

THOMAS MERTON: The Man, Mystic and Prophet
Christine A. Hearn, MA, CSD
Adult Accelerated Course
Wednesdays: May 20-27-June 3-10-17-24

Religion 318 SU-1
Summer I, 2009
Room: FH 205
7:00 – 10:00 PM

Required Texts: 1. Bochen, C. *Thomas Merton: Essential Writings*. Orbis. 2000.
2. Shannon, W.H. *Thomas Merton: An Introduction*. St. Anthony
Messenger Press. 1997. (Revised edition of *Something a Rebel*)

PURPOSE OF COURSE: This course will examine the life and teachings of Thomas Merton, the 20th Century Trappist monk, writer, and social activist, whose contemplative writings have become an inspiration for those seeking to integrate the secular with the spiritual. Besides exploring Merton's life, we will also study his philosophy on church renewal, prayer and contemplation, social justice issues (race, war, and morality), and inter- religious dialogue. Some mention of Merton's poetry and literary essays will be included.

A. COURSE OUTCOMES: Overall, REL. 318 SU-2 shares and endorses the goals of the Religious Studies Department (numbered one through four), as well as the outcomes of the Value requirement of the Core Curriculum (numbered five through eight). In addition, each outcome is followed by a particular assessment for student achievement. Specific assignments are listed further in the outline.

1. Students will understand ways in which people in different religious traditions conceive of the ultimate. Our study of Merton's appreciation of various religions will assist us in this regard, especially with our group discussions and journal sharing.
2. Students will understand the relationship between religion and social justice, and the historical, cultural, and social forces that have contributed to that relationship, particularly in light of the mission and ministry of the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Reflecting on Merton's contribution to social justice issues through journals, film, and discussion will add a significant depth to student learning. Each student will be asked to write three journal assignments regarding his/her learning about specific areas of Merton's life and writing.
3. Students will be able to respond to the way in which religious belief challenges and is challenged by contemporary culture. Examining the spiritual writings of Merton on prayer and meditation will assist students in determining where religious belief fits into their life journey. Experiential classes in meditation and prayer will invite students to consider how culture has impacted them, either for or against faith and practice.
4. Students will understand the central theological and ethical beliefs of people in different religious contexts. Merton's gift of inter-religious dialogue, especially his travels to Asia, will help the students to examine their concerns about alternative faith practices. Reading and reflecting on Merton's sharing with the Buddhists, Sufis, and others will assist us in this regard.
5. Students will be more self-critical when making moral commitments. Reading, hearing and seeing Merton's life journey and conversion to faith, as well as his commitment to a different way of life, will allow students to ask themselves where their journey is taking them. Sharing in class will be part of this process.
6. Students will be encouraged to be more self-critical when making future moral decisions and commitments. Merton's journey and commitment to being a monk and writer had its own set of unique problems. We will discuss how inner growth and maturity assists in planning for future decisions and commitments. Readings on Merton's personal struggle in living out his own vocations of monk and writer will be part of this process.

7. Students will appreciate and respect the differences in the moral beliefs of other persons and cultures. Merton's great contribution to society was his ability to connect with others from different walks of life and to deeply appreciate the diversity it brought to him. Students will be asked to do an oral presentation on various topics about Merton's faith, life, and diversity that will challenge their assumptions about morality and belief.
8. Students will be able to engage in rational discourse about morality and moral issues. Merton's writing corpus contains volumes on the particular moral issues of his day: war and peace, race relations, nuclear weapons, etc. Students will be able to reflect on a summary of these issues presented in the texts and in film.

B. OFFICE HOURS: Since we will be meeting for six class sessions, opportunities for personal appointments will be sporadic. I am usually at the college by 5:00 PM, and you can probably find me in the Jazzman Café. If you need to contact me, please feel free to call me: cell phone: **(908) 500-9283**. Please leave a short message, your phone number and a time I can return your call. You can reach me by e-mail at the following: **(chrissetra@comcast.net)** or **(Christine.A.Hearn@Cabrini.edu)**. Thanks.

C. COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

1. **ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION.** Students are expected to attend and to participate in class. We only have six class meetings, and your attendance is crucial to our class discussions, etc. Those students with more than one unexcused absence will have their grade reduced by ONE level for each additional absence (e.g., if your final grade is B, but you have two unexcused absences—you will receive a B- for the course).

