

PT 610 – Spiritual Formation and Social Change

Instructor - **Dr. Tim Van Meter**

Associate Professor of Christian Education and Youth Ministry

Catalog Description

This course explores connections between a life of faith grounded in spiritual practice and a hunger for justice. In this exploration, we begin with the assumption that spiritual formation is not an individual task, but rather the practice of formation in community. This course looks at personal and corporate practices of spiritual formation as a catalyst and support for social change.

The writers we will read in this course reflect an understanding that spiritual practices are graced expressions for revealing ourselves as we truly are in relationship to God, each other, and God's creation. This assumes that spiritual practices are not methods for constructing pious or religious understandings of ourselves, rather, they reveal, with grace and integrity, aspects of ourselves that piety or religiosity struggle to keep hidden. Students are asked to participate in this course with a sense of humor and openness to encountering new understandings of themselves, their classmates, their faith tradition, and their images of God.

Course Objectives

As a result of successfully completing this course students should be able to:

- 1) demonstrate familiarity with a wide range of 20th century political mystics
- 2) articulate an understanding of the relationship between prayer and action
- 3) construct an understanding of connections between spiritual and political engagement
- 4) be able to spend time in silence as part of a weekly rhythm of spiritual practice

Required Texts

Berrigan, Daniel. Daniel Berrigan: Essential Writings. Orbis Books, 2009.

Day, Dorothy. Selected Writings: By Little and by Little. Orbis Books, 2005.

Dennis, Marie. Oscar Romero: Reflections on His Life and Writings. Orbis Books, 2000.

Ellsberg, Robert. *Modern Spiritual Masters: Writings on Contemplation and Compassion*. Orbis Books, 2008.

Heschel, Abraham Joshua. *Abraham Joshua Heschel: Essential Writings*. Orbis Books, 2011.

Merton, Thomas. *Thomas Merton: Essential Writings*. Orbis Books, 2000.

Stringfellow, William. *William Stringfellow: Essential Writings*. Orbis Books, 2013.

Thurman, Howard. *Howard Thurman: Essential Writings*. Orbis Books, 2006.

Recommended Reading

Flinders, Tim. *John Muir: Spiritual Writings*. Orbis Books, 2013.

Forsthoefel, Thomas. *The Dalai Lama: Essential Writings*. Orbis Books, 2008.

Hanh, Thich Nhat and Robert Ellsberg. *Thich Nhat Hanh: Essential Writings*. Orbis Books, 2001.

Hollyday, Joyce. *Clarence Jordan: Essential Writings*. Orbis Books, 2009.

Frere Roger. *Essential Writings: Brother Roger of Taize*. Orbis Books, 2006.

Soelle, Dorothy and Dianne Oliver. *Dorothy Soelle: Essential Writings*. Orbis Books, 2006.

Tucker, Mary Evelyn and John Grim. *Thomas Berry: Selected Writings on the Earth Community*. Orbis Books, 2014.

Vanier, Jean. *Essential Writings*. Orbis Books, 2008.

Weil, Simone and Eric O. Springsted. *Simone Weil: Essential Writings*. Orbis Books, 1998.

Supplemental Reading

Coles, Robert and Daniel Berrigan. *The Geography of Faith*. Skylight Paths Publishing, 2001.

Dancer, Anthony. *An Alien in a Strange Land: Theology in the Life of William Stringfellow*. Cascade Books, 2011.

Flinders, Carol. *Enduring Lives: Living Portraits of Women and Faith in Action*. Orbis Books, 2013.

Kellermann, Bill Wylie. *A Keeper of the Word: Selected Writings of William Stringfellow*. Erdmann's Books, 1996.

Assignments

1) Spiritual Reading and Practice Journal - Students are asked to keep a journal throughout the course. There should be a minimum of three (3) entries per week. This journal should consist of reflections that arise from the readings. You should bring your journals to class, your journal will be a resource for in class reflection. You are expected to do the work and I will ask for progress reports. (20% of final grade)

2) Close reading of a particular spiritual writer (April 12) – Choose a single writer from the above readings. Choose two primary resources from this writer, read them closely and offer a 3-5 page review of the resources in the Populi Discussion area.

In addition, comment on five (5) reviews posted by other students, these substantive comments should be around 200 words per review. (30% of final grade for combined work in this section)

3) Final Project - (Due May 22 - graduating Seniors due May 17 - by 5 pm – 30% of final grade)

Possible methods for completing final project.

Retreat or four-week curriculum plan for exploring a particular spiritual writer with a group of your choice. This plan must include a detailed description of the context, expected participants, a resource list, a description of pedagogical methods to be employed, discussion questions, group exercises, and a plan for implementation.

Or

6-8 page paper on connections between prayer and activism from the perspective of a particular spiritual writer Please select resources from the course plus any additional resources that allow you to explore the historical, theological, communal and individual aspects underlying your chosen writer and that person's influence on your understanding.

