I. Course Description: An upper-division course offering a multi-disciplinary approach to “Popular Religion” in America, studying representative spiritual traditions from the perspective of their spatial contexts, landscape, and sense of place. The divine-human encounter as it occurs in connection with the American land will be examined in its varied ecological settings, as seen in Native American, Spanish/French Catholic, Puritan, Evangelical Protestant, Shaker, and Catholic Worker traditions (among others).

Tangential questions will include the social structure of sacred places, the continuing fascination with nature throughout American history, and the recent increase in fine nature writers evincing a keen spiritual sensitivity. Methodologically, the course will bring together insights from cultural geography, American Studies, and the history of religions. The traditions considered will be explored by reference to representative primary texts, including sermons, prayer books, diaries, poetry, etc. They range from Native American creation tales and the autobiography of Marie of the Incarnation to Jonathan Edwards' Personal Narrative of 1740 and the writings of Dorothy Day.

The course will further try to “root” its investigations in field studies within the St. Louis area--perhaps visiting Cahokia Mounds in discussing Native American spirituality, looking at the relics at the Motherhouse of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet (in reflecting on French Catholic spirituality), going to Bellefontaine Cemetery in talking about 19th century Evangelical perspectives on death, and sharing in activities at Karen House on the north side in studying the Catholic Worker movement.

II. Course Goals, Learning Outcomes, Skill Set Acquisition:

a. To demonstrate an interdisciplinary methodology, convinced as the teacher is that neither good theology nor an adequate study of culture can occur apart from each other. Sartre once defined the true intellectual as one who “meddles in what is not his business.” Hence, a theologian attempting to understand American spiritual traditions will have to concern herself with the intersecting disciplines of geography, material culture studies, and sacramental theology (among other things).

b. To understand the American experience of place. What broader conceptions of the American mind can be gained by examining the sense of place, as well as the celebration of displacement, that characterizes the American imagination? Are we a people who have been molded by the expanding frontier to value constant mobility and frenetic activity, as Frederick Jackson Turner proposed? Do we lack any holy places, because we've never stayed long enough in one locale to discern such? Or may there be more sacred sites than we imagine along the Blue Highways of the land? And what about the American romance with the pastoral, natural scenes popularized by the Hudson River School of artists and later 19th century painters like Albert Bierstadt? Are American holy places discovered only by a return to nature and wilderness or is the “holy” also discerned in places formed by the hand of technology? Is “sacred space,” as explored by researchers, an “ontological” reality (Eliade) or purely a social construction (Chidester and Linenthal)?
c. To comprehend people's thirst for God as encountered in the ordinary experience of being “placed” in this world. How is it that mystical experience is so often directly connected to very common, tangible things and places? What is it about the human imagination that drives us, inexorably at times, to an attachment to place? How do we understand the paradox of a God who (in the Judeo-Christian tradition) can never be bound by place and yet continually offers herself in specific contexts (at Sinai, at Golgotha, on the holy mountain, at table as bread is broken)?

Skills to be acquired through the course include critical thinking, critical and reflective writing, analysis of various faith traditions, and better skills in communication (through public speaking and computer technology).

III. Course Format: The course will be structured on a modified seminar basis, with readings and discussion each week based on primary and secondary sources. Generally, the instructor will take the first hour, opening the material for the day with lecture, story, and questions for discussion. Then general discussion will grow out of these presentations, with particular attention to the readings for the day. On selected days field trips will take us to particular sites outside of the classroom.

IV. Course Requirements:

a. Weekly readings in Belden Lane's two books, Landscapes of the Sacred: Geography and Narrative in American Spirituality (Johns Hopkins, 2001) and The Solace of Fierce Landscapes (Oxford, 1998), in Philip Sheldrake’s Spaces for the Sacred (2001), and in a collection of primary (and other secondary) source readings. These readings will prepare the student for regular participation in class discussions, as expected each week. They are available on E-Reserve through the Pius Library Homepage. [Under “electronic Resources: click on “Electronic Reserves.” Then click on the instructor, “lane, Belden.” Click on the name of the course “American Spirituality and Landscape” and type in the password, “Landscape.” A hard copy of the readings is also available in the Reserve Room on the 2nd floor of the Library.]

