RGP 3260H & RGP6260H
SPIRITUALITY IN LITERATURE

DON EVANS **REGIS COLLEGE**

FALL TERM 2003 **THURSDAYS 9-11 a.m.**

ABSTRACT

The subtleties, intensity and depth of spiritual consciousness are often conveyed more clearly in literature than in theological prose. This seminar course considers four diverse Christian writers and a Muslim mystical poet: Feodor Dostoevsky, George Bernanos, T.S.Eliot, Michael Dean and Rumi.

The class discussion will not focus on issues of literary criticism or historical influences, but rather on personal spiritual and theological reflection in response to each novel, play or poem.

Evaluation: seminar participation, weekly written discussion-openers in response to guide-questions, and a final essay.

RESTRICTED NUMBERS IN THE CLASS:
At 3260 level: 10 At 6260 level: 5 Auditors: 4

REQUIRED READINGS (Ordered through Bob Miller Bookroom, 180 Bloor West)

1. Feodor Dostoevsky, *The Grand Inquisitor,* with related chapters from *The Brothers Karamazov*, edited with an (illuminating) Introduction by Charles B. Guignon (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993)

2. George Bernanos, *The Diary of a Country Priest,* translated from the French by Pamela Morris, (New York: Carrol and Graf, 1999)

3. T.S.Eliot, *The Cocktail Party* (London: Faber, 1979)
***Four Quartets,* (London: Faber, 1978)**

4. Michael Dean, *The Walled Garden,* (Windsor, Ontario: Black Moss Press, 1993).

5. Rumi, *The Essential Rumi,* translated and edited by Coleman Barks, (Edison, NJ: Castle Books for Harper Collins, 1995).

A NOTE CONCERNING EDITIONS OF BOOKS
It is crucial that you buy or borrow the same edition as the one listed in the Course Outline, since detailed page references are given for each assignment.

INSTRUCTOR: DON EVANS
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Retired Minister, United Church of Canada
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COURSE REQUIREMENTS

(l) Discussion-Openers (300 words) For 3260, 66% of the final mark, for 6260, 60%))

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 FOURTEEN discussion-openers are required. If a student submits more than fourteen, the BEST FOURTEEN will be considered in calculating the final mark.

Since there are only eleven classes at which discussion-openers can be submitted, you may find it prudent to submit TWO at SEVERAL of the earlier classes, in case at a later class you are prevented from submitting a discussion-opener because of illness or other emergencies.

No more than TWO can be submitted at any one class.

(2) Final Essay

(A) "Personal-reflection" essay, outlining any changes in your own understanding of 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.

For 3260, length 1500 words; submit (A) OR (B); 10% of the final mark

For 6260, length 3000 words; submit (B), and do so in a way that involves academic research beyond the assigned readings for class discussion; 20% of the final mark.

(3) Seminar Discussion; For 3260, 24% of the final mark; for 6260, 20%.
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, pertinence in relation to other students' remarks, etc. Frequent absence from class reduces the overall mark for class discussion.

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.

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.**
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 in writing discussion-openers. Indeed it is to some extent discouraged (though 6260 students may want to do such reading in preparation for their FINAL essay). Devote your time instead to reflection in response to the assigned readings, which all students in the class will have read. (One possible exception: some students new to Eliot's *Four Quartets* may need to consult some suggested resources.)**
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 he means, then I agree—or disagree—for the following reasons".**

Criteria in Grading Guide-Question Answers:

(1) Clarity of the answer in detail and in overall structure.
(2) Substance of the answer: profound or superficial, subtle or simplistic, rigorous or sloppy.
(3) Accuracy of the answer, where it is partly a summary or explanation of the text.
(4) Originality, independence and creativity of the answer, indicating personal pondering and reflection
(5) Scope of the answer, that is, while focusing carefully on the question, bringing in a wide perspective—e.g. considering a rival view to your own and showing why you reject it; or relating what an author says to something you have read or experienced.
(6) Conciseness of the answer, in contrast with being wordy or repetitive or overly elaborate.

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 l927, 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 l960s 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 and of social issues; also existentialism, ethics and philosophy-and-literature). Since then he has been regularly teaching two sections of a first-year seminar course, "Human Nature in Great Literature" at Victoria College.

In the Spring term, 2002-3 he taught at Emmanuel College a course on "Varieties of Christian Spirituality: Theory and Practice". It considered Thomas Ryan on Christian mantra, Henri Nouwen on the Prodigal Son, the United Church's Lowville Centre on Christian healing, the Wesleys on "assurance" and "Christian perfection" and Sister Frances Teresa on praying with St. Francis and St. Clare.

(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

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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 1982. 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. In 1991 he helped to 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; and for the patients of a cancer psychotherapist.

(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 twenty years has been healing the rifts between men and women and between the masculine and feminine within all of us.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN AT THE FIRST (INTRODUCTORY) SESSION

(No prior preparation is required.)

The instructor will 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 introduce himself and will initiate a discussion of spirituality by presenting a brief lecture on kinds of spirituality.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN AT EACH SUBSEQUENT SESSION

Students will come prepared, having studied the assigned pages and having (usually) written at least one discussion-opener to present at class. A student will volunteer to read her/his opener, others will respond, another will read, and so on.

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 NOTE CONCERNING THE EXTENSIVE PRELIMINARY NOTES ON BERNANOS AND ON RUMI

My preliminary notes for the books by Dostoevsky and Dean are much less extensive. I have led many seminars on the two books and know from experience that the guide-questions by themselves can generate excellent class discussions. Eliot requires a little more introduction, but probably most students will have had some previous acquaintance with him, and there are excellent brief readings available as guides for newcomers. My impressions concerning Bernanos and Rumi, however, (whom I have not previously attempted to teach) is that students will need in-depth introductions if they are to appreciate the subtle profundity of the author's spiritual teaching during only two weeks of study.

SPIRITUALITY IN LITERATURE
TOPICS FOR ELEVEN SEMINAR DISCUSSIONS
(After the Introductory Session, September 11)

1. Dostoevsky First Session, September 18: (p.7)

(1) Theodicy: The Cost of Human Freedom

(2) Religious Institutions: Reducing the Cost of Human Freedom

2. Dostoevsky Second Session, September 25: (pp.7-8)

Mystical spirituality in relation to (1) being responsible for everyone (2) having to confess (3) transforming servitude (4) the concept of hell.

3. Bernanos First Session, October 2; (pp.8-16)

Sin: (1) its origin and nature (2) ten developmental dimensions of it. (3) the alleged inevitability and holiness of poverty.

4. Bernanos Second Session, October 9: (pp.17-24)

Saintliness: (1) its origin and nature (2) possible for everyone or only a few?

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5. Eliot First Session, October 16: (The Cocktail Party) (pp.25-27)

(1) Awareness of inauthenticity contrasted with awareness of sin.

(2) Is it possible to move from the former awareness to the latter?

NO CLASS OCTOBER 23: READING WEEK

6. Eliot Second Session, October 30: (Four Quartets) (pp.28-29)

(1) The Negative Mystical Way (2) Memory and the Positive Mystical Way

(3) "The weakness of the changing body" as a limiting condition for mystics.

7. Dean First Session, November 6: (pp.29-30)

(1) Is it possible to combine saintly spirituality and sexual intimacy?

(2) Must male spirituality involve transcending body, earth and women?

8. Dean Second Session, November 13: (pp.30-31)

(1) Heaven and earth, masculine and feminine reconciled in a broken heart.

(2) Women's spirituality and solidarity in mourning.

(3) The Virgin Mary challenged by Mary Magdelaine.

9. Rumi First Session, November 20: (pp.31-37)

On how a human being unites with God while remaining human.

10. Rumi Second Session, November 27: (pp.37-41)

God is Within our Longing for God.

On experiencing all spirituality as Music.

11. Poetry and Spiritual Awakening, December 4: (pp.42-44)

Further explorations of language and consciousness in Eliot and Rumi.

GUIDE QUESTIONS ON DOSTOEVSKY

Assigned Text;

The Grand Inquisitor (excerpts from Feodor Dostoevsky's The Brothers Karamazov) ed. Charles B. Guignon, Hackett, 1993.

FIRST SESSION

Required Reading:

Introduction by Charles Guignon. Then pages 1-37.

Guide Questions:

Explain and discuss the following quotations in their contexts:

1. "Tell me yourself, I challenge you—answer. Imagine that you are creating 0a fabric of human destiny with the object of making men happy in the end, giving them peace and rest at last, but that it was essential and inevitable to torture to death only one tiny creature—that baby beating its breast with its fist, for instance—and to found that edifice on its unavenged tears, would you consent to be the architect on those conditions?"(16d)

2. "Thou wouldst go into the world, and art going with empty hands, with some promise of freedom which men in their simplicity and their natural unruliness cannot even understand, which they fear and dread—for nothing has ever been more insupportable for a man and a human society than freedom. . .How are the other weak ones to blame, because they could not endure what the strong have endured? How is the weak soul to blame that it is unable to receive such terrible gifts? Canst thou have simply come to the elect and for the elect? But if so it is a mystery, and we cannot understand it. And if it is a mystery, we too have a right to preach a mystery, and to teach them that it is not the free judgment of their hearts, not love that matters, but a mystery which they must follow blindly, even against their conscience. So we have done. We have corrected thy work and have founded it on miracle, mystery and authority."(25d, 30bc)

SECOND SESSION

Required Reading

Read Guignon's Introduction again. Then pages 39-80.

Guide Questions

Outline and discuss some of the main elements in the mystical spirituality presented through Markel, Zossima and the Mysterious Visitor in relation to ONE of the following: (or two, if you decided to submit two guide-questions responses)

1. "We are each responsible to all for all, it's only that men don't know this. If they knew it, the world would be paradise at once."(51cd cf. 57cd and 75d)

2. He believed with his whole heart that if he confessed his crime, he would heal his soul and would be at peace forever." (62d)

3. "It is impossible that there should be no servants in the world, but act so that your servant may be freer in spirit than if he were not a servant."(73c)

4. "I ponder, 'What is hell?' I maintain that it is the suffering of being unable to love". (78d). Consider also a different translation, by MacAndrew: "…the suffering of one who can no longer love".

GUIDE-QUESTIONS ON BERNANOS

Assigned Text: Georges Bernanos, The Diary of a Country Priest, translated by Pamela Morris, (New York: Carroll & Graf: 1983 to 1999)

Assigned reading: pages l-18l. Important to read ALL of this before the FIRST SESSION. You are not required to read the rest of the novel since this would involve spending too much preparation time on reading, leaving little time left for in-depth study, personal reflection and writing your response(s). You are free, of course, to read the entire novel, but for purposes of class discussion we will not assume that everyone has done so.

Introductory Comments by the Instructor

This monumental novel stirs readers to many diverse reflections, but for purposes of seminar discussion I have selected two topics, one for each session: the origin and nature of sin and the origin and nature of saintliness. My choice is not arbitrary, for Bernanos introduces them very early and returns to them again and again. And they are inter-related, for one theme is that only a saint can deeply understand what sin really is, having deeply explored it within him/her self.

