

Course Syllabus

KNT 3511/6511HS

Christian Spirituality in the Reformed Protestant Tradition

Knox College, Toronto School of Theology

Winter 2026

Instructor Information

Instructor: John A. Vissers, Professor of Systematic Theology
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Course Identification

Course Number: Course Code KNT3000/6000
Course Format: *In-person onsite*
Course Name: Christian Spirituality in the Reformed Protestant Tradition
Course Location: Knox College Academic Wing, Room TBC
Class Times: Tuesdays, 9:00 – 11:00 a.m.
Prerequisites: KNT1101 - Reformed Theology in Dialogue (or equivalent) and Global History of Christianity (or equivalent).

Course Description

This is a course in spiritual theology, it explores theologies and practices of Christian spirituality, i.e., the study of the experience of God; what the Reformed Protestant tradition has called 'piety.' The course will look at spiritual theologians in the history of Reformed Protestantism, the themes they wrote about, and the implications for spiritual practices today. Throughout the course, we will examine 'Reformed' spirituality in relation to catholic, ecumenical, contemporary, and Indigenous spiritualities. The first half of the course focuses on the spiritual theology of the sixteenth century Reformer John Calvin, set against the Catholic spirituality which preceded it, and the theology and practices of the means of grace (the Word, the sacraments, and prayer) which emerged from it in the Reformed tradition, including a discussion of the significance of these practices for people of faith today. The second half of the course highlights key moments, figures, and themes in the history of Reformed spirituality, and sets these in conversation with contemporary spiritualities.

Course Objectives/Learning Outcomes

Spiritual theology is the study of the experience of God and the spiritual practices of the Christian life. It examines those experiences and practices in terms of the Bible, the Christian tradition, and the experience of people of faith today. It offers critical reflection on those experiences and practices by interpreting them in terms of Christian doctrine (teaching, dogma), and in conversation with disciplines such as psychology and sociology. This course is intended to assist students in preparing to be congregational ministers and psychospiritual therapists.

In respect of knowledge and skills, these are the top five outcomes:

- Be able to describe and explain the primary spiritual disciplines of the Christian tradition
- Be able to discuss the theological presuppositions that undergird spirituality, especially regarding distinctions between Roman Catholic and Reformed Protestant practices
- Develop a plan to adopt and incorporate at least one spiritual practice in one's life during the course
- Able to teach a confirmation class or a class for new Christians or seekers on the meaning and practice of spiritual practices
- Able to reflect critically on the theology and practices of Reformed Protestant spirituality in relation to Indigenous spiritualities

The syllabus describes a more detailed list of learning outcomes below.

Course Texts

Required:

Course pack of primary text readings on Quercus on: John Calvin, John Owen, Richard Baxter, Jonathan Edwards, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Karl Barth, Jürgen Moltmann, Randy Woodley, Henri Nouwen, Daniel Migliore, and John Vissers. Additional readings will be recommended throughout the course.

Course Website

Quercus: <https://q.utoronto.ca/> This course uses Quercus for its course website. To access it, go to the UofT Quercus login page at <https://q.utoronto.ca/> and login using your UTORid and password. Once you have logged in to Quercus using your UTORid and password, look for the **My Courses** module, where you'll find the link to the website for all your Quercus-based courses. (Your course registration with ACORN gives you access to the course website in Quercus.) Information for students about using Quercus can be found at: <https://community.canvaslms.com/docs/DOC-10701>.

Course Schedule

Week 1: Tuesday, January 6

What is Reformed Spirituality?

Required Reading: John Vissers, "Reformed (Calvinist) Spirituality," *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, General Editor, Glen Scorgie. Zondervan, 2011, 710-712.

