

## **Chalmers Summer School 2009**

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### **SP510A: MONASTICS & MYSTICS: THROUGH THE EYES OF THOMAS MERTON**

**Dr. Patrick F. O'Connell**

**July 6-10, 2009: 1:30-4:30 p.m.**

This course will examine significant figures in the rise of early Christian monasticism and important Christian mystical writers through the early modern period from the perspective of Thomas Merton's monastic conferences to novices and young monks. The course aims to illuminate key aspects of monasticism and mysticism by drawing on the insights of Merton, as well as to gain a fresh perspective on Merton through his engagement with significant writers, movements and themes of the Christian tradition as communicated to those in formation at the Abbey of Gethsemani. The course will draw primarily from the published volumes of Merton's conferences, with ancillary readings from related Merton essays and from primary source materials by authors discussed by Merton.

#### **Course Requirements and Evaluation**

##### **Competence Objectives:**

At the completion of this course, students will:

- demonstrate a basic familiarity with key figures and texts of early Christian monasticism;
- demonstrate a basic familiarity with significant themes and writings of the Christian mystical tradition through the early modern period;
- recognize the influence of the monastic and mystical traditions on the thought of the twentieth-century monk and spiritual writer Thomas Merton;
- understand Merton's pedagogical approach to communicating the early monastic and mystical traditions to the novices and young monks in his charge.

##### **Basic Expectations of All Students:**

- preparation for each class by reading materials assigned for that day;
- regular class attendance;
- participation in class discussion through raising and answering of pertinent questions, exploration of significant issues and responding to comments and insights of the professor and other students.

##### **Expected of Students Registered for Continuing Education Credit:**

- one 8-10 pp. paper (typed, double-spaced, 1" margins, 12-point Times New Roman or equivalent) focused on the spiritual teaching of one of the figures discussed in the course, on a comparison of some significant aspect of the spiritual teaching of two such figures, or a consideration of some dimension of the pedagogical approach of Thomas Merton in the monastic conferences on early monasticism and on mysticism.

##### **Expected of Students Registered for MATS/MDiv Academic Credit**

- one 12-15 pp. paper (typed, double-spaced, 1" margins, 12-point Times New Roman or equivalent) focused on the spiritual teaching of one of the figures discussed in the course, on a comparison of some significant aspect of the spiritual teaching of two such figures, or a consideration of some dimension of the pedagogical approach of Thomas Merton in the monastic conferences on early monasticism and on mysticism.

## Reading List

### Basic texts:

Thomas Merton, *Cassian and the Fathers: Initiation into the Monastic Tradition*, edited with an introduction by Patrick F. O'Connell; preface by Columba Stewart, OSB [CF]. Monastic Wisdom [MW], vol. 1. Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2005. lxvi + 305 p.

Thomas Merton, *Pre-Benedictine Monasticism: Initiation into the Monastic Tradition 2*, edited with an introduction by Patrick F. O'Connell; preface by Sidney Griffith [PBM]. Monastic Wisdom [MW], vol. 9. Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2006. lxi + 391 p.

Thomas Merton, *An Introduction to Christian Mysticism: Initiation into the Monastic Tradition 3*, edited with an introduction by Patrick F. O'Connell; preface by Lawrence S. Cunningham [ICM]. Monastic Wisdom [MW], vol. 13. Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2008. lviii + 416 p.

Thomas Merton, *The Rule of St. Benedict: Initiation into the Monastic Tradition 4*, edited with an introduction by Patrick F. O'Connell; preface by Joan Chittister, OSB [RSB]. Monastic Wisdom [MW], vol. 19. Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications, 2009. lxi + 291 p.

### Other Merton texts:

Thomas Merton, *Collected Poems* [CP]. New York: New Directions, 1977.

Thomas Merton, *The Monastic Journey*, ed. Brother Patrick Hart [MJ]. Kansas City: Sheed, Andrews & McMeel, 1977.

Thomas Merton, *Passion for Peace: The Social Essays*, ed. William H. Shannon [PP]. New York: Crossroad, 1995.

Thomas Merton, *Raids on the Unspeakable* [RU]. New York: New Directions, 1966.

Thomas Merton, *The Wisdom of the Desert: Sayings from the Desert Fathers of the Fourth Century* [WD]. New York: New Directions, 1960.

### Primary source materials are mainly taken from:

David A. Fleming, SM, ed. *The Fire and the Cloud: An Anthology of Catholic Spirituality* [F&C]. New York: Paulist Press, 1978 (not available at VST);

### Egeria reading taken from:

Egeria: *Diary of a Pilgrimage*, ed. George E. Gingras, Ancient Christian Writers vol. 38 (New York: Newman Press, 1970).

