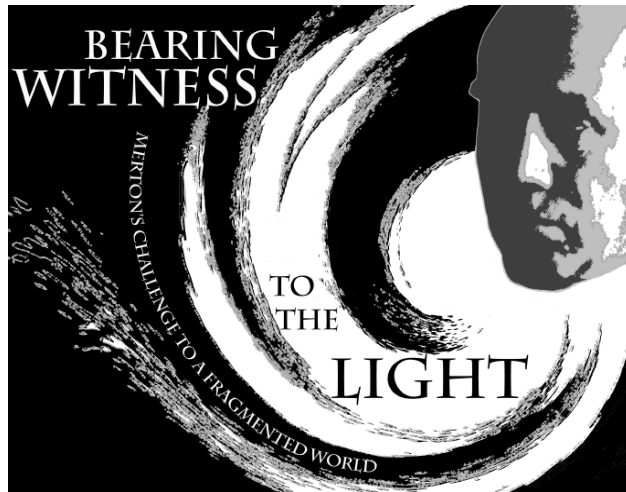


**IONA COLLEGE
DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES
Spring Semester Every Odd Year**

RST 332 HYEА

THOMAS MERTON: Spiritual Legacy



Thomas Merton's Challenge to a Fragmented World

Kathleen Deignan, C.N.D., Ph.D.
Iona Spirituality Institute
Spellman Hall 2nd Floor
Office Hours: TBA

914 633 2570
kpdeignan@iona.edu

Teaching Merton's Message in the New Millennium

Introducing new generations of students to the radically prophetic voice of Thomas Merton is a challenge, and perhaps a mandate, for scholars and teachers engaged in handing on the integral legacy of Thomas Merton. This is a particularly urgent task for Christian scholars of religion, theology and spirituality, who acknowledge Merton's stature and significance as a contemporary "Father of the Church," and "Master of Christian Spirituality." As such, his explicitly articulated vision of the Christian life in the modern age boldly explores the social, political, and moral dimensions of living the life of "the new man / woman" in a world of violence, injustice, and global ecological peril. He does this with exceptional authenticity and boldness, echoing the voice of the prophetic traditions of Judaism and Christianity, the wisdom traditions of Asia and Native America, and standing in lineage with a host of 20th century visionaries who not only announced the crises of our time, but also identified routes of recovery and social salvation.

How does a teacher / scholar mediate Merton's prophetic wisdom to a new generation of students – particularly within settings of Christian higher education - and by what skillful means might young adults be brought into engagement with his challenging writings on questions of war, peace, and social justice?

This course explores one such venue within the college curriculum, inviting students new to Merton's

writings, as they encounter him for the first time and wrestle with his spiritual and prophetic legacy. This course will culminate in the selection of at least two Iona students to receive Daggy Scholarships to participate in *The General Meeting of the International Thomas Merton Society* held bi-annually and gathering Merton scholars and students from around the world.

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, an appetite for Buddhism, and a great love for the natural world marked Merton's spirituality as uniquely contemporary and catholic. By following Merton along his spiritual path, students may explore the legacy of this exceptional spiritual master and draw upon his wisdom and insight for their own lives.

Rationale

Thomas Merton continues to emerge as a spiritual luminary for the 21st Century. Granting the universality of his significance and contribution, Merton's genius and appeal are nonetheless uniquely American and Catholic. His sapiential legacy bears special import for our world culture since it identifies and illuminates those spiritual issues that articulate a contemporary narrative of the spiritual life. Indeed Merton himself stands as exemplar and capitulator of the modern spiritual experience and his prophetic life anticipated some new designs currently unfolding in global spirituality.

Approaching Thomas Merton as a *spiritual master* will allow us to focus on:

- a) his identity as an exemplary sage within the Catholic Christian tradition
- b) his articulation of an authentic Christian experience of the divine
- c) his role as monastic teacher of the contemplative and mystical life
- d) his skill in transmitting the deep sources of Christian spirituality for a contemporary audience
- e) his prophetic voice regarding social injustice, poverty and violence
- f) his work and witness as a pioneer of interfaith encounter and dialogue
- g) his challenge to Catholic universality and ecumenism
- h) his vocation as writer and narrator of the spiritual quest

Course Objectives

Students will be guided to:

