Ancient Wisdom for Discerning the Spirits

June 25, 2018—July 12, 2018, Monday—Thursday 5:45 PM—9:00 PM
(No class July 4)

A study of the discernment of spirits in the ancient church, including the Old and New Testaments, select Church Fathers, the Life of St. Anthony, and the desert fathers and mothers. For the purposes of showing their relevance for the present day, continuities with the *Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola and The Screwtape Letters of C. S. Lewis will be considered.*

The course will consist of lecture and class discussions. I will call on students at random to discuss the subject material in light of the assigned readings. Students will be graded for their attendance, their preparedness for participating in class discussions, the pre-class written assignment, and a 20 minute oral exam at the end.

Pre-Course Work

Pre-Course assignment is located on Page 2.

Required Reading

C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters (New York: HarperCollins, 2001).*
Benedicta Ward, ed., *The Desert Fathers: Sayings of the Early Christian Monks (New York: Penguin Books,* 2003).
Other assigned readings will be made available as downloadable files from the Canvas system.

BOSTON COLLEGE
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY AND MINISTRY

Summer at STM 2018

Barton T. Geger, S.J.
Assistant Professor of the Practice, STM, Boston College

In addition to his faculty status at the STM, Fr. Geger also serves as Research Scholar in the Institute for Advanced Jesuit Studies (IAJS) and as General Editor of "Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits." Fr. Geger joined the Society of Jesus in 1990, and was ordained a Catholic priest in 2001. He came to Boston College in 2017 from Regis University in Denver, where he was superior of the Jesuit community. He writes on St. Ignatius Loyola and early Jesuit spirituality. His dissertation is on the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus.

Education

M.A., Saint Louis University
M.TH. Systematic Theology, Heythrop College, University of London
S.T.L., Weston Jesuit School of Theology
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Contact Information

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Pre-Course Work

1. **Read** Barton T. Geger, SJ, "Introduction to the Discernment of Spirits" [unpublished essay].

2. **Read** the following Scripture passages, and be prepared to discuss any italicized questions in class.
Genesis 22:1-19 *What was going through Abraham's mind after God gave him that command?*
Genesis 39:1—41:46 The interpretation of dreams.
1 Samuel 3:1-18 *Why would Eli need humility here?*
Proverbs 14:1-35 "Sometimes a way seems right to a person, but…"
Sirach 34:1-12 Do not trust in dreams.
Jonah 1:1—4:11 *How many discernments are in this story? Why is Jonah angry at the end?*
Matthew 4:1-17 *How, precisely, does Satan attempt to manipulate Jesus?*
Matthew 7:15-23 Dangers from false prophets
Matthew 11:1-6 *Why is John confused? How does Jesus reassure him?*
Mark 3:20-30 *Jesus is accused of what? What is Jesus' defense?*
John 10:1-42 "All who came before me are thieves and robbers."
1 Cor. 9:1-27 and 2 Cor. 11:1—12:10 *What arguments does Paul give to the Corinthians that they should trust him as an authentic Christian preacher?*
Galatians 2 A clash between institutional authority (Peter) and mystical authority (Paul).
2 Peter 2:1-22 *What particular danger in the spiritual life is treated here?*
1 John 4:1-21 Test every spirit. Are there different motivations that one can have for doing the right thing, some more noble than others?
2 John 1:13 The ever-present tension between tradition and change in the church.

One fundamental question to keep in mind: to what extent do people rely on reason (logical thinking) in these biblical passages to determine what God is really saying? To what extent do they rely on intuition? Emotion? Faith? Something else?
3. **Write** an essay of **1200-1500** words, in which you explain how the basic principles of the "discernment the spirits," as you know understand them, applies to either a current tension in the church or a current tension in your own personal life. Cite at least four specific scripture passages (either from these above or from others of your choosing) to illustrate your points. (Any papers written on personal issues will be kept strictly confidential.)

The essay should be 12-point *Times New Roman font, double spaced.* **Please submit essay by email to professor Barton Geger (Barton.Geger@bc.edu) by Wednesday, June 20, at 12:00 p.m.**

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