Another topic, instead of saintliness, might have been priesthood, the requirements for being a "good priest". Much in the novel would support such a focus, but this is an enormous topic in itself. Nevertheless as we examine saintliness we will need to bear in mind at times that perhaps – or perhaps not – a particular dimension of saintliness is connected with the distinctive responsibilities of a priest.

Bernanos' depictions of sin and of saintliness are complex, profound and controversial. As a way of bringing some initial structure to the seminar discussion, I will be outlining a number of themes or dimensions for each. This analysis is, of course, open to question and revision, both concerning its clarity and concerning its faithfulness to Bernanos' intentions. But the outline can provide a useful starting-point.

IT IS IMPORTANT TO READ THE NOVEL BEFORE READING THE DETAILED ANALYSES BY THE INSTRUCTOR

Students are encouraged to respond to Bernanos' presentation not only through their own detached theological reflection but also as "existentially" as seems appropriate for them. That is, it is clear that Bernanos wants us to respond, to some extent, in a personal, experiential way, e.g. "What is wrong with me?" and "To what do I aspire?" Of course our main emphasis can be on "What is wrong with human beings? and "To what should human beings aspire?"

Some readers, like myself, may on first reading be put off by the Cure de Torcy's monologue in pages 8-23, with its portrayal of the ideal priest as a condescending, authoritarian ruler not unlike Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor! If this is true of you, I encourage you to set aside first impressions and to persist, as I did. The section turns out to be in many respects a 'foil' for the rest of the novel.

FIRST SESSION ON BERNANOS
AN OUTLINE ANALYSIS OF HIM ON THE ORIGIN AND NATURE OF SIN

1. Sin is an Inner-Life State, not a Behavioural deed or omission

"People always refuse to see beyond the individual fault. But after all the transgression itself is only the eruption. And the symptoms which most impress outsiders aren't always the gravest and most disquieting."(108b; cf. 107d-108a & 75c)

Concerning misuse of confession: "I still cannot manage to understand what horrible metamorphosis has enabled so many people to show me their inner life as a mere convention, a formal scheme without one clue to its reality. Petty lies can slowly form a crust around the consciousness of evasion and subterfuge. . . their sly candour reminds one of a dirty window-pane so blurred that light has to struggle through it, and nothing can be clearly seen." (86d-87a; cf. the Comtesse in 157d-159c, especially "It has nothing to do with my confessor. These are feelings which I can't control. But I've never let them influence my conduct.")

"How many men will never have the least idea of what is meant by supernatural heroism, without which there can be no inner life! Yet by that very same inner life shall they be judged." (108d; cf. 108b-110c)

"I'm not stopping you from calculating the procession of the equinoxes or splitting the atom. Bu what would it profit one even to create life itself, when you have lost all sense of what life really is? Might as well blow our brains out among your test-tubes."(20cd)

"To judge us by what we call our actions is probably as futile as to judge us by our dreams. God's justice chooses from this dark conglomeration of thought and act, and that which is raised towards the Father shines with a sudden burst of light, displayed in glory like the sun." (87d)

"Crimes, no matter how atrocious, no more reveal the nature of evil than the greatest works of saints the splendour of God." (144a)

2. Sin Defined as the Destruction of the Desire for Faith

Faith: "supernatural knowledge of ourselves in the Divine"(126b)

Sin: "Impurity does not destroy this knowledge, it slays our NEED of it. I no longer believe, because I have no wish to believe. You no longer wish to know yourself. I no longer believe, because I have no wish to believe. You no longer wish to know yourself. This profound truth, your truth, has ceased to interest you."(126bc)

"We can only really possess what we desire, since complete and absolute possession does not exist for a human being. You no longer want to possess yourself. You no longer desire your own joy. You can only love yourself through God. You no longer love yourself, and you will never love yourself again either in this world or hereafter—through all eternity."(126cd)

DE: This passage concludes a section on sin as "impurity" in the form of "lust". People substitute lust for their desire for supernatural self-knowledge and self-love in the Divine. If they persist, their state can become permanent. There are, however, examples where the "impurity" is not "lust" except in an extended sense of the word, where it refers to any inordinate human desire that is substituted for the desire to know and love oneself in the Divine. For example, when the Comtesse is finally "face to face" (168a) with God, she is dangerously close to that permanent, hellish state. What she has substituted for her desire for self-knowledge and self-love in the Divine is her addictive, idolatrous attachment-'love' for her son. And although Chantal is not hovering close to permanent hell, her state involves a similarly obsessive attachment-'love' for her father (135) which has changed into hatred towards him (as well as the governess and her mother). Concerning her the priest comments: "God, are we really such wretched creatures that a proud soul in revolt must needs turn against itself?"(137cd)

3.Sin as "Lust"

(l) Bernanos contrasts lust with "that desire which unites the sexes" (123bc) and with "virility"(125d) which it "stifles". But he does not elaborate on this in any clear way, offering no examples of life-enhancing sexual desire.

(2) Concerning lust as sinful sexual desire he is very eloquent, comparing it to a (cancerous) tumour devouring the sexual organ, "a tumour whose very deformity horribly reproduces the shape"(123bc). In his dreams he still sees the lust-filled faces of men in the low-life pub where he lived as a twelve-year-old: "I had seen those hard and avid faces suddenly fixed in indescribable smiles. God! how is it we fail to realize that the mask of pleasure, stripped of all hypocrisy, is that of anguish? (124b) "Ultra-sensitive, shifty faces, skilled in disguise, that hide themselves in lust, as beasts hide to die."(124d-125a)

(3) Such lust is specially corrupting for a child to witness, whether in the disgusting pub or artfully disguised by society. Initially the "still unsullied"(123c) children have a "human dignity"(123c) and might revolt against this "wound in the side of humanity; or rather at the very source of its life!"(123b). Although "angels still stand guard"(124a) over the child, society prevails in its corruption.

(4) It is concerning <u>such</u> "lust" that the priest says, "Impotent to create, it can only contaminate in the germ he frail promise of humanity; it is probably at the very source, the primal cause of all human blemishes"(125d). With an implicit reference to Genesis, he goes on, "Lust, just as she is, as she emerged forth from the hands of the Master of Prodigies, the cry from our hearts is not only terror, but imprecation: 'You, you alone have set death loose upon the world!"(126a)

DE: This seems to involve an interpretation of Genesis in which the Devil's tempting of Adam and Eve was not that they proudly substitute narcissistic desires for their desire to know themselves in God. Rather, the Devil somehow worked directly on human sexual desire, corrupting it. This is a perennial debate among theologians. (See, for example, Sebastian Moore's critical review of Mary G.Durkin's book concerning Pope John Paul II on Human Intimacy in *Commonweal* (November 7, 1986).)

The quotation also suggests – as most Christian theology has traditionally held – that but for the Fall human beings would be immortal. This is difficult to reconcile with contemporary evolutionary-history accounts of our origin, unless our very existence as embodied beings is itself a "fall".

<u>4. Childhood, Innocence and Sin</u>

For Bernanos, some children retain for a while an INNOCENCE with which they come into the world. Eventually everyone loses it, yet saintliness involves, to some extent, a recovery of it. (Concerning saintliness consider, later, 175ac.)
As we have seen, the loss of innocence is for Bernanos mainly associated with the advent of lust. But as we shall see it is also associated with socialization into human conventions and with a wretched, despairing loneliness.
(1) Sylvestre. . .is a strangely beautiful child who gives me the almost poignant feeling of innocence, an innocence previous to all sin, the sinlessness of an innocent beast. . .I felt that in his quiet attentive eyes I could read the sympathy I craved"(88ab).
(2) "The dying girls of whom I speak showed plainly how they repented of their sin. Yet it was only after death that their poor sweet faces managed to recapture that serene look of the little children which they almost were. . .An indefinable air of confidence and wonder, that limpid gaiety. The devil of lust is a dumb fiend."(72c)
(3) "Why does our earliest childhood always seem so soft and full of light? A kid's got plenty of troubles, like everybody else, and he's really so very helpless, quite unarmed against pain and illness. . .But that very sense of powerlessness is the mainspring of a child's joy. He just leaves it all to his mother, you see. Present, past, future—his whole life is caught up in one look, and that look is a smile."(18d-19a)
(4) "It is rare for a child not to have known any inner life, as Christianity understands it, however embryonic the form. One day or another all young lives are stirred by an urge which seems to compel; every pure young breast has depths which are raised to heroism. Not very urgently perhaps, but just strongly enough to show the little creature a glimpse, which sometimes half-consciously he accepts, of the huge risk that salvation entails, and gives to human life all its divinity. He has

sensed something of good and evil, has seen them both in their pristine essence unalloyed by notions of social discipline and habit." (109ab) Cf. 52bc.
(5) "The first realization of misery is fierce indeed. Blessed be he who has saved a child's heart from despair! . . .A little boy is all alone. . .Distress is not shared, each creature is alone in his distress, it belongs only to him, like his face and his hands. . .I don't think I had any perception of that loneliness . . .but merely submitted to this law of my life, without understanding. (52cd) The priest goes on concerning how his reading of Gorki's childhood memories "gave me a whole people for my companions"(53top). This people, as it were, join together in sounding their distress in a hymn which is not a church hymn: "the howling of a moujik under the rods, the screaming of a beaten wife, the hiccup of a drunkard, and the growling of animal joy, that wild sigh from the loins. . .distress that has forgotten even its name, that has ceased to reason or to hope" (53b)

5.<u>Human Wretchedness and Suffering as the Soil for Sin</u>

DE: The collective wretchedness portrayed by Gorky in adults and by Bernanos in children involves a <u>loss</u> of the discernment which might otherwise arise "heroically", that is, the discernment arising from the inner reflection that draws on our human desire to know and love ourselves in God.
(1) "That shifty fear of the Divine, that oblique flight through life, as of a man in the shadow of a wall, while the whole earth is bright with sunshine. . .It puts me in mind of some wretched animal, dragging itself back into its hole, having served as the plaything of cruel children. . .Ah, if we could view with angelic sight these maimed human beings"(95b)
(2) "I had before me a distorted face, whose disfigurement was not due to pain, but to a deep inner panic. I had seen features thus strained before, but only on the faces of the dying. . .What could I say, what could I do to help this wounded creature whose life seemed to be flowing away from some secret hurt."(133d)
(3) Torcy provides what could be called a "social-scientific" account of the behaviour of a coward, a miser and a brutally-heartless person (118d-119b) whose "wretchedness" Christ takes on. (Compare with Gorky's chanting sufferers, whose distress "lays its tortured head at random, will awaken one day on the shoulder of Jesus Christ" 53c) DE: Does the use of a social-scientific account here imply that human freedom is minimal among the "wretched"?