- a) examine critically select texts of the voluminous works by and about Thomas Merton that illuminate his particular wisdom as a modern spiritual master;
- b) identify key elements, themes, and recurring motifs that delineate Merton's presentation of contemporary spirituality;
- c) assess Merton's critique of and contribution to Christian spirituality;
- d) engage in the contemporary culture-wide conversation and renewed appropriation regarding spirituality
- e) consider his religious experience as an archetypal spiritual narrative
- f) explore Merton's spiritual legacy as a practical path to similar spiritual realization

- g) to invite students in modest and appropriate ways to experience the transformational practices of which Merton wrote

RST Departmental Goals (R) RST 332 The Spiritual Legacy of Thomas Merton fulfills our Departmental learning goals in the following way:

R1. Knowledge: To help students gain skill in reading the work of a contemporary spiritual master, especially in primary sources of Merton's extensive literary legacy, and to develop an understanding of Merton's contribution to the history of Christian spirituality and practice.

R2. Critical Thinking: To advance students' awareness of and capacity to assess the work of the 20th Century's most significant Catholic spiritual master, to survey his voluminous written corpus which resources and recovers the fundamentals of Christian spirituality and translates them into a post-modern vernacular addressing all the multi-dimensional features, issues and challenges of contemporary Catholic life.

R3. Diversity and Tolerance: To present Merton's way of being in the world as exemplaristic of a mature Catholic faith and practice; to generate a dialogue with Merton regarding the variety and validity of religious and spiritual pluralism; his call to inter-racial justice; his practice of "conversation" as a way of engagement in a world of diversity – religious, political, economic, cultural.

R4. Ethical Awareness: To engage students in a constructive and challenging dialogue with Merton's prophetic challenges regarding race-relations; commodity culture and consumerism; ecological degradation; violence and war; and the divide between rich and poor; the critique of technological and totalitarian civilization; the need for consciousness transformation and the recovery of authentic human nature.

R4. Affective and Practical Experiences: To guide students in an experience of the affective power and transformative potential of Merton's spiritual teaching by experimenting with its application and by engagement with practitioners of his spiritual techniques and commitments and those of the other religious traditions with which he was in dialogue.

Core Curriculum Learning Goals:

The Religious Studies Core, and RST 332 The Spiritual Legacy of Thomas Merton in particular, serves the following College Core Learning Goals (C) in very specific ways:

Develop the competencies and ethics required for decision making and problem solving

RST 332 will engage students in critical inquiry and analysis of relevant contemporary crises and challenges which preoccupied Merton, weighing his proposals and commitments and entering into scholarly dialogue with him on the to explicitly address issues of conscience formation and ethical thinking as constitutive of Christian life.

Instill the habits of mind required for lifelong learning, critical thinking, and intellectual inquiry

RST 332 will foster the intellectual life by introducing students to the rich legacy of the most intellectually prolific spiritual masters of the modern/post modern era whose literary legacy spanned a variety of disciplines, requiring and inspiring students to engage with the scope and depth of Merton's intellectual and aesthetic legacy.

Blend the rich traditions of the liberal arts with the demands of the post-college marketplace:

RST 332 will provide students with the opportunity to consider how the intellectual life may serve as a resource for their human spiritual development, and invite them to consider profession and livelihood within the deeper context of “vocation” for and in the contemporary world.

Provide foundations for successful completions of academic and professional programs of study

RST 332 will cultivate skills in reading, writing, speaking, and critical and creative thinking that will serve students in any future studies

Promote the values of justice, peace, and service in the tradition of American Catholic higher education

RST 332 will explicitly address the core themes of Merton’s writings: of peace and justice making, creation care, consciousness and conscience transformation, and social service as integral to Christian spirituality in course themes, readings and assignments.

Assessment of Learning Goals:

Student achievement of the stated Religious Studies (R) and Core (C) learning goals will be assessed in a variety of ways:

Intake exam for a base-line of initial understandings of material to be presented in the course, to be revisited at end-term

Bi-Weekly quizzes (7 quizzes; drop lowest 2 grades – 25%) to assess mastery of subject matter from assigned readings and lectures, and to foster habits of regular academic discipline (C 2, 4; R 1, 2)

Term paper and practicum (10%) Each student will choose a select topic in from Merton’s legacy requiring early graded submission of heuristic / inquiry question, proposed outline, bibliography and other resources student will use for this spiritual investigation; before the end of term students will submit completed paper for evaluation of their skill in several competencies: critical thinking, intellectual organization, written expression and appreciative understanding of spiritual practice (C 1,2,3,4,5; R 1,2,3,4)