Week 2: Tuesday, January 13

Piety and the Experience of God

Required Reading: *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book I.1.1, 1.2 (35-43)

Week 3: Tuesday, January 20

The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life

Required Reading: *Institutes*, Book III.1.1, 1.2 (537-542); III.6-8 (684-712)

Recommended Reading: Daniel Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, Chapter 11 (266-293)

Week 4: Tuesday, January 27

The Bible and the Christian Life

Required Reading: *Institutes*, Book I. XI-IX (69-96)

Week 5: Tuesday, February 3

Theology and Practice of Prayer

Required Reading: *Institutes*, III.XX (850-920)

Week 6: Tuesday, February 10

The Sacraments and the Spiritual Life

Required Reading: *Institutes*, IV.XIV (1276-1303)

Week 7: Reading Week (No Class on February 17)

Week 8: Tuesday, February 24

Puritan Spirituality on Friendship with God

Required Reading: selections from Richard Baxter, *Depression, Anxiety and the Christian Life*, and John Owen, *Communion with God*

Week 9: Tuesday, March 3

Jonathan Edwards on Religious Affections

Required Reading: *Edwards*, selections from *Religious Affections* and *A Personal Narrative*

Week 10: Tuesday, March 10

Schleiermacher on Religious Experience

Required Reading: selections from F.D.E. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*

Week 11: Tuesday, March 17

Karl Barth on the Word of God and the Christian Life

Required Reading: selections from Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. IV

Week 12: Tuesday, March 24

Jürgen Moltmann on Suffering and Hope

Required Reading: selections from Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*

Week 13: Tuesday, March 31

Reformed Spirituality in Contemporary Perspective: Feminist, Post-Colonial, 2SLGBTQ+, Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Ecumenical, Interfaith, Indigenous

Required Reading: Randy Woodley, selections from *Indigenous Theology* and Henri Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*.

Week 14: Examination Week

3000-level students: Spiritual practices paper due Tuesday, April 7, 5 p.m.

6000-level students: Final research paper due Tuesday, April 7, 5 p.m.

Course Requirements

1. Attendance and participation. Your full involvement during the course is required to achieve a thorough understanding of Reformed spirituality through interaction with the instructor, the course material, and other students. Class sessions will consist of lectures and discussions. Students must attend at least 80% of classes to be eligible for credit, i.e., not more than two absences. Participation is worth 10% of the final grade based on a student's self-evaluation. The instructor reserves the right to adjust this self-evaluation.

2. Thoughtful and careful completion of the required readings. All students are expected to obtain and/or have access to the course texts and complete the weekly readings. Readings must be done ahead of class; students should be prepared to discuss the readings in class. The total number of pages in the readings for this course is approximately 720 pages, 60 pages per week.

3. Critical Summative Papers/In-class presentations: In the first half of the course, all students will submit a brief report on the five readings from Calvin's Institutes. Each week, one student will present their paper and lead a discussion on it in class. The presentation should be a two-page review of the document that includes a summary, key issues, and critical questions. The first paper will be graded as Pass/Fail. The remaining four papers are each worth 7.5% of the final grade ($4 \times 7.5\% = 30\%$ total).

4. Spiritual Leadership Paper: All students will prepare a lesson for an adult class in a congregation on one of the following topics: (1) How to Pray, (2) How to Read the Bible, or (3) How to Prepare for the Lord's Supper. The presentation should include such things as definitions and descriptions of the means of grace being emphasized, the distinctive emphasis on the Reformed tradition, practical instruction on how to engage in these spiritual practices, etc. The paper should be four to six pages long and in the form of a lesson or presentation. The paper is worth 20% of the final grade. Due: Tuesday, March 3, 5:00 p.m.

5. Spiritual Theologian Paper: All 3000-level students will write a short biographical paper on one spiritual writer in the history of the Reformed Protestant tradition. The paper will focus on the writer's contribution to spirituality and why the writer should continue to be ready today (or not). It should be written in the format of a dictionary entry and limited to 500 words. The paper is worth 20% of the final grade. Due: Tuesday, March 17, 5:00 p.m.

6. Spiritual Practice Paper: All 3000-level students will write a paper on one of the following topics in spirituality: (1) Self-Examination; (2) Spiritual Friendship; (3) A Rule of Life; or (4) Keeping a Spiritual Journal. This paper should describe the practice, how to go about it, and reflections on its theological and spiritual significance for the Christian life. The paper should be four to six pages in length. The paper is worth 20% of the grade. Due: Tuesday, April 7, 5:00 p.m.