Supplementary texts helpful for the student without much background in the history of American religion might include Sydney Ahlstrom's Religious History of the American People or Martin Marty's Pilgrims in Their Own Land.

b. A 20-minute Presentation in class on a figure in contemporary American spirituality. This should provide a lively engagement of the figure, summarizing his or her life and work, offering excerpts from significant writings, and even including powerpoint or video images as these might be available. The presentation, along with regular attendance, and participation in class discussions will count 25% of the course grade.

c. A take-home Final Exam (based on readings and class presentations by the professor) will be handed out well in advance of the time it is due. The Final exam will be due May 8th and will count 25% of the course grade.

d. A Research Paper (15-20 pages, including notes) on a movement or figure in American spirituality, using Belden Lane’s Landscapes of the Sacred and Philip Sheldrake’s Spaces for the Sacred to reflect on the way their spirituality is formed in relation to landscape or place. The paper should include the following:
--A brief comparison the books on sacred space by Lane and Sheldrake (the one phenomenological and descriptive; the other theological and analytical), drawing out particular themes or principles from each one and evaluating their usefulness in studying the spirituality of a given movement or figure. (The reflections on these two books can be incorporated within the paper and don’t have to be given separately at the beginning.)

--A description and analysis of the spirituality of a particular figure or movement in the American experience, applying the relevant categories from Lane and Sheldrake in reflecting on the importance of place in their understanding and practice of the spiritual life. For example:

--The spirituality of Flannery O’Connor, over against her Southern experience in Georgia
--The spirituality of Thomas Merton, in the setting of a monastery in Kentucky
--The spirituality of Dorothy Day, in the context of New York City in the Depression
--The spirituality of Henri Nouwen and the L’Arche Daybreak community, given the experience of handicapped people in Toronto
--The spirituality of the Karen House Catholic Worker Community through 30 years in North St. Louis
--Emily Dickinson’s spirituality, given her life of solitude in her Massachusetts home
--Sojourner Truth’s truth, over against her experience as a slave in New York State
--Mother Jones’ Irish spirituality, in the setting of Midwestern mills and mines
--Ralph Waldo Emerson’s spirituality, in the context of Boston and Concord
--American Jesuit spirituality among the worker priests of New York City
--John de Brebeuf’s spirituality among the Hurons and Iroquois of Upper New York State
--Abraham Lincoln’s spirituality, formed on the Illinois prairies
--The spirituality of Thich Nhat Hanh, in connection with the Vietnam Memorial

These are only suggestions, and by no means an effort to limit possibilities. Papers will be due April 17th and will count 50% of the course grade.

V. Attendance, Grading Procedures, and Non-Tolerance of Academic Dishonesty: Regular attendance in class is expected. More than three unexcused absences during the semester will influence the grade, especially in marginal situations. Each three additional unexcused absences beyond this will result in the reduction of the grade by a full letter.

--The grading scale for the course will be as follows: A = 95-100; A-= 93-94; B+ = 88-92; B= 85-87; B-= 83-84; C+ = 79-82; C= 74-78; C-= 72-73; D = 60-71; F = 0-59. An “A” grade signifies the highest degree of achievement and intellectual initiative. An “A-” is for work approaching highest achievement. A “B+” indicates a level considerably above average quality, “B” suggests above average work. A “B-” refers to work that is slightly above average. A “C” distinguishes average achievement, with a “C+” being somewhat better and a “C-” indicating less than average. A “D” is inferior, but passing.

A range = Superior, exceptional, outstanding. The assignment demonstrates critical, informed, and creative theological inquiry that reflects superior understanding of essential theological/historical concepts. This means the student demonstrates depth of insight beyond what is normally expected. Carefully nuanced reasoning and writing, free from material, structural and grammatical error are presupposed in this grade.

B range = Good. The assignment demonstrates ready command of full range of concepts and shows some critical, informed, and creative inquiry that reflects above average understanding of essential theological/historical concepts. This means the student has produced an assignment that is free from material, structural and grammatical errors.

C range = Acceptable. The assignment demonstrates satisfactory ability to describe overall picture and essential concepts. This means the student has completed the assignment
in a manner involving no significant errors. Material may not be free from structural and grammatical errors. Nuanced reasoning is not demonstrated.

D range = Below average. The assignment demonstrates reasoning that is neither carefully nuanced nor coherently presented; writing is insufficient in depth of insight and/or use of texts; presentation is not free from material error in structure, spelling and grammar. This means that the student failed to respond adequately to the assignment and its intentions.

F = Unsatisfactory. In one or more of the following ways the student: 1) failed to turn in the assignment; 2) did not respond to the assignment as given; 3) submitted work so thoroughly flawed as to indicate that the student did not make a serious effort, 4) was involved in plagiarism or cheating.

--Requests for a grade of “Incomplete” can only be honored in cases of unusual sickness or family emergency. Students with particular disabilities should feel free to request special needs with regard to testing, hearing, etc.