Web assignment (5%) to assess ability to research and evaluate spirituality resources on the Internet (C 1,2,4; R 1,2)

Reflection papers and oral reports (2 @ 5% each) on spirituality practicum and interfaith dialogue opportunities afforded during the semester (C 1,2,3,4,5; R 1,2,3,4)

Oral participation in class dialogue (5%) to assess quality and frequency of in-class engagement, with focus on verbal expression as demonstrations of comprehension and ability to articulate understanding of subject matter and completion of assigned readings (C 1,2,3,4; R 1,2,3)

Mid-Term and Final Exams (20% and 25%) assessing the development and integration of semester’s learnings (C 1,2,3,4; R 1,2,3,4)

Course Texts

Thomas Merton: Essential Writings
Merton’s Palace of Nowhere

Christine Bochen, Editor
James Finley

To Be Discussed:

When The Trees Say Nothing: Thomas Merton’s Writings on Nature

or

Thomas Merton: A Book of Hours

Kathleen Deignan,

CND, Editor
(check for \$16 payable to Schola Ministries)

Course Theme

Each semester our course will focus on the theme of the *The Conference and General Meeting of the International Thomas Merton Society*. As in the past the students in our Iona Merton Studies Course will be eligible for a scholarship to attend the four-day meeting which draws on Merton scholars from around the world. So far, Iona has sent six or more students to the conference as “Daggy Scholars” – young Merton scholars who have the chance to spend four days together exploring their interest in the legacy of Thomas Merton. The two students who win these scholarships will have the opportunity to meet young university colleagues with similar interest in the life and work of this exceptional spiritual master. Consider working for a scholarship during the semester.

The invitation to the Conference reads as follows, and will comprise the context of our conversations during the semester:

(Example from 2009)

Thomas Merton’s Christian faith and monastic commitment led him to explore the wisdom of other religious traditions and to develop mutually enriching relationships with people of other faiths throughout the world. As he wrote in a letter to his Pakistani Muslim friend Abdul Aziz in 1960, “I speak to you from my heart of our obligation to study the truth in deep prayer and meditation, and bear witness to the light that comes from the All-Holy God into this world of darkness where He is not known and not remembered. The world we live in has become an awful void, a desecrated sanctuary, reflecting outwardly the emptiness and blindness of the hearts of men who have gone crazy with their love for money and power and with pride in their technology.” It is the common duty of all people of faith, Merton concludes, to open the eyes of others to the light of Truth (Hidden Ground of Love). The Eleventh General Meeting of the International Thomas Merton Society will focus particularly on the ways in which Merton serves as a model of creative interreligious dialogue and witnesses to its importance in building a world in which the dignity of every person is respected and nurtured.

Course Methodology

This Religious Studies elective course is **HYBRID** in format which means that we will do 2/3 of our work in traditional classroom setting and 1/3 in alternate ways. The course is designed to have one class hour be a lecture mod, and the other 45 minutes be Team dialogue, presentations and inquiry, and the other third of the course will be working on-line with a tutorial resource and your study groups. We will also engage in visitation to religious communities under consideration; viewing video or on-line media; on-line in research and team dialogue activities; traditional class lectures and assigned out-of-class lectures and presentations, particularly those offered through the Iona Spirituality Institute and the Driscoll Professorship in Jewish Catholic Studies; on and off-line discussion groups; formats available through BlackBoard, and other on-line course resources; group projects; seminar mods; intensive reading assignments; graded writing assignments with referrals to the Rudin Academic Resource Center for skills development; internet assignments; videography; library research assignments; quizzes and exams; term papers; graded oral participation.

Because of the alternative nature of this course, students will be evaluated on a number of academic

qualities:

- creative and critical use of video and internet resources;
- willingness and ability to be more responsibility engaged in one's own learning process;
- timely completion of assignments;
- willingness to contribute to the learning community formed during this course in class conversations and on-line dialogue sessions

This semester the **HYBRID** feature of our course will aggregate our class into **Dialogue Teams** in which you will do the work of peer conversation on subjects raised by reading Merton's writings.

Learning Agreement

There is a 5% grade assigned for the quality of class participation. Each student's contribution to the learning environment in class will be evaluated in terms of motivation, courtesy and active verbal and on-line participation in discussions. A positive grade (5 – 1) will be assigned for engagement that enhances the learning environment; a negative grade (0 - -5) will be assigned for attitudes and behaviors that detract from the teaching and learning project.

