

Professor David Belcastro

Striving Towards Being: The Lives and Work of Thomas Merton & Albert Camus

In a letter to the poet Czeslaw Milosz, Merton wrote, "I feel that all is futility except our striving towards Being." These few words express what was at the center of Merton's vocation as a monk and writer. Merton sought others who shared this concern and were committed to addressing the problem of nihilism in the modern world. Living, however, as a hermit within a monastic enclosure, his conversations with others were limited for the most part to correspondence. This was, however, not possible with regard to Merton's interest in Albert Camus. Camus' accidental death in 1960 prevented the possibility of what might have become one of the most interesting exchanges of letters between two significant thinkers of the 20th century. Even so, the works of great writers like Camus always remain in the present tense. And, when placed in the hands of an attentive reader like Merton, become a meeting place for minds that transcends time and place. Challenged by what he saw as Camus' prophetic critique of the Church's contribution to violence in the world, Merton responded with seven essays. His intention was to further develop the essays into a book. The project was never finished due to his death in 1968 while on a pilgrimage to India. Even so, these essays provide us with an opportunity to enter into a conversation with Merton and Camus . . . for these essays also remain in the present tense.

This seminar will meet weekly for three hours to discuss essays, short stories, journal entries and letters by Merton and Camus. The final project will be a term paper on *striving towards being*.