

PT 610 – Spiritual Formation and Social Change

Fall 2024, Wednesdays 6:00 pm to 7:30

with weekly asynchronous work

Dr. Tim Van Meter, G 238 (office)

740.362.3437 - tvanmeter@mtso.edu

I. Course 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 our self, 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.

II. 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 spirituality and community engagement
- 4) be able to spend time in silence as part of a weekly rhythm of spiritual practice

III. Contribution to MTSO's Educational Mission and Degree Outcomes

This course fulfills the spirituality requirement for the M.Div. and is a required course for the MASJ.

Specific Degree Outcomes – MDiv & MASJ

- 1) Ability to understand the contextuality of spiritual practices
- 2) Engage with spiritual writers and practices for sustaining vocation
- 3) Recognize the importance of spirituality in building and sustaining community

Aspects of the MTSO mission and/or MTSO's general theological curriculum

This course supports MTSO's commitment to sustainable justice for people, communities, fellow creatures, and world.

IV. Textbooks

Required Texts

Day, Dorothy. *Selected Writings: By Little and by Little*. Orbis Books, 2005.
Dennis, Marie and Scott Wright. *Oscar Romero: Reflections on His Life and Writings*. Orbis Books, 2000.
Heschel, Susannah. *Abraham Joshua Heschel: Essential Writings*. Orbis Books, 2011.
Hull, Akasha Gloria. *Soul Talk: The New Spirituality of African American Women*. Inner Traditions, 2001.
Stringfellow, William. *William Stringfellow: Essential Writings*. Orbis Books, 2013.
Thurman, Howard. *Howard Thurman: Essential Writings*. Orbis Books, 2006.

Optional Texts (Choose one for 11/2 session)

Bakewell, Sarah. *Humanly Possible: Seven Hundred Years of Humanist Freethinking, Inquiry, and Hope*. Penguin Books, 2024.
Tucker, Mary Evelyn and John Grim. *Thomas Berry: Selected Writings on the Earth Community*. Orbis Books, 2014.
Hanh, Thich Nhat and Robert Ellsberg. *Thich Nhat Hanh: Essential Writings*. Orbis Books, 2001.

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V. Course Requirements and Assessment of Student Learning

This course is practice based. It isn't enough to learn about the people, read their writings and form ideas. The people we are reading were formed by a lifetime of daily practice. The best way to engage their writing is to plan to read a little every day, think, write, and pray or meditate rather than cram the entire reading into the day before the class meeting. Take this course as an opportunity to slow your pace for a time each day and learn with a contemplative activist you would never have met except through their writing.

Building this course will require putting forward our best collaborative work. It also requires offering each other a significant amount of grace while maintaining our commitment to engaged learning. We will be using Populi and Zoom as our primary tools.

- 1) Spiritual Reading and Practices Journaling - Students are asked to keep a journal throughout the course. There should be a minimum of two entries per week (semester minimum total 20). Your journaling should consist of reflections arising from the readings, class discussion, documentaries, and additional resources related to the particular spiritual writer for the following week. Please remember what you write and refer to it for discussion areas and course papers.

You are expected to complete journal entries, each week. If you miss entries, please do not write a series of makeup entries at the end of the semester. I will check on progress throughout the semester. You will turn in journal entries on the assignments page on Oct 14; Nov 25; and Dec 16.

(Journal entries total 20% of final grade).

- 2) Close reading of a particular spiritual writer (**Due Dec 2**) - (25% of Final Grade)
Submit this paper in Populi in the Close Readings Assignment under Assignments. Submit as a Word attachment, not as a comment or in any other format. Anything but a Word Doc submitted through the Assignments tab on Populi will not be graded or considered turned in.

Choose a single writer from the required, optional, or additional booklists on Populi. Choose two primary resources from this writer, in addition to the collection on our booklist. Read all three texts closely and offer a 3-5 page engagement of the resources as to how they can help more deeply understand prayer, spirituality, justice, etc.. Your paper will be strongest with a clear thesis and argument for a particular insight into your writer. I suggest choosing an area to focus on for your writer, such as, peacemaking, community life, activism and how these topics appear in the writer's understanding of a spiritual life. These are not book reviews or biographies.

- 3) Final Project - (**Due Dec 20** - 40% of final grade)
Turn this project in on Populi in the Final Project area under Assignments. Only a Word Doc submitted through the Assignments tab on Populi will be graded or considered turned in. All other submissions are invalid.

10-12 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.

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- 4) Discussion and Class Participation will be a central part of this course. Students are expected to attend each synchronous session having completed all of the assigned reading and ready to interact in an informed and helpful manner. Students are expected to complete all work in a timely fashion as detailed in this syllabus (15% of final grade).

