages (noting also 26c): "God, it seems, is not in the wilderness. This is because God *is* the wilderness and we are lost in it, an experience both wonderful and terrible... We forget that God is in whatever is, including ourselves. We must start, and can only start, from where we are... We are already in relationship with God simply by existing, but we are being invited to deepen this relationship... If we are doing all we are able, or all that, at present, we

see to do, then we must rest as peacefully as possible in things as they are. This may be all we *can* do but it is also all we *need* to do.” (25b, 25c, 25d, 26b)

### **3. Embracing the Leper**

Explain and discuss the following passage (noting also 8b, 28d, 29d, 30b, 30d): “The leper Francis kissed was indeed Christ. On another level, the leper was also Francis’ own self, his despised and neglected self, the putrefying and decaying aspects of his personality, the as-yet unredeemed areas.” (27d-28a)

### **Preparation for the Eighth Session through Daily Practicum**

Practice daily the meditation on self-healing and self-loving.

**New Practicum during the Eighth Session (beginning the evening with a transition from the Wesleys to the Franciscans):** sounding, singing “Love Divine” and then contemplating an icon of St. Francis.

## **NINTH SESSION (second of three on *Living the Incarnation*)**

### **Preparation for Class Discussion, including Written Responses to Guide-Question**

Read *Living the Incarnation*, pages 32-67. Reflect concerning all the following quotations. Prepare a written discussion-opener to submit at class in response to ONE (or more) of the following three questions:

#### **1. Clare’s Route to Living in God in the World**

Consider the following quotation (noting also 36ab and 107d) and compare or contrast your own route to God: “Clare understood this imitation of Christ to mean...becoming like Christ by doing what Christ did, that is, gazing into the depths of the Godhead. ‘ Place your mind in the mirror of eternity! Place your soul in the splendour of glory! Place your heart in the icon of the divine substance! Through contemplation b completely transformed into the image of the Godhead itself!’...By gazing into Christ we see God. In fact this gazing means being caught up into the life of the Godhead itself. From Christ, we learn how to live in God.” (35cd)

#### **2. Seeing in Christ both what is Possible for us and what is Lacking in us Now**

Explain and discuss the following quotation (noting also 39b, 41ab, 42b, 49d-50a, 51d-52a, 57d): “When we look into the mirror, we see both Christ and ourselves...We see what we are called to be and we see what we are... We see the face of one loved, redeemed and made beautiful by God as well as someone in whom this work is not yet completed...We tend to see ourselves only as we are now, but God never loses sight of what we are becoming.” (40c, 41c)

#### **3. Clare’s Honest Process of Mourning**

Consider the following quotation (noting also 6ld, 63b, 64d, 65d, 66a) and compare or contrast your own way of responding to bereavement or to intense disappointment: “She grappled with the sense of being at the mercy of destructive events by accepting the reality of those events rather than by denial of them... Destruction and creation, hostility and friendliness lie, she discovered, in our hearts as well as in external events, for the external

may wound us, but it can only destroy if it finds an ally within us... Nothing can damage the person who has come to total inner integrity, but because most of us have not yet come to this, we are wounded, sometimes severely, by the events that happen to us... At such a time, truth alone can be our prayer. Our most honest feelings, no matter how negative, are all we can truthfully bring to God.”(66c-67b)

### Preparing for the Ninth Session through Daily Practicum

Meditate on the story of Francis and the leper in a way similar to Nouwen’s meditations on scripture

AND/OR

Meditate on your own image in a mirror following the suggestions in guide-question #2 for the Ninth Session.

### New Practicum During the Ninth Session

The instructor will introduce a meditation of mutual spiritual appreciation in pairs, where each person is open to glimpsing the divine presence in the other. The instructor will also lead in an abbreviated version of the “Tree” meditation.

