

Draft Syllabus

Howard Thurman: Mystic, Pastor, Prophet

Instructor: Rev. Liza J. Rankow, MHS, PhD

Spring 2015 • Wednesdays 2:10pm – 5pm • SKSM Fireside Room

Enrollment: No prerequisites, PIN required

Course Description:

Howard Thurman was a 20th century religious leader and thinker whose prophetic vision and quiet mentorship were instrumental to Martin Luther King Jr. and other activists of the Civil Rights Movement, and beyond. Thurman's writings and sermons are rich with the poetics of mystic spirituality, yet reveal insightful social commentary on racism, militarism, and suffering that is as relevant and revolutionary today as it was during his lifetime. Through readings, discussion, creative activities, and video and audio recordings of Dr. Thurman, we will dive deep into his life and teachings and explore their application to our own spiritual development, ministry, and commitment to social justice and transformation.

ECO / Thresholds:

The life and legacy of Dr. Howard Thurman provides a rich and fitting context to further SKSM's commitment to "educating to counter oppressions and create just and sustainable communities." Thurman's philosophical, intellectual and pastoral contributions were formative to the Civil Rights Movement, and his "liberating spirituality" (as Vincent Harding has termed it) stands as a precursor to Black Liberation Theology. In the laboratory of Fellowship Church, Thurman honed his theories about the deconstruction of oppression and the development of a community based on reverence for every individual as one with the universal life of God. These commitments were given eloquent witness in his writing, teaching, preaching, pastoring, and in how he moved and interacted in the world. Howard Thurman is a valuable guide for seekers of any faith tradition, and a profound mentor for those on the path of ministry and spiritual service.

Because Thurman, himself, crossed Thresholds as a pastor, prophet, mystic, counselor, preacher, teacher, scholar, artist and activist, this course will organically incorporate most of SKSM's Threshold Areas. Our particular emphasis will be on *Prophetic Witness* and *Spiritual Practice & Care of the Soul* as essential to understanding Thurman in a meaningful way.

Class Format:

The intention of the course is to provide a wholistic engagement with the material – not only studying the intellectual content of Thurman's works, but employing his commitments to building community, incorporating the creative arts, and developing the "growing edge" of one's own spirituality. A highly interactive lecture-discussion format will be liberally supplemented by audio and video recordings of Dr. Thurman, and possibly visits from special guests who knew and studied with him. Each class meeting will begin with a centering meditation, usually keyed to the subject of that session, and end with prayer. This is, as the title of Thurman's autobiography suggests, a course of both head and heart.

Instructor Contact Information:

The best way to reach me is by e-mail to: rankow@onelifeinstitute.org. Please put "SKSM Class" as the subject line so I will be able to recognize it as coming from you. You may also leave a voice message on the OneLife Institute voice mail line (510.595.5598); I am the only one who receives those messages. From there we can arrange to meet by phone or in person, as needed. (For instructor bio visit: www.onelifeinstitute.org/meetourteam.html)

Student Expectations:

- Attendance and active participation in class discussion and activities
- Timely completion of assigned readings
- Brief (1-3 pg) weekly thought paper (10 total) reflecting on readings (Semester total 20-30 pg.)
- Final project – a creative expression in any medium (visual art, poetry, song, dance, spoken word, etc) demonstrating the student's engagement with the course content and how they have been impacted as a result. These will be presented to the class as a whole.
- Keep a "reader's journal" of ideas, insights, questions, revelations, disagreements, aha's, resonances, applications, quotes, etc to fuel and focus class discussions, thought papers and final project.
- Recommended – field trip to attend one Sunday service at Fellowship Church in SF

Required Texts:

Fluker, W.E. and C. Tumber, ed. *A Strange Freedom: The Best of Howard Thurman on Religious Experience and Public Life*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1998. [SF] ISBN 0-8070-1057x / \$21

Thurman, A.S., ed. *For the Inward Journey: The Writings of Howard Thurman*. Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1984. [FTIJ] ISBN: 0-15-132656-8 / \$24

Thurman, H. *Disciplines of the Spirit*. Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1984. [DS] ISBN: 0-913408-35-2 / \$13

Thurman, H. *Jesus and the Disinherited*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996. [JD] ISBN: 0-8070-1029-4 / \$16

Thurman, H. *With Head and Heart: The Autobiography of Howard Thurman*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1979. [H&H] ISBN: 0-15-697648-X / \$18

* Note: These books can be found less expensively online, new and used

Background Articles (will be provided):

Bennett, L. "Howard Thurman: 20th Century Holy Man." *Ebony* (February 1978).

Harding, V. "Dangerous Spirituality." *Sojourners* (January/February) 1999.

Smith, J.A. "Howard Thurman: Thoughts from a Student." *Creation Spirituality* (March/April 1991).

Smith, L.E. "Companion for the Journey: The Works of Howard Thurman." *Sojourners* (Dec.1993).

Recommended Texts:

Smith, L.E. *Howard Thurman: The Mystic as Prophet*. Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1991.

Thurman, H. *The Luminous Darkness*. Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1989.

Thurman, H. *The Search for Common Ground*. Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1986.

A Few Web Resources:

"The Psalm of Howard Thurman," a documentary film (in production) by Arleigh Prelow:

<http://howardthurmanfilm.com/>

The Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples (co-founded by Thurman in 1944). See LINKS page to access many on-line Thurman resources: www.fellowshipsf.org

Article by Dr. Walter Fluker, "Dangerous Memories and Redemptive Possibilities: Reflections on the Life and Work of Howard Thurman" (2004) PDF available at:

www.morehouse.edu/leadershipcenter/Dangerous%20Memories.pdf

"An Interview with Howard Thurman & Ronald Eyre" in *Theology Today*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (1981).

Available on-line at: <http://theologytoday.ptsem.edu/jul1981/v38-2-criticscorner1.htm>

Preliminary Course Outline:

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| Week 1 | The Life and Legacy of Howard Thurman
Introductions. Overview. Thurman video. |
| Week 2 | Deep is the Hunger
Assorted meditations. Readings from Thurman's autobiography. |
| Week 3 | Disciplines of the Spirit: The Growing Edge / Commitment |
| Week 4 | Disciplines of the Spirit: Suffering / Prayer |
| Week 5 | Deep River / The Negro Spiritual Speaks of Life & Death |

- Week 6** **Jesus and the Disinherited, part 1**
Overall context (historical Jesus, Jewish law and society, Roman occupation, etc)
Introduce the “three hounds of hell” (fear, hate, deception)
- Week 7** **Jesus and the Disinherited, part 2**
“Hounds of Hell” ~ continued
- Week 8** **Reading Week – no class**
- Week 9** **Jesus and the Disinherited, part 3**
Readings on Love and Reconciliation
- Week 10** **Beloved Community: The Search for Common Ground**
Fellowship Church. Principles of nonviolent social change.
- Week 11** **Spirituality and Social Justice**
Mysticism & Social Action. Religion in a Time of Crisis.
- Week 12** **A Journey of Head and Heart**
Assorted readings on discerning and living one’s purpose, etc.
- Week 13** **Creative project presentations**
- Week 14** **Remaining project presentations. Summary, wrap-up and closing activities**

**** PLEASE NOTE:** *This is a preliminary syllabus and subject to revision. Thank you.*