7. Major Research Paper: all 6000 level students will write a major research paper on a spiritual writer on a key doctrinal theme (e.g. union with Christ) and/or spiritual practice (e.g., prayer) in the Reformed Protestant tradition. Papers should demonstrate an ability to utilize primary text material and engage as an interlocutor with the relevant secondary material. A suggested list of topics will be distributed in class, and students must consult the instructor before choosing a topic. The paper should be 15-20 pages. The paper is worth 40% of the final grade. Due: Tuesday, April 7, 5:00 p.m.

Course Grading

Participation	10%
Critical Summative Papers	30%
Spiritual Leadership Paper	20%
Spiritual Theologian Paper	20% (3000 only)
Spiritual Exercise Paper	20% (3000 only)
Major Research Paper	40% (6000 only)

The course will be graded according to the grade scheme of the TST and Knox College

Basic Degree Handbooks:

A ⁺	90 – 100	Profound and Creative
A	85 – 89	Outstanding
A ⁻	80 – 84	Excellent: clear evidence of original thinking, of analytic and synthetic ability; sound critical evaluations, broad knowledge base.
B ⁺	77 – 79	Very good
B	73 – 76	Good: good critical capacity and analytic ability; reasonable understanding of relevant issues, good familiarity with the literature
B ⁻	70 – 72	Satisfactory: adequate critical capacity and analytic ability; some understanding of relevant issues and with the literature
FZ	0 – 69	Failure: failure to meet the above criteria

Course Policies

Handbooks: Policies for courses are contained in the TST Basic Degree Handbook (You can find the TST Basic Degree Handbook at <http://www.tst.edu/content/handbooks>) and the Knox Student Handbook (You can find the content of the Knox College Student Handbook at <https://knox.utoronto.ca/documents>).

Class attendance. Students are expected to conduct themselves in a manner congruent with the vocation they are seeking to enter and in which they desire to give leadership. To that end, it is a regulation of Knox College that a minimum of approximately 80% attendance at courses (10 of 12 weeks) is required for credit; 100% attendance is expected at seminar courses. Habitual lateness for class will be counted as absence.

Teaching and learning are interactive, not passive, activities. Therefore, students may not “attend” an in-person class through unauthorized audio or video streaming or by watching or listening to a recording; instructors are not obligated to record or permitted to stream their in-person classes. Online classes that include a synchronous video component require the same level of attendance as an in-person course, and students may not “attend” by watching or listening to a recording. Online classes that include an asynchronous component require participation in all the activities for each week or module to meet the attendance requirement. Students requiring accommodations to attend class must present medical and/or Accessibility Services documentation that outlines the type and duration of accommodation(s) required.

Class recording. Much of the learning that goes on in the virtual or in-person classroom is founded upon mutual disclosure that takes place between instructor and student, and between students. Parties outside of this learning community have not committed themselves to this relationship of trust. A student without an approved accommodation who wishes to make an audio recording of an in-person class must secure the agreement of the instructor and all classmates; livestreaming and video recordings are not permitted. Online video-streamed classes may be recorded at the discretion of the instructor. Personal recordings may be used only by the student who made the recording; no recording may be reproduced, posted, or distributed without the written permission of the instructor.

Upload assignments: All assignments are to be uploaded either as .pdf or .docx files onto Quercus.

Late Policy. Basic Degree students are expected to hand in assignments by the date given in the course outline. Please check the Late Policy in the Knox College Student Handbook and the TST Basic Degree Handbook. The absolute deadline for the course is the examination day scheduled for the course or the last day of exam week for the semester in which the course is taught, whichever is sooner. This penalty is not applied to students with documented medical or compassionate difficulties or exceptional reasons (e.g., a death in the family or a serious illness); when facing such difficulties students must consult the instructor immediately.

