

**RGP 3260H & RGP6260H**  
**SPIRITUALITY IN LITERATURE**

**DON EVANS**  
FALL TERM 2003

**REGIS COLLEGE**  
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**

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

Retired Minister, United Church of Canada

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

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

Phone: 416-924-3943 (do not use 416-585-4422)

Email: [donald.evans@utoronto.ca](mailto:donald.evans@utoronto.ca)

Webpage: <http://individual.utoronto.ca/devans>

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

**(1) 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 1927, he graduated in Philosophy and English from the University of Toronto in 1950.

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

He also studied theology at McGill University (B.D. 1955), was ordained as a minister in the United Church of Canada and served a congregation at Grand Forks, B.C. 1955-58. During the 1960s he was active in the national Committees on International Affairs (writing on South Africa) and on Christian Faith (helping to write the new United Church Creed). Having taught in the McGill Faculty of Divinity 1960-64, he moved to the Department of Philosophy at University of Toronto where he taught until official retirement in 1993 (philosophy of religion, of mysticism, of human nature 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

**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-lead 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?

**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.