This grade will be factored in to the overall evaluation and grade computation.

Those behaviors that are specifically inappropriate in this class are **sleeping, chatting, chewing** (this means gum), **cheating, digital diddling, leaving class before the break or dismissal, inappropriate use of PC, and ANY use of cell phones during the session.** A student who is called to order more than once will be asked to leave the session and meet with the professor after class. Professor reserves the right to dismiss from the course students who chronically disrupt the learning environment.

There will be a 3 -5 minute break when necessary. Only at that time may cell phones be engaged.

Protocol for PC use in class:

Students using PCs in class will sit in the front seats and show professor their computer notes at the end of each class. Any student found on-line or otherwise cybernetically entertained during class forfeits right to PC use and risks a negative class participation grade.

Attendance

The quality of learning will be greatly enhanced by student engagement in the class conversation and practice sessions intended to facilitate exploration, assimilation, and integration of course material. Because this class usually will meet only on Tuesdays for 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ hours, each session is critical for your successful mastery of material. Therefore each unexcused absence earns a $\frac{1}{4}$ -grade demerit on final grade. Three absences are reported to the Dean. Five unexcused absences – failure of the course. All absences are reported to the Dean with final grade.

The Professor will take attendance very seriously. If a student anticipates an absence it is to be reported to the Professor; the same holds in case of emergency or extenuating circumstance that keeps one from class or an assigned activity. A student who does not return to class after the break will be marked absent for the entire session.

Course Necessities

Access to Internet
Cassette recorder for audio assignments
Journal for reflective writing

Spiritual Journal

Students are encouraged to keep a spiritual journal for reflecting on the themes and issues of the course as an aid to their own spiritual development. Morning and evening page entries are to be made daily each week reflecting on the readings in a more personal way and to track the ways this kind of contemplative learning is affecting the learner. From time to time entries may be shared with a partner, and used as material for written submissions.

Policy on Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty: Cheating on quizzes, homework assignments or term paper will incur a-n F grade, and be reported to the Department Chair. Cheating on an exam will incur an F grade and may result in failure for the course, and be reported to the Dean. See Iona Handbook

A 100 – 95
B+ 94 - 88 **B** 87 - 81 **C+** 80 - 73
C 72 - 66 **D** 65 - 60 **F** 59

(N.B.: The assignment of an **A** grade reflects a consistent standard of excellence in all modes of evaluation throughout the semester- it is a qualitative as well as quantitative assessment of student performance and are reserved for the highest achievers; **B** is a grade of consistent good work and effort; **C** stands for any Cell Phone usage during class.)

SAMPLE SCHEDULE

Thomas Merton Spiritual Legacy Calendar of Assignments

- Week I** **January 20**
Spiritual Master: Thomas Merton – Soul of the Age
Introduction and overview of themes, issues and contemplative methodology of the course
Biographical sketch of Merton the man and Merton the spiritual master.
Video: *PBS documentary on Merton.*
Assignment: Begin reading and reading and reading!!!
Thomas Merton: Essential Writings pp 11-49
Submit essay on Merton’s vision of education
- Week II** **January 27**
Spiritual Master: Thomas Merton – Soul of the Age
Introduction and overview of themes, issues, and contemplative methodology of the course
Biographical sketch of Merton the man and Merton the spiritual master.
Video: *PBS documentary on Merton (continued)*
Assignment due: Thomas Merton: Essential Writings pp 11-49
- Week III** **February 3**
Narrative Theology: Spiritual Autobiography and the Quest for God
Dominant themes of the conversion process with Merton as mirror of the core issues faith and the spiritual journey.
Journal exercise “My spiritual auto-biography” - outline and main themes
Assignment Due: Merton’s Palace of Nowherepp 7-41
Test # 1 on material to date

Assignment Due: *Spirituality Practicum Paper*

Week XII **April 14**
Merton's Turn East

Week XIII **April 21**
Visitation Empty Hand Zendo

Week XIV **April 28**

Thomas Merton: Ecological Prophet

Visit from Daggy Scholar and Iona alum Daniel Potocki, M.Div. Harvard 08

Endings

Video: "Winter Rain"

Praxis: Centering Prayer

Week XV **May 5**
FINAL EXAM