Completion of Course work: all course work (including any late work) must be completed by the end of term; the absolute final due date is the Thursday of examination week. Only in the case of illness (with a note from a doctor), bereavement or other unusual circumstances will an extension be considered, and this must be authorized by the Academic Dean and reported to the Basic Degree Committee and the Faculty of Knox College. Students facing such difficulties are kindly requested to consult with their faculty adviser or basic degree director, who should make a recommendation on the matter to the instructor and request an SDF. The absolute deadline for obtaining an SDF for the course is the examination day scheduled for the course or the last day of examination week, whichever is sooner. An SDF must be requested from the registrar's office in the student's college of registration no later than the last day of exam week in which the course is taken. The SDF, when approved, will have a mutually agreed upon deadline that does not extend beyond the conclusion of the following term. If a student has not completed work but has not been granted an SDF, a final mark will be submitted calculating a zero for work not submitted.

Back-up copies. Please keep back-up copies of all essays that have been submitted online.

Course grades. Consistent with the policy of the University of Toronto, course grades submitted by an instructor are reviewed by a committee of the instructor's college before being posted to ACORN. Grades are not official until they are posted to ACORN. Course grades may be adjusted where they do not comply with University Assessment and Grading Practices Policy found at <https://governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/secretariat/policies/grading-practices-policy-university-assessment-and-january-26-2012>, policies found in the TST conjoint program handbooks, or college grading policy.

Inclusive Language. Knox College has an inclusive language policy, available at https://knox.utoronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Knox-College-Policy_Use-of-Language-Policy-and-Glossary_221003.pdf.

Accessibility. Students with a disability or health consideration, whether temporary or permanent, are entitled to accommodation. Students in conjoint degree programs must register at the University of Toronto's Accessibility Services offices; information is available at <http://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/as>. The sooner a student seeks accommodation, the quicker we can assist.

Plagiarism. Students submitting written material in courses are expected to provide full documentation for sources of both words and ideas in footnotes or endnotes. Direct quotations should be placed within quotation marks. (If small changes are made in the quotation, they should be indicated by appropriate punctuation such as brackets and ellipses, but the quotation still counts as a direct quotation.) Failure to document borrowed material constitutes plagiarism, which is a serious breach of academic, professional, and Christian ethics. An instructor who discovers evidence of student plagiarism is not permitted to deal with the situation individually but is required to report it to their head of college or delegate according to the Graduate program Handbook linked from <http://www.tst.edu/academic/resources-forms/handbooks> and the University of Toronto *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters*

<https://governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/secretariat/policies/code-behaviour-academic-matters-july-1-2019>. A student who plagiarizes in this course will be assumed to have read the document “Avoidance of plagiarism in theological writing” published by the Graham Library of Trinity and Wycliffe Colleges:

<https://www.trinity.utoronto.ca/library/research/theology/avoiding-plagiarism-in-theological-writing/>

Use of Generative AI, e.g., ChatGPT. With the advent of publicly accessible generative AI (GenAI) tools, U of T has been assessing the technological landscape and updating relevant guidelines and protocols as needed. The University will be collecting and sharing the guidelines and protocols as they become available. Additional resources are regarding GenAI usage by faculty, students, researchers, and staff are posted at <https://ai.utoronto.ca/>. **Students may use generative AI tools like ChatGPT for research, but all use of generative AI for composition to complete an assignment is strictly forbidden. All use of online resources must be properly documented.**

Other academic offences. TST students come under the jurisdiction of the University of Toronto *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters*.

<https://governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/secretariat/policies/code-behaviour-academic-matters-july-1-2019> .

Obligation to check email. At times, the course instructor may decide to send out important course information by email. To that end, all students in conjoint programs are required to have a valid utoronto email address. Students must have set up their utoronto email address which is entered in the ACORN system. Information is available at www.utorid.utoronto.ca. The course instructor will not be able to help you with this. 416-978-HELP and the Help Desk at the Information Commons can answer questions you may have about your UTORid and password. Students should check utoronto email regularly for messages about the course. **Forwarding** your utoronto.ca email to a Hotmail, Gmail, Yahoo or other type of email account is not advisable. In some cases, messages from utoronto.ca addresses sent to Hotmail, Gmail or Yahoo accounts are filtered as junk mail, which means that emails from me may end up in your spam or junk mail folder.