<u>6. Human Boredom as the Soil for Sin</u>

"My parish is bored stiff; no other word for it. We can see them being eaten up by boredom, and we can't do anything about it. Some day perhaps we shall catch it ourselves, become aware of the cancerous growth within us. You can keep going a long time with that in you. . . It is like dust. . .To shake off this drizzle of ashes you must be for ever on the go. And so people are always 'on the go'. . .I wonder if man has ever before experience this contagion, this leprosy of boredom: <u>an aborted despair, a shameful form of despair in some way like the fermentation of a Christianity in decay."(1c-3a)</u>

7 Sin as Culpable Connivance with Evil

The priest seems to view the wretchedness and boredom in human beings generally as a kind of "folly" with whose shamefulness and suffering he can empathize without judgement, but in the case of the Comtesse he feels differently: "The contrast of the graceful house with its loathsome secrets made me indignant. For indeed the folly of human beings seemed as nothing beside their stubborn malice, the sly help which under the eye of God Himself they will give to all the powers of evil, of confusion and death. When you think how ignorance, misery and disease eat into thousands of innocent lives—and then, when Providence miraculously spares some haven in which peace might flourish, human lusts must needs creep into it."(158c)

DE: Human beings seem to be portrayed as giving "sly help" to powers of evil as a way of obscuring their awareness of the Divine and of themselves in the Divine. Their connivance or conspiracy or secret cooperation is with three aspects of evil: (i) their own individual tendencies towards malice, hate, judgement and heart-hardening. (ii) what Bernanos calls "the communion of sinners", which is a collective tendency towards reinforcing these qualities and (iii) what Bernanos calls "essential" or "satanic" evil, which is a metaphysical reality transcending human individuals and human collectivities. Human beings draw on this evil by permitting themselves to be possessed by it. We'll consider (ii) &(iii) in turn, in sections #8 &#9.

8. Sin as the "Communion of Sinners"

(1) "There is not only a communion of saints; there is a communion of sinners. In their hatred of one another, their contempt, sinners unite, embrace, intermingle, become as one. . .Who are you to condemn another's sin? He who condemns sin becomes part of it, espouses it. You hate this woman and feel yourself so far removed from her, when your hate and her sin are as two branches of the same tree. . .Who cares, if from now on you are linked together in evil, trapped all three in the same snare of vice, the same bond of evil flesh."(138d-139b)

DE: Here one person harms another and the latter responds sinfully with hatred and judgement, so both contribute to a collective evil that exceeds their individual evil. This also happens on a larger scale. The one remedy is forgiveness.

(2) In another passage the priest (like Father Zossima) explores a special dimension of sinful human interaction, where not only our deeds but also our private feelings and thoughts affect others telepathically: "Hidden sins poison the air which others breathe, and without such corruption at the source, many a wretched man, tainted unconsciously, would never have become a criminal."(166b). And the consequences of bad thoughts are unpredictable, random: "Evil thoughts are like good ones; thousands may be scattered by the wind, or overgrown or dried up by the sun. Only one takes root."(166a) Elsewhere the priest is pessimistic concerning the frequency of good taking root: "Truly, man is always at enmity with himself—a secret sly kind of hostility. Tares, scattered no matter where, will almost certainly take root. Whereas the smaller seed of good needs more than ordinary good fortune, prodigious luck, not to be stifled."(102c) A "clear knowledge"(166c) of how closely we are bound together psychically in good and evil would make it impossible to go on living; so we typically repress such awareness.

9. "Essential Evil" or "Satanic Evil": a METAPHYSICAL (DE: my word) Source from which Humans Draw and by which they allow themselves to be Possessed.

(1) The priest recalls his challenging words to Chantal as conveying his own "very vivid sensation of evil. . .more than sensation, almost vision. . .my own image of evil, of the power of evil, since as a rule I try to push the thought away from me. It hurts too much, it forces me to realize the meaning of. . .certain suicides."(143d) He sees some people who are indifferent to any religion or morality glimpsing for an instant "something of this satanic possession"(144a) and longing to escape it.

(2) Bernanos distinguishes human evil from this essential evil: "CRIMES, NO MATTER HOW ATROCIOUS, NO MORE REVEAL THE NATURE OF EVIL THAN THE GREATEST WORKS OF SAINTS THE SPLENDOUR OF GOD"(144a). "Historians, moralists, even philosophers refuse to see anything but the criminal, they re-create evil in the image and likeness of humanity. They form no idea of essential evil." (144d-145a)

Human beings have only a "very limited choice of wrong. . .at their disposal. .for miserably plagiarizing true evil. Satan is too hard a master. He would never command as did the Other with divine simplicity: 'Do likewise'. The devil will have no victims resemble him. He permits only a rough caricature, impotent, abject, which has to serve as food for eternal irony, the mordant irony of the depths."(144b)

(3) Bernanos has two images of essential evil:

(i) "The world of evil is so far beyond our understanding. Nor can I really succeed in picturing hell as a world, a universe. It is nothing, never will be anything but a half-formed shape, the hideous shape of an abortion, a stunted thing on the very verge of all existence. I think of sullied, translucent patches on the sea. Does the Monster care that there should be one criminal more or less? Immediately he sucks down the crime into himself, makes it one with his own horrible substance, digests without once rousing from his terrifying eternal lethargy."(144c)

(ii) "that vast yearning for the void, for emptiness, since if ever our species is to perish it will die of boredom, of stale disgust. Humanity will have been slowly eaten up as a beam by invisible fungi, which transform in a few weeks a block of oakwood into sponge matter which our fingers have no difficulty in breaking"(145a) (Compare with 164b: "The sorrow, the unutterable loss of those charred stones which once were men is that they have nothing more to be shared")

(4) DE: Three Reflections concerning "Essential" or "Satanic" Evil

(i) Bernanos speaks about "Satan" as both in both personal and impersonal ways, that is, as both an individual agent and a pervasive reality. He also speaks about God (as most of us do) in both ways, though Satan is a parody of God in that Satan is subhuman and barely real at all. Indeed Satan reduces humans to Satan's subhuman level.

(ii) Bernanos is not, for me, clear enough in distinguishing between what he calls "Satanic possession" and possession by an "invisible spirit of evil"(135c). In my own experience invasion by an evil spirit is not uncommon, but possession is rare; and evil spirits vary greatly in the degree of their evil. I think that the existence of individual evil spirits, whether these be disembodied humans or fallen minor angels, needs to be distinguished from the possible existence of what Bernanos depicts as "Satan". For one thing, only a very small minority of malevolent spirits is comparable to Satan in being what I call "demonic" because they go beyond mischief-making and even beyond hate, revenge or sadism to focus their intention on destroying love as such.

(iii) All that he explains by reference to "Satan" I attribute to demonic forms of collective human evil. Human evil accumulates as patterns or "pools" of malevolent human energy and thought. Such patterns persist independently of any individual human beings, sometimes remaining in particular places where hate-filled atrocities occurred. It is from these that sinful individuals unconsciously or consciously draw Some of the patterns are what I call "demonic" and these are the ones that I view as equivalent in function to Bernanos' Satan.

(Of course I expect that some students will reject not only Bernanos' metaphysical claims concerning the existence of Satan, but also my proposals concerning disembodied or unembodied evil spirits, and concerning accumulated thought-energy patterns of evil. On what bases do we accept or reject these various beliefs, or suspend judgment concerning them? Scripture and/or tradition and/or reason and/or personal spiritual experience? How important or unimportant are they?)

10. Hell as a Metaphysical "Shape" and as a Loss-of-Humanity Human State

In 144c, above, Bernanos equates Satan with Hell, and vice versa, and sees self- damned human beings as assimilating into this sub-human "shape". This happens if and when hardness of heart is so extreme that the person has lost entirely the power to love (163c)

Bernanos distinguishes such hardness of heart from hate, which involves life: "Our very hate is resplendent, and the least tormented of the fiends would warm himself in what we call our despair, as in a morning of glittering sunshine. Hell is not to love any more, madame. Not to love any more! That sounds quite ordinary to you. To a human being still alive, it means to love less or love elsewhere. . .The error common to us all is to invest these damned with something still inherently alive, something of our own inherent mobility, whereas in truth time and movement have ceased for them; they are fixed for ever."(163d-164a). The compassionate priest would be willing to share in the sufferings of the vilest of the living cast into hell, but "the unutterable loss of those charred stones which once were men, is that they have nothing more to be shared"(164b)

For Bernanos hell is not to be conceived as "a kind of penal servitude for eternity"(163a). It is not punishment but a consequence, a self-damnation. Nor

does it involve suffering in any usual sense of the word. The person who has become completely unable to love has ceased to be a person who can grieve a loss!

DE: Many questions to ponder and discuss here, for example: If the priest had not tried "to liven (the Comtesse's) heart in an instant, bring light into the innermost recess of a conscience"(168c), would she have moved into a permanent loveless state? Is it only if one is clearly and consciously "face-to-face" with God and in that moment rejects God that self-damnation can occur? Or does such a clear awareness of God preclude hardening one's heart against God? Indeed, can one render oneself totally inaccessible to God's love? Are there none or many "in hell"?

GUIDE-QUESTIONS FOR FIRST SESSION ON BERNANOS:

Guide-question #1:

This is a compulsory question in the sense that IF you do ANY guide-question on Bernanos for this session, you must do at least this one. You may also do one more, either #2 or #3.

You may answer either A or B versions of this question. Version A can be quite impersonal, but Version B is more personal and "existential".

#1(A): In relation to your own spirituality and/or theology discuss briefly what you see as the main strengths and weaknesses of Bernanos' portrayal of the origin and nature of sin.

#1(B): Discuss Bernanos' overall portrayal of the origin and nature of sin in relation to your own awareness of sin in yourself and others.

Guide-question #2:

Explain, and discuss briefly, any ONE of the ten "dimensions" of sin in Bernanos' novel with reference to the exploration given above and the text.

Guide-question #3:

Discuss Bernanos' "inner-life" emphasis concerning sin in relation to the ideas presented in the novel concerning the inevitability and the holiness of poverty, for example in these two quotations:

60cd: "Have we kept God's word intact: *the poor you have always with you?"*

50a: "Our Lord took poverty as his bride, and invested the poor man with such dignity that now we'll never get him off his pedestal".

Consider also 46b-63a, 79b-83b, 92b-93b and 158a-161b and any other passages that seem relevant.

SECOND SESSION ON BERNANOS
ORIGIN AND NATURE OF SAINTLINESS
Additional Reading Required for the Second Session:
199ab, 203ad, 291d-298d

SOME THEMES IN BERNANOS OUTLINED

Preliminary Reflections concerning the Origin and Nature of Saintliness
For Christians the distinction between the origin and the nature is clear at the most fundamental theological level: the origin is the Holy Spirit, and the nature is manifested in a saint as various "fruits of the Spirit". The origin is divine and the nature involves a process of divinization of the human.

If, however, we inquire concerning human involvement in the process through which a human being becomes saintly, the distinction between origin and nature becomes less clear. The process involves a person becoming more open to the Spirit in various ways. Each way of being more open gradually becomes less impure, more intensive and more pervasive. By persevering in these ways, one can increase in holy receptivity; and this increase is an increase in saintliness.

