

**RES 338 Thomas Merton: Mystic and Prophet
Perspectives II – Spring 2013**

Christine M. Bochen, Ph.D.
GAC 309
389-2728 (office) / 377-6346 (home)
cbochen4@naz.edu

Office Hours:
Tuesday 11:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
Wednesday 1:30-2:30 p.m.
Friday 10:30-11:20 a.m.
Also by appointment.

“Our real journey in life is interior:
it is a matter of growth, deepening, and of an ever greater surrender
to the creative action of love and grace in our hearts.”

The Asian Journal 296

“Hate is the seed of death in my own heart,
while it seeks the death of the other.
Love is the seed of life in my own heart
when it seeks the good of the other.”

“Honorable Reader” 123

“We are already one. But we imagine that we are not.
And what we have to recover is our original unity.
What we have to be is what we are.”

The Asian Journal 308

Course Description

Readings in Thomas Merton, twentieth century monk and writer, mystic and prophet, with a focus on spirituality (meditation, prayer, living contemplatively), compassionate response to urgent social issues (violence, war and peace, racism and technology), and the search for unity through inter-religious dialogue and understanding.

A Word about Thomas Merton

In each age, there are people to whom others turn for lessons on how to live. These are the guides and gurus, the prophets and the saints: people who seem to have discovered, through experience, life’s meaning and who have the gift of being able to point others in the right direction, to steer them home, to help them discover their true selves. Lawrence Cunningham names these people “spiritual masters.” A spiritual master is “one who has learned the spiritual way with such experiential exactitude that he or she is able to guide others on that path and serve as an exemplar or paradigm for those committed to its journey.” (Introduction to *Thomas Merton: Spiritual Master*)

Thomas Merton was a “spiritual master” for many during his lifetime. More than forty –five years after his death, he continues, through the example of his life and through his writings, to guide many to a deepened experience of themselves, the human community, and God. Merton’s “mastery” is derived from the practice and personal experience that inform his vision of God, self, others, and the world.

Studying Merton’s life and work invites us as his readers to reflect on our own spiritual journeys: on who we are, how we live, what we have to contribute. Merton challenges us to examine our worldviews, beliefs and values. Most important, Merton challenges us to consider our relationships – to others, to the earth and to God. Put simply, he urges us to “learn to live.”

In this course, we will study Thomas Merton – Trappist monk and writer, contemplative and social prophet – through his writings. Drawing on Merton’s autobiography, the journals he kept throughout all of his adult life, and the letters he wrote as well as his essays, books, and poetry, we will trace his spiritual journey. We will discover how a deepening experience of God led him to take responsibility for the world he thought he had left behind when he entered the monastery. We will see how he began speaking out for social justice and against nuclear war, the war in Vietnam, racism, and other forms of violence. We will learn what he has to say about non-violence as a way of life. We will also discover how he was drawn to study the wisdom of the world’s religions as a way of enriching his own contemplative experience and how his growing knowledge of the world’s religions contributed to his realization of unity. In the process, we will have the opportunity to critically examine and assess his contemplative, compassionate and unitive spirituality and, if we choose, our own spiritualities as well.

Reading Thomas Merton is an opportunity to explore a host of related topics and issues: spirituality *and* religion; prayer and meditation; mysticism; images and understandings of God; the self and the experience of conversion; monasticism; issues of social justice including war, non-violence and peace-making. Reading Merton is also an opportunity to learn about Catholicism and the Catholic tradition; explore an ecumenical vision of Christianity; and consider the necessity and nature of dialogue between and among the world’s religions.

Required Readings by Thomas Merton

New Seeds of Contemplation (New Directions, 1962)

The Seven Storey Mountain (Harcourt Brace, 1948)

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

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

Thomas Merton: On Eastern Meditation, ed. Bonnie Thurston (New Directions, 2012)

These books are available in the bookstore. Additional readings will be identified on the calendar and will be made available in class and/or the Merton Room and/or on reserve in the Library.

Course Requirements

- Regular, attentive, prepared, active presence and participation in class (10%)
- Satisfactory completion of writing assignments: reflection papers (15%) and final project (25%)
- Shannon Lecture and Conversation attendance and responses (10%)
- Midterm exam (20%)
- Final portfolio including a final integrating essay –shared during the final exam period (20%)

Course Structure and Format

Merton's life and writing will serve as the framework for the course as we interweave his story – recounted in autobiography and letters – and the development of his spirituality – marked by his seeking God, speaking out for peace and justice, and witnessing to what unites us. Put differently, the course will explore Merton's spirituality as one which calls his readers to contemplation, compassion, and unity.

