

STMA 593 Mysticism and Transformation

Fall, 2007

Wednesdays, 1:30-4:20

Hunthausen Hall 100

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*Any profound view of the world is mysticism. Albert Schweitzer
Change is the only constant. Heraclites*

Course Description:

This course will study a variety of primary texts designated as “mystical texts” so as to entertain the questions of what mysticism is prior to exploring the myriad of theoretical positions postulated by philosophers, theologians, and social scientists on this topic. We will be looking at the experiences described in order to examine and assess the multiple ways these spiritual classics have imaged the process of transformation as well as the various pathways of mysticism. We will then engage in the process of critical appropriation by bringing pertinent questions, issues and concerns to bear from our own experiences. Questions such as what is mysticism, what does it have to do with justice, is it only a private subjective experience, it is empowering or is it escapism, how important is it in the 21st century, is it shared by all world religions, is it only for the elite or are we all mystics, what does it have to say about the experience of the Holy One, etc.?

Objectives:

Participants will have:

- read and studied several examples of mystical texts critically appropriating their significance for our times;
- examined and assessed multiple ways these texts have imaged the process of transformation and their meanings for our times;
- investigated cross-cultural metaphors of transformation and analyzed their strengths and limitations;
- a basic understanding of the various theoretical positions on the topic of mysticism and how these positions compare to the lived experience of those designated as “mystics”;
- come to some greater understanding of their own religious experiences within this larger historical framework of spirituality

Required Reading

Etty Hillesum, *An Interrupted Life: The Diaries of Etty Hillesum*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1983.

Ralph Metzner, *The Unfolding Self*, Novato, CA, Origin Press, 1998.
Dorothee Soelle, *The Silent Cry: Mysticism and Resistance*, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2001.
Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle*, Paulist Press,

Athanasius, *The Life of Antony* (handout)
John Ruusbroec, *The Sparkling Stone/The Third Life* (handout)

Several pertinent articles will be distributed during the course.

Highly Recommended:

Olivier Clement, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism*, New City Press, 1993.
Mark Salzman, *Lying Awake*, Alfred A. Knopf, 2000.
Howard Thurman, *With Head and Heart*, Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1979

Course Requirements

1. Active participation in class discussions and processes. 50%
2. Reading of assigned materials. 25%
3. Integration Work: volunteer to be either
 - a **Prayer Facilitator**
 - or a **Metaphor Explorer**. The task of the Metaphor Explorer will be *to help the class explore* the rich depth of the metaphor under consideration in the assigned chapter and its transforming possibilities and limitations as well as its pertinence for contemporary spirituality. Two persons can work on a metaphor of choice. You will have 30 minutes. 10%
4. Synthesis Activity: There can be a number of ways you can choose to synthesize the course for yourself.
 - **Reflection paper at the end of the course** integrating the diverse topics considered during the class (No longer than 10 pages.)
 - Or THREE 3-4 **page reflection papers** on the source material turned in along the way, (Papers DUE 1. **Oct 17; 2. Nov 7 and 3. Dec.5**)
 - OR a research paper on a mystic you always wanted to read but never did, (10 page limit)
 - OR further exploration of a metaphor of transformation in some way (**keep the final papers to a maximum of 10 pages**)
 - OR creative art projects-paintings, poems, dance, etc. reflecting the content of the course.
 - We will share these integrative pieces the last day of class. Each participant will have 7 minutes for their sharing. 15%

ALERT!!! It would be highly advantageous for students to begin reading Etty Hillesum's *An Interrupted Life* for the October 3rd class session NOW!!!!

Tentative Schedule of Class Sessions

(This outline is tentative and can be modified according to need at the instructor's discretion.)

Sept.26 Getting Started
 Introductions and charting the landscape

Oct 3: Prayer Facilitator: _____
 Etty Hillesum, *An Interrupted Life*

Questions for reflection:

1. Try to get a sense of some of the people who populate this journal. These would include: "S" [Julius Spier], Han Wegerif [Etty's landlord], Etty's father, Etty's mother, and Etty's brother [Mischa].

2. Suppose that you are a friend of Etty:

--what is your reaction to her?

--what is it about her that you would affirm?

--what is it about her that you would challenge?

3. As you see it, how does the "world" that Etty inhabits, the culture in which she moves and breathes, affect her spiritual quest?

4. During the last half of the book, Etty changes and develops in significant ways. How would you describe this change? What are some aspects or dimensions of this change that you notice?

5. In your opinion, what are some factors that contribute to the change?

6. What metaphors/images landscape Etty's spiritual journey?

7. During the last sections of the diary, we see Etty's final transformation. What do you think: did she become a mystic? How would you describe her transformation?

8. What questions does this book prompt in you?

9. Please note any passages you would like to discuss.

Oct. 10 Prayer Facilitator : _____

Soelle, *The Silent Cry*, pp. 1-54. _____

Metzner, *Introduction*, pp. 1-19

Metaphor: *Awakening*: Ch. 1 pp.20-35

Explorers: _____

Oct. 17 Prayer Facilitator: _____

Athanasius, *The Life of Antony*

Soelle, *The Silent Cry*, pp. 55-93 _____

Metaphor: *Uncovering the Veils of Illusion*

Explorers: _____

From Captivity to Liberation

Explorers: _____

Oct. 24 Prayer Facilitator _____

Ruusbroec, *The Sparkling Stone/The Third Life*

Soelle, *The Silent Cry*, pp. 97-132

Metaphor: *Purification by Inner Fire*

Explorers: _____

From Fragmentation to Wholeness

Explorers: _____

Oct. 31 Prayer Facilitator: _____
Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle, Dwellings 1-4*
Soelle, *The Silent Cry*, pp. 133-190

Metaphor: *Reconciling the Inner Enemy*

Explorers: _____

On Dying and Being Reborn

Explorers: _____

Nov. 7 Prayer Facilitator _____
Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle, Dwellings 5-7*
Soelle, *The Silent Cry*, pp. 191-232.

Metaphor: *From Darkness to Light*

Explorers: _____

Integrating the Inner Animal

Explorers: _____

Nov. 14 Prayer Facilitator _____
TBA
Soelle, *The Silent Cry*, pp. 233-258

Metaphor: *Unfolding the Tree of Life*

Explorers: _____

Journey to the Place of Vision and Power

Explorers: _____

Nov. 28 Prayer Facilitator _____
TBA
Soelle, *The Silent Cry*, pp. 279-302

Metaphor: *Returning to the Source*

Explorers: _____

Dec. 5 Synthesis Day!

