

ANTH3308AA & CORE3791AA:
THOMAS MERTON, RELIGION, AND CULTURE

Spring Semester 2013

Syllabus

Instructor: Peter Savastano, Ph.D.

Day & Time: Tuesday and Thursday; 11:00 a.m. – 12:15 p.m.

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**Office Hours: Tuesday, 12:45 p.m. - 1:45 p.m. & Thursday, 1:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.;
Or by appointment.**

Important Note: The overall approach to the course syllabus is open-ended and flexible so as to leave room for necessary adjustments as the semester progresses, meaning that the syllabus, readings, and written assignments may be revised and amended as needed. When relevant, additional articles in the discipline may be assigned.

The Goals of the Anthropology and Sociology Programs are to: 1) Familiarize students with the various sociological and anthropological theories of collective life from the founding of the two disciplines to the present; 2) Expose students to a range of substantive concentrations in the two disciplines, and in anthropology to the four-fields (physical, cultural, linguistic, archeological); 3) Train students in the logic of research methodology, as well the various techniques, both quantitative and qualitative, on which researchers can draw, and provide them with opportunities to design and carry out a research project of their own; 4) Develop in students the capacity to analyze contemporary issues and controversies through a sociocultural lens that will enable them to become effective change agents; 5) Provide students with opportunities to apply their theoretical and methodological training, whether in faculty sponsored or organized research projects, or on-campus or off-campus internships; 6) Prepare students for careers in a number of occupations and professions, including academia, applied research, education, social work, organizational development, public administration, counseling, the museum professions, cultural resource management, law, urban planning, management, public relations, market research, diplomacy, media consulting, journalism, and diversity training; 7) Partner with other programs (Honors Program, Women's and Gender Studies, Religion, Communications, Criminal Justice, Political Science, Diplomacy and International Relations, Museum Professions, and Art) in an effort to contribute to cross-disciplinary dialogue and a cross-fertilization of ideas on campus; and 8) Infuse into our courses basic intellectual proficiencies: critical thinking; effective written and oral communication; careful reading and interpretation of texts; information literacy; and numeracy.

Course Rationale: Describing himself in one of his letters to a peace activist during the 1960s "as a Catholic Buddhist of long standing and also in fact a Quaker..." Roman Catholic, Trappist Monk, civil rights, anti-war activist, cultural critic and poet Thomas Merton (1915-1968) was among the first pioneers of a contemporary movement now referred to as "being religious interreligiously". Merton's deep and firm grounding in his own Roman Catholic tradition made it possible for him to explore, both in theory and in practice, other religious traditions thus deepening and expanding his own Catholic faith and commitment to monastic life. Although Merton essentially left few stones unturned when it came to interreligious exploration, it was to Buddhism and specifically Zen, that Merton was most drawn; for he found in the lives and sayings of the Zen Masters remarkable parallels to the lives and sayings (*Apophthegmata Patrum*) of the Desert Fathers (and Mothers) of the early Christian monastic movement that flourished in the deserts of Egypt, Palestine and Syria in the fourth and fifth centuries CE.

Though not an anthropologist, Merton sought, as anthropologists do, first hand experience of that which he studied. Like some contemporary anthropologists, Merton's approach to his subject matter was one of "participation-comprehension" rather than "participation-observation". In the process of his explorations, Merton also became a powerful prophetic voice of conscience, for Catholics and non-Catholics alike including many atheists, calling Americans to embody the best spiritual and social values of their culture and society. He was an advocate for peace in a time of war, a voice for social justice when racial prejudice and segregation was an institutionalized reality of the American social, cultural and political landscape. With incredible foresight (perhaps a premonition), even for the 1960s, Merton anticipated the globalization process and the rapid technological change now underway in the twenty-first century. Thomas Merton was especially concerned for the potential corrosive effects that technology could have on the quality and depth of the human spirit and religious life, and on our collective life and culture.