At a particular stage in an earthly life others may say, "She's a saint", because the saintliness seems so evident; and later the Roman Catholic Church may, or may not, declare that the person is to be recognized as "a saint". But during an earthly life it's clear that being saintly is a matter of degree, even for people who later are canonized, but also for many less saintly, less holy people. Perhaps if we used the words "saintliness" and "holiness" as alternatives, it would become clear that a person might aspire to become "more saintly" without aspiring (presumptuously!) to become "a saint"!

It is possible to read Bernanos' novel as a posing of the question, concerning the fictitious priest's life as a whole, "Was he a saint?" in the sense, "If he had existed, would he appropriately have been designated such by the Roman Catholic Church?" In our seminar discussion, however, we will not be focusing on this question. Rather, we will consider four dimensions of saintliness as they are depicted in the priest.

1. Saintliness as Participation in Divine Compassion for Human Beings, Identifying with them in their Suffering.
(1) Wise monks through prayer undergo a "deepening of the spirit" which renders them "tender in their humanity", enabled to "enter more deeply each day into the pain of others" uniting them as individuals "with mankind in the spirit of universal charity" (104d, b). It is "the unanimous testimony of saints" that the deepening of the spirit "ends in sudden total illumination, opening out upon azure light"(104d-105a). Cf. "the strong gentle pity of the saints"(8d).
DE: What makes Bernanos' novel especially insightful is that it presents not only such descriptions of the outcome of a profoundly transformative process but also, in the case of the narrator-priest, of the stages and struggles within that process. I discern the following stages:

(i) Self-Preoccupied Empathy and Collective Wretchedness: the priest feels a connection with, and a place within, the collective wretchedness of human beings in suffering. As I have noted in the analyses of dimensions of sin, the priest, on reading Gorki, found such a connection positive in that it considerably reduced his own sense of utter aloneness in his own suffering. But his empathetic openness also affected him negatively, as a "childish shrinking from other people's pain"(8c), a vulnerability which overwhelmed him by reinforcing his own pain. And at times he even complains to God for making him wretched: "You cast me off into despair as we fling a scarce-born animal into the water, tiny and blind." (145cd)

(ii) Judgement and the Community of Sinners: In one of the passages cited previously concerning this (138d-139b) the priest challenges Chantal: "Who are you to condemn another's sin? He who condemns sin becomes part of it, espouses it." Yet in the first part of his encounter with her (130a-133b) he had done just that himself, most blatantly when he says, "I wouldn't do what you have done were it to save my life"(133b), but also in his harshness and lack of empathy for Chantal's plight as the scape-goat in a disfunctional family: She, not the governess, is being forced to leave. But then there was a shift in his way of seeing her, a shift from judgement to compassion:

(iii) Compassionate Empathy Focused on the Suffering from which the Sin Arises. "I had before me a distorted face, whose disfigurement was not due to pain, but to a deep inner panic. I had seen features thus strained before, but only on the faces of the dying. . .What could I say, what could I do to help this wounded creature whose life seemed to be flowing away from some secret hurt? In spite of all this I felt I had better remain silent a little longer."(133d) Then the priest has a vision of Chantal's face and wonders whether this vision has "something to do with my prayer, *was* my prayer, in some way? My prayer was sad and so was the image. I could hardly bear such sadness and yet I was anxious to share it, to assume it in its entirety, to let it flood my soul, my heart, my bones, my whole being." (134bc)
DE: This passage expresses the essence of compassionate empathy, but there are three additional features that need to be considered:

(a) Grace and human co-operation. The priest's shift into compassion silences "the confused rumble of inner hostile voices which had troubled me for the last few weeks. The old silence had returned to me. The blessed quiet wherein the voice of God can be heard."(134c) DE: Perhaps his own initial silence in response to the vision was a human part of the transformative shift from turbulent judgement to quiet compassion; but perhaps it too, like everything else that happened, was simply a work of divine grace in him.

Later on, however, speaking to the Comtesse, he describes such a shift as something which he as a priest can in a sense facilitate by shifting the energy of his own attention beyond a person's blasphemous words so as to focus on his/her suffering: "A priest pays attention only to suffering, provided that suffering is real. What do the words which express it matter, even if they're so many lies?"(151b) Compare this with "I refused to see anything else but the girl before me, tottering as though on the brink of a double gulf of hate and despair. O agonized face! Such a face can never have lied, such anguish…"(142b). DE: His commitment to focus on her anguish, her "terrified shrinking from all the sorrow and shame of life"(142c)

requires courage and determination, for her anguish stirs similar feelings within himself, vivid "memories of unhappy childhood".

(b) Transforming the Community of Sinners by Eliminating Judgement. The shift from being judgmental to being compassionate occurs through acknowledging, alongside the sinner, that both of us have suffered and thereby been tempted into sin. His words to the Comtesse concerning paying attention not to her blasphemies but to her suffering were immediately preceded by these words: "I don't presume to judge you. . .neither can I allow myself to judge your daughter. . . I know what it is to suffer. I've suffered myself. . . And I know that suffering speaks in its own words, words that can't be taken literally. It blasphemes everything: family, country, the social order, and even God". (150d-151a) He acknowledges that he doesn't approve of such blasphemy, but says, "I try to understand it. A priest can't shrink from sores any more than a doctor. He must be able to look at pus and wounds and gangrene. All the wounds of the soul give out pus, madame". (151ab) He has suffered such wounds himself. Indeed, he implied to Chantal his own acquaintance with sin within the communion of sinners (138c-139a) and this seems to have been the occasion for evil to begin leaving her, in this her "great and final struggle against God"(139a).

© Compassion and Forgiveness. The priest's restraining himself from judging the Comtesse and Chantal has to do with their dealings with each other, not their dealings with him. He seems to ignore their scornful contempt, nasty insults and condescending dismissals, so the issue of forgiving them does not directly arise for him. Consider, for example, this passage: "She (the Comtesse) may have been trying to hurt me. But at that instant I was incapable of taking any kind of offence. Usually my dominant feeling is that of the powerlessness of us all, poor feeble creatures that we are—our invincible blindness. And now the feeling was stronger than ever in me." (147d).

Most of us, however, can find an application of Bernanos' teaching in the context of forgiveness: I need to focus my attention not on an abuser's unfair judgements of me but rather on the suffering out of which it arises. If I do, I am less likely to feel not only judgmental but also resentful.

2. Saintliness Involves Humble Reliance Solely on God's Wisdom and Power

(1) Initial Note Concerning "Humility":

The "humility" that saintliness involves must not be confused with the priest's "humble" acknowledgment that he is less competent than other priests and other human beings. His acknowledgment is merely an honest self-appraisal, though it also may involve some self-preoccupied self-rating. It is a fact that he is less competent than others in his management of property and of money. He is also less competent than others in skilful interactions with people. Instead of being able to lead people where he wants them to go, he is easily manipulated by them. He lacks discernment, confidence and assertiveness, and this enables individual parishioners such as M. Pamyre and Seraphita to manage him for their own purposes. And he allows himself to be defined and constrained by the parish as a whole, while he deludes himself that he understands them. (Instances of his

incompetence occur throughout the novel, but an initial impression can be gained in 6b-7a, 23b-28c, 33d-34d and 90d-91d.)

Is it easier for him to be humble than it would be for a very successful TV evangelist? The answer to this question depends on what one means by "humble": (i) The everyday understanding construes "humility and "pride" as contrasting self-ratings alongside others on a scale of comparative competence. Clearly in this sense the priest is humble as contrasted with, say, a successful TV evangelist, who is bound to be proud if he is honest with himself.
(ii) A genuinely spiritual understanding views "humility" as a matter of surrendering oneself to God to be used as an instrument of divine wisdom and power. "Pride" then is a matter of being self-preoccupied concerning one's self-rating, whether this rating be high or low. Such pride, whether self-inflating or self-deflating, is an obstacle to surrendering oneself so as to become a divine instrument. If I think that I've already "got it all together", I'm unlikely to let God do more than assist me in scoring my goals. If I see myself as too incompetent to affect people positively, I'm unlikely to let God do wondrously divine works through me! The latter is the priest's challenge and it is evident in the priest's crucial encounter with the Comtesse (146d-174d). We will consider this encounter in the next section.

(2) How Total Reliance on Grace Brings a Calm, Discerning Confidence to an Incompetent Man.

When he first arrives to talk with the Comtesse (146d) he is initially self-preoccupied, hesitant and confused, but he challenges his own cowardice and blurts out his desire to talk about Chantal (147b). She then tries to intimidate him, but – as we have seen – he refers to his own powerlessness, feebleness and invincible blindness, but this time not singling himself out in these respects, but noting that they apply to "us all"(147d). Then he compares himself to the Comtesse's poker: "Had God endowed it with just enough consciousness to put itself into your hands whensoever you needed it"(148bc).

"I was amazed at my own calm. Perhaps it contrasted so entirely with the humility of my spoken words that this intrigued her and made her uncomfortable. Several time she sighed, eyeing me furtively."(148cd). From here on, God speaks to the Comtesse through the priest, not as a spirit might speak through a medium, displacing the medium's personality and voice, but through the priest's personality and voice. In 164b he writes: "I think the above is more or less what I said to her, and on paper my words may look quite impressive. But I know that as I spoke them they came so clumsily, so haltingly, as to seem ridiculous. . .Anyone seeing me there . . .would have taken me for a culprit (and doubtless I was really that) whose excuses are not believed."

Eventually the decisive moment arises: "Now at last you're face to face with Him. She still stared into space and would not reply. At the moment I was seized with unnameable fear. . .I had tried to liven this frozen heart in an instant, bring light into the innermost recess of a conscience which perhaps God's mercy intended still to leave in the pitiful dark. What was I do say? Or do? . . .while I struggled with all my might against doubt and terror, a spirit of prayer came back to my heart."(168b-169a). DE: I interpret this as a shift into even deeper surrender, which

enables the Comtesse to draw out the medallion and to begin her arduous process towards surrender of her attachment to her dead son. He can only become an instrument that helps her towards surrendering completely if he himself is similarly surrendering alongside her in his own way.

Later he reflects concerning what happen in his own way ed, in a passage that is for me unusually inspiring in its insightful eloquence: "'Be at peace,' I told her. And she had knelt to receive this peace. May she keep it for ever. It will be I that gave it her. Oh, miracle –thus to be able to give what we ourselves do not possess, sweet miracle of our empty hands! Hope which was shrivelling in my heart flowered again in hers; the spirit of prayer which I thought lost in me for ever was given back to her by God and – who can tell – perhaps in *my* name. Lord, I am stripped bare of all things, as you alone can strip us bare, whose fearful care nothing escapes, nor your terrible love!"(180cd)

3. Saintliness Presupposes Knowing the Depths of SIN within Oneself

(1) Introductory Considerations

In the previous section on "saintliness as participation in divine compassion" we saw how the priest, responding to Chantal, is himself moved from "collective wretchedness" through "judgement within the community of sinners" into saintly compassion. He can help her because he himself has been through what she has been feeling, and knows the way out. And this not only explains why he, as a saintly man, can help others. It is also an essential part of the journey in which he has become saintly. For he starts out simply as a human being alongside other human beings, experiencing human wretchedness and suffering as the soil for sin, and being tempted to connive with evil in the community of sinners. He also recognizes, and struggles with, the temptation to distract himself from his desire to know himself within the Divine, as we shall see later.

