

"Contemplation is basically a social matter. Solitude has its own special work: a deepening of awareness that the world needs. A struggle against alienation. True solitude is deeply aware of the world's needs. It does not hold the world at arm's length....Contemplation at its highest intensity becomes a reservoir of spiritual vitality that pours itself out in the most telling social action." (Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander)

DRAFT Syllabus (subject to revision)

SPST 2504: SPIRITUALITY OF THOMAS MERTON

Clare Ronzani

Spring 2011

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REQUIREMENTS

I. READINGS

A. Common Readings

Malits, Elena, *The Solitary Explorer: Thomas Merton's Transforming Journey* (selections on Moodle)

Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*

The Intimate Merton: His Life from His Journals,

ed. Patrick Hart and Jonathan Montaldo

Thomas Merton: Spiritual Master (selections,

ed. Lawrence S. Cunningham

Materials posted on Moodle

B. Readings of choice: 2-3 books (or the equivalent in essays, tapes, etc.) on a particular focus in Merton. Focus areas include the following (suggested bibliography will be provided):

1. *The Inner Merton: Journals*
2. *Prayer/Solitude/Contemplation*
3. *Merton's Social Critique*
4. *Merton and Inter-Religious Dialogue*
5. *Merton's Literary Writing/Poetry and Art*
6. *Merton's Letters*
7. *Merton and the Natural World*
8. *Other (contact Clare)*

C. Recommended: *Thomas Merton: Essential Writings* (ed. Christine Bochen)

II. PARTICIPATION IN CLASS DISCUSSIONS AND ACTIVITIES

III. CLASS PRESENTATIONS: Depending on your interests, this may be done either individually or collaboratively with others on a given topic.

Focus: 1. To highlight what your particular study offers you/us to further our understanding of Merton

2. To explore how a consideration of his spirituality might help us to relate contemplation and action, prayer and prophecy in our own lives and historical reality.

These presentations may be *as creative as you are*, incorporating *both input and group discussion/response/process*. They will be evaluated in terms of how well you:

- o distill Merton's thinking on the topic
- o raise pertinent insights/questions regarding contemporary spirituality which arise from your having dealt with the content
- o integrate input and group engagement/discussion.

Suggestion: Brief excerpts from your readings to be given out one week prior to your presentation, to acquaint the rest of the class with the topic you are presenting.

IV. WRITTEN WORK

1. Reflection papers

Three brief reflection papers (approximately three pages; see dates below)

The purpose of these papers is to articulate what is evoked for you as you read Merton and participate in class discussions -- e.g. what in the readings/discussion has offered you particular insight; what you find stretching and/or confirming; how/where Merton calls you to deeper prayer and engagement in the world.

Questions for your consideration will be posed in some class sessions. In the spirit of Merton, feel free to incorporate poetry, art, etc., as well as prose, in your reflection papers.

Due dates: February 23

March 16

April 13

2. Final paper: 8-10 pages, based on the topic of your class presentation.

Due date: May 18

V. Grading (1/3 attendance/participation; 1/3 reflection papers; 1/3 presentation/final paper)

SPST 2504

Spirituality of Thomas Merton

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Spring 2011

Feb. 2: INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION

Feb. 9: THE JOURNEY AND VISION OF THOMAS MERTON

Reading: Cunningham, *Thomas Merton: Spiritual Master*, Introduction
Malits, *The Solitary Explorer*, chapter 2: "Journey into the Unknown"
Reader: Shannon, *Hidden Ground of Love*, Letters
to Catherine de Hueck Doherty
Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, ch. 1-3

Feb. 16: MERTON: EXPLORING VOCATION/BECOMING A MONK&WRITER

Reading: Hart and Montaldo, *Intimate Merton*, pp. 1-102
Cunningham, 63-106, from *Seven Storey Mountain*
New Seeds, ch. 4-6

February 23: EXPLORING SOLITUDE

Reading: Cunningham, 241-250, from *Thoughts in Solitude*

Malits, ch. 3, "The Solitary Explorer"

Reader: "Notes for a Philosophy of Solitude" (from *Disputed Questions*)

"Silence and Solitude" (from *Thomas Merton: Essential Writings*)

"Thomas Merton, Man of Prayer" (Steindl-Rast, from *Thomas Merton, Monk*)

New Seeds, ch. 7-9

Recommended reading: "Renewal and Discipline" (*Contemplation in a World of Action*)

