

Thomas Merton and the Way of Mercy

Dr. Christine M. Bochen
July 7-9, 2016
Vancouver School of Theology

The theme of mercy will serve as a lens through which we view Thomas Merton's life and writings and consider how his experience of the God of mercy informed his spirituality, his witness to justice and non-violence, and his call to unity through dialogue and mutual understanding. Drawing on a broad selection of Merton's writings across genres including autobiography and journals, poetry and essays, and letters, we will reflect on how Merton maps a pathway to mercy that is so urgently needed in our times. This intertextual approach to Merton's writings will illuminate Merton's contributions as monk and writer, social critic and prophet, and person of faith rooted in his Christian tradition and open to the wisdom of the world's religions.

Course objectives

To trace the development and illustrate the interconnectedness of themes which are integral to understanding Merton's life and legacy: contemplation and contemplative living; compassion, justice, non-violence and peace-making; unity, ecumenism and interreligious dialogue.

To read Merton's life and a selection of his writings through the lens of mercy, considering how Merton's experience of the God who is Mercy informed his spirituality.

Student learning goals

At the end of the course students should be able:

To demonstrate a grasp of major themes in Merton's life and writings and discuss how these themes intersect with and illuminate each other.

To identify and reflect on ways in which Merton's experience, vision, and witness can illuminate a pathway to mercy in our lives, communities, and world.

Required reading:

Thomas Merton, *Thomas Merton: Essential Writings*, ed. Christine M. Bochen (Orbis, 2000)

Thomas Merton, *Thomas Merton: A Life in Letters*, ed. William H. Shannon and Christine M. Bochen (Harper Collins, 2008)*

Thomas Merton, *Thomas Merton: Selected Essays*, ed. Patrick F. O'Connell (Orbis, 2013)

*This selection of letters will serve as the frame for our reading and discussion of selected essays and excerpts.

Course schedule:

Thursday, July 7

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| 2:00-3:30 p.m. | Introductory session for course participants |
| 6:00 p.m. | Merton reception |
| 7:00-9:00 p.m. | Public lecture: "Thomas Merton's Legacy and Challenge: 'Mercy, always, in everything, mercy'"
Q and A |

Friday, July 8

9:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m. and 1:00-4:00 p.m. Sessions for course participants

Saturday, July 9

9:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m. and 1:00-4:00 p.m. Sessions for course participants

Recommended/related reading:

Christine M. Bochen (ed.), *The Way of Mercy* (Orbis, 2016)
Thomas Merton, *Cold War Letters*, ed. Christine M. Bochen and William H. Shannon (Orbis, 2006)
Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (Doubleday, 1968)
Thomas Merton, *In the Dark before Dawn: New Selected Poems*, ed. Lynn Szabo (New Directions, 2005)
Thomas Merton, *On Christian Contemplation*, ed. Paul M. Pearson (New Directions, 2012)
Thomas Merton, *On Eastern Meditation*, ed. Bonnie Thurston (New Directions, 2012)
Thomas Merton, *The Intimate Merton*, ed. Patrick Hart and Jonathan Montaldo ((HarperSanFrancisco, 1999)
Thomas Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain* (Harcourt Brace, 1948)
William H. Shannon, Christine M. Bochen, and Patrick F. O'Connell, *The Thomas Merton Encyclopedia*, (Orbis 2006)

Certificate and Degree Requirements and Evaluation Information

Students taking a Summer School course for degree credit will meet in an additional paper topic consultation seminar group with the instructor for one hour. Reading prior to the course and written assignments following it comprise the total package of learning time. The final day of Summer Term (August 30) is the due date for all Summer School papers.

Certificate course work expectations:

Students are expected to complete all reading as assigned by instructor, participate in class and group work, and comply with the 100% attendance policy.

Written assignments (5-7 pages in length for a 1.5 unit course) should:

- Demonstrate the ability to thoughtfully engage the material and reading for the class
- Give a personal reflection on the material covered

Requirements for Diploma, M.Div., M.A. credit:

Intensive expectations include: substantial pre-reading assignments; reading and full participation in classes; research and course assignments before, during and/or after the intensive class period. 100% attendance is expected in intensive courses.

