

SP 2503
Thomas Merton
JSTB, Spring 2008

Instructor: Bruce H. Lescher, Ph.D.
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Office Hours: I am at JSTB 9-5 Mon-Thurs; please call or e-mail for appointment.
Class: Thursday, 2:10 - 5:00, CDSB 224

Course Description

This course will be taught seminar style, which is to say that students will be encouraged to discuss the material under consideration, and each student will also be asked to give one presentation. This seminar will explore Merton's writings through several "tracks" that will be running consecutively. First, we will follow Merton's life chronologically as presented in a summary of his journals. Second, we will read selections of Merton's writing that correspond to the time period under discussion. Third, we will read *New Seeds of Contemplation*, one of Merton's books on spiritual practice, in small segments. Finally, in the latter part of the semester students will have the opportunity to make presentations on a topic of their choice. The goal of the class is to give students an opportunity to read and reflect on a wide variety of Merton's writing, including his spiritual writing, social critiques, letters, journals, and poetry.

Texts

Cunningham, Lawrence S., editor, *Thomas Merton: Spiritual Master* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992).

Merton, Thomas, *Faith and Violence: Christian Teaching and Christian Practice* (Notre Dame, IN: Univ of Notre Dame Press, 1968).

Merton, Thomas, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions, 1961).

Merton, Thomas, *The Intimate Merton: His Life from His Journals*, ed. Patrick Hart and Jonathan Montaldo (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001).

There is also a reader containing photocopied material. This will be available at Copy Central, 2483 Hearst, near Euclid. Cost: \$19.84.

Learning Outcomes

At the end of the course the student will be able to:

- Describe orally and in writing the stages of development in Merton's life.
- Identify, describe, and analyze some of the major theme's in Merton's writing: being a monk and a writer, the true self, solitude and community, the role of the monk, racial injustice, peace and non-violence, interreligious dialogue.
- Become especially conversant on aspect of Merton's writing, chosen by the student.
- Articulate the relevance of Merton's writing for one's own spirituality and ministry.

Accountability

1. Attending class and participating in discussions.
2. Doing the readings listed for each class; readings are due on the day they are listed.
3. Accessing the class via the Internet on Blackboard. Blackboard will be used for announcements and materials available on the internet. Possibility of online discussion as well.
4. Writing three four-page papers; these will be due on February 28, March 20, and April 17. Suggested topics will be handed out a week ahead of time.
5. Making one presentation in class. Depending on people's interests, this may be done either individually or in a small group. Dates: May 8, and 15. More information to follow.
6. Handing in a final paper (10-15 pages) based on your presentation. Due on May 21.

Important

If you have a learning disability or some other physical condition which requires special arrangements for classroom seating or writing assignments, please inform me early in the semester so that these arrangements can be worked out.

Schedule

February 7 - Introduction

February 14 - Merton: background, overview, early life

Reading: William H. Shannon, *Silent Lamp*, 1-77 [in reader]; Cunningham 15-60; *New Seeds* 1-13.

February 21 - Merton: Exploring the monastic vocation

Suggestions for Paper 1 to be handed out.

Reading: Hart and Montaldo, 1-44; Cunningham 63-106; *New Seeds* 14-51.

February 28 - Merton: Becoming a Monk and Writer

Paper 1 due

Reading: Hart and Montaldo, 45-102; Cunningham 241-250; "Notes for a

Philosophy of Solitude," from *Disputed Questions*, 139-160 [in reader];

New Seeds 52-79.

March 6 - Merton: Pursuing the monk's true life

Reading: Hart and Montaldo, 103-154; Cunningham 107-164; *New Seeds* 80-103.

March 13 - Merton: Pivotal Years, Cold War Writings

Suggestions for Paper 2 to be handed out

Reading: Hart and Montaldo, 155-209; "The Root of War is Fear" [in reader], L.C.

McHugh, "Ethics at the Shelter Doorway," *America* 105 (30 September 1961):

824-826 [in reader]; "Shelter Ethics" [in reader], "Breakthrough to Peace" [in

reader]; *New Seeds* 104-125.

March 20 - Merton: Hermitage, writings on non-violence

Paper 2 due

Reading: Hart and Montaldo, 211-267; *Faith and Violence* 3-13 (Toward a

Theology of Resistance); 14-29 (Blessed are the Meek), 30-39 (Non-

Violence and the Christian Conscience), 40-46 (Peace and Protest), 47-68

(The Prison Meditations of Father Delp), 69-75 (An Enemy of the State), 87-

95 (Vietnam--An Overwhelming Atrocity), 106-108 (Nhat Hahn is My

Brother), 111-118 (A Note on the Psychological Causes of War by Eric

Fromm); *New Seeds* 126-149.

March 27 - no class; Spring break

April 3 - Merton: Exploring Solitude and Freedom, Monastic Renewal

Reading: Hart and Montaldo, 269-313; Cunningham 165-213 (Vow of

Conversation); 214-222 (Day of a Stranger); Selected letters from *At Home*

in the World [in reader]; *New Seeds* 150-175.

April 10 - Merton on Racial Equality

Suggestions for Paper 3 to be handed out

Reading: *Faith and Violence* 121-129 (From Non-Violence to Black Power), 130-144 (Religion and Race in the United States), 145-164 (Events and Pseudo-Events), 165-181 (The Hot Summer of Sixty-Seven), Ishi: A Meditation [in reader]; *New Seeds* 176-198.

April 17 - Merton, the Mature Monk

Paper 3 due

Reading: Cunningham 265-279 (Wisdom of the Desert); 357-367 (Learning to Live); 367-387 (Contemplation in a World of Action); 388-398 (Rain and the Rhinoceros); *New Seeds* 199-238.

April 24 - Merton on Contemplation, some poems

Reading: Cunningham 294-356 (The Inner Experience); selection of poems (in reader); *New Seeds* 239-274.

May 1 - Merton: End of the Journey, Religions of the World

Reading: Hart and Montaldo, 313-363; Cunningham 223-237 (Asian Journal); 399-420 (A Christian Looks at Zen); Letters to Abdul Azziz, in *Hidden Ground of Love*, 43-67 [in reader]; *New Seeds* 275-297.

May 8 - Class presentations

May 15 - Class presentations, wrap-up

May 22 - Final paper due