Course Objectives: 1) to ground the student in the anthropological understanding of the interrelatedness of consciousness, religion and culture, especially as the process of globalization continues to unfold in the contemporary world; 2) to explore the life and writings of Thomas Merton as a concrete example of a meaningful response to rapid change and for encouraging the "right use of technology" in the 20th and 21st centuries; 3) to educate the student in the relevance and value of Merton's contemplative and engaged approach to life, whether or not the student is a monastic or religious practitioner.

Course Outcomes: By the end of the semester students will have: 1) a broad exposure to the writings of Thomas Merton; 2) an awareness of the events and circumstances of Thomas Merton's life as one of the most popular and powerful religious voices of the twentieth century; 3) an appreciation for the continued relevance of the life and works of Thomas Merton for the twenty-first century; 4) an understanding of what it means to be religious interreligiously without having to abandon one's native religious tradition; 5) a firsthand experiential appreciation of the value of contemplative practice (sacred silence)

and its importance in the fast-paced and fragmented world of information overload in which we all currently live whether we choose to do so or not.

Required Texts:

Cunningham, Lawrence S., Editor. 1992. *Thomas Merton: Spiritual Master, The Essential Writings*. New York: Paulist Press.

Dekar, Paul R. 2011. *Thomas Merton, Twentieth-Century Wisdom for Twenty-First Century Living*. Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books.

Merton, Thomas. 1999. *The Intimate Merton, His Life From His Journals*. Edited by Patrick Hart and Jonathan Montaldo.

Shannon, William H. and Bochen, Christine, M. Editors. 2008. *A Life in Letters, The Essential Collection*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.

Course Requirements and Policies

Critical Thinking: This course requires you to challenge what you already think you know, if anything, about Thomas Merton, his corpus of writings and his legacy. The course exhorts you to transcend your opinions, and/or misconceptions and attend to the complexity of who Thomas Merton was and the nature of his spiritual journey and its relevance for our time. Likewise, you are being asked to cultivate openness to the different topics we may read about and discuss in the course as well as in relation to the research that you will do during the course of the semester. In so doing, you are required to develop and use "critical thinking" as a way of engendering a fuller and richer appreciation of the problems and challenges we face at the individual, local, and global levels as we enter into the age of globalization more fully at the beginning of the twenty-first century. You are also expected to cultivate the same openness and critical thinking in relation to the ideas and feelings of your fellow participants in the course. Along with the goals outlined above, this course is also designed to challenge your own ethnocentric worldview with an aim toward expanding, revising, or updating your most cherished version(s) of reality.

Class Participation, Preparedness and Attendance (Worth 35% of your final grade):

You are required to complete all reading assignments and to think about what you read before you come to class; to actively participate in class discussions; and to write about them when asked to do so. I expect you to be prepared enough to isolate the thesis statement of all readings, to provide an overview of the assigned readings, both in discussion and in writing, and to provide critical questions for discussion. My evaluation of your class participation will not be based solely on the quantity of your questions or comments, but rather on their quality. **Obviously, active class participation also requires regular attendance. PLEASE NOTE THAT I CONSIDER MORE THAN THREE ABSENCES UNACCEPTABLE. I assure you that your final grade will**

“seriously” suffer for your failure to show up regularly, to participate in class discussions, or to be prepared by having done the assigned readings and writings.

Extra Credit Policy: Please do not ask me whether or not you can do additional work to earn "extra credit." The answer is NO! If you have done what is required of you to earn the "regular credit" for this course, then "extra credit" will never be necessary.