Email communication with the course instructor. The instructor aims to respond to email communications from students in a timely manner. All email communications from students in conjoint programs must be sent from a utoronto email address. Email communications from other email addresses are not secure, and also the instructor cannot readily identify them as being legitimate emails from students. The instructor is not obliged to respond to email from non-utoronto addresses for students in conjoint programs. Students in non-conjoint programs should only use the email address they have provided to their college of registration.

A note about “trigger” warnings: You are preparing for vocations (congregational ministry, spiritual care, psychotherapy, teaching, research, etc.) that by their nature present you with stimulating situations, including domestic violence, child sexual abuse, effects of addiction, and other very traumatic events. Your vocational preparation anticipates that you will meet such

situations in the real world, that you will not be warned about the nature of the stimulus, and that you have to protect a person from your own reaction to situations that may “trigger” a response in you. Your faculty advisor, the registrar’s staff, and the Ecumenical Chaplains can direct you to resources for you to engage in care for your own self. In your studies you will likely not be warned about the kind of “triggering” event that you may encounter.

In this course, if you begin to lose control of your emotions, you may leave with one colleague from the class until you can collect yourself, or you may engage in other practices (journaling, meditation) that allow you to regain control. If you or your colleague are concerned that you cannot regain control or are unduly distressed, you and your colleague should seek assistance from the Knox Registrar’s office. Staff there have access to immediate assistance. In the end, your emotional safety is your own responsibility. **Please note that in this course we may be addressing questions concerning experience, suffering, anxiety, and depression in the spiritual writings and practices of the Christian tradition.**

Consultation: Please do not hesitate to consult the instructor with any questions you have.

Basic Degrees – Knox and TST

<i>This course has the following course-level learning outcomes</i>	
	Evaluation
Religious Heritage Outcomes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> able to describe major distinctives of Reformed spirituality 	Critical Summative Papers Class Participation

2. Cultural Context Outcomes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> able to identify and describe the ways in which spiritualities take shape in diverse cultural global contexts 	<p>Click or tap here to enter text.</p> <p>Critical Summative Papers</p> <p>Spiritual Theologian Paper</p> <p>Class Participation</p>
3. Spiritual Formation Outcomes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ability and commitment for life-long learning in exploring Reformed spirituality able to accurately self-assess one's own understanding and practice of spirituality demonstrate a commitment to engage in spiritual practices as integral to experiencing the reality of God as a Christian leader/minister/therapist 	<p>Critical Summative Papers</p> <p>Spiritual Leader Paper</p> <p>Spiritual Practices Paper</p> <p>Class Participation</p>
4. Capacity for Professional Ministry Outcomes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> able to reflect critically upon the meaning of spirituality for practice of ministry 	<p>Critical Summative Papers</p> <p>Spiritual Leader Paper</p> <p>Spiritual Practices Paper</p> <p>Class Participation</p>

<i>A student successfully completing this course has made progress towards the following Knox College degree program learning outcomes:</i>		
MDiv	MTS	MPS
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Interprets Scripture and Christian tradition (Reformed), using a variety of methods, sources, and norms, to preach, teach, write, and to provide care...	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates knowledge at a basic level in various theological disciplines.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates knowledge at a basic level in various theological disciplines, in the Reformed or another tradition. [* the student may come from another tradition]

