

## **Module MTh01: The History of Christian Spirituality**

Spirituality is understood as the intrinsic, self-transcending character of all human persons and how this is concretely lived in everyday life. Spirituality points toward the essential human capacity to receive and transmit the life of God, and reflects our unlimited openness to being, to life, and conscious relationship. Therefore, the study of the history of spirituality is a lot more than the study of facts and the events of history, rather it traces the progress of women and men as individuals and groups, as congregations and movements, as cultural trends and political developments towards an ever deeper appreciation of the reality of God and the lived expression of that reality. The history of spirituality documents the particular ways in which Christians have come to understand, value, and direct their lives as disciples of Jesus in their own time.

The following is an outline of the module units:

- 1) Introduction to the study of the history of spirituality.
- 2) The Scriptural Origins of Christian Spirituality.
- 3) Patristic Spirituality
- 4) Christian Monastic Spirituality
- 5) Mendicant Spirituality
- 6) Late Medieval Spirituality
- 7) Reformation Spirituality
- 8) 17th Century Spirituality
- 9) The Modern Period
- 10) Postmodern Spirituality

The History of Spirituality must start with a sense of the abiding presence of God from its roots in the Jewish faith tradition, through to the incomparable presence and reality of Jesus. History reflects the deep need and desire of humankind to experience the invitation by God, to experience the Spirit who lives among and within us, who wills and works to recreate and fashion humankind as a whole into the people of God. The history of spirituality is founded upon, and traces, the understanding and experience of those men and women who seek to fully realise the divine potential of humankind, who understand its promise, and embody the challenge of a transcendent present and a more authentic future. These people stand at the spiritual centre of history, reflecting the great promise of an intimate joining of humanity at its deepest core with an infinite Being; in so doing they link the past, present and future, transcend time and space, life and death. This relationship with God grounds and supports all human experience. It is the function of the history of spirituality to identify the origin and development of the growing consciousness of the special reality of God's to transform people and human society in the movement towards a new creation. While this history is a story of transformation, the formation and reformation of God's people, it also documents the many ways in which the journey into God has become distorted and has deviated from an authentic response to the abiding presence of God. This is also part of our history and needs to be acknowledged and understood so that we might learn from the past mistakes of others.

Required reading for the module: Woods, Richard. Christian Spirituality: God's Presence through the Ages, Revised Edition. New York: Orbis Books, 2006.