### TENTH SESSION (last of three on *Living the Incarnation*)

#### Preparation for Class Discussion, including Written Responses to Guide-Questions

Read *Living the Incarnation*, pages 68-130. Reflect concerning all the following quotations. Prepare a written discussion-opener in response to ONE (or more) of the following:

#### 1. Francis’ Kinship with all Fellow Creatures

Explain and discuss the significance of Franciscan spirituality for the contemporary ecological crisis, considering especially the following:

- (i) Francis’ “Canticle of Creation” (86d-89d and 129a-130c).
- (ii) “Francis not only loved creatures for God’s sake, but he learnt to love them as God loves them, tenderly and with delight.’ He discerned their hidden nature with his sensitive heart’, and so the timid knew they were safe with him.” (89c; cf.83d-84a)
- (iii) “His reading of Genesis never led Francis to see himself as lord and master of the animals and plants. He did not even consider himself God’s steward with regard to creation, because he did not consider he was ‘over’ anyone or anything, even in a delegated capacity. At all times, he was a brother.” (90b; cf. 83b, 90a)

#### 2“Every Christian is invited to be an incarnation of the incarnation.

Every Christian effects a physical presence of Christ in the world.” ( 101b)

Explain and discuss this teaching in relation to at least one of the following themes:

- (i) “Just as Christ was the Word made flesh, so we are invited to become the same: the love of the Godhead in bodily form, invited to continue speaking this

message of love and communication. Christ is the first-born, the eldest, but only the first of many. We are the many. Like Francis, we gradually become incarnations of the incarnation. This is our calling.” (98b) “The incarnation was not a divine contingency plan because things had gone wrong.” (55d)

- (ii) “As Christ shared our human nature, so may we be brought to share in his divine nature.” (58a) “Even though we are invited into a sharing of the divine, we are never summoned out of our original humanity...but God, instead, issues this call to become Christ with all our weaknesses, aware that those weaknesses and our struggles with them do not go away but remain to the end, no matter how Christ-like we might become.”(101c) The saints God likes and seeks are robust human beings in all our original quirks. To become holy is really to become our dearest selves... It is often our most endearing aspects which have led us into the most trouble, been our most wilful or sinful areas.” (110c)
- (iii) “Sin and suffering must have a place, because although the new creation is indeed new, it is also the fruit of the individual history of each one of us as well as of our collective history. The new creation grows out of the old and, like it or not, sin is woven inextricably into the fabric of our lives. Redemption can never be a simple restoration but a movement forward into something new... Holiness can now no longer mean the absence of sin but the presence of redemption.”(120c) “Redemption enters our hearts through our own sinfulness when we grapple with the evil in ourselves, that enemy within which colludes with external, objective evil. Redemption happens when we repay evil with good and choose the joy of salvation instead of the gloom of our sinfulness... Joy is a sharing in God’s life, not what we feel when nothing is going wrong.” (121b-c)
- (iv) “Only those who are still immersed in the material, physical world can sweep that world with them on their journey to God. Only those whose own material being has become infused with the spirituality of love, can lift creation to the fulfilment of its destiny as an unspotted mirror of the working of God. Creation’s own mysterious quest needs the service of our love as a kind of priesthood.” (115b)

#### **Preparatory Daily Practicum for the tenth session**

Use the “Tree Meditation” daily if possible, varying the version on occasion:

- (i) Opening the heart to receive what Spirit brings at this time.
- (ii) With the intention of connecting more clearly or deeply with fellow creatures (see guide-question #1 for the tenth session)
- (iii) With the intention of inviting the Incarnate Christ to pervade my embodied self.

#### **New Practicum at the Tenth Session**

Meditation of self-emptying towards mystical union with God and/or alignment with God’s will for us.

## Introduction to sessions eleven and twelve on Etty Hillesum

Ideally, this is a book to read over many weeks, pondering a single paragraph and then returning next day to another one. I expect that many students will eventually be moved to treat it in this way, as an unusually rich spiritual resource. Within the constraints of the course, however, I suggest that you try to read – or even skim – the **WHOLE** book, focusing especially on passages that “leap out” to challenge you at this time, especially in relation to the guide-questions. So please read my introduction to these questions, and the questions themselves, before you read the book.