Excused absences are allowed for the following reasons:

- a. Illness serious enough to require a visit to the doctor. Common colds are not excused absences; the stomach flu is. Routine medical and dental appointments should be made so as not to conflict with class.
 - b. Death in the immediate family.
 - c. Participation in an activity that is approved by the college.
 - d. An important business trip that is required by your place of employment.
- *** Appropriate documentation for these absences is required.

2. **CLASS DISCUSSIONS.** Because teaching/learning is an active process that we enter into, attendance and participation in **DISCUSSION** is essential to this course. Students are invited into active collaboration with the teacher to form a community in which each person both teaches and learns. Active reading of the Bochen and Shannon texts and any handouts will lend itself to this endeavor, as well as active listening to lectures, outside reading re: Merton, assigned films, and attendance at any type of retreat/workshop where Merton's philosophy is presented. Assigned journals will assist us in this regard as well. Students are encouraged to bring in articles and/or information about any of the topics that we are studying. Since discussion in a class is so important, cell phones and other devices should not be used, especially text messaging. This can be very distracting to the teacher and other students. Please be courteous in class. This point requirement total will be at the sole discretion of the professor. **10 POINTS TOWARDS OVERALL GRADE.**

3. **CRITIQUE/REFLECTION/JOURNAL PAPERS.** Each student will submit three written journals on assigned readings from the textbooks/films/handouts. You are asked to do the following:
- Write a short summary of the material.
 - Reflect on the information presented and indicate if it has relevance for our study at the present time. Discuss whether or not the information would benefit society/world community or even yourself.
 - Feel free to critique, make comments (either positive and/or negative) re: what the author states in the specific selection, and to give your opinion (pro or con)
- Each paper should be no more than four (4) pages in length, but at least three (3). Font size may be 10-11 or 12. Suggestion for font: Times New Roman. Please put a proper heading on the first written page, with your name and date in the left hand corner. **DOUBLE SPACE PLEASE. The dates for the assignments are June 3 – June 10 and June 17. EACH PAPER IS WORTH 15 POINTS TOWARDS YOUR FINAL GRADE. 45 POINTS TOTAL. *** ASSIGNED PAPERS:** Papers should be typewritten, double-spaced, pages numbered. **DO NOT** use plastic covers. **STAPLE** pages together in upper left-hand corner. Please **PROOFREAD** before handing in the paper. Grammar, spelling, punctuation, sentence construction, etc. will count in the grading. When quoting the author or the body of the text, please follow standard quotation rules with page numbers. MLA Style Sheet will be a good resource in this regard. Late papers **WILL NOT BE** accepted. Papers will not be accepted over e-mail; if you will not be in class on a specific evening, please leave your paper in my mailbox in Grace Hall (upstairs) or give it to someone who may be in class with you. Please make sure your name is located on the first page at the top. Papers are returned at the next class meeting. Grades are final.

4. **ORAL PROJECT:** Each student will be asked to give an oral presentation to the class regarding some specific teaching or learning about Thomas Merton. Topics will be distributed at class on May 20. You will be expected to follow some simple directions below. The presentations will be graded according to those points, especially #4.
- Research your topic. The Internet is great for this and there are literally thousands of hits on the Search engine for Thomas Merton. I would be happy to give you some recommendations regarding your topic (books, magazines, etc.)
 - Gather any handouts you can about your topic. If you choose, you may present the topic via Power Point. **PLEASE CHECK THE EQUIPMENT AHEAD OF TIME IN THE CLASSROOM.** Creative presentations are always appreciated. Feel free to bring props, books, art, music, etc. as part of your project. Feel free to engage the class as much as possible.
 - Your presentation should be no more than 10 – 15 minutes. This does not include set-up time or distribution of your handouts. This can be done ahead of time.
 - Your final presentation should include the following:
 - Short history of the topic – why did Merton pursue this?
 - How the topic affected Merton or what learning came from it.
Did Merton write any books or articles on this topic? What were they?
 - How does the topic impact you? (like friendship or nature)
 - Your opinion for or against the topic.