Or

I am open to other proposals of similar rigor and engagement that allow you to explore questions that arose from this course, please schedule an appointment if you wish to do a final project different than the above two options.

4) Discussion and Class Participation will be a central part of this course. Students are expected to attend each class having completed all of the assigned reading and ready to interact in an informed and helpful manner. (20% of final grade)

Course Schedule

February 2 – Introduction

Syllabus

February 9 – Thomas Merton - read Merton through page 95

February 16 – Thomas Merton - read Merton page 96 to end

February 23 –Dorothy Day - read By Little and by Little and Ellsberg MSM on Day

March 1 – Oscar Romero – read Marie Dennis on Romero

March 8 – Daniel Berrigan (10-12 people) **or William Stringfellow** (10-12 people)
(Read Berrigan or Stringfellow complete)

March 15 – Simone Weil (4-5 ppl); **Dorothy Soelle** (4-5 ppl); **Women’s Voices** (8-12 ppl)

March 21 - April 3 – Spring Recess and Holy Week

April 5 – Howard Thurman (5-6 ppl); **Jean Vanier** (7-8 ppl); **Clarence Jordan** (7-8 ppl)

April 12 – John Muir (5-6 ppl) **or Thomas Berry** (5-6 ppl)

April 19 – Abraham Joshua Heschel

April 26 – Thich Nhat Hanh (5-6 ppl) **or Dalai Lama** (5-6 ppl)

May 3 – Other Voices & Visions

(read additional twentieth century spiritual masters in Ellsberg MSM)

May 10 – Other Voices/Final Project Presentations (5-7 min)

May 17 – Final Project Presentations (5-7 min)

Final Projects Due for Graduating Seniors

May 22 – Final Projects Due at 5 pm for everyone else

GRADING

A range: written and oral work is superior, with attention to detail, clarity and depth of thought, good flow and excellent grammar. Appropriate and mature participation in class is necessary.

B range: written and oral work is good, with solid thinking processes, good grammar/flow and obvious quality of time spent on the assignments. Appropriate and mature participation in class is necessary.

C range: written and oral work is adequate, though there are significant problems with clarity, argument and grammar. Appropriate and mature participation in class is necessary.

F range: written and oral work is not completed as assigned, or the work indicates that the student is not giving attention to or is incapable of completing requirements in this course.

Inappropriate or lack of participation, lack of attention to the professor's comments on written work, cruising on the internet/Facebook during class, or incomplete assignments may also be a factor in a lower grade.

Please see Student Handbook for sections providing policy details on the following:

ADA—MTSO seeks to remove barriers to inclusion in its learning communities. Students who feel they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a documented disability should contact the instructor privately to discuss their specific needs at the beginning of the semester. Please contact the Director of Student Services to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities. Any accommodation must be agreed upon prior to the due date of the affected course requirement.

Class attendance—Regular attendance is expected in all classes. During unavoidable absences, students are responsible for missed work. An excessive number of absences may result in grade reduction or course failure, despite successful completion of all assigned work. In most cases, a student will not be allowed credit for a course if he or she is absent for 25% of the class sessions.

Electronic Devices—Turn mobile devices off or “vibrate only” during class. Browsing the Internet or engaging in email or social network conversations during class is discouraged. Instructors have the right to impose grading penalties for disruptions due to electronic devices.

Human Subjects Research—Research by MTSO faculty, students, or affiliated personnel that collects non-public information from and/or about living individuals or contemporary organizations/groups for purposes of publication or public presentation (including class assignments) must be approved by the Human Subjects Research Committee. MTSO faculty, students, or affiliated personnel should err on the side of caution and apply for committee approval of any activity that may fit this description.

Inclusive Language—In accordance with MTSO's policy on inclusive language, all students are expected to use gender inclusive or gender neutral language in their writing and in the classroom discussions when referring to human beings.

Incompletes—To receive a course grade of Incomplete, students must submit the petition form from the Registrar with all signatures to the Dean's Office before the last day of regularly scheduled classes. See Student Handbook for intensive term deadlines. Any petition submitted without a due date for outstanding work will be denied. If work is not complete by the due date the Registrar will record the grade of F for the course.

Pass/Fail—The decision to exercise this option must be made before the end of the second week of the course by completing the appropriate form available through the Registrar. To receive a grade of "pass" the student must do at least the equivalent of C minus work in the course.

Plagiarism—Plagiarism is a serious matter of academic, professional, and personal integrity. All students at the masters level are expected to understand the requirement to provide attribution when the work of others is used. Students are also expected to be familiar with and understand the school's policy on Academic Misconduct found in the Student Handbook. If a student has questions about attribution, citation, and how to avoid plagiarism they should consult the course instructor, the school's writing instructor, or library staff. When in doubt it is better to provide attribution even if one is uncertain about the proper citation form. Plagiarism is a form of academic misconduct that results in disciplinary actions per the Student Handbook that may range from failing an assignment or course to expulsion.