VI. Course Schedule and Format

Course Schedule of Synchronous Meetings

August 28 – Introduction

Course overview, review of course tools and syllabus

September 4 – Dorothy Day

Ready to discuss Dorothy Day readings

September 11 – Day continued

September 18 – Oscar Romero

Ready to discuss Oscar Romero readings

September 25 – *Soul Talk*

Ready to discuss book

October 2 – Howard Thurman

Ready to discuss Howard Thurman readings

October 9 – Thurman continued

(journal entries to date due in journal assignments #1 on Oct 14)

October 16 – Fall Break

October 23 – Abraham Joshua Heschel

Ready to discuss Abraham Joshua Heschel

October 30 – William Stringfellow

Ready to discuss Stringfellow

November 6 – Conversation with Stringfellow and Heschel

November 13 – Thich Nhat Hanh or Thomas Berry or *Humanly Possible* (choose one)

November 20 – Thich Nhat Hanh or Thomas Berry or *Humanly Possible*

November 27 – Thanksgiving Break

(Next group of journal entries due Nov. 25 in journal assignments #2)

December 4 – Close Reading Presentations

(close reading papers due Mon, 11/29)

December 11 – Final Class meeting reflection and evaluation

(last submission journal entries due Dec. 16 in journal assignments #3)

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Asynchronous online work

Tools used for asynchronous learning in this course include Zoom and Populi.

Each week's asynchronous materials will be posted in the Lessons section on Populi. Primary asynchronous work will consist of viewing lectures, documentaries or other visual media, listening to podcasts, reading short articles, personal letters, etc. My hope is that our asynchronous learning can enrich our knowledge about the lives and practices of the people we are reading.

The close reading and final papers are to be turned in through the assignments area on Populi as Word docs attached in the proper assignment space.

VII. MTSO Standard Syllabus Statements

Carefully review these policies and refer to the MTSO Academic Catalog / Student Handbook for additional details.

All students in every degree program are expected to become familiar with MTSO policies as listed in the most current MTSO Academic Catalog and Student Handbook, connected here. The policies listed below are in the handbook and are highlighted here because of their importance to our academic lives together. https://www.mtso.edu/site/assets/files/2103/academic_catalog_-_student_handbook_20-21.pdf.

Class Attendance

Regular attendance is expected in all classes. In campus extend (online and hyflex), you are **REQUIRED** to show your face the entire class time, otherwise you will be considered "absent". You are expected to attend class as you would in a face-to-face classroom (not driving, cooking, folding clothes etc.). During asynchronous class time, faculty will monitor time used in the posting and responding to colleagues to track your participation. 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 fail a course if they are absent for 25% of the class sessions (including online meetings).

Electronic Devices

As an institution dedicated to the advancement of learning, MTSO is firmly committed to a philosophy of mutual respect. When your use of electronic devices violates that respect instructors have the right to impose appropriate grading penalties. **Because of MTSO Campus Extend, a hyflex model, electronic devices are integral to learning.** However, the use of such devices should be restricted to course-related purposes. General browsing of the Internet or engaging in email or social networks during class time is inappropriate. Unless there is an emergency requiring immediate attention, phone calls should be returned during classroom breaks (even if you're at your home) in an area that is not disruptive to others.

Title IX/504 ADA Statement

MTSO is committed to providing a workplace and educational environment that are free from discrimination, harassment, and retaliation. To ensure compliance with federal and state civil rights laws and regulations, and to affirm its commitment to promoting the goals of fairness and equity, MTSO has developed internal policies and procedures that provide a prompt, fair, and impartial process for those involved in an allegation of discrimination or harassment on the basis of protected class status, and for allegations of retaliation. More information about the University's policy and grievance processes can be found at <https://www.mtso.edu/about-mtso/notice-nondiscrimination/>. Reports of misconduct can be made to the Title IX/504/ADA Coordinator, Kathy Dickson, kdickson@mtso.edu.

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ADA/Disability Services

MTSO supports all students by encouraging self-advocacy and empowering students to help themselves, while providing a safe environment in which to do so. We commit to an inclusive learning environment and will support reasonable, documented requests for accommodations and learning adaptations. To request a reasonable accommodation, contact the director of student services, Dr. Jeremy Garber at jgarber@mtso.edu.

Documenting written work at MTSO

All written work submitted for courses at MTSO must conform to the Note-Bibliography style in the Chicago Manual of Style (17th edition). For a helpful discussion of how to avoid academic misconduct, see the Purdue University Online Writing Lab (OWL) website at <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/589/02>. Students who commit academic misconduct will be subject to penalties up to and including expulsion from the Institution.

VIII. Supporting Materials

- Bibliography (*must conform to the Note-Bibliography style in the Chicago Manual of Style (17th edition).*)