☒ Demonstrates skills in creative, faith-centred, adaptive, and innovative leadership for current and emerging communities of faith.	☒ Finds, selects, reads, and appropriately integrates theological information.	☒ Demonstrates knowledge and skills in spiritual care and therapy, grounded in appropriate theories, for professional practice and leadership in community and institutional settings.
☒ Enhances the vocational and spiritual development, practices, and well-being of self and others. (See Professional and Critical Competencies.)	☒ Engages respectfully and constructively in a theological community of scholarship.	☒ Demonstrates an appropriate spiritual and professional identity formation in relation to specialized practice.
☒ Analyzes and evaluates social, cultural, and community contexts to enable communities of faith to participate in God's work and justice in a diverse and changing world.	☒ Writes and speaks in English sufficiently well to engage in theological discourse.	☒ Writes and speaks in English sufficiently well to engage in professional practice.
TST BASIC "DEGREE LEVEL EXPECTATIONS"	CORRESPONDING COURSE GOALS AND OUTCOMES (see college outcomes above)	CORRESPONDING COURSE ELEMENTS / ASSIGNMENTS
EXPECTATIONS: <i>In this course students are expected to demonstrate the following:</i>		
1. Depth and Breadth of Knowledge	Demonstrate knowledge and critical understanding of the nature, content, and interpretation of Christian spirituality	Critical Summative Papers Class Participation Spiritual Papers

TST BASIC "DEGREE LEVEL EXPECTATIONS"	CORRESPONDING COURSE GOALS AND OUTCOMES (see college outcomes above)	CORRESPONDING COURSE ELEMENTS / ASSIGNMENTS
2. Knowledge of methodologies	<p>Ability to articulate what the dominant methodologies are in spiritual theology to describe spiritual practices</p> <p>Ability to critically engage current scholarship on methods, sources and norms of Reformed soteriology</p> <p>Ability to evaluate critical distinctions between authoritative primary sources and relevant secondary sources for the study of Reformed spirituality</p>	<p>Critical Summative Papers</p> <p>Spiritual Papers</p> <p>Class Participation</p>
3. Application of Knowledge	<p>Ability to employ appropriate methodologies, sources and norms of Reformed spirituality to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Engage in respectful dialogue with other ecclesial traditions o Interpret cultural contexts o Communicate theological concepts o Exercise responsible church leadership and able to reflect critically upon one's own practice 	<p>Critical Summative Papers</p> <p>Spiritual papers</p> <p>Class Participation</p>
4. Communication Skills	<p>Ability to foster a safe and respectful environment within which to communicate arguments and analyses effectively and collegially, orally and in writing, to a range of different audiences.</p>	<p>Critical Summative Papers</p> <p>Spiritual Papers</p> <p>Class Participation</p>
5. Awareness of Limits of Knowledge	<p>Awareness of limits of knowledge in the methods, sources, and articulated norms of Christian spirituality</p>	<p>Critical Summative Papers</p> <p>Spiritual Papers</p> <p>Class Participation</p>

TST BASIC “DEGREE LEVEL EXPECTATIONS”	CORRESPONDING COURSE GOALS AND OUTCOMES (see college outcomes above)	CORRESPONDING COURSE ELEMENTS / ASSIGNMENTS
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respectful engagement with sociocultural influences, perspectives of other Christian or other spiritual traditions, and contributions of other scholarly disciplines. 	
6. Autonomy and Professional Capacity	Ability to develop and evaluate strategies for ongoing professional development to advance theological knowledge for collaborative teamwork, effective decision-making, moral integrity, academic integrity, and spiritual sensibilities required for specialized leadership.	Critical Summative Papers Spiritual Papers Class Participation

The following outcomes apply to students enrolled in this course at the 6000 level.

Graduate Degrees – TST only

EXPECTATIONS and EVALUATIONS: In this course, students are expected to demonstrate the following by fulfilling the relevant assignments as either very good, excellent, or outstanding:

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|---|---|
| 1. Depth and Breadth of Knowledge: | Readings and Class Participation
Critical Summative Papers
Major Research Paper |
| 2. Research and Scholarship | Major Research Paper |
| 3. Level of Application of Knowledge | Spiritual Leadership Paper |
| 4. Professional Capacity or Autonomy | Spiritual Leadership Paper
Major Research Paper |
| 5. Level of Communication Skills | Class Presentation |
| 6. Awareness of the Limits of Knowledge | Major Research Paper |