

RST 423 Kathleen Deignan, C.N.D., Ph.D.
THOMAS MERTON: SPIRITUAL MASTER

Course Description:

A study of the themes and issues that comprise the spiritual teaching of Thomas Merton, American monk, mystic and prophet. The desire for Christian contemplation, a passion for justice and an appetite for Buddhism marked Merton's spirituality as uniquely contemporary and catholic. By following Merton along his spiritual path, students may explore the terrain of one exemplar's interior life and recognize certain features of their own.

Course Texts:

Thomas Merton: Spiritual Master Lawrence Cunningham
Paulist Press (\$15)

The Miracle of Mindfulness Thich Nhat Hanh
Beacon Press (\$10)

Course Requirements and Evaluation:

- Attendance
- Special Events Reflection Papers (2) 30%

There will be two events sponsored by the Iona Spirituality Institute integrated into the course during the semester. In response, submit a 3 - 5 page typed paper summarizing the themes of the presentation, and noting at least three issues that intersect or relate to our discussion of prayer according to Thomas Merton.

- Spiritual Journal - students are expected to keep a spiritual journal for writing on the themes and issues of the course and as an aid to their own spiritual development. Entries are to be made each week reflecting on the readings in a more personal way; from time to time we will share our entries with a partner.

- Home Work Sheets (5) 30%

On the weeks noted on the calendar submit a brief summary and reflection on the assigned reading by identifying the three most significant issues dealt with in the material and how they underscore Merton's significance as a spiritual teacher.

- Final Exam 25%
- Class Participation 15%

CLASS SCHEDULE

Week I Introduction and overview of themes and issues of course. Biographical sketch of Merton the man and Merton the model of prayer.

View PBS documentary on Merton.

Week II Narrative Theology: Spiritual Autobiography and the Quest for God. Dominant themes of the conversion process. Merton as mirror of core issues of faith and the spiritual journey.

*** Assignment: TM:SM 1 -55

Praxis: Journal exercise " my spiritual autobiography" - outline and main themes
draft one

Week III "Naming God": An exploration of our common quest for right speech in addressing the mystery of God. *** Assignment: TM:SM 56 - 106

Reflection Paper #1 due in two weeks.

Week IV Spiritual Anthropology and the Christian Vocation

*** Assignment: TM:SM 107-120; 122; 144-146; 162-164.

Film: "The 60s"

Work Sheet #1 due

Week V The Contemplative Descent: Deepening into Solitude; Deepening into History; Deepening into God

*** Assignment: TM:SM 165-213

Praxis: Journal work - the world as monastery (30 min.)

Week VI Prayer and Prophecy

*** Assignment: Articles from Thomas Merton: Prophet in the Paradox Belly

Praxis: Conversation with partner on last week's journal work (30 min.)

Reflection Paper #1 due

Week VII The Other Side of God: The Turn East

*** Assignment: MM 1-55

Film: Tich Nhat Hanh

Work Sheet #2 due

Week VIII Meditation East and West

*** Assignment: MM 55-end

Film: Tich Nhat Hanh

Week IX The Christian - Buddhist Encounter

*** Assignment: TM:SM 214-237; 399-420

Praxis: Zazen

Work Sheet #3 due

Week X The ecology of the Contemplative Life: Merton's Spiritual Writings

*** Assignment: TM:SM 241-280

Praxis: Centering prayer

Week XI Transformations and Revisions: The Life of Prayer, 21st Century USA

*** Assignment: TM:SM 294-325

Praxis: Contemplative writing (30 min.)

Work Sheet #4 due

Week XII "The Inner Experience"

*** Assignment: TM:SM 325-356

Praxis: Conversation on contemplative writing with a partner (30-min.)

Week XIII Contemplation in a World of Action

*** Assignment: TM:SM 368-387

Praxis: Centering Prayer

Work Sheet #5 due

Week XIV Continued

*** Assignment: TM:SM 388-398

Praxis: Contemplative writing (30 min.)

Reflection Paper #2 due

Week XV Endings

Film: "Winter Rain"

WORK SHEET

PRAYER ACCORDING TO THE SPIRITUAL MASTER THOMAS MERTON

NAME _____

SELECT THREE ISSUES, THEMES OR TOPICS FROM THE READINGS AND CONSIDER HOW THEY UNDERSCORE MERTON'S SIGNIFICANCE AS A SPIRITUAL MASTER.