A topic paper will be the final evaluation method. The topic for the paper will be determined in consultation with the instructor. The paper will demonstrate the following competencies:

- Integration of course content, assigned reading, and the student's contemporary social, cultural and ecclesial context
- Knowledge of the chosen subject and relevant primary and secondary literature
- Critical analysis of the chosen topic
- Originality and creativity regarding choice of and approach to the chosen topic
- Clarity and organization of the student's writing style

For a 1.5 credit hour course (15 hours):

Pre-reading: 350 – 600 pages

Paper: 12 pages in length (3,000 words). Research paper bibliography of 5 – 10 entries beyond course texts (Diploma/M.Div/MA). The paper will be submitted to the Course Instructor no later than August 30.

Grading and Evaluations:

Course evaluations at VST will combine a letter grade system with a competence model of assessment.

Assignments within a course are given either an APP (Approved) or NAPP (Not Approved) designation.

One re-write is allowed on any assignment which is NAPP within a course. The final grade for a course is reported both as a letter grade and as a narrative evaluation on the basis of a student's overall fulfillment of the competencies and expectations of the course, which are stated in the course syllabus.

Final grade designations are: A+, A, A-, B+, B, B-; and NAPP. Competency for VST graduate courses is defined as B- or better.

Instructor biography:

Christine M. Bochen is professor of religious studies at Nazareth College, Rochester, New York, where she currently holds the William H. Shannon Chair of Catholic Studies. A founding member and past president of the International Thomas Merton Society, she has taught courses and spoken on Merton in a variety of venues – conferences, professional organizations, colleges and universities, and church gatherings. Christine is co-author, with William H. Shannon and Patrick F. O'Connell, of *The Thomas Merton Encyclopedia*; the editor of *Courage for Truth* (a volume of Merton's letters to writers), *Learning to Love* (volume 6 of Merton's journals), and *Thomas Merton: Essential Writings*; and co-editor, with William H. Shannon, of *Cold War Letters* and *Thomas Merton: A Life in Letters*. Most recently, she edited *The Way of Mercy* (Orbis 2016), a selection of essays and reflections on mercy, that includes writings by Pope Francis; theologians such as Walter Kasper, Jon Sobrino and Leonardo Boff; and spiritual writers such as Thomas Merton, Dorothy Day, Jim Forest and Joan Chittester.

Instructor contact information:

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Course Outline

Thursday, July 7

2:00-3:30 p.m.

Introductory session: Overview of the Course / Merton's Life in His Own Words

Readings:

Thomas Merton: Essential Writings (TMEW) – Introduction

Thomas Merton: A Life in Letters (TMLL) – Introduction (skim) and Part I: "A Life in Letters"

Thomas Merton: Selected Essays (TMSE) – Introduction and "Learning to Live," "The White Pebble," and "Day of a Stranger"

7:00-9:00 p.m.

Public lecture: "Thomas Merton's Legacy and Challenge: 'Mercy, always, in everything, mercy'"

Q and A

Friday, July 8

9:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.

“Becoming and Being a Monk”

Reading: TMLL Part 2
TMSE “Notes for a Philosophy of Solitude” (optional)

“A Call to Contemplation” / “Seeking God in the Ordinarieness of Life”

Reading: TMEW Part 1
TMLL Part 5
TMSE “The Contemplative Life in the Modern World”

1:00-4:00 p.m.

“Speaking the Truth”

Reading: TMLL Part 4
TMSE “Boris Pasternak and the People with Watch Chains” **or** “A Letter to Pablo Antonio Cuadra concerning Giants,”
“Message to Poets,” and “Rain and the Rhinoceros” (optional)

“A Call to Compassion” / “Networking for Peace”

Reading: TMEW Part 2
TMLL Part 7

Saturday, July 9

9:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.

“A Call to Compassion” – continued

Reading: TMSE “A Tribute to Gandhi” and “Peace: A Religious Responsibility”

“Reading the Signs of the Times” – Issues of Race and Ecology

Reading: TMLL Part 6
TMSE “Religion and Race in the United States” **or** “Events and Pseudo-Events: Letter to a Southern Churchman”
and “The Wild Places”

1:00-4:00 p.m.

“Keeping Faith” / “A Call to Unity” / “Seeking Unity Beyond Difference”

Reading: TMLL Part 8
TMEW Part 3
TMLL Part 9
TMSE “Christian Culture Needs Oriental Wisdom” **or** “A Christian Looks at Zen”