The basic texts will be available in the VST Thomas Merton Room: purchase of some or all of the basic texts is recommended but not required.\* Additional Merton essays are from volumes also available in the Thomas Merton Room; primary source excerpts will be available for reading and photocopying in a binder on reserve in the library.

\*The cloth edition of *Cassian and the Fathers* is available for US \$9.99 through June 30 – further information at: <http://www.cistercianpublications.org/Features.aspx?ID=69>.

## Course Outline

### Day 1: Introduction – Merton in the Monastic Classroom

CF xv-liv; PBM xi-xvi, li-lxi; RSB xi-xiv, xlii-xlvi; ICM xi-xix.

### Day 2: Cassian and the Fathers

CF 31-39, 71-80, 107-40, 203-20, 231-56.

WD 3-24; & ## 8, 43-44, 61-65, 72, 88-91, 94-95 (F&C 23-27)

Athanasius: *Life of Antony* (excerpts) (F&C 13-22)

Cassian: *Conference* 10 (F&C 28-41)

### Day 3: Pre-Benedictine Monasticism

PBM 24-40, 169-87, 279-325

“Rain and the Rhinoceros” (RU 9-23)

“Macarius and the Pony”; “Macarius the Younger” (CP 317-21)

Egeria: *Pilgrimage* (chs. 1-5, 20-21)

### Day 4: The Rule of St. Benedict

RSB 5-38, 50-79, 152-73

“Conversion of Life” (MJ 107-20)

Gregory the Great: *Life of St. Benedict* (excerpts) (RSB 233-44)

*Rule of St. Benedict*: cc. 1-7 (F&C 65-78)

### Day 5: Introduction to Christian Mysticism

ICM 15-38, 72-82, 121-36, 170-95, 232-51, 294-304

“St. Maximus the Confessor on Non-Violence” (PP 242-47)

Gregory of Nyssa: *Life of Moses* (excerpts) (F&C 49-53)

Teresa of Avila: *Interior Castle* (excerpts) (F&C 229-39)

### Recommended Reading:

Non-assigned materials in the Introductions and texts of the four volumes of Merton's monastic conferences will broaden and deepen knowledge of the material which is the focus of this course.

### Selected Bibliography:

Merton, Thomas. *Contemplation in a World of Action*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971.

Merton, Thomas. *The Monastic Journey*, ed. Brother Patrick Hart. Kansas City: Sheed, Andrews & McMeel, 1977.

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Burton-Christie, Douglas. *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Dunn, Marilyn. *The Emergence of Monasticism: From the Desert Fathers to the Early Middle Ages*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2000.

Fry, Timothy, OSB, ed. *RB 1980: The Rule of Saint Benedict in Latin and English with Notes*, Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1981.

Harmless, William, SJ. *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Jones, Cheslyn, Geoffrey Wainwright, and Edward Yarnold, eds. *The Study of Spirituality*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.

McGinn, Bernard. *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*. Vol. 1: *The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century*. New York: Crossroad, 1992; Vol. 2: *The Growth of Mysticism: Gregory the Great through the 12<sup>th</sup> Century*. New York: Crossroad, 1994; Vol. 3: *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism – 1200-1350*. New York: Crossroad, 1998; Vol. 4: *The Harvest of Mysticism in Medieval Germany – 1300-1500*. New York: Crossroad, 2005.

### **Instructor Biography:**

Patrick F. O'Connell is Professor in the Departments of English and Theology at Gannon University, Erie, PA. He holds doctorates in English Literature from Yale University and in Historical Theology from Fordham University. A founding member and former president of the International Thomas Merton Society, he has published more than two dozen articles on Merton's work and has spoken on Merton throughout the United States as well as in Canada, Great Britain and Ireland. He is coauthor, with William H. Shannon and Christine M. Bochen, of *The Thomas Merton Encyclopedia* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002), which received the 2003 award for best reference work by the Catholic Press Association, which called the volume "a comprehensive and authoritative resource on one of the most important spiritual guides of the twentieth century." He was editor of a collection of essays entitled *The Vision of Thomas Merton* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2003), and is presently editing a series of volumes of Merton's monastic conferences for Cistercian Publications: the first, entitled *Cassian and the Fathers*, appeared in 2005, the second, *Pre-Benedictine Monasticism*, in 2006, the third, *An Introduction to Christian Mysticism*, in 2008; the fourth, *The Rule of St. Benedict*, in 2009. Since 1998 he has served as editor of *The Merton Seasonal: A Quarterly Review*, published jointly by the International Thomas Merton Society and the Merton Center at Bellarmine University, Louisville, KY, the major repository of Merton's papers.