Our format will include a variety of teaching and learning approaches such as short lectures, videos, small group discussions, full class discussions, various kinds of writing (see below), and campus events.

Course Writing

Writing – informally, semi-formally, and formally – will be an integral part of your learning in this course. This emphasis on writing as a way to learn and to communicate with readers seems especially appropriate given the subject of this course. Thomas Merton was himself a prolific and versatile writer. He kept a journal; filled notebooks with entries that captured his response to what he was reading as well as ideas for future projects; published an autobiography and journals; wrote, collected, and even published some of his letters; and wrote and published many articles, essays, poems and books.

The course will include:

- **Informal writing** will consist of **in class writing** (free writes, pair and share, minute papers, mapping, exit passes, etc.) and **journal/notebook** entries, written out of class. Informal writing is short . . . spontaneous . . . exploratory . . . personal . . . expressive. . . unedited . . . process-oriented . . . ungraded.
- **Semi-formal writing** will take the form of **reflection papers and responses to the Shannon Chair Lectures and Conversations**. Semi-formal writing is characterized by many of the qualities of informal writing listed above but it also is intended to communicate with a reader and so should be edited to ensure correct grammar, spelling and syntax. Semi-formal writing will not be graded but students will receive feedback on each reflection paper and reflection papers will earn credit as a set toward the final grade. Brief responses to the Shannon Chair events will also be graded.
- **Formal writing** will consist primarily of the final project and the introduction and integrating essay prepared for the final portfolio. Formal writing builds on informal and semi-formal writing. Formal writing is intended to communicate with an audience. Formal writing will be graded.

The course will also include **two conferences** with your professor: a group conference to brainstorm the subject and direction of your final project and a conference to review the draft of your project.

See final pages of the syllabus for details on course writing.

Special Campus Events

The William H. Shannon Chair in Catholic Studies was established at Nazareth College to make known and enrich the study of the Catholic intellectual and theological tradition. Each year the Chair sponsors a The William H. Shannon Chair in Catholic Studies was established at Nazareth College to make known and enrich the study of the Catholic intellectual and theological tradition. Each year the Chair sponsors a lecture series. The theme of the 2012-2013 academic year's lectures and conversations is "Integrating Faith and Science: Dilemmas, Debates, and Decisions" and, this spring, includes the lecturers and presentations listed below. The theme and topics of the lecture

series are pertinent to this course. Your attendance at these lectures and/or conversations is required as are written response papers on these events.

Lisa Sowle Cahill

“Catholic Bioethics, Political Priorities, and the Common Good”
Thursday, February 28 at 7:00 p.m.
Forum, Otto Shults Community Center

“Jesus, Feminism, and Catholic Women”
Friday, March 1 at 1:30 p.m.
Linehan Chapel, Golisano Academic Center

Celia Deane-Drummund

“Christ and Evolution as Theo-Drama”
Thursday, March 21 at 7:00 p.m.
Forum, Otto Shults Community Center

“Human Nature, Evolution, and Other Animals”
Friday, March 22, 2011 at 1:30 p.m.
Linehan Chapel, Golisano Academic Center

Mary Evelyn Tucker

“Envisioning a Sustainable Future: Ecological, Spiritual, and Ethical Perspectives”
Thursday, April 18 at 7:00 p.m.
Forum, Otto Shults Community Center

“Religions and Ecology: The Emerging Alliance”
Friday, April 19 at 1:30 p.m.
Linehan Chapel, Golisano Academic Center

The topics of the lecture series are pertinent to this course. Your attendance at the October and November lectures and/or conversations is required as are brief written responses to these events.

Course Learning Goals

Content: At the end of the course, you should be able to:

- Describe Thomas Merton’s life, his “exterior” journey and his “interior” journey.
- Trace the development of monasticism in Christianity, identify the key elements of monastic life, and discuss Merton’s developing understanding of what it means to be a monk.
- Demonstrate a grasp of Merton’s spirituality with its three-fold call to contemplation, compassion and unity.
- State and explain what Merton has to say about war, proliferation of nuclear weapons, racism, the misuses of technology
- Identify and explain the principles of non-violence and discuss what the practice of non-violence entails
- Explain the relationship between spirituality and justice and between contemplation and action in Merton’s thought.
- Trace Merton’s encounter with the world’s religions and discuss what he learned about other religions and his own in the process.
- Identify and explain what Merton sees to be the principles guiding interreligious dialogue.

