School of Theology & Ministry Seattle University Seattle, WA 98122-1090

Fall Quarter, 2009

Course Information:

STMM 593- Spirituality & Theology of Howard Thurman

Credits: 3

Tuesdays: 1:30-4:20 p.m. Hunthausen, Room 100

Instructor:

Flora Wilson Bridges, Ph.D. Hunthausen, Room 214 Office Hours: Thursdays, 9:30-12:00 & by appointment

Required Texts:

Fluker, Walter Earl and Tumber, Catherine, Eds. A Strange Freedom: The Best of Howard Thurman on Religious Experience and Public Life. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1998.

Thurman, Howard. *With Head and Heart: The Autobiography of Howard Thurman*. San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1979.

Thurman, Howard. *Jesus and the Disinherited*. Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1949.

Thurman, Howard. The Creative Encounter. Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1954.

Recommended Texts:

These books by Howard Thurman are all published by Friends United Press, Richmond Indiana:

The Centering Moment

Deep is the Hunger

Deep River and the Negro Spiritual Speaks of Life and Death

Meditations of the Heart

Temptations of Jesus

The Growing Edge

The Inward Journey

The Luminous Darkness

The Mood of Christmas

The Search for Common Ground

For the Inward Journey

A Strange Freedom

Course Description:

This course seeks to illuminate and address the fundamental crisis of "non-community" in the Christian Church, the United States, and the world by way of careful and rigorous examination of the explication and application of the ideal of community and its relationship to Christianity in the life and work of Howard Thurman. Thurman scholar Walter Fluker states, "Thurman's quest for community was the central defining category of his life and thought." Thurman, himself, states, "The significance of the religion of Jesus to people who stand with their backs against the wall has always seemed to me to be crucial...Why is it that Christianity seems impotent to deal radically, and therefore effectively, with the issues of discrimination and injustice on the basis of race, religion and national origin (*Jesus and the Disinherited*)?" This searching question will help to guide the course through our deliberations as we seek to understand why Dr. Thurman came to the conclusion, "I am deeply convinced that in the general area of my inquiry is to be found the answer without which there can be little hope that [humankind] may find in Christianity the fulfillment which it claims for its gospel." We will encounter and probe the

theological and biblical views that resulted in his socio-ethical interpretation of Jesus of Nazareth as the prophet of a new righteousness that leads to community.

Course Objectives:

The first major objective of this course is to familiarize students with the life and work of Howard Thurman as a leading 20th century Christian minister, theologian, mystic, and social prophet who made significant contributions to the religious and social life of the United States and the world. Thurman's earliest experiences of community and non-community in the segregated South had a profound impact on his life-long quest for and interpretation of human community. Thus our tasks in this course will be:

- 1) To examine the relationship between socio-historical contexts and politico-ethical claims associated with the ideal of community in Thurman and their foundation in the Black community of the United States by asking the question: What were the social and intellectual sources which informed and shaped Howard Thurman's understanding of community?
- 2) To discuss the ideal of community in Howard Thurman by asking the questions: How is community conceived? What is its nature or character?
- 3) Finally, to raise questions about the actualization of community: What are the barriers to be overcome in the actualization of community? How is community actualized?

The second major objective of this course, concurrent with this intellectual scrutiny, is to encourage students to assume some ultimate action toward a morally grounded praxis of justice that realizes community. Scholar Cornel West states that in the African-American prophetic tradition, "black, prophetic, Americans tended to assume such ideals and standards ought to make a difference in regard to how individuals act and operate." Therefore this course seeks to inspire, empower, and equip students to engage in the search, as Howard Thurman did in his lifetime, for the "beloved community."

Learning Outcomes for the Course:

- Ability to reflect theologically on the central themes of the Christian tradition
- Knowledge of the interaction of religious/spiritual experience and culture in their ecumenical, multicultural, and inter-religious dimensions
- Ability to articulate a personal and ecclesial theology of ministry
- Ability to inform ecclesial leadership with theology
- Ability to read scriptural texts critically from a liberation hermeneutic
- Awareness of your own social location/assumptions/hermeneutics as you engage the text in your own life, your community, and the larger world
- Ability to use biblical tools and resources as a way to inform your own exegesis for the purpose
 of doing your ministry
- Knowledge of the tradition in relation to sacramental theology, liturgical method, worship elements and structure, and the ability to engage them in an ecumenical diversity of praxis
- Ability to draw critically and constructively on Christian moral traditions to lead toward a more just and sustainable world
- Ability to discern and nurture spiritual experience in relation to self and others
- Ability to articulate one's relationship with God, as it is informed by theological reflection on one's social context

- Ability to articulate and live from an understanding of self as human, minister, and leader
- Ability to be a responsive, discerning listener who can enter another's worldview
- Ability to guide and direct a Christian community (i.e. a congregation, parish, pastoral care unit, etc.) in its mission
- Ability to engage the community with the larger social context and to articulate and communicate the mission that guides the community

Instructional Methods to be Employed:

This is essentially a seminar based course. It engages an eclectic mix of pedagogical techniques that include: class worship, lectures, journaling, sermons, films, music, prayers, oral presentations with visual aids such as slides, videotaped interviews, etc. that will encourage the classroom to become a place that is life-sustaining as well as heart and mind expanding. The instructional methodologies employed seek to open the space for a living dynamic that (in the words of bell hooks) will make the classroom "...a place of liberating mutuality where teacher and student work together in partnership" to "recover our collective awareness of the spirit of community that is always present when we are truly teaching and learning." The embodied teaching and learning experience of the classroom as community will enable us to "confront feelings of loss and restore our sense of connection." This will empower us to create community.