Although the guide-questions invite you to focus positively on what you can learn from Etty, in class discussion you can, of course, feel free to express any reservations that you may have.

As part of this introduction, I include some stimulating quotations from her

(i) “I rejoice and exult time and again, oh God: I am grateful to You for having given me this life. A soul is forged out of fire and rock crystal. Something rigorous, hard in an Old Testament sense, but also as the gesture with which his tender fingertips sometimes stroked my eyelashes.” (“his” – her lover, Julius Spier) (195b)

(ii) “Alas, there doesn’t seem to be much You Yourself can do about our circumstances, about our lives. Neither do I hold You responsible. You cannot help us but we must help You and defend Your dwelling place inside us to the last.” (151bc) “I promise that I shall try to find a dwelling and a refuge for You in as many houses as possible. There are so many empty houses, and I shall prepare them all for You, the most honoured lodger.”(174b)

(iii) “I love people so terribly, because in every human being I love something of You. And I seek You everywhere in them.” (168a) “How good and beautiful it is to live in Your world, oh God, despite everything we human beings do to one another.” (169b)

(iv) (To Klaus, a dedicated Marxist) “We have so much work to do on ourselves that we shouldn’t even be thinking of hating our so-called enemies. We are hurtful enough to one another as it is.....I see no alternative, each of us must turn inwards and destroy in himself all that he thinks he ought to destroy in others. And remember that every atom of hate we add to this world makes it still more inhospitable.”(179d-180b)

(v) “It suddenly felt as if life in its thousand details, twists and turns had become perfectly clear and transparent. Just like a crystal-clear sea. You huddle in the corner on the floor in the room of the man you love and darn his socks and at the same time you are sitting by the shore of a mighty ocean so transparent that you can see to the bottom. And that is an unforgettable experience.”(166d)



(vi) “I am filled with a sort of bountifulness, even towards myself, and a veil envelops me through which life seems more serene and often much friendlier as well. And a feeling of being at one with all existence. No longer: I want this of that, but: life is great and good and fascinating and if you dwell so much on yourself and flounder and fluff about, you miss the mighty, eternal current that is life.”(60d-61a)

(vii) “Oh God, I thank You for having created me as I am. I thank You for the sense of fulfilment I sometimes have: that fulfilment is after all nothing but being filled with You.”(61d)

### ELEVENTH SESSION: Interior Processes & Exterior Engagement

Etty Hillesum presents a challenge to Christians because she actually embodied an ideal of loving and heroic self-sacrifice in her deliberate decision not to go into hiding to escape the Nazi death-camps but rather to accompany fellow Jews so as to provide them with strength and inner hope. (See, e.g. pp.149c-153c.) In this she resembles the saints in diverse religious traditions who have chosen to identify themselves with the marginalized and oppressed, sharing their plight, whether they be victims of other genocides or people suffering from leprosy or AIDS or homelessness.

Etty’s challenge is greatly intensified for us because her diaries help us towards understanding the inner spiritual processes which gradually enabled and impelled her to behave as she did,

In so far as we realize how she became the person that she did, we realize that she is for us not merely a remote ideal. On the contrary, living in ways similar to her is a real possibility for us – if that turns out to be our calling, as it has been for many Christians over the centuries.

I should have said, “Christians and others”, for one of the ways in which her writings are specially accessible to many questioning Christians today is that here reflections do not presuppose belief in a Christian religious framework of beliefs. It is true that in one passage (185b), where she advocates living in the present without anxious preoccupation concerning the future, she quotes Matthew’s Gospel (6.34), but elsewhere she needs no such authority to back up that claim. And although she accepts Klaus’s referring to her rejection of hate as mere “Christianity” her response means, “If that seems Christian to you I don’t mind”. In her assumptions she is no more distinctively Christian than she is Buddhist or Jewish.