At one point in his exchange with the Comtesse (170c) she speaks about challenging God to "stamp out" her son and herself, and she is surprised by his gentle response, which arises from his recognizing a similar impulse within himself and within Dr. Delbende. He goes on concerning the human soil for such impulses: "And I heard, or thought I heard, the groaning of so many men, their dry sobs, their sighs, the rattle of their grief, grief of our wretched humanity pressed to earth, its fearsome murmurings"(170d). Previously he had acknowledged that he had tried to avoid letting himself become aware of essential evil, for it "hurts too much", forcing him to realize the meaning of "certain suicides"(143d).

At one point in his exchange with Chantal he rebuked her for using the word "love" as if she knew what it meant (138b). The intensity of his response probably came his ongoing personal glimpse of hell: "Supposing I were never able to love again"(106a). He went on: "I am nothing more than a poor priest, very unworthy and very wretched, but I know what sin is. And you don't. All sins are alike. There is only one sin. I'm not speaking to you in riddles. Such truths are within reach of the humblest Christian if only he be willing to receive them from us."(138d).

It is possible to interpret this passage as an appeal to the teaching authority of the Church, in which he as a priest participates, having studied Catholic theology and been ordained. In context, however, it seems to me more plausible to see him as

appealing to his own personal experience on his journey of increasing saintliness. And more generally, it seems clear that the depth and range of the priest's discernments concerning sin have arisen from his life-experience. This is true even of hell. Consider the following passages.

(2) Sliding Towards Hell:

"Let me force myself to think of other agonies like mine. I can feel no compassion for these strangers. My solitude is complete and hateful. I can feel no pity for myself. Supposing I were never to love again!" (105d-106a)

"What wouldn't I give to be able to suffer! Even pain holds aloof. Even the most usual, the most humble, the ordinary pain in my inside. I feel horribly well. No fear of death, it is just as indifferent to me as life."(106c)

"A dark, more terrible resignation than the worst convulsions of despair in its cataclysmic fall"(122d). Compare with his words to the Comtesse: "Yes, madame, one gets used to not loving. Satan has profaned everything, even the resignation of saints."(159b)

"The sin against hope—the deadliest sin and perhaps also the most cherished, the most indulged. It takes a long time to become aware of it, and the sadness which precedes and heralds its advent is so delicious! The richest of all the devil's elixirs, his ambrosia." (110c)

DE: The title "Sliding Towards Hell" is mine. It is meant to suggest a movement-towards rather than an arrival. Although the priest is caught up in hellish, satanic states, a part of him is still free. His faith has not totally departed from him (122a, 122, 111a). Consider this passage: "I feel as though I had gone right back all the way I've come since God first drew me out of the void. First I was no more than a spark, an atom of the glowing dust of divine charity. I am that again, and nothing more, lost in unfathomable night. But now the dust-spark has almost ceased to glow; it is NEARLY extinguished."(106d) DE: A Dark Night!

(3) In the Dark Night of the Soul

In hell there is a total extinction of light, life and love. Hence a state of NEAR extinction of these can seem very close to hell. But in a dark night of the soul one's sense of personal identity is stripped down to one's origin in God. Nothing else of one's self remains to cling to, and God is "known" only as darkness. So the above quotation from 106d can be viewed either as part of a drift towards hell or as a letting go into "heaven", that is, into God.

In the novel, authentic prayer is, or expresses, the desire of the soul to know itself in God. Sin is, therefore, whatever we substitute for prayer. "Faith" is the knowledge of oneself in God from which springs true self-love and love of others. But "faith" also is at work in the desire for faith. The priest's "dark night" process involves both sin and faith, and hence it can be confusing in its complexity.

His dark night involves a loss of his sense of identity in relation to everyday life, to which he can "return" from his prayers: "What lay behind me was no longer any normal, familiar life, that everyday life out of which the impulse to pray raises us, with still at the back of our minds the certainty that whensoever we wish we can return. A void was behind me."(103c) This new situation gives his prayer a new

intensity: "I needed prayer as much as I needed air to draw my breath or oxygen to fill my blood." So in a way his prayer-desire is unusually strong. But what he had previously grasped as his self-knowledge in God seems to have disappeared: "The same solitude, the same silence. . .I breathe, I inhale the night, the night is entering into me by some inconceivable, unimaginable gap in my soul. I, myself, am the night." And his love for self and for others has, in the moment, disappeared.

What he laments in other passages is the loss of the "joy of prayer"(122d) or the "spirit of prayer"(127a). This he recognizes as sinful, no longer desiring one's own joy, no longer able to love oneself (126d). We human beings can only "possess" what we desire, for complete and absolute possession of anything is impossible for us (126d). At one point the priest insists that he has lost "neither Faith, Hope nor Charity"(111b), but these "eternal goods" are useless in this mortal life. "What counts is the longing to possess them. I feel I have <u>ceased to long for them."</u>(111b) DE: If he has ceased to long for Faith, how can he claim <u>not</u> to have lost Faith? Perhaps here what he means is that he has not lost the concept of Faith and can remember something of what such Faith used to mean experientially. But he no longer hopes for Faith (cf. "the sin against hope"(110c)). Nor does he hope for Hope or for Love-Charity!

The dark night of the soul involves grave temptation, since an intense desire to know oneself in God no longer brings awareness of God or of self as previously known. The temptation is to replace the desire by a Hell-prone despair and resignation. Having persevered through the temptation, however, the priest is more profoundly transformed towards saintliness.

Perhaps, however, the priest's path has distinctive features that are not true of other saintly people. These may be indicated in 199ab and 203ad, which imply that for him there is a pervasive agony of abandonment which mingles with his humble surrender into God.

<u>4. Saintliness Involves some Recovery of Childhood</u>

This theme is explicit very early in the novel: "Villages do not scramble to their feet like cattle at the call of a little boy. And yet, last night, I believe a saint might have roused it"(2c). It is also implicit in the Comtesse's letter of thanks to the priest: "What can I say to you? I have lived in the most horrible solitude, alone with the desperate memory of a child. And it seems to me that another child has brought me to life again. I hope you won't be annoyed with me for regarding you as a child. Because you are! May God keep you one for ever! I wonder what you've done to me….*Now* I hope again! This hope is really all my very own, nobody else's. . .This hope is the flesh of my flesh. I can't express it. I should have to speak as a little child."(175ac).

I leave it to you, students, to explore this theme in relation to section #4, "Childhood, Innocence and Sin" of the outline concerning SIN, consulting also 291d-294a, 296b, 296d.

GUIDE-QUESTIONS FOR SECOND SESSION ON BERNANOS:

Guide-Question #l:

You may answer either A or B versions of this question. Version A can be quite impersonal, but Version B is more personal and "existential"

#1(A): In relation to your own spirituality and/or theology discuss briefly what you see as the main strengths and weaknesses of Bernanos' portrayal of the origin and nature of saintliness.

OR

#l (B): Reflect concerning all the following questions and write a response which includes some of your reflections and conclusions: "Do I aspire to participate more than I do in the dimensions of saintliness exemplified in the priest? If I do, is it all of them or only some? Why? If I do not aspire to a dimension, is this because I do not esteem it in anybody, or because I do not feel drawn to it myself? Or, while esteeming it in general, do I regard it as, regrettably, inaccessible for myself? Would I esteem any dimension, or find it more accessible, if it were revised in some aspects?"

Guide-Question #2: (to be answered ONLY as a SECOND essay, having already done #l)

One of the issues already raised by Dostoevsky and later to be raised by Eliot is whether all "ordinary Christians" are called to be "saints" or whether only a small minority has the latter calling. These rival views can be labeled "democratic" and "elitist". On one reading of Bernanos, he may be implying the "democratic" conviction when he celebrates the decisive spiritual transformation of the Comtesse; but we would have to assume that she would have continued to live a saintly life, had she not died. Another indicator in the same direction is where the priest says to Chantal, "I know what sin is. And you don't. All sins are alike. There is only one sin. . .Such truths are within reach of the humblest Christian if only he be willing to receive them from us" (138d). It is arguable that he understands sin deeply because he is saintly, not because he is a priest who has studied theology.

On the other hand, when Bernanos frequently depicts very pessimistically the spiritual possibilities of most human beings, he may be implying the "elitist" view. Note also his claim that if a saint, a "steward of divine grace"(118a), who has been "given more than others"(117d) in spiritual riches, should fail, the consequences for thousands are disastrous.

The Guide-Question: Present your own interpretation of Bernanos concerning "democratic" and "elitist" views of the calling to become a saint.

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GUIDE-QUESTIONS ON ELIOT

FIRST SESSION ON ELIOT: THE COCKTAIL PARTY

Some Background Quotations

Natural End for All, Supernatural End for Some: "It would be a society in which the natural end of man—virtue and well-being in community—is acknowledged for all, and the supernatural end—beatitude for those who have the eye to see it." (Eliot's "*The Idea of a Christian Society*", quoted in "T.S. Eliot's '*The Cocktail Party*' edited with notes and a commentary by Nevill Coghill (London: Faber, 1974, p.263))

Love of Creatures Replaced by Love of God: "'The best of a bad job is all any of us make of it, Except, of course, the saints…' Sir Henry…is making reference to the philosophical and theological view that ours is a 'fallen' world. . .In such a world the only way to do better than 'make the best of a bad job' of the world and its ways, is to 'divest itself of the love of created beings' and seek the love and will of God." (Coghill, p.221)

Two Alternative Modes of Love: "One of them is that mode which withdraws from the humdrum world of daily secular life under vows of chastity, poverty and obedience. . .The other is that of a life lived in the normal, natural bustle of the world, and which, if moved by love, takes other vows—the vows of marriage." (Coghill, p.24l)

Ordinary People Can Appreciate a Saint: "Eliot is not concerned with the person of exceptional spiritual awareness, or the saint, in isolation, but always with his relationship to the community, to ordinary men and women. He wants therefore to reach ordinary people, to help them towards 'some awareness of the depths of spiritual development' and "some appreciation and respect for those. . .who can proceed further in spiritual knowledge than most of us can'."(D.E. Jones, "*The Plays of T.S. Eliot*" (London: Routledge, 1960, pp.124 and 123))

Awareness of Sin is the Beginning of Saintliness: "The recognition of the reality of Sin is a New Life" (T.S.Eliot, quoted in Jones, same book, p.139)

Later, in "*The Elder Statesman*"(1958), Eliot Depicts Love Between Human Beings Much More Positively than in "*The Cocktail Party*":

(1) The Dedication to his Wife (whom he married in 1957)
"To whom I owe the leaping delight
That quickens my sense in our wakingtime
And the rhythm that governs the repose of our sleepingtime,
The breathing in unison

Of lovers. . .
Who think the same thoughts without need of speech
And babble the same speech without need of meaning:

To you I dedicate this book, to return as best I can
With words a little part of what you have given me.
The words mean what they say, but some have a further meaning
For you and me only."(294)

(2) Living Within Silent Love
"Father! You know that I would give my life for you.
Oh, how silly that phrase sounds! Bu there's no vocabulary
For love within a family, love that's lived in
But not looked at, love within the light of which
All else is seen, the love within which
All other love finds speech.
This love is silent."(333d-334a)

(3) Through Human Love Into Awareness of Divine Love
"MONICA: I've loved you from the beginning of the world.
Before you and I were born, the love was always there
That brought us together. . . .
Age and decrepitude can have no terrors for me,
Loss and vicissitude cannot appal me,
Not even death can dismay or amaze me
Fixed in the certainty of love unchanging.
I feel utterly secure in you; I am a part of you."(355bc)

(Page references in (1), (2) and (3) are to T.S.Eliot, "*Collected Plays*" (London: Faber, 1962)

(4) Mutual Love Mutually Transforms

"The last lines (of Eliot's Dedication to his Wife) are an exact parallel to the experience of Monica and Charles in a passage which. . . goes on to throw new light upon one of the main themes of *'The Cocktail Party'*—the change which makes people strangers is here countered by the change which lovers induce in each other as they grow into a new unity. . .