Part II: Seeking God: Merton's Call to Contemplation **Weeks of February 4, 11, 18, and 25 and March 4**

Focus on Merton's experience and understanding of spirituality and prayer, especially contemplation, which means becoming aware of who one is as one becomes aware of God within.

Read: Introduction and selections from *Thomas Merton: Essential Writings* (Part I)
New Seeds of Contemplation
Thomas Merton: A Life in Letters, Parts 4 and 5
Selected Journal Passages
Selected Essays
Selected Poems

View: *Gethsemani*

Midterm: February 27

Part III: Seeking Peace: From Contemplation to Compassion **Weeks of March 4, 18, 25, and April 1**

Focus on how contemplation led to Merton's own engagement in the social issues of his day: war, racism, technology. Analysis of the roots of violence. Special attention to the meaning and practice of non-violence.

Read: Selections from *Thomas Merton: Essential Writings* (Part II)
Thomas Merton: A Life in Letters, Parts 6 and 7

Selected Poems
Selected Journal Passages
Selected Essays

View: *Original Child Bomb*

Part IV: Seeking Unity: Merton's Call to Be What We Already Are **Weeks of April 1, 8 and 15**

Exploration of the ever -widening circle of contacts and relationships that helped shape Merton's inclusive vision. Focus on Merton's vision and critique of Catholicism, his ecumenical vision of Christianity, and his openness to and valuing of the wisdom of the world's religions. Reflection on Merton's vision of unity with self, other, God and nature.

Read: *Thomas Merton: A Life in Letters*, Parts 8 and 9
A Day in the Life of a Stranger
Selections from *Thomas Merton: Essential Writings* (Part III)
Selections from *Thomas Merton: On Eastern Meditation*

View: *Thomas Merton and Renewal, Christian and Jewish* with Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi
The (Almost) Final Days of Thomas Merton: A Conversation with Harold Talbott
Twenty-Five Years Later: A Visit to Gethsemani by the Dalai Lama

Part V: Sharing the Wisdom

Weeks of April 15 and 22

Sharing insights gleaned from final project

Final: Presenting Portfolios

**1:20-3:50 p.m.
Saturday, May 4**

EXPECTATIONS AND POLICIES

I will do all I can to make this course a positive learning experience for you. I value the opportunity to work with you in the classroom and individually. Your questions, concerns, and learning are important to me. Please feel free to see me during office hours or to make an appointment at a mutually convenient time.

If you have a documented learning disability or are a non-native English speaker, please contact me as soon as possible so that we may discuss and implement whatever arrangements are needed in terms of class participation, assignments or exams.

Carefully note the following expectations and policies.

- **Attend class regularly.** Class attendance is a requirement for success in this course. Attendance implies but is not limited to being physically present. The quality of your presence matters. You are expected to listen, participate and respond. Please note that excessive absences will result in a lower course grade, e.g. B > B- > C+ etc. Absences in excess of three (the equivalent of one week of classes) are considered excessive. In addition, please note that attendance is a prerequisite for “in class work.” See above for section on “Course Assessment.”
- **Observe appropriate classroom decorum.** Refrain from any behaviors that may be disruptive to others and detract from an environment that is conducive to learning.
- **Prepare for class by doing the assigned reading and written work.** Coming to class prepared not only promotes your own learning but also enriches your classmates' learning. We learn together. Come ready to share your insights and questions.
- **Contribute to class discussion and small group work.** You contribute by participating actively. Participation includes speaking and attentive and respectful listening to others.
- **Take tests as scheduled.** Make-ups *may be* permitted at the discretion of the professor only when, in the judgment of the professor, a *serious* reason for the absence warrants rescheduling.
- **Demonstrate satisfactory writing skills.** Please note that the staff of the Writing Center is ready to assist you at any point of the writing process. If you need assistance in developing, organizing, and revising your written work, I encourage you to visit the Writing Center.
- **Papers and portfolio are due as assigned.** Late papers will be penalized, by one grade-step per day (e.g. B+ to B), including days when classes are not in session. It is also essential that you complete and present your portfolio on time – especially since each member of the class has a responsibility to the class.
- **Please read carefully the Nazareth College policy on Academic Integrity:**

“Academic integrity is essential to the educational mission of Nazareth College of Rochester, for the free pursuit of knowledge and understanding is seriously impeded by any form of academic dishonesty. Hence, no form of academic dishonesty will be condoned by the college.