At core, what she gives us is her probings of herself as a human being. As such they are directly accessible to a very wide range of fellow human beings. And as human being who is also a Jew, identifying herself with her fellow Jews in the midst of the holocaust, what she says is specially challenging to all of us, for it was in the context of such unsurpassable horror that she manifested to others her intimacy with Divine Love.

### Guide-Question #1

**“Mortal fear in every fibre. Complete collapse. Lack of self-confidence. Panic” (47d, November 10, 1941).**

**“I think that I can bear everything life and these times have in store for me. And when the turmoil becomes too great and I am completely at my wits’ end, then I still have my folded hands and bended knee....We should be willing to act as a balm for all wounds.” (194a,196b, October 10-11, 1943)**

**Outline and discuss some of the interior processes that took place in Etty, enabling her to be transformed so radically during 23 months.**

### Guide-Question #2:

**Note that this is a more personal question than #1. Which insights (realizations, inner changes) were especially illuminating and therefore challenging for you in Etty’s Diaries? Select about four to outline and discuss. (Save any insights that pertain to sexual intimacy for the 2<sup>nd</sup> session.)**

### Practicum in Preparation for the Eleventh Session

**Daily practice of the meditation for self-emptying. towards mystical union with God and/or alignment with God’s will.**

### New Practicum at the Eleventh Session

**The instructor will introduce a meditation that draws partly on sacred-sensual energies in spiritual healing.**

### Twelfth Session: Sexual Passion & Spiritual Surrender

**In so far as Etty Hillesum’s intimacy with God involved sexual intimacy that was not only outside marriage but also with more than one mate at a time (59ad, 93d-96b, 99bd,103d-104c), she provides a challenge to assumptions prevalent in even very liberal Christian denominations. We are challenged not so much to ask, “How can I become like her?” but rather “If such a saintly person can be so unconventional, is her example something I need to seriously consider?”<sup>i</sup>**

**For it is clear that the sexual outlook of Etty Hillesum and of Julius Spier (her special lover) is not the same as that of secular ‘swingers’ (e.g. ‘Playboy’ and ‘Sex and the City’). For Etty and Julius, sexual intimacy with another human being is inseparable from a surrender into loving spiritual intimacy with God. This latter mystical dimension also distinguishes them from much in liberal Christianity, which tends to be more focused on external behaviour and on the human-emotional dimensions of sexual intimacy.**

**As we read Etty’s diary we also realize that for her such a “sacred sexuality” is not simply a “given”. On the contrary, it is something she persistently probes and ponders more and more deeply in her prayers. And although her loving passion arises to some extent out of the extreme life/death crises through which she is living, it clearly depends more on other considerations. For example, when Etty sets aside marriage as a personal**

option, this does not depend mainly on her realizing that each day may be her last day (or Spier's). On the contrary, although she sees marriage as an appropriate option for some people, for her it would involve an inappropriate restriction of her divine-human love to only one human being (p.165d-166top). In this respect she resembles traditional Christian mystics, but in stark contrast with them the divine-human love that she brings to some people includes full sexual intimacy (e.g. 59ad etc.) And even where physical intimacy is boundaried, ETTY's love (and Julius') sometimes includes some erotic elements (e.g. p.88bc, cf.105c-106top)

#### **Guide-Question #1**

Outline and discuss several inner processes that ETTY went through as she probed her spiritual-sexual relationship with Julius Spier (and perhaps also with Father Han). Focus on those most illuminating, and therefore challenging, for you.

#### **Guide-Question #2**

Julius Spier initiated ETTY Hillesum into a loving intimacy with God. Outline and discuss some of the ways in which this shaped her calling to initiate others similarly. (Note especially pages 166d-176b, but also many other brief allusions, e.g. 195b.)

#### **Daily Preparatory Practicum for the Twelfth Session**

The mode of spiritual healing introduced as the new practicum at the Eleventh Session.

#### **New Practicum for the Twelfth Session**

To be announced then.