MONICA: How did this come, Charles? It crept so softly
On silent feet, and stood behind my back
Quietly, a long time, a long long time
Before I felt its presence.
CHARLES: Your words seem to come
From very far away. Yet very near. You are changing me
And I am changing you.
MONICA; Already
How much of me is you?
CHARLES: And how much of me is you?
I'm not the same person as a moment ago.
What do the words mean now—*I* and *you*?
MONICA: In our private world—now we have our private world—
The meanings are different."

(D.E. Jones, "*The Plays of T.S. Eliot*" (London: Routledge, 1962, p. 196ac). The passages quoted from the play are on page 298 of the "*Collected Plays*" cited above.)

FIRST SESSION ON ELIOT: THE COCKTAIL PARTY
GUIDE-QUESTIONS

Preparatory Reading

Read the play straight through, noting any sections that seem relevant to the first guide-question. Then study those sections very carefully.

Guide-Question #l:

This is a compulsory question in the sense that you can not answer #2 unless you already have answered #l.

By the end of the play Edward and Lavinia have undergone radical changes in their self-understanding. So has Celia. Compare and contrast the changes for Edward and Lavinia, on the one hand, and for Celia, on the other.

Guide-Question #2:

Imagine that you are a playwright, pondering the contents of an Epilogue to follow Act III. Five years later, Edward and Lavinia still together in marriage. They have both changed during the five years, having been inspired to become more like Celia in the depths of her awareness of sin and her saintly surrender into God. From your view of spirituality, what spiritually significant changes would it be possible and desirable for each of them to have undergone?

SECOND SESSION ON ELIOT; FOUR QUARTETS

Some Possible Resources for Interpreting the Poems

Harry Blamires, "*Word Unheard: A Guide through Eliot's Four Quartets*" (London: Methuen, 1969).

Northrop Frye, "*T.S.Eliot: An Introduction*" (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963,1981). See chapter 5, especially page 77.

Helen Gardner, "*The Composition of Four Quartets*" (London: Faber, 1978)

Paul Murray, "*T.S. Eliot and Mysticism: the secret history of Four Quartets*" (New York: St. Martins Press, 1991)

Raymond Preston, "*Four Quartets Rehearsed: A Commentary on T.S. Eliot's Cycle of Poems*" (New York: Haskell, 1972 –reprint of the 1946 edition)

(See also the quotations in the Eliot Prologue for the FINAL SESSION)

Abbreviations for the *Four Quartets*:

BN: Burnt Norton **DS: The Dry Salvages**
EC: East Coker **LG: Little Gidding**

Preparatory Reading in the Four Quartets

BN: Movements I, II and III (but in II, skimming "Garlic and sapphires…among the stars")
EC: I, III and IV **DS : V** **LG: III**

GUIDE-QUESTIONS ON FOUR QUARTETS

(You may respond to one or two of the three)

Guide-Question #l, The Negative Way:

STUDY: EC III and then BN III (especially lines 114-126). In these passages Eliot explores what is often called the "negative" mystical way.

QUESTION: What for you is the spiritual significance of this way as presented by Eliot?

Guide-Question #2, Memory and the Positive Way:

STUDY: BN, I and lines 83-90; LG, III; EC, I; DS, lines 85-99.
Note especially these lines: BN, line 11: "Footfalls echo in the memory".
LG, lines 15 6-157: "This is the use of memory: for liberation. . .".
EC, line l: "in my beginning is my end".
DS, line 93: "We had the experience but missed the meaning"

QUESTION: Explain and discuss the positive role of what Eliot calls "memory" in spirituality.

Guide-Question #3, Saints, Ordinary Christians and the "weakness of the changing body":

STUDY: BN lines 62-82; EC IV; DS V.

CONTEXT: In DS lines 199-233 Eliot depicts the saint as apprehending "the point of intersection of the timeless with time" during his/her "lifetime's death in love, ardour and selflessness and self-surrender", thereby receiving the gift of "Incarnation" where the "impossible union of spheres of existence is actual". For "most of us", in contrast with the saint," the gift is only "half-guessed" and "half-understood". Yet in BN, line 62-82 a similar apprehension "at the still point of the turning world" is depicted as impossible for mankind to sustain:

> **"Yet the enchainment of past and future**
> **Woven in the weakness of the changing body,**
> **Protects mankind from heaven and damnation**
> **Which flesh cannot endure."**

QUESTION: How is it possible for saints to avoid or transcend this apparently-universal human limitation? Is any light shed on this in ECIV, linked with Act III of "*The Cocktail Party*" (Reilly's comments on Celia's death)?

GUIDE-QUESTIONS ON DEAN

Introduction to Michael Dean, *The Walled Garden* (Windsor, Ontario: Black Moss Press, 1993).

In this novel, the narrator's self-identity and self-understanding is inextricably linked with a network of metaphors which arise from the accumulated collective consciousness of Western culture, especially Roman Catholic culture's artistic portrayal of Christian saints. The narrator also draws on unconscious dimensions of this collective network.

The author, in discussion, has described himself as being immersed in changes which have recently been taking place, and which should take place, within the accumulated Western culture and within himself. His conception of spirituality has affinities with Northrop Frye and Carl Jung in their emphases on human creative imagination, both collective and individual. In somewhat different ways, both these thinkers de-emphasize questions concerning the empirical-historical Jesus and consequently disturb Christians who are more literal in their focus. So, in his own way, does Dean, though he differs from Frye and Jung in his insistence that spirituality be quite literally embodied.

The novel is written in a "post-modern" way: the narrator is both within the story and outside it, commenting on it. Some readers who expect and enjoy reading a straightforward linear story have found this initially confusing and irritating, but usually they see the point to Dean's approach if they persist. For example, when the narrator's distances himself from himself by making comments on his life in the "garden" from the "wall" this is a crucial element in his existential spiritual malaise.

FIRST SESSION ON DEAN

Preparatory Reading:

Read or skim the entire book, paying special attention to all the passages referred to in the guide-questions and any others that seem relevant to each question.

Question #1

"There were tears in her eyes because the love of the two saints had not been allowed to live in the world as an intense physical passion between them."(34a) Consider 33d-34b, 32c; 30d; 62b-69d; also 80a-8ld, 83a and 95d, 98d, 100ab, 109bc. Do you share or reject Claudette's lament? Why? More generally, what are your reflections concerning saintly spirituality and sexual intimacy?

Question #2

"Before that night, moonlight on snow had been like the point of brilliance in an angel's eye. On that night I was fooled by it; the light no longer led me to heaven, but downward into the heart of matter."(37d) "She kept me bound to this Earth when I wanted, so desperately, to be in Heaven." (64b) Consider 35a-38d, 40ab, 41d-43a; also 15bc, 17b, 46c, 63b-69c, 78cd, 79a, 97b. To what extent does all this present an issue for spiritually-minded men as distinct from women?

SECOND SESSION ON DEAN

Preparatory Reading

Read more carefully any parts of the book that you skimmed for the first session. Pay special attention to all the passages referred to in the guide-questions and any others that seem relevant to each question.

Question #1

Explain and discuss the following quotation in relation to the other passages cited and any others that seem relevant: "Imagine that I am lying face up in the garden where the rosebush used to be, and imagine that the axis that goes between Heaven and the depth of the Earth is plunging through my heart and pinning me down so that my empty heart and the hole in the ground are one. Therefore, when August Baker and the Lady of the Laurel Hedge moved up and down the tunnel, my heart was their meeting place. Therefore, my heart is a walled garden half way between Heaven and the darkness at the depth of the Earth."(53d). Consider 52b-53d, 16d, 23ab, 44b-46c, 61cd, 80bd.

Question #2

"And that's where I've been all winter, deep inside myself, standing at the edge of the Grove with my own mother and her mother's mother and all our mothers before them. And I felt with them the salt embrace of all the years of separation from the Beloved. Women have always taken care of the serious business of life while the men have always gone off somewhere. They have gone off to sea, or off to war, or off to heaven leaving us alone and exposed for centuries on the rock-formation at the base of ourselves. I stood at the edge of the sacred Grove and

prayed 'Maranatha' with the mothers. This was more sorrowful for me than visiting the Gaspe. It was more sorrowful than Egypt must have been for Isis. The Grove was like the place where the St. Lawrence and the Nile meet each other and flow together into the sea forever."(77bc). Consider 23d-24c, 54a-56d, 59a, 74c-78d, 81a, 82d-83d, 85a-86c, 89a-97b.

To what extent does all this present an issue for women that is universal?

Question #3

Explain and discuss the following quotation in relation to the other passages cited and any others that seem relevant: "She is the forgotten and unforgiven aspect of Mother Mary. She has been driven underground since the beginning of Christianity. She has been forgotten and all men fear Her. You fallen angels think you know everything! But when you fall in love with the Virgin in your high-minded spiritual way, you get the Magdelaine as well, and the Magdelaine demands relationship and you cannot relate to Her strength and power, so you run back to heaven. Heaven is filled with cowards like you. The Lady has been hurt so much by heaven! She hides in the darkest part of the dark. She is the shadow cast by the swaying linden in night storms. She is the thorn of the laurel that sticks in the flesh of men. I speak with Her voice and when you hear me you tremble."(91bc) Consider 92b, 86bc-87b, 98a-104c, and 107a-110c.

