

Practicing God's Presence: A Theology of Prayer
Summer Session, July 17-19, 2017
Vancouver School of Theology

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Note: "Suchocki" is a Polish name. The first "C" is silent, telling Polish folks how to pronounce the following "h" (I can't manage it!). The "cki" ending is a variant of the more common "ski" ending. The name in its Americanization is pronounced, "Sue-hockey," which is not at all how my in-laws pronounce it.

The **PURPOSE OF THE COURSE** is to explore the implications that follow when our understanding of God shifts from a centrality of omnipotence to omnipresence, particularly for a theology of prayer.

COMPETENCE OBJECTIVES: Students are expected to become minimally conversant with the historical role of "omnipotence" in the shaping of spirituality, and the subtle changes that occurred in medieval mysticism when omnipresence took a more dominant role. Students will also be expected to understand process theology as part of the shift toward omnipresence in our own time, and to explore its implications for prayer, particularly in the Christian tradition. As a result of this study, students should be able to formulate a contemporary theology of prayer.

FORMAT AND CONTENT: This is a three-day intensive course worth 1.5 credit hours. Work in the course consists of six class sessions. Readings in required texts should be done ahead of the course. The class sessions involve lectures and discussion. Recommended readings are offered for further exploration of particular issues raised in the course, and may be helpful in writing the paper required following the course.

TEXTS: All are available through amazon.com.

1. Fiona Bowie and Oliver Davies, eds. *Hildegard of Bingen: Mystical Writings*. New York, Crossroad Spiritual Classics Series, 1992.
2. Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*. Any edition available through Amazon.
3. Jay McDaniel. *Earth, Sky, Gods and Mortals*. Eugene, Oregon, Wipe & Stock, 2009.
4. Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, *In God's Presence: Theological Reflections on Prayer*. St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1996.

Additional recommended texts:

1. Paul F. Bradshaw. *Daily Prayer in the Early Church*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982.
2. Paul F. Bradshaw. *Two Ways of Praying*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995.
3. Catherine Keller. *On the Mystery: Discerning Divinity in Process*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008.
4. Depending on the direction of the student's final paper, the student may wish to consult major theologians from the Christian tradition such as Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Wesley, Schleiermacher. Alternatively, students may wish to do further study in liberation theologies as they affect prayer; almost any book by Sallie McFague would be helpful in this regard. Discuss options with the professor.

COURSE POLICIES:

1. VST requires 100% attendance at all six class sessions, Monday through Wednesday.
2. Readings and assignments: Students are expected to read all required assignments before class and to submit a completed class paper of 7 pages by August 31.
3. Academic honesty: Students are expected to adhere to VST's requirements for academic honesty as published in the Student Handbook.
4. Inclusive language: In speaking and writing, inclusive language is expected when making reference to humans, and a variety of metaphors are anticipated when making reference to God.
5. Assignment and Course Evaluation. Course evaluations combine a letter grade system from A+ to B-; course failure is "not Approved." Students enrolled for certificate studies will be graded on an Approved/Not Approved basis. While the final deadline for submission of the final paper is August 31, students may submit a provisional paper up until August 20 for professor's feedback prior to submission of the final paper on August 31. Papers should be emailed in PDF format to mhsuchocki@gmail.com.
6. Late Assignments. Submission of assignments on time is part of academic, professional, and pastoral competence and a part of every course at VST. Completed assignments are due on August 31.
7. VST is committed to creating safe space and an inclusive learning environment. If you are diagnosed with a learning disability, chronic condition, mental health concern, or physical requirement which you anticipate may impact your participation in this class, you are encouraged to discuss your needs with the instructor and the Dean prior to the close of the class sessions on July 19.

CALENDAR

Monday, July 17, Session I: 9-Noon

A brief history of the three "omni's" traditionally attributed to God: omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence, and a discussion of why omnipresence and omniscience were interpreted through the dominant category of omnipotence. Class discussions will explore the implications of shifting dominance to omniscience and/or omnipresence. Examples of the emphasis on omnipotence: Augustine, *Freedom of the Will*; Aquinas, Question 25, Article 3; Luther, *On the Bondage of the Will*.

Monday, July 17, Session II: 1-3

A brief and selective history of the mystical tradition, in which omnipresence tended to become more functionally important than omnipotence. Examples: Hildegard of Bingen in Germany and Brother Lawrence in France. Students will have looked for the respective roles of omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence in their prior reading of Hildegard and Brother Lawrence, and will discuss their findings in class.

Tuesday, July 18, Session III: 9-Noon

The shift to the dominance of omnipresence in twentieth century theology, particularly in forms of liberation theology and in process theologies. This session will include a summary presentation of process theology.

Tuesday, July 18, Session IV: 1-3

A study of Jay McDaniel's appropriation of omnipresence in his development of process theology, ecology, and spirituality. Class discussion will focus particularly on the implications of McDaniel's work for a theology of prayer.

Wednesday, July 19, Session V: 9-Noon

Marjorie Suchocki's understanding of the implications of omnipresence for a theology of prayer. Class discussion will explore contrasts between McDaniel's and Suchocki's work, and look for any commonalities in their work with what we have learned from Hildegarde and Brother Lawrence.

Wednesday, July 19, Session VI: 1-3

Problems and possibilities for further development of practicing God's presence for a theology of prayer. Students will use this class session to look ahead to their own work in developing the assigned paper in which they explicate their own theology of prayer in light of God's omnipresence. The paper is due on August 31.

Evaluative Criteria

1. Class participation: Students are expected to participate in class discussions, and do adequate preparation of in-class discussion. Evaluative criteria: comments and questions show adequate preparation, an understanding of the assigned readings, and a readiness to apply readings to interpretive questions and insights.
2. Short paper: This paper will help students gain specific skills and learn critical study methods. Evaluative criteria include concise and clear writing, and completeness and accuracy in beginning to develop one's own theology of prayer.
3. Audit students are required to do all the reading and participate in the class discussions.
4. Certificate students are required to do all the reading and participate in class discussions.