Criteria and Methods for Evaluation and Grading:

Attendance and Class Participation: 40% of Grade. Students are required to attend all classes. Please note that much that determines your grade is dependent upon mutual discussion and interaction. You are required to demonstrate effective group skills by actively contributing to group discussions and using constructive peer feedback that includes honesty, challenge, and mutual respect. Please note that it also includes lively discussion and timely reading of the assigned texts that reflect *critical* theological and biblical assessment.

Class Presentation: 40% of Grade. Perhaps the greatest contribution of the theology of Howard Thurman is the Thurman "synthesis" that includes and transcends at a higher level of integration all divisions—creedal, racial, sexual, religious, ecological, and national. He believed that "the highest act of celebration of the human spirit is the worship of God" and that in the act of worship there is "neither male nor female, Black, nor White, Protestant nor Catholic nor Buddhist, nor Hindu, but a human spirit laid bare, stripped of whatever there is that is literal and irreducible." He was engaged in a life-long quest for community or a quest for experiences of unity which unite and reconcile men and women and races and religions across all divisions, all barriers, and all creeds.

The Presentation Format

In light of the above statement on Thurman's quest for community, select one area of crisis or challenge within your own life and experience as a religious caregiver where there are divisions. Then through employing the theological methodology of Howard Thurman, begin and document your own "quest for community" in the following ways:

- 1. A Day of Quiet Contemplation Away from Distractions: Select a serene setting (mountains, lake, ocean, park, etc.) for at least one entire day to pray, meditate and reflect upon your chosen challenge to community. Then journal by asking yourself the following questions:
 - a. What are the barriers to unity in this situation?
 - b. What are my resources for strength as I seek to help bring about reconciliation?
 - c. What do I believe God is saying about this situation?
 - d. What biblical texts and Christian theology inform my understanding?
 - e. What do I say about all of this and why am I saying it?
 - f. What will I do to bring healing and unity in this situation?
- 2. Spend at least one hour each day praying, meditating, journaling, and reflecting upon the quest for community in the situation you have chosen. You may choose to share portions of your journal for class analysis and discussion. Write a concise, honest, and biblically and theologically sound paper (no more than 7 double-spaced pages) on the above. This paper should be substantially be referred to and used as the basis for the presentation below.
- 3. Prepare a final slide presentation that documents the challenge to community you have chosen, your research and analysis, and your praxis over the course of the quarter as you have sought to bring about reconciliation. Each presentation should take 45 minutes which includes both your presenting and leading class discussion. Include additional readings from Howard Thurman (see the list of recommended texts) in preparation for your presentation. Make sure you reference these readings. Please note: your paper is due on the day you present.

Opening Class Worship: 20% of Grade

All students will be responsible for leading us in corporate worship for one class session. This opening worship *must* engage the use of Howard Thurman resources (prayers, spirituals he wrote about as essential to his personal spiritual development and that of his church and community, excerpts from Thurman's sermons, books, etc.). The worship experience *must* include the theology of Thurman that is demonstrated clearly in the week's assigned reading. In addition, synthesize your own experience into this worship. It must be no more than 20 minutes in length.

Faculty Policies:

Attendance: All students must attend all classes. The nature of this class is essentially interactive and dependent upon the development and formation of community; therefore, the community must be present. Failure to attend class will result in the lowering of your grade by one-half of a letter grade for each absence. For example, if your final grade is an "A", one absence will reduce the grade to an "A-." Please do not ask me (by phone, email, nor in person) for an exception unless you are critically ill and/or have consulted with Dr. Sharon Callahan, Academic Dean for Academic Programs and Student Life.

Late Arrival to Class: The same policy applies as above (see attendance). It is necessary for us all to be present for the opening worship.

Missed Assignments: All assignments are due according to the Class Assignment Schedule listed below. A missed assignment will result in a reduction of the grade that equals the percentage that is given for that assignment under "Criteria and Methods for Evaluation and Grading" listed above. Please do not

ask me (by phone, email, nor in person) for an exception unless you are critically ill and/or have consulted with Dr. Sharon Callahan.

Late Assignments: These do not exist. Late assignments will not be accepted and will be "missing" (see above under "Missing Assignments").

Academic Honesty:

"The School of Theology and Ministry strictly adheres to the Academic Policy concerning Academic Honesty as published in the Seattle University Student Handbook."

Students with Disabilities:

"If you have, or think you may have, a disability (including an 'invisible disability' such as a learning disability, a chronic health problem, or a mental health condition) that interferes with your performances as a student in this class, your are encouraged to discuss your needs and arrange support services and/or accommodations through Disabilities Services staff in the Learning Center, Loyola 100, (206) 296-5740."

CLASS ASSIGNMENTS SCHEDULE

Tuesday, September 29, 2009 Tuesday, October 6, 20
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Opening Worship: Instructor Opening Worship: Denise & Bradley

Read: With Head and Heart

Tuesday, October 13, 2009 Tuesday, October 20, 2009

Opening Worship: Hilary & ML Opening Worship: Molly & Suzanne

Read: Jesus and the Disinherited Read: The Creative Encounter

Tuesday, October 27, 2009 Tuesday, November 3, 2009

Opening Worship: William & Theresa Opening Worship: Ruth & Bruce

Presenters: Denise, Bradley, Hilary Presenters: ML, Molly, Suzanne

Read: A Strange Freedom Read: A Strange Freedom

Tuesday, November 10, 2009 Tuesday, November 17, 2009

Opening Worship: Maggie & Kevin Opening Worship: Larry & Becky

Presenters: William, Theresa, Ruth Presenters: Bruce, Maggie, Maitland

Tuesday, November 24, 2009 December 1, 2009

Opening Worship: Maitland Closing Worship: Instructor

Presenters: Kevin, Larry, Becky