

## **TH410: Seminar in Theology: Writings of Thomas Merton**

Spring, 2014

Saint Joseph's College of Maine

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Dr. Marilyn Sunderman, RSM

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

This seminar provides an intensive exploration of the spiritual theology of Thomas Merton by studying some of his key writings and selected commentary on these writings. Topics treated in the course include Merton's reflections on monasticism (especially Cistercian monastic life), silence, solitude, contemplation, faith, the true self, being "in Christ", love, nature, Eastern religions (especially Zen Buddhism), social justice issues such as racism and war (including the cold war and nuclear war).

### **COURSE OUTLINE:**

#### **I. Introduction to the Life and Writings of Thomas Merton**

Readings: *Thomas Merton: Spiritual Master*, 1-60  
 TMSM, 63-106  
*The Vision of Thomas Merton*, 9 - 20  
 VOTM, 23-41

#### **II. Merton and Monasticism**

Reading: VOTM, 65-75

#### **III. Merton's Spiritual Theology**

Readings: Merton, *Life and Holiness*  
 VOTM, 43-62  
 TMSM, 294-356  
 TMSM, 421-431  
 TMSM, 368-387  
 TMSM, 241-250  
 TMSM, 251-256  
 TMSM, 257-264  
 TMSM, 265-279  
 TMSM, 280-293  
 TMSM, 357-367

#### **IV. Merton and Nature**

Readings: TMSM, 388-398  
 VOTM, 135-153  
 VOTM, 119-33

#### **V. Merton and Eastern Religions**

Readings: TMSM, 223-237  
 TMSM, 399-420

VOTM, 203-209  
VOTM, 211 - 223

VI. **Merton's Journals**

Readings: TMSM, 107-120  
TMSM, 121-164  
TMSM, 165-213  
TMSM, 214- 222  
VOTM, 77-97  
VOTM, 99- 117

VII. **Merton's Poetry**

Readings: VOTM, 155-184  
VOTM, 187-201

VIII. **Merton and Social Justice**

Reading: Merton, *Peace in the Post-Christian Era*

IX. **EVALUATION OF STUDENT PERFORMANCE:**

1. **Classroom participation** includes keeping a journal, presentations based on required readings, asking/answering questions, offering comments and doing individual/group work during/outside class. Class participation is worth **20%** of the course grade.
2. **Attendance:** Value: **15%** of the course grade. This grade is based on the percentage of the student's class attendance.
3. Any act of plagiarism will result in a failing grade for a given assignment.
4. All student presentations/writing in this seminar will be evaluated on the basis of quality of content, clarity of expression and grammatical correctness.
5. Each student completes a **review of a book written by Thomas Merton**. The review is a 5 page, double-spaced, typed paper that includes a summary of material treated in the text; a discussion of agreements/disagreements (i.e., any combination of 4 with rationale for each) that the student has with the content of the text; a discussion of strengths/weaknesses (i.e., any combination of 4) and a treatment of at least 3 ways in which the student can apply to his/her life what s/he has learned from reading this book. The paper must be typed or compute-generated with a font size of 12. Top and bottom margins must be 1" and side margins 1" - 1.25". Value of paper is **10%** of the course grade. Each student completes an in-class presentation of his/her review. The in-class presentation is valued at **5%** of the course grade.
6. Each student reviews a **CD lecture series by/about Thomas Merton** and then writes a 5 page, typed, double-spaced summary of the lecture, which includes a discussion of several agreements/disagreements (any combination of 2 with rationale for each). This review is valued at **10%** of the course grade. Each student completes an in-class presentation of his/her review, which is valued at **5%** of the course grade.

7. Each student completes a final essay valued at **10%** of the course grade.
8. **Research paper:** Each student writes a 10 page, typed, double-spaced research paper that develops one of the topics from the list provided by the professor. The bibliography for this paper includes a minimum of 6 entries, (two of which can be from Internet sources) which represent at least 200 pages of reading outside of the course reading requirements. Each bibliography entry must indicate pages read. The research paper should be typed or computer-generated with a font size of 12. Top and bottom margins should be 1" and side margins 1" - 1.25. Value of the paper is **20%** of the course grade. Each student completes a 20 minute classroom presentation based on the contents of his/her research paper. This presentation is valued at **5%** of the classroom participation grade.

**X. Required Readings:**

Cunningham, Lawrence, ed., *Thomas Merton: Spiritual Master*, N.Y.: Paulist Press, 1992.

Merton, Thomas, *Life and Holiness*, N.Y.: Image Books/Doubleday, 1996.

Merton, Thomas, *Peace in the Post-Christian Era*, ed. Patricia A. Burton, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2004.

O'Connell, Patrick F., ed., *The Vision of Thomas Merton*, Notre Dame, In.: Ave Maria Press, 2003.