

Programme: M.Th. (Carmelite Studies)

Module MTh04: Contemporary Spiritualities

The study of contemporary Christian Spirituality presents us with a challenge as we live in a world that in the last fifty years has seen a rapid process of change concerning the perception of religion in our western societies, which some are now claiming is a post-Christian society. What can be a Christian reaction to this challenge? This is question that received considerable attention within the 'Academy' at the turn of the millennium. It is thus a wide subject that needs to be considered from a wide range of perspectives and a flavour of the width of this modules approach may be gained from the assigned readings that are made available in each of the ten units.

1.	Dermot Lane, <i>The Experience of God: An Invitation to Do Theology</i> . Dublin: Veritas, 2003. Chapter 2: Experience, God and Theology.
2.	<i>Scripture as the Soul of Theology</i> , edited by Edward J. Mahoney, Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2000. Chapter 1: Biblical Foundations for Spirituality by Sandra Schneiders.
3.	Michael Downey, <i>Altogether Gift: A Trinitarian Spirituality</i> . Dublin: Dominican Publications, 2000. Chapter 2: A Grammar of Gift: The Doctrine of the Trinity.
4.	Pat Collins, <i>Spirituality for the Twenty-First Century: Christian Living in a Secular Age</i> . Dublin: Columba Press, 1999. Chapter 1: Models of Spirituality.
5.	Ronald Rolheiser, <i>Seeking Spirituality: Guidelines for a Christian Spirituality for the Twenty-First Century</i> . London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1998. Chapter 10: Sustaining Ourselves in the Spiritual Life.
6.	Ann Ulanov and Barry Ulanov, <i>Primary Speech: The Psychology of Prayer</i> . Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1999. Chapter 2: Prayer as Primary Speech.
7.	<i>Christian Spirituality: Post Reformation and Modern</i> , edited by Louis Dupré and Don Saliers, London: SCM Press, 1989. Chapter on Christian Feminist Spirituality by Sally Purvis.
8.	James Nelson, <i>The Intimate Connection: Male Sexuality, Masculine Spirituality</i> . London: SPCK, 1992. Chapter 6, New Ways in our Sexual Spirituality.
9.	Jon Sobrino, <i>Spirituality of Liberation: Towards Political Holiness</i> . New York: Orbis, 1988. Chapter 2: Spirituality and Liberation.
10.	James Bacik, <i>Spirituality in Transition</i> . Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1996. Chapter 1, Christian Spirituality in a Postmodern World.

From a Carmelite perspective we might say that a significant step in the spiritual life is coming to understand that we can routinely find God in ordinary experience and also to know that experience is a test of the truth of God. The lives and writings of our saints' bear witness to this: but what is experience in our contemporary context?

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Experience serves a critical function in the spiritual life; that is why there is always a phenomenological dimension to spirituality. In other words, there must first be a person, or event or something we experience or encounter to which we then make a response. This is why the study of spirituality has to start with experience; otherwise, there is the danger that it will remain a series of concepts, or merely an account of the spiritual experience of others. Experience makes spirituality personal and objective. From a Christian perspective we understand that experience has both a human and a divine dimension; that it is both immanent and transcendent – it is through the entire range of human and religious experience that we discover God's self-revelation to us. This is why we need to understand and explore the nature and dynamics of human experience since this becomes the foundation for our relationship with the Transcendent.

This forms the basic approach that this module takes to look at our contemporary experiences in the field of Christian Spirituality.