Use of Laptops, Tablets, I-pods, I-Phones, Smartphones, etc. in Class: All cell phones, I-phones, “droids” and smart-phones are to be turned off during class time. Here is why: It is both disrespectful and inconsiderate of your fellow students and of me for you to make or to receive phone calls, text or twitter during class time! Class time is hard and deep thinking time! Please save your phone time for breaks or other free periods of the day. **Laptops and Tablets:** My experience with allowing students to use their laptops or tablets in class has been negative. **Therefore, unless I specifically ask you to use your laptops or tablets (which I will ask you to do frequently; so please bring them), laptops and tablets are not to be used in class! As for other technological devices, all of which serve to keep you hooked up to virtual reality rather than actual reality, please save these excursions into hyper-reality for another time and place.**

Meditation as a Pedagogical Tool: A number of professors at various institutions around the nation have begun to use meditation as a pedagogical tool. I am one of them. In preparation for learning and for opening our hearts and minds to the material we read, the discussions we have, and to each other, meditation has proven to be an effective tool. It enables students and professors alike to transition from the various demands, stresses, and distractions of contemporary life to the learning environment. Therefore, with your willingness, we will begin each class session with 7-10 minutes of meditation. I will provide basic meditation instruction for students who are not familiar with the practice of meditation.

More apropos to this seminar on Thomas Merton, the practice of sacred silence and stillness of body, emotions, mind and spirit were essential dimensions of Merton's own contemplative practice. Therefore, in the spirit of experiential anthropological methodology we have in the regular practice of meditation an opportunity to participate in Merton's own contemplative and meditative approach to life as a way of entering more fully into the subject matter of the course.

Should you wish to further explore the "contemplative pedagogy" movement please visit the website for the Association of the Contemplative Mind in Higher Education (www.acmhe.org). There are also some books: *Meditation as Contemplative Inquiry: When Knowing Becomes Love* by Arthur Zajonc (New York: Lindisfarne Press, 2008) and *Meditation and the Classroom: Contemplative Pedagogy for Religious Studies* by Judith Simmer-Brown & Fran Grace, Editors (Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 2011).

Students with disabilities: It is the policy and practice of Seton Hall University to promote inclusive learning environments. If you have a documented disability you may be eligible for reasonable accommodations in compliance with University policy, The Americans with Disabilities Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and or the New

Jersey Law Against Discrimination. Please note, students are not permitted to negotiate accommodations directly with professors. To request accommodations or assistance, please self-identify with the Office for Disability Support Services (DSS), Duffy Hall: Room 67 at the beginning of the semester. For more information, or to register for services, contact, DSS at 973-313-6003 or by email at DSS@shu.edu.

Research Projects, Written Assignments, and Oral Presentations:

Three (3) Three-Page Reflection Papers (Worth 15% your final grade): You are expected to write three 3-page reflection papers for the course. The topic of the paper is open ended but must be on some aspect of Merton's life and/or writings drawn from what we have covered in the course prior to each time that one of three papers is assigned respectively. See reading schedule below for due dates for the three reflection papers.

Oral Presentations: (Worth 25% of your final grade): Students will be divided up into groups of either three or four (depending on the number of students in the course). Starting on or around April 2nd and through the month of April, each group will give an oral presentation on a specific assigned book written by or about Thomas Merton. During the oral presentation students are expected to be able to report on the content of the book, discuss the topic covered by the book, and to engage in meaningful conversation about the book with your fellow participants in the course. The oral presentation can be in any media format you choose. I encourage you to use images and to search You Tube and other Internet sources on Thomas Merton and his life. There is a wealth of visual and textual information available.

Note on Format for Written Assignments and Late Policy: The format for written assignments is: typed, 12 pt., Times New Roman, or Helvetica Font (Keep in mind that *Italics* is only used for emphasis or to cite book titles.), white paper, black ink, one inch margins, and double spaced.

Remember, if you quote directly from a source you must properly cite it. If you are uncertain as to the procedure for properly citing a quote, I recommend that you consult *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*,¹ or another comparable writer's manual.

Note on Plagiarism and Failure to Cite Sources: Any student caught plagiarizing will be subject to serious penalties including automatic “F” for the entire course. For those who may not be clear on what it means to plagiarize *Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* defines it as follows: “to steal and pass off (the ideas or words of another) as one’s own: use (a created production) without crediting the source...: to commit literary theft: to present as new and original an idea or product derived from an existing source” (1990:898).

¹Turabian, Kate, L. 1996. *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. Sixth Edition. Chicago, and London: The University of Chicago Press.