**STUDENTS WILL PRESENT ON JUNE 03 – JUNE 10 AND JUNE 17.
THIS ASSIGNMENT IS WORTH 15 POINTS TOWARD YOUR FINAL
GRADE POINT AVERAGE. GOOD PRESENTATION SKILLS COUNT
AS PART OF YOUR GRADE, SO SMILE AND SPEAK CLEARLY.**

5. FINAL EXAM: Students will be given an “at-home open book written” exam during the **LAST CLASS, JUNE 24. NO ONE IS EXCUSED FROM THIS CLASS. If you cannot be here on JUNE 24, please do not take this course.** The exam will be taken from the lecture material and the life of Thomas Merton and will be distributed during the last class. Students should complete the exam at home and send to me over email before JUNE 29.

30 POINTS TOWARD OVERALL GRADE.

*** Grade Equivalents:	A	93 - 100	C	73 - 77
	A-	90 - 92	C-	70 - 72
	B+	88 - 89	D+	68 - 69
	B	83 - 87	D	60 - 67
	B-	80 - 82	F	60 or below
	C+	78 - 79		

Academic dishonesty of any kind is not tolerated in this course. Students suspected of violating academic honesty will be dealt with in accordance with policies outlined in student and faculty handbooks. If the accusation is upheld, the student will receive a failing grade for the course. Theft and mutilation of library materials is considered academic dishonesty.

The following course outline is subject to change due to the professor’s discretion. Inclement weather may also necessitate some changes in meeting times, etc.

It is extremely important to be in class ON TIME. Continual lateness to class or leaving early will impact on a student’s grade. Students are also expected to be courteous and respectful of others in the class as well. Private conversations and rudeness will not be tolerated during the class. Recorders and laptops are always welcome, but please be sensitive to those around you when setting up equipment as it can be distracting. Personal IPODS, cell phones or pagers should be turned off during class. Thank you for your cooperation in these matters.

C. COURSE OUTLINE: Readings should be done after the class meeting.

MAY 20

Introduction to Course/Syllabus

Background & Life of Thomas Merton

1. Readings: Shannon (p. 1-55) & Bochen (p.15-49)
2. Lecture: Merton’s Life & Importance to Spirituality
3. Film: GETHSEMANI:
4. Handouts: “My Lord God” & “Day of a Stranger”
5. Choosing Oral Report Topics

MAY 27

Merton’s Spirituality

1. Readings: Shannon (p.57 -- 119) & Bochen (p. 51-88)
2. Lecture: Contemplative Spirituality – Merton Style
3. Experiential Prayer Form/Meditation
4. Handouts: “Learn to Be Alone” & “Defining Contemplation”

JUNE 03

Exploring Merton's Themes on Social Justice

1. Readings: Shannon (continue from last week) Bochen (p. 89-139)
2. Lecture: Catholic Social Justice Themes & Merton
3. Film: SEEDER OF RADICAL ACTION
4. Handouts: "The Root of War is Fear" & "Quotes"

1st PAPER DUE TONIGHT

ORAL REPORTS BEGIN

JUNE 10

Exploring Merton's Themes on Peace/Non-Violence

1. Continuation of readings/handouts from last week
2. Lecture: Principles for A Non-Violent Life
3. Film: ORIGINAL CHILD BOMB: A MEDITATION
4. Discussion

2nd PAPER DUE TONIGHT

ORAL REPORTS CONTINUE

JUNE 17

Inter-religious Dialogue

1. Readings: Shannon (p.121-171); Bochen (p. 140-199)
2. Lecture: Merton's Exploration in World Religions
3. Experiential Prayer Form/Meditation
4. Handouts: "I will be a better Catholic . . ."

3RD PAPER DUE TONIGHT

ORAL REPORTS FINISH

JUNE 24

Follow-up for the Future

1. Film: SOUL SEARCHING: The Journey of Thomas Merton with short discussion
2. *The International Thomas Merton Society* and *The Thomas Merton Foundation* – how to join
3. Course Evaluations

***** FINAL EXAM DISTRIBUTED: send final to:**

chrispetra@comcast.net (make sure you use Word document for your final). I will not count punctuation and/or grammar in your final total. Good luck.

If you would like your final exam returned to you, please come to class with a stamped, self-addressed envelope on the evening of June 24. I would be happy to mail the material to you. Make sure the envelope and stamp amount is correct. Thanks.