GUIDE-QUESTIONS ON RUMI

Page References and Abbreviations:

Unless otherwise indicated all page references are to Coleman Barks, translator, *The Essential Rumi,* Harper (Castle Books) 1997

. Abbreviations for other books translated by Coleman Barks:

RBL: *Rumi the Book of Love,* Harper, 2003

SR: *The Soul of Rumi*, Harper, 2002

FIRST SESSION ON RUMI
GUIDE-QUESTION #1:HUMAN INCARNATION OF THE DIVINE

A Biblical Prologue: (New International Version)

Colossians 2.9-10: "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ."

2 Peter 1.4: "He has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature."

A Franciscan Prologue:

"Every Christian is invited to be an incarnation of the incarnation"(101b) "Just as Christ was the Word made flesh, so we are invited to become the same: the love of the Godhead in bodily form…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). "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." (101cd) Quotations from Sister Frances Teresa OSC, Living *the Incarnation: Praying with Francis and Clare of Assisi* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd 1993)

Coleman Barks' Prologue: (see SR, pages 8-10)

Two Arabic words, "FANA" and "BAQA" refer to a movement out (human-becoming-God) and a movement in (God-becoming-human).

Rumi's poetry occurs in a "dervish doorway" through which the human and divine energies move in either direction. "By letting these two conditions, *fana* and *baqa*, flow and exist simultaneously in his poetry, Rumi is saying that they are one thing, the core of a true human being, which he was and out of which these poems are spoken."

FANA: *"FANA* is the streaming that moves from the human out into mystery—the annihilation, the orgasmic expansion, the dissolving swoon into the all.

"What was in that candle's light that opened and consumed me so quickly!" That is the moth's question after *fana*, after it becomes flame. The king's falcon circles in the empty sky.'

"*Fana* is what opens our wings, what makes boredom and hurt disappear. We break to pieces inside it, dancing and perfectly free. We are the dreamer streaming into the loving nowhere of night. Rapt, we are the devouring worm who, through grace, becomes an entire orchard."

"*Fana* is that dissolution just before our commotion and mad night prayers become silence…it's human-becoming-God…the 'I am the truth' of Al-Hallaj Mansour. The arms open outward. This is the ocean with no shore into which the dewdrop falls."

"*Fana* is *annihilation in Allah*."

BAQA; "The concentration of a night of stars into one needle's eye. " God-becoming-human. Daily meditative practice and a sanctifying of the everyday. The qualities associated with *baqa* are honesty, sobriety, carefulness, a clarity Rumi sometimes calls 'reason', compassion and work within a community." A refinement, companionship, two people walking along some *particular* country road. The absorbing work of *this* day. The precise painting of a piece of trim. Courtesy and craftsmanship. "

<u>INSTRUCTIONS FOR READING:</u> FANA and BAQA combine in Rumi's "The Sunrise Ruby", which "balances love (enthusiasm) and discipline (practical helpfulness)"(Barks RBL, page 119) <u>Begin with this poem in ER</u>, page 100. It starts with lovemaking that leads into *fana* ("*There's* nothing left of me"). Then it moves into *baqa,* in two stages. The first is a brilliant image of God-becoming-human: "*The ruby and the sunrise are one".* The second is an exhortation to dedicated daily practice.

After studying "The Sunrise Ruby", <u>study "Sanai</u>" (an elegy for a Sufi saint, 22d-23c) and "<u>Each Note</u>" (which moves from being "bewildered in love" to being "your note" which God blows through you, 102-3). And ponder what Coleman Barks says in RBL concerning his Sufi mentor, Bawa Muhaiyaddeen: totally present in each moment and so attentive to every detail, the tiniest bit of outer onionskin left on a chopped bit, while also feeling with each breath the divine presence flowing through him (see p.118). Here Barks also says that such a lover as Bawa may seem to be judiciously considering very troubling matters, the world situation, relationship difficulties; but really he is leaning back riding in a wagon on the Bukhara road, soul beauty his only expertise.

Then study the assigned FANA-READINGS, followed by the assigned BAQA-READNGS.

<u>ASSIGNED FANA-READINGS</u>
ER 6b to 16d, 23d, 28c, 32bd

<u>ASSIGNED BAQA-READINGS</u>
<u>First, some poems from SR</u>

<u>WALKINGSTICK DRAGON (28d-29a)</u>

I want to dance *here* in *this* music,
Not in spirit where there is no time.
I circle the sun like shadow. My
head becomes my feet. Covered with

existence, Pharaoh; annihilated, I
am Moses. A pen between God-fingers,

a walkingstick dragon, my blind mind
taps along its cane of thought. Love

does no thinking. It waits with soul,
with me, weeping in this corner. We're

strangers here where we never hear
yes. We must be from some other town.

BACK TO BEING (34ac)

The ocean can do without fish. My soul,
Let me tell you a secret; it's rare to

meet a fish like the ocean! Seawater is
the nursing mother. Fish, the crying

babies. But sometimes the ocean comes
looking for a particular fish to hear

what it wants. The ocean will not act
before it knows. That fish is an

emperor then; the ocean its minister.
but don't call such a fish a *fish*! How

long will I keep talking in riddles?
Shams is the master who turns the earth

fragrant. When plants feel him near,
they open out. I would not have a soul,

if after tasting the taste of Shams,
I could go back to being who I was.

SOME KISS WE WANT (127bc)

There is some kiss we want with
our whole lives, the touch of

spirit on the body. Seawater
begs the pearl to break its shell.

And the lily, how passionately
it needs some wild darling! At

night, I open the window and ask
the moon to come and press its

face against mine. *Breathe into*
me. Close the language-door and

open the love-window. The moon
won't use the door, only the window.

ESSENCE IS EMPTINESS (31c)

Essence is emptiness.
Everything else, accidental.

Emptiness brings peace to your loving.
Everything else, disease.

In this world of trickery emptiness
is what your soul wants.

BLUE PERFECTION (32d)

How will you know the difficulties
of being human, if you're always
flying off to blue perfection?

Where will you plant your grief seeds?
Workers need ground to scrape and hoe,
not the sky of unspecified desire.

ASSIGNED BAQA-READINGS Second, from *Essential Rumi*
109ac, 238c, 243d, 244a, sections #25 and #26 (that is, 261 to 276)

ASSIGNED GUIDE-QUESTION #1:

(1) Does Rumi's fana-baqa poetry illuminate Christian calling in response to the biblical and Franciscan prologues?

OR

(2) Compare and contrast Rumi's fana-baqa poetry with your own conception and/or experience of human-divine union.

FIRST SESSION ON RUMI (CONTINUED)
GUIDE-QUESTION #2: RUMI GUIDES US ON THE WAY

Preliminary Note:

In SR, page 9d, Barks also considers under *baqa* "a return from expansion into each's unique individuation work, into pain and effort, confusion and dark comedy: the end of a frayed rope, the deep knowing of absence". Unlike most of the poems that we have considered as "*baqa*", the poems we will consider for this second guide-question depict human processes that typically involve work towards eventually uniting divine and human in our lives, but can seem very remote from such a fulfillment. There is no sharp line between the kinds of poems, but the second group can be considered as counsel for any of us, wherever we are on our way towards union with divine love.

ASSIGNED GUIDE-QUESTION #2:

Having pondered all the following poems, select several which you, personally, have found especially insightful, and explain why.

Assigned readings from ER:
Sections 9,11 and 12.and 4b-5d, 50c-53c, 69d-75d, 103bottom-105c, 109ac (contrast 98b), 111d, 145b-146b, 153bd, 193b-194top, 205ac

Assigned reading from SR: (l41bd)

A SONG OF BEING EMPTY

A certain sufi tore his robe in grief, and the tearing
brought such relief he gave

the robe the name *faraji w*hich means, "ripped open," or
"happiness', or "one who brings

the joy of being opened". It comes from the stem *faraj*,
which also refers to

the genitals, male and female. His teacher understood
the purity of the action,

while others just saw the ragged appearance. If you want peace and purity, tear

away your coverings. This is the purpose of emotion, to let a streaming beauty

flow through you. Call it spirit, elixir, or the original agreement between yourself

and God. Opening into that gives peace, a song of being empty, pure silence

.

SECON D SESSION ON RUMI
GUIDE-QUESTION #1: GOD IS WITHIN OUR LONGING FOR GOD

A Christian Prologue

Many of us go through life with the delusion that some other human being can complete us; but at best this is a way through to realizing, eventually, that only God can complete me, only God can satiate the longing that has been built into the very fabric of our human being. As St. Augustine famously said, "You, God, have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless till we find our rest in thee."

This restlessness can become a roar within us, as we realize that our own longing for God merges with God's longing for us: "Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me."(Psalm 42.7) Our longing is like an animal's panting thirst: "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God"(Psalm 42.1).

Our thirst-longing for the living God can be felt within our bodies if we let ourselves become open to its wordless groaning. As St. Paul said, "We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express". (Rom.8.26) The groaning of the Spirit joins with our own inward groaning: "We ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for our adoption as son, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved." (Rom.8.23-4) Thus our longing-groaning is also our living hope, a first fruit of the Spirit.

GUIDE-QUESTION #1:

Study the following poems in their given order, emphasizing the first four and then outline what is for you the theological significance of spiritual longing.

Assigned Readings from ER:

(i) 155a-56a; (ii)"I was sleeping. . ."(top of the page before page l); (iii) 17d-19b; (iv) 146c; 19b-20b; 20b-21c; 29cd; 286b, 2ac; 103d-104b.

Assigned Readings from SR:

THE ROAD HOME (170d-171a)

An ant hurries along a threshing floor with its wheat grain,
moving between huge stacks

of wheat, not knowing the abundance all around. It thinks its
one gain is all there is to

love. So we choose as tiny seed to be devoted to. This body,
one path or one teacher. Look

wider and father. The essence of every human being can *see,*
and what that essence-eye takes

in, the being becomes. Saturn. Solomon! The ocean pours
through a jar, and you might say it

swims *inside* the fish! This mystery gives peace to your
longing and makes the road home.

ONE SWAYING BEING (173cd)

Love is not condescension, never
that, nor books, nor any marking

on paper, nor what people say of
each other. Love is a tree with

branches reaching into eternity
and roots set deep in eternity,

and no trunk! Have you seen it?
The mind cannot. Your desiring

cannot. The longing you feel for
this love comes from inside you.

When you become the Friend, your
longing will be as the man in the

ocean who holds to a piece of
wood. Eventually wood, man, and

ocean become one swaying being,
Shams Tabriz, the secret of God

SECOND SESSION ON RUMI
QUIDE-QUESTION #2: SPIRITUALITY IS MUSIC

A SUFI PROLOGUE: INAYAT KHAN'S 'MUSIC'

Rumi belonged to the Muslim-mystic tradition of SUFIS which he helped to shape. One fundamental theme for sufis is the centrality of music in spirituality. An eminent Sufi teacher in the 20th century was Inayat Khan. I will quote from a work by him that is not easily accessible: *Music,* published for the International Headquarters Sufi Movement, 11, Rue John Rehfous, Geneva by She. Muhammad Ashraf, Lahore,Pakistan, 1971.

Music, the Cosmos and Human Beings

"The music of the universe is the background of the small picture which we call music. Our sense of music, our attraction to music, shows that there is music in the depth of our being. Music is behind the working of the whole universe. Music is not only life's greatest object, but it is life itself.