Penalty for Late Assignments: You are expected to hand in all written assignments on the dates they are due. Students who suspect that they may not be able to hand in an assignment on time must get prior approval from me to hand-in an assignment late. Students who do not get my authorization to do so will be penalized as follows: for each day you are late with an assignment one grade point will be subtracted from the highest possible grade you can receive, i.e., for a paper one day late, the highest grade you can receive is A-, two days B+, etc. I will not accept papers after one week, at which point the highest grade you will receive for the assignment is "F".

Examinations: There is no mid-term exam. However, there will be a take home final essay exam (Worth 25% of your final grade). See reading schedule below for distribution date and due date for the final exam.

Grading Scale

95-100=A, 90-94=A-, 86-89=B +, 83-85=B, 80-82=B-, 76-79=C +, 73-75=C, 70-72=C-, 66-69=D +, 60-65=D, 0-59=F

Grading Rubric:

Grade: A

- A work of excellence;
- A demonstration of a profound ability for disciplinary interpretation of all assigned texts (which automatically presumes and requires that you will have purchased all of the assigned texts for the course at the beginning of the semester) , including careful and imaginative readings of sources and a clear understanding and explication of context as well as a firm grasp of anthropological concepts as pertains to the subject matter of the course;
- Written assignments have perfect spelling and grammar and adhere completely to the guidelines for submission of written assignments as indicated on all course syllabi;
- Written assignments demonstrate a clear thesis statement, well developed arguments, and exhibit innovative and critical thinking;
- Oral presentations are well thought out with a creative use of images and you don't waste our time by showing us video clips as a way of covering up for your lack of proper research. Most importantly you do not read verbatim from a power point presentation;
- Papers are well researched and sources are from books, journal articles, and scholarly publications rather than cut and pasted from internet websites;
- An "A" grade also demonstrates very active contribution to class discussions, including a willingness to listen to classmates and bring them into the conversation;
- An "A" grade demonstrates an ability to pose pertinent, well formed and incisive questions;

- All assignments are submitted on time and you are on time for every class with no unexcused absences for the duration of the semester.
- You abide by the rules for the use of technology during class time as indicated on the course syllabus;
- No texting during class, either overtly or covertly.

Grade: A-

- The degree of excellence is superior but not up to the standards specified for the "A" grade;
- A superior demonstration of ability for disciplinary interpretation of all assigned texts but lacking the profundity required for the "A" grade;
- Written assignments have minimal (as in one or two) spelling or grammatical errors;
- Superior adherence to the guidelines for written assignments as indicated on the course syllabus;
- Very active participation in all class discussions and clear demonstration that you have done the readings and taken the time to think about them before coming to class;
- All assignments are submitted on time;
- You are not late for class more than once and you have no more than three absences from the class for the duration of the semester;
- You adhere to all rules regarding the use of technology in class including no texting.

Grade: B+

- Good work that demonstrates strong skills for disciplinary interpretation, including careful readings of all assigned sources for the course and a clear understanding and explication of context and attention to disciplinary matters relevant to the subject matter of the course;
- Near perfect adherence to the guidelines for written assignments with minimal spelling and grammatical errors;
- Clearly written and well argued written assignments that are creative and engaging with a strong thesis statement and good but not perfect ability to build the body of the paper on your thesis statement or question;
- Sound and strong research for written assignments with scholarly sources drawn from books, journals and other scholarly works with no sources cut and pasted from internet websites;
- No more than four absences from class for the duration of the semester and not late for class more than twice;
- Perfect adherence to the guidelines for the use of technology in class and no texting.

Grade: B or B-

- As stipulated for the "B+" grade but in the case of a "B" two of the specifications of the "B+" grades are lacking, respectively;
- For the B- grade as stipulated for the "B+" grade but with three or four of the specifications lacking.

Grade: C+

- Written and/or oral work that is "Ok" but definitely needs improvement, and/or you're not trying hard enough.