Academic Integrity Statement: “Students are expected to be honest in their academic work. The University reserves the right to penalize any student whose academic conduct is, in its judgment, detrimental to the University. Such conduct shall include cases of plagiarism, collusion, cheating, giving or receiving or offering or soliciting information on examinations, or the use of previously prepared material in examinations or quizzes. Violations should be reported to your course instructor, who will investigate and adjudicate them according to the Policy on Academic Honesty of the College of Arts and Sciences. If the charges are found to be true, the student may be liable for academic or disciplinary probation, suspension or expulsion from the university.”

Academic Assistance: If you have special needs stemming from a physical or learning disability, please contact the instructor as soon as possible and not later than two weeks before the first exam or assignment is due. Any student who feels that he/she may need academic accommodations in order to meet the requirements of this course—as outlined in the syllabus, due to presence of a disability, should contact the Office of Disabilities Services in the Academic Resources Center (3840 Lindell), Room 130. Please telephone the office at 314.977.2930, or visit Room 131 in the Academic Resources Center, 3840 Lindell Blvd. Confidentiality will be observed in all inquiries.

VI. Syllabus:

Jan 24: Topophilia: The Love of Place and the Desire for God
(Reflections on the Nature of American Spirituality and its relation to Place)

Readings: Landscapes of the Sacred, pp. 3-61

Jan.31: Spanish and French Catholic Spirituality (Fieldtrip to Holy Family Chapel, Motherhouse of the Sisters of St. Joseph, Carondelet)

Readings: Chapter four in Landscapes of the Sacred, The Solace of Fierce Landscapes, pp. 3-78, and photocopy excerpts from Cabeza de Vaca’s Los Naufragios, Marie of the Incarnation's Autobiography (“The Ninth State of Prayer”), and “How Father Jogues was taken by the Iroquois and what he suffered.”
Feb 7: Desert Terrain, the Construction of Self, and the Appeal of Wilderness

Readings: The Solace of Fierce Landscapes, pp. 160-232; and a chapter from Edward Abbey's Desert Solitaire entitled “Down the River.”

Presentation: Ed Abbey’s Ornery Desert Spirituality

Feb. 14: Puritan Consciousness and the Presence of a Transcendent God

Readings: Chapter four in Landscapes of the Holy, and photocopy excerpts from the poetry of Anne Bradstreet and Edward Taylor, Jonathan Edwards' “Personal Narrative” of 1740.

Presentation: Jim Wallis and Sojourners Community (the New Evangelicals)

Feb. 21: Evangelical Revivalism (Fieldtrip to Bellefountaine Cemetery)

Readings: “Liminal Places in the Evangelical Revival” in Landscapes of the Sacred (pp. 180-188); photocopy excerpts from “The Dairyman's Daughter” (American Tract Society, 1841) and excerpts from Phoebe Palmer's The Way of Holiness.

Feb. 28: Millennialist Spirituality

Readings: Photocopy excerpts from Jonathan Edwards' “The Latter Day Glory is Probably to Begin in America, “Hal Lindsey's The Late Great Planet Earth, and Randall Balmer's Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory.

Presentation: Tim LaHaye’s Left Behind Books

Mar. 6: African-American Spirituality

Readings: Photocopy excerpts of Frederick Douglass' autobiography, James Cone's The Spirituals and the Blues, Bruce Rosenberg, The Art of the American Folk Preacher (a chanted sermon), Howard Thurman's For the Inward Journey, and several Black Spirituals.

Presentation: Maya Angelou’s Life and Spirit

Mar. 13: St. Louis Catholicism and American Spirituality (Fieldtrip to Cathedral Basilica) (Led by Fr. Nick Smith)

Mar. 20: No class (Spring Break)

Mar. 27: Transcendentalist Spirituality

Readings: Photocopy excerpts from Emerson's Nature (1836), Margaret Fuller's Woman in the Nineteenth Century, and Henry David Thoreau's “Walking.”

Presentation: Mary Oliver as Poet, Naturalist, and Spiritual Guide

Apr. 3: Communitarian Spirituality: The Shakers (Fieldtrip to Shaw Garden)

Apr. 10: Spirituality of the Self-Made Man [sic]

Readings: Photocopy of Russell Conwell's *Acres of Diamonds*

Presentation: The Prosperity Gospel of Joel Osteen and Joyce Meyer

Apr. 17: Spirituality of the Social Gospel (Papers due)

Readings: Photocopies of excerpts from Walter Raushenbusch's *Prayers of the Social Awakening* and Charles Sheldon's *In His Steps*.

Presentation: Walter Wink’s “Engaging the Powers”

24: Catholic Worker Spirituality (*Fieldtrip* to Karen House)


May 1: Native American Spirituality (*Fieldtrip* to Cahokia Mounds and Picnic)

Readings: Chapter three in *Landscapes of the Sacred*. 