Hafiz, the great and wonderful Sufi poet of Persia, says, 'Many say that life entered the human body by the help of music, but the truth is that life itself is music.' What made him say this? He referred to a legend which exists in the East and which tells how God made a statue of clay in His own image, and asked the soul to enter into it; but the soul refused to be imprisoned, for its nature is to fly about freely and not to be limited and bound to any sort of capacity. The soul did not wish

in the least to enter this prison. Then God asked the angels to play their music, and as the angels played the soul was moved to ecstasy, and through that ecstasy, in order to make the music more clear to itself, it entered this body. And it is told that Hafiz said, 'People say that the soul, on hearing that song, entered the body; but in reality the soul itself was song!'

It is a beautiful legend, and much more so is its mystery. The interpretation of this legend explains to us two great laws. One is that freedom is the nature of the soul, and for the soul the whole tragedy of life is the absence of that freedom which belongs to its original nature; and the next mystery that this legend reveals to us is that the only reason why the soul has entered the body of clay or matter is to experience the music of life, and to make this music clear to itself. And when we sum up these two great mysteries, the third mystery, which is the mystery of all mysteries, comes to our mind. This is that the unlimited part of ourselves becomes limited and earthbound for the purpose of making this life, which is the outward life, more intelligible.

Therefore there is a loss and a gain. The loss is the loss of freedom, and the gain is the experience of life, which is fully gained by coming into this limited life which we call the life of an individual.

What makes us feel drawn to music is that our whole being is music; our mind and our body, the nature in which we live, the nature which has made us, all that is beneath and around us, it is all music; and we are close to all this music, and live and move and have our being in music."(pages 8-9)

<u>Music prior to painting, poetry and religion</u>

"Many in the world take music as source of amusement, a pastime, and to many music is an art and a musician an entertainer, (but it is) the most sacred of all arts…..What the art of painting cannot clearly suggest, poetry explains in words; but that which even a poet finds difficult to express in poetry is expressed in music. By this I do not only say that music is superior to art and poetry, but in point of fact music excels religion; for music raises the soul of man even higher than the so-called external forms of religion.

By this it must not be understood that music can take the place of religion; for every soul is not necessarily tuned to that pitch where it can really benefit by music, nor is every music necessarily so high that it will exalt a person who hears it more than religion will do. However, for those who follow the path of the inner cult, music is essential for their spiritual development. The reason is that the soul who is seeking that is in search of the formless God. Art no doubt is most elevating, but at the same time it contains form; poetry has words, names, suggestive of form; it is only music which has beauty, power, charm and at the same time can raise the soul beyond form." (pages 3-4).

<u>Music and Nature</u>

"We say that we enjoy nature. But what is it in nature that we enjoy? It is music. Something in us has been touched by the rhythmic movement, by the perfect harmony which is so seldom found in this artificial life of ours; it lifts one and makes one feel that nature is the real temple, the true religion. One moment

standing in the midst of nature with open heart is a whole life-time, if one is in tune with nature." (page 10)

Music and Illuminated Souls

"The whole life of the most illuminated souls who have lived in this world, like the greatest prophets in India, has been music. From the miniature music which we understand, they expanded the whole universe of music, and in that way they were able to inspire. The one who receives the key to the working of life, is he who becomes intuitive; it is he who has inspiration. It is he to whom revelations manifest, for then his language becomes music.

Every person who comes to us, every object we see, is revealing. In what form? It tells us its character, nature and secrets. Every person tells us his past, present and future. In what way? Every person explains to us all that they contain. In what manner? In the form of music, if we can only hear it….. In every being you can see this, and if one looks deep insight into the nature of things one will read it even in a tree." (pages 10-12)

RUMI SECOND SESSION
GUIDE-QUESTION # 2

Assigned Readings from ER:

102d-103d, 105d-106a, 98b, 34d-35c, 36b, 46d, 51bc, 253d-254top, 247d-248a, and Section #27 (pages 277-28l)

Assigned Guide-Question:

Having studied the Sufi Prologue and the assigned readings, outline some of your own reflections concerning the spiritual significance of music.

FINAL SESSION
LANGUAGE AND SPIRITUALITY
PERSPECTIVES IN ELIOT AND RUMI

PREPARATORY WORK FOR THE SESSION

READING: Below there are prologues and assigned readings for both of the authors. Read them all so that you can join in the seminar discussions of each author on his own, and perhaps of both together, comparing and contrasting.
WRITING: There is a Guide-Question for each of the two authors. Write a response to ONE (or perhaps two) of them.

ELIOT

PROLOGUES TO ELIOT

Harry Blamires;

"In many ways art provides examples of how movement and stillness can be reconciled and stability moulded out of the flux of time. Poetry and music move 'in time' both in the sense that they have metrical measure and in the sense that in performance they begin and end. But the pattern gives them stillness in spite of the fact that movement is of the essence. Conversely, the live outlines of a Chinese jar give it unceasing 'movement' in spite of the fact that stillness is its essence." (op. cit., p.36)

"Eliot will not evade the ultimate demand of truth that it should not be isolatable from the truth-speaker, should not be something to which the true utterance points, but something of which the true utterance partakes, and indeed something which the true utterance manifests both in its own matter and in its own form. The truth of the *Quartets* is here present in their writing, here in their reading, here in their understanding, in their performance, as it is there present in the matters to which they draw our attention, or rather in the matters in which they involve us. For, strictly speaking, they draw our attention to nothing. Rather they commit us to an experience which is a re-living of experience and an anticipation of experience—and not only ours, but the poet's, and not only his, but humanity's (and 'not the experience of one life only'; see DS98). The poems do not tell us about, but take us into, a present in which past and future are contained, a present filled full of meaning by virtue of the patterned moments of illumination it is capable of bearing." (op. cit., p.38)

Denis Donoghue:

"I have been suggesting that the fundamental motive of 'Bunt Norton' is to void the claim of spontaneity; to represent as vulgar any immediate response to an event; to imply a form of life in which the meaning of an event comes long after its mere occurrence and in a light which is not that of punctuality. According to the rhetoric of Eliot's Christian poetry, the only event in which meaning coincides with the act is the Incarnation." ("On 'Burnt Norton'" in *Words in Time: New Essays on Eliot's Four Quartets*, ed. Edward Lobb, London: Athlone Press, 1993).

Raymond Preston:

"The difference between the 'temporal' and the 'eternal' is expressed in phrases which are condensed to the utmost: the simplification of expression which you find in a biblical phrase like 'before Abraham was, I am' is carried a stage further by means of a play on two senses of the verb 'to be'.

In order to arrive there,
To arrive where you are . . .

is Eliot's adaptation of St. John's phrase, 'In order to arrive at being everything'—in other words, at complete realization of one's potentialities, which in time are always in process of being realized. If you take the phrase 'where you are' in the common sense ('where you are placed at the moment') –as you do at a first reading—the whole line appears unintelligible. And the process of finding a meaning for the line is not merely the process of solving a puzzle; it involves changing, in a moment, the direction of the whole mind, which is perhaps influenced more than we imagine by common forms of speech. As the eye may be first focused on a fly on the window-pane and then, immediately, on a distant mountain, so the mind in grasping the line first makes the too familiar assumption of movement in time, and then in a flash realizes the intended concept of being." (Op. cit. pp. 32-33; the reference to "St. John" is to the mystic St. John of the Cross, on whom Eliot draws much in EC, III)

Northrop Frye:

"What he (Eliot) finds in Christianity does not give him a formula for value judgments on poetry, but a conception of the function and context of poetry. We start with what he calls, quoting Andrewes, 'The word within the word, unable to speak a word,' at the hidden centre of reality. And for Eliot as for Coleridge before him, we end with the Word as the circumference of reality containing within itself time, space, and poetry viewed in the light of 'the conception of poetry as a living whole of all the poetry that has ever been written.' This last is an experience of poetry as the Song of Man which is also, like the poem which inspired St. John of the Cross, the Song of Songs, and also, like the Bhagavadgita, to Eliot the greatest poem in the world next to Dante, the Son of God."(op. cit., pp. 45-46).

ASSIGNED READINGS FOR ELIOT;

Study mainly BN, V. Relevant but less central are EC, II and V; also DS, lines 85-123. Note as well the Dedication for *The Elder Statesman*, quoted above in the session on *The Cocktail Party*.

GUIDE-QUESTION ON ELIOT:

Consider Eliot's statement, "My words echo / Thus, in your mind" (BN, lines 14-15) in its immediate context and in relation to the Quartets as a whole, especially the assigned readings for this session.

In your mini-essay, discuss how he succeeds or fails in communicating spiritual truth to you as reader.

RUMI

PROLOGUES TO RUMI

Anne Marie Schimmel

"Rumi knows that speech hides as much as it reveals; to speak means to close the window opening onto Reality; and the dust that is stirred up by the movement of the broom' Tongue' settles on the mirror 'Experience'. Hence the constant reminder to be silent." (*I am Wind You are Fire: The Life and Work of Rumi* (Boston: Shambhala, 1992, p. 44)

"His poetry—so he thinks in moments of high ecstasy—is 'food for angels', and when he does not talk, the hungry angel comes and forces him to speak. Yet poetry at most conveys the fragrance of the Beloved to those who are blind, like Jacob, and consoles them with its scent, but it can never convey the fullness of Reality." (op. cit. p.43)

Andrew Harvey:

"Rumi is an initiatory poet. He is initiating anyone who can hear to the deepest truth of their own being. . . He can fling before us his rubies and pearls and diamonds, he can speak of the highest truth, he can fashion works of consummate, outrageous beauty, but nothing can happen if we are not receptive. . .

My poetry is like Egyptian bread.
Night passes and you cannot eat it.
Eat it while it is fresh, before the dust settles,
Its place is in the tropics of awareness.
It dies in this world because of the cold.

. . .How will we understand a word of what this man is attempting to give to us if we do not, all of us, open the tropics of awareness within us? That is, open our entire being to everything that we have ever known of ecstasy and of joy. Coalesce, condense, transmute everything, every ecstasy that you have ever had, sexual, emotional, musical, looking at a sunset, looking at the sea. Condense them, meditate on them, draw them deep into your heart, and at that moment, when the heart is filled with bliss, then read Rumi's poetry. Read it by the light of that bliss. And then his poetry will take us even further into that bliss."

Coleman Barks:

"Some sufis have seen the beauties of art as something that can slow down soul growth. Art gives a teasing taste of surrender without the full experience. Beautiful poetry can keep one on the verge of the oceanic annihilation in God. Rumi says, we've been walking in the surf holding our robes up, when we should be diving naked under, and deeper under."(ER, page 118)

ASSIGNED READINGS FOR RUMI

ER: Section 10 (pages 118-23), 104-5, 171d-172c, 30b-32a

GUIDE-QUESTION ON RUMI;

Discuss, in relation to the assigned readings, your own experience in responding to Rumi's poems.