‘Academic dishonesty’ is understood as any act of deceit bearing on one’s own or another’s academic work, where ‘academic work’ is understood to mean any activity pertaining to the educational mission of the college. Such acts include, but are not limited to, plagiarism in any form and the use during an exam of information or materials not authorized by the instructor for such use.” *Nazareth College 2012-2013 Undergraduate Catalog, 12.*

In other words, do your *own* work. Do not copy anyone else’s work. **That means that you may not copy any published or unpublished work, including material from published articles or books, material you find on the Internet, and the work of other students or individuals. Presenting another's ideas or work as your own is unacceptable: it constitutes plagiarism. Your sources must be cited properly and fully in the body of your text. Direct quotes from another's work (including another student’s work) must be identified as such and indicated through the use of quotation marks. You also must cite sources in the text of your papers for passages that are paraphrased.** Plagiarism is a serious violation of academic honesty and will result in an "F" for the assignment and may also result in an "F" for this course.

- **Complete all course requirements.** Satisfaction of course requirements means that all assignments and the final portfolio have been completed.

Details on Informal and Semi-Formal Writing

Informal Writing

Recall that informal writing is short . . . spontaneous . . . exploratory . . . personal . . . expressive. . . unedited . . . process-oriented . . . ungraded.

In addition to doing **in-class writing** (free writes, pair and share, mapping, exit passes, etc.), you are invited to keep a **journal/notebook**.

Merton was a prolific writer as one can readily conclude from a glance at his list of publications. His “formal writing” often grew out of “seeds planted” in informal writing. In his journals, Merton recorded personal experiences, impressions, and insights. In his notebooks, he kept track of his reading, copied key passages, jotted ideas, planned writing projects, and occasionally wrote poetry.

You may follow Merton’s example by keeping your own journal/notebook, in which you:

- Make connections between what you are reading and your own experience.
- Jot down lines and short passages that strike you.
- Reflect on the meaning of what Merton is saying.
- Work through new ideas.
- Respond to questions posed in class.
- Sketch out ideas for formal writing you have underway.
- Prepare for or follow-up on class discussion.

Make it a practice to write in your journal/notebook for a few minutes after class, after you finish a reading assignment, and when an idea strikes.

Your journal/notebook is your own and need not be submitted for grading. However, you will be invited to share entries in your portfolio – in class, in conference with your professor. You may also choose to include selections from your journal/notebook in your final portfolio.

“Semi-Formal” Writing: Reflection Papers

“Semi-formal” writing is characterized by many of the qualities of informal writing. In addition, it is intended to communicate with a reader and so should be edited to ensure correct grammar, spelling and syntax. Reflection papers will not be graded but students will receive feedback on each reflection paper as well as a check (satisfactory), a check/plus (very fine), a plus (outstanding) or a minus (indicating why that the reflection is unacceptable).

Write and submit a reflection paper **at the beginning of class on seven of the following nine Fridays and one Wednesday**: January 18, 25; February 1, 8, 15, 22 (a Wednesday); and March 1, 8, 22, and 29. You **must submit at least three papers by February 15**. See class by class calendar for writing prompts.

Additional details:

- Suggested **length**: 300-450 words or 1-2 pages.
- **Date** each paper and **include the writing prompt** (single-spaced) at the top of the reflection.
- Format: **typed (12pt.) and double-spaced**.
- Reflection papers will not be graded individually but will be assigned a check (satisfactory), check-plus (better than satisfactory), plus (excellent), or a minus (unsatisfactory).
- **To earn full credit**, you must hand in the required number of satisfactory papers on the dates due and you must **submit at least three papers by February 15**. You must also **demonstrate careful reading and thoughtful responses to the writing prompts**.
- **Write seven satisfactory papers** and **submit them on time** to earn an “A” (credit 15%).
- **Save** reflection papers for inclusion in your final portfolio.

Formal Writing:

Details on the final project and course portfolio are forthcoming.