Grade: C & C-

- Written or oral work that is almost "Ok" but definitely needs considerable improvement in relation to the standards for the "C+" grade.

Grade: D, D-

- Something is desperately wrong. What is it?

Grade: F

- Failing of the course is possible, and means you have expended little energy and/or you just don't care;
- You are one of those students who shows up only for the first day of class, completes none of the readings or assignments in the interim, and then sends an email on the last day of class wanting to know what you can do to get an "A" for the course;
- You have only shown up for three or four or ten class sessions, handed in no written assignments, made no oral presentations, taken no exams but have failed to withdraw from the course or to meet with me in relation to your poor performance in the course;
- You have come to see me about your poor performance in the class and we have agreed that there are certain things you must do to get a minimally passing grade and you have failed to do them;
- You have failed to request an Incomplete for the course within a reasonable time frame during the course of the semester;
- You requested an Incomplete but did not do what was required of you in order to earn a passing grade for the course.

Class participation: 35%
Three Reflection papers: 15% (or 5% each)
Oral Presentation: 25%
Final Exam: 25%

Course & Reading Schedule

- 1/15 Introduction to the course.
Who is Thomas Merton? (Student Internet Search Assignment)**
- 1/17 Cunningham, *Thomas Merton: Spiritual Master* (Hereafter referred to as TMSM); Foreword, Preface and Introduction.
- 1/20 TMSM: Chronology of Merton's Life and "A Christian Looks at Zen" from *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*.
- 1/22 **DVD: Merton: A Film Biography**
- 1/24 TMSM: From *The Seven Storey Mountain*.
- 1/29 TMSM: "Fire Watch, July 4, 1952".
- 1-31 TMSM: From *Conjectures of A Guilty Bystander* and "A Letter on Contemplative Life".
- 2/5 **3-page reflection paper due.**
TMSM: From *A Vow of Conversation: Journals 1964-65*.
- 2/7 Merton, *The Intimate Merton* (Hereafter referred to as M-IM): Part I.
- 2/12 M-IM, Part II.
- 2/14 Merton, *A Life in Letters* (Hereafter referred to as (M-ALIL): Parts I & 2.
- 2/19 TMSM: *Day of A Stranger*.
- 2/21 **DVD: Soul Searching: The Journey of Thomas Merton.**
- 2/26 TMSM: From *The Asian Journal*.
- 2/28 **Special Guest Lecturer: Jonathan Montaldo (tentatively).**
- 3/5 **Spring Break, No Class.**
- 3/7 **Spring Break, No Class.**
- 3/12 M-IM, Part III.
- 3/14 M-ALIL, Parts 3 & 4.

- 3/19 3-page reflection paper due.**
M-IM, Part IV.
- 3/21** TMSM: From *Thoughts in Solitude* and "The General Dance" from *New Seeds of Contemplation*.
- 3/26** TMSM: "Hagia Sophia" and From *The Wisdom of the Desert*.
- 3/28 No Class, Holy Thursday.**
- 4/2 Oral Presentations;** TMSM: "The Inner Experience" and "Learning to Live" from *Love and Living*.
- 4/4 Oral Presentations;** TMSM: "Contemplation in a World of Action" and "Is the World a Problem?" from *Contemplation in a World of Action*.
- 4/9 Oral Presentations;** TMSM: "Rain the Rhinoceros" from *Raids on the Unspeakable*.
- 4/11 3-page reflection paper due.**
Oral Presentations; M-ALIL, Part 9.
- 4/16** M-IM, Part IV.
- 4/18** M-IM, Parts V & VI.
- 4/23** M-IM, Part VII.
- 4/25** Dekar, *Thomas Merton, Twentieth-Century Wisdom for Twenty-First Century Living* (Hereafter referred to as TM-20/21), Foreword and Chapters 4 and 5.
- 4/30** TM-20/21, Chapters 6 and 7.
- 5/2 Last Day of Classes; Take Home Final Exam Distributed.**
TM-20/21, Appendices 1 and 2.
- 5/? Take Home Final Exam Due TBA.**