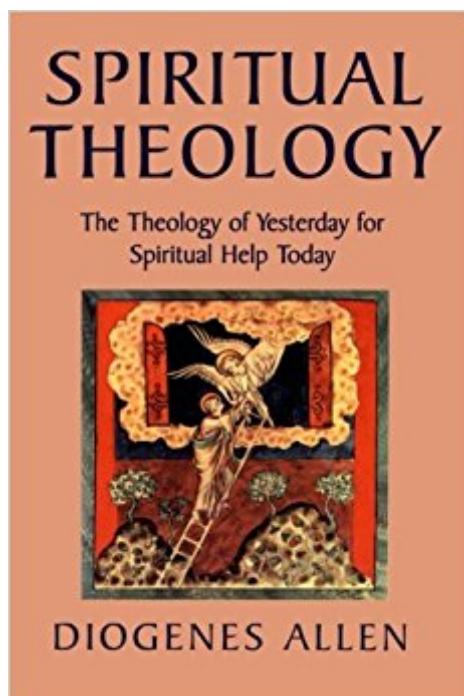


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# Spiritual Theology: The Theology Of Yesterday For Spiritual Help Today



## Synopsis

Often spirituality today is isolated from church teaching and doctrine, as in Joseph Campbell's treatment of myth and the many forms of New Age theologies, but doctrine apart from the life of prayer is abstract and sterile. In Spiritual Theology Allen turns to the great teachers of the past—*the church fathers, Augustine, Maximus the Confessor, Bonaventure, Hugh of St. Victor, Calvin and Luther, George Herbert*—to recover a spirituality that is rich with the doctrines and disciplines of theology. Allen covers the great questions of the spiritual life: what is the Christian goal? what leads us toward that goal, and what hinders us? what is conversion? how can we discern our progress in the spiritual life? what are the fruits of the Spirit? A second purpose of the book is to introduce readers to the disciplines and texts of the threefold way, found in the eastern church from the fourth century on. Allen writes simply and clearly of the active life and the development of virtue, and the contemplative life, which includes coming to know God through the Book of Nature and the Book of Scripture as well as directly, face to face, which is the domain of mystical theology. This book is a basic and accessible introduction to the classic writings and doctrines of the spiritual life.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Diogenes Allen's new book . . . begins with an autobiographical exploration as to his discovery of 'spiritual theology' after years of being a teacher of philosophy and theology to students preparing to be ministers.' "This introduction is helpful and sets the scene for

Allen's endeavour, which is to open up the depths and vistas of the Great Tradition as a practice of holy living—â ¢a bodily practice of learning —â ¢to live every moment of one's life with an awareness of God.' Allen writes fluently, and in eleven shortish chapters covers the classical pattern of the spiritual journey as it has been repeatedly performed in the tradition. Above all his work bears the very real enthusiasm of a —â ¢convert' who you sense is discovering something for the first time and is exceptionally eager to pass it on. (David Moss, *St. Stephen's House New Directions*)C. S. Lewis once wrote of *The Imitation of Christ* that —â ¢it is not addressed to our condition.' It suggests, for example, that scholars and writers hide themselves in the study when they should be helping in the kitchen. . . . The main thrust of this book is addressed directly to our condition. It is concerned with how we may live in the presence of God, and grow in the spiritual life. . . . —â ¢The author draws on the whole sweep of theology and spirituality throughout the ages, and makes substantial connections between, for example, Calvin's *Institutes* and the life of prayer, Gregory of Nyssa and the goal of Christian spirituality, and Iris Murdoch and moral awareness. —â ¢The book is accessible in the best sense, not patronizing or simplistic, but clear, well illustrated, and free from theological jargon. It is a good and useful book which will take a thoughtful reader into the rich tradition of theological spirituality. (Philip Crowe *Theology*)I was glad to see the first chapter of this book entitled —â ¢What is Spiritual Theology?' as that was the first question that came to my mind when I wondered whether or not to read it, given that I do not like theology and have never heard of the spiritual variety. . . . In a way, Diogenes Allen's opening is an easy one, clearly and kindly written, citing examples from all ages and branches of Christian history. . . . —â ¢Allen examines the most common reasons why people seek God, starting with distress in the face of troubles such as natural disasters. He writes well. All the motives he mentions for God-seeking are well explained, with the help of extracts from his customary wealth of sources. —â ¢ —â ¢Perhaps it is because I am a Catholic that I settled down most comfortably when I was past conversion and on to the eight deadly thoughts (or seven deadly sins, as they were called when I first learnt about them). Allen's account of the difference between lust and sexual instinct is just one of those in this chapter which I thought a masterpiece. His piece on the dark night of the soul is wonderful. . . . —â ¢By the time I had finished his chapters on —â ¢The Book of Scripture' and —â ¢The Book of Nature,' I was feeling positively inspired. It was a bit of a relief to find the end of the book discussing the growing closeness of God in terms of a habitual presence for spiritual theologians rather than a moment of ecstasy. . . . —â ¢The book . . . is only 161 paperback pages of text, of which the central matter-of-fact core of advice will be good to have at hand while fighting one's way through life. (Teresa McLean *The American Spectator*)

DIOGENES ALLEN is Stuart Professor of Philosophy at Princeton Theological Seminary. He teaches widely in both Presbyterian and Anglican churches, and is the author of a number of books on the spiritual life.

Listened to the tapes first, which I really, really liked. Even better than the book; but read the book to in case he went into more depth, or gave added information, and if for no other reason than to make sure I had not missed anything. It was THAT good. It will take me a good while to do a really decent review, which will come latter. But essentially, raised as a Protestant, it seemed that we took a intellectual quick look at "religion." This book calls for you to take a REAL look at your effort and practices as a Christian and IF you are really a "practicing" Christian or only a Christian in word and an intellectual acceptance of the "ideas" of Christianity. Dr. Allen points out that the world is another divinely inspired communication to us that we can use to pursue an understanding of God. He explains a little about the different theologies. In the tapes he is funny, sort of dry in the book. BUT jammed with information and not time wasting narrative. He tells you how to pursue Divina Lectura to help you look for communication with God. (don't know if I spelled that right) Just tons of useful, stretching and strengthening of the pursuit of God.

I took Diogenes Allen's course on SPIRITUAL THEOLOGY at Princeton Theological Seminary while he was preparing this book in manuscript form. This is great stuff, and unfortunately much neglected in contemporary theological studies. Think of spiritual theology as what we need to do to nurture our spirits, much as philosophy should be what we need to do to cultivate wisdom. Both senses have largely been lost in contemporary theology and philosophy. Allen's book shows us how to reclaim that aspect of theology.

With this question, Diogenes Allen began his search into the depths of Christian spirituality. What he found resulted in a brief but very powerful overview of the history of spiritual theology. Allen probes the insights of the Bible and such spiritual masters as St. Anthony and the desert fathers, Augustine, Basil the Great, Bonaventure, Cassian, Evagrius, Francis of Assisi, Gregory of Nyssa, George Herbert, Julian of Norwich, Maximus the Confessor, Teresa of Avila, and Simone Weil. Perhaps the best concise spiritual theology written, tying ancient wisdom to the needs of today.

Outstanding presentation on the how of living a truly Christian life. The writer addressed so many of

the questions that I have had over the years but did not know where to seek the answers.

Love the book. It is very insightful in mapping the spiritual journey to a closeness with the Lord Jesus. It is informed, thoughtful, and logical. Great read.

Years ago, I did a radio interview with Professor Allen on this book. In brief compass, it offers much to ponder about the Christian life. His best contribution is in the chapter which addresses the "eight deadly thoughts."

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