Thomas Merton: Essential Writings, Part I: "A Call to Contemplation" (ed. Christine M. Bochen)

Reflection Paper due (double space, 12 point font)

March 2: EXPLORING THE MONK'S TRUE LIFE/CONTEMPLATION AND THE TRUE SELF

Reading: *Intimate Merton*, 103-154
Cunningham, 121-164, *Conjectures*
Malits, ch. 6 "A Mind Awake in the Dark"
New Seeds, ch. 10-12

Recommended: Cunningham, "Letter on the Contemplative Life"

March 9: TURNING TOWARD THE WORLD

Reading: Cunningham, 368-387, from *Contemplation in a World of Action*
Malits, ch. 4, "A Guilty Bystander"
Intimate Merton, 155-209
Reader: "The Shoshoneans," from *Ishi Means Man*
New Seeds, ch. 13-14

Recommended: *Thomas Merton: Essential Writings*, Part II: A Call to Compassion

March 16: ISSUES OF CONSCIENCE: WAR AND PEACE/NONVIOLENCE

Reading: Reader: "Blessed are the Meek" (*Faith and Violence*)
"Gandhi, the Gentle Revolutionary" (*Nonviolent Alternative*)
"Toward a Theology of Resistance" (*Faith and Violence*)
"Original Child Bomb" (*The Nonviolent Alternative*)
"A Devout Meditation in Memory of Adolf Eichmann"
"Peace and Protest" (*Faith and Violence*)
Douglass, James, Foreword to *Cold War Letters*
Selections from *Cold War Letters*

[New Seeds, ch. 15-17](#)

Reflection Paper due

March 23: (Spring Break: no class!)

March 30: TBA

New Seeds, ch. 18-20
Additional reading tba

April 6: THE HERMITAGE

Reading: *Intimate Merton*, 211-267
Cunningham, 214-222, "Day of A Stranger"
Reader: "Merton's Hermitage: Bachelard, Domestic Space, and Spiritual Transformation" (*Spiritus*, Fall 2004, Vo. 4, No. 2)
New Seeds, ch. 21-23

April 13: MERTON AND THE FEMININE

Reading: *Intimate Merton* 269-312

Cunningham, 257-264, "Hagia Sophia"

Reader: "The Feminine Mystique" (*Springs of Contemplation*)

Burton-Christie: "Rediscovering Love's World: Thomas Merton's Love Poems and the Language of Ecstasy"

(*Cross Currents* 39: Spring 1985, pp. 64-82)

Selected poems (handouts)

New Seeds, ch. 24-25

(plus preparatory reading for presentations)

Reflection paper due

April 20: MERTON AND NATURE (possible class presentation)

Reading: Cunningham, 165-222, *A Vow of Conversation*

Reader: Merton, "The Wild Places" (*Preview of the Asian Journey*, ed. Walter Capps)

Weis, "Dancing with the Raven: Thomas Merton's Evolving View of Nature" (from *The Vision of Thomas Merton*)

Weis, "Discovering Compassion in the Wilderness" (*Thomas Merton's Gethsemani*)

New Seeds, ch. 26-27

(plus preparatory reading for presentations)

Recommended: *When the Trees Say Nothing; Thomas Merton Writings on Nature* (ed. Deignan)

**April 27: MERTON AND INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE
and CLASS PRESENTATIONS**

Reading: Cunningham, 223-237 (*Asian Journal*) and 399-420 ("A Christian Looks at Zen")

Intimate Merton, 313-363

Malits, ch. 5, "A Poor Pilgrim"

Reader: Shannon, "Thomas Merton in Dialogue with Eastern Religions" (*The Vision of Thomas Merton*, ed. O'Connell)

New Seeds, ch. 28-29

(preparatory reading for presentations)

Recommended: Merton, "On Taoism" and "On Hinduism" (*Thoughts on the East*)

May 4: CLASS PRESENTATIONS

Reading: *New Seeds*, ch. 30-35

(preparatory reading for presentations)

Recommended: *Thomas Merton: Essential Writings*, Part III: A Call To Unity

**May 11: MERTON'S INTEGRATION AND OUR OWN: A MERTON
CELEBRATION**

Reading: *New Seeds*, ch. 36-39

MAY 18: Final Reflection Paper due (no class session). Please put paper in Clare's mailbox at JST-SCU with return SASE envelope.