

**SP5/729 – Communicating Communion:
Thomas Merton and Christian imagination in the face of social crisis**

Vancouver School of Theology SUMMER 2022 – July 7-9

**Thursday afternoon 2 pm – 4 pm; Merton lecture 7 – 9 pm;
Friday 9 am – noon and 2 – 4:30 pm, Saturday 9 am – noon and 2 – 4:30
(available in person or via Zoom)**

Instructor: Revd Dr Gary P. Hall
Contact information/email: hallg@queens.ac.uk

PURPOSE: Through this course we will focus on what Merton said about his public vocation as a Christian writer-monk in the face of social crisis, and how that communicative vocation continues in relation to present-day readers. Specifically, how (according to the testimony of his readers) does Merton continue to shape Christian imagination, attentive action, and the kind of interdependence we might describe as communion or interdependence?

EXPECTATIONS AND COMPETENCE OBJECTIVES:

Students will be expected to learn and demonstrate the ability to:

- identify some key texts in which Merton describes his vocation;
- distinguish between different types of text which make up the Merton corpus;
- describe and contextualise Merton’s understanding of the nature of social crisis at various times in his life;
- recognise and evaluate ways in which Merton’s legacy informs reader responses to present-day social crises;
- critically review some of Merton’s descriptions of contrasting forms of social communicating.

REQUIRED READINGS: To pre-read before the course begins.

Rowan Williams, *A Silent Action: Engagements with Thomas Merton* (Louisville, Kentucky: Fons Vitae, 2011) [75 pages]

Bonnie B. Thurston, *Shaped by the End You Live For: Thomas Merton’s Monastic Spirituality* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2020) [165 pages]

(Please purchase your own copies of these books, readily available from online sellers.)

Essays (Posted by June 1 on Student Portal course site)

‘Rain and the Rhinoceros’ (pp.9-23) and ‘Message to Poets’ (pp.155-61), in *Raids on the Unspeakable* (New York: New Directions, 1966).

‘Love and Solitude’ (pp.15-24), ‘Creative Silence’ (pp.38-45), and ‘Symbolism: Communication or Communion?’ (pp.54-79) in *Love and Living* (London: Sheldon Press, 1979).

‘Toward a Theology of Resistance’ (pp.3-13), ‘Apologies to an Unbeliever’ (pp.205-14), ‘The Contemplative Life in the Modern World’ (pp.215-24) ‘Events and Pseudo-Events: Letter to a Southern Churchman’ (pp.145-64), in *Faith and Violence: Christian Teaching and Christian Practice* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968)

‘Contemplative Life as Prophetic Vocation’ (pp.129-142), and ‘Prophecy, Alienation, Language’ (pp.143-159) in Thomas Merton, Jane Marie Richardson, ed., *The Springs of Contemplation: A Retreat at the Abbey of Gethsemani* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1992)

‘Openness and Cloister’ (pp.129-42) and ‘Is the World a Problem?’ (pp.143-160) in *Contemplation in a World of Action* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday 1971).

‘War and the Crisis of Language’ (pp.234-47) in *Thomas Merton on Peace*, ed. and intro. by Gordon C. Zahn (New York: McCall Publishing, 1971).

‘Preface to the Japanese edition of The Seven Storey Mountain. *Nanae no yama* (1963)’ (pp.69-76) in *Thomas Merton, Reflections on my Work* (Collins, 1989)

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Reading and class participation: All Students including auditors are expected to do all the required readings and participate in class discussions. 100% attendance is required of Certificate and Degree students.
2. Certificate students: Certificate students are required to hand in 5-6 pages of writing that demonstrates the ability to thoughtfully engage the material and reading for the class and gives a personal reflection on the reading and material covered. **Due August 15th.**
3. Basic degree students (Diploma; MA; M.Div): are required to do any required oral assignments during the course itself and submit any combination of written assignments totaling approximately 1500-1875 words/6-8 pages. **Due August 15th.**
4. Advanced degree students (Th.M): are required to do any required oral assignments during the course itself and submit any combination of written assignments totaling approximately 3500 words/12-15 pages. **Due September 30th.**

Further details about assignments will be provided on the course syllabus.

5. **SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Books by Thomas Merton

Thoughts in Solitude (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1958; repr. Tunbridge Wells: Burns & Oates, 1975)

Disputed Questions (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1960)

New Seeds of Contemplation (New York: New Directions, 1961; repr. Wheathampstead, Herts: Anthony Clarke, 1972)

Seeds of Destruction (New York, NY: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 1964)

Raids on the Unspeakable (New York: New Directions, 1966)

Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966; new edn London: Sheldon Press, 1977)

Faith and Violence: Christian Teaching and Christian Practice (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968)

My Argument with the Gestapo (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1969; repr. New York: New Directions, 1975)

Contemplation in a World of Action (Garden City, NY: Doubleday 1971)

The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton, ed. by Naomi Burton, Patrick Hart and James Laughlin (New York: New Directions, 1973; repr. London: Sheldon Press, 1974)

Love and Living, ed. by Naomi Burton Stone and Patrick Hart (London: Sheldon Press, 1979)

Thomas Merton in Alaska: The Alaskan Conferences, Journals and Letters, ed. by Robert E. Daggy (New York: New Directions, 1989)

The Springs of Contemplation: A Retreat at the Abbey of Gethsemani, ed. by Jane Marie Richardson (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1992)

At Home in the World: The Letters of Thomas Merton and Rosemary Radford Ruether ed. by Mary Tardiff (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995)

Peace in the Post-Christian Era, ed. and intro. by Patricia A. Burton (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004)

Thomas Merton: Selected Essays, ed. and intro. by Patrick F. O'Connell (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2013)

Interpreting Merton's public witness

Ephrem Arcement, *In the School of Prophets: The Formation of Thomas Merton's Prophetic Spirituality* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2015)

John Eudes Bamberger, *Thomas Merton: Prophet of Renewal* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2005)

Paul R. Dekar, *Thomas Merton: God's Messenger on the Road towards a New World* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2021)

Jim Forest, *The Root of War is Fear: Thomas Merton's Advice to Peacemakers* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2016)

Gregory K. Hillis, *Man of Dialogue: Thomas Merton's Catholic Vision* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2021)

Gordon Oyer, *Pursuing the Spiritual Roots of Protest* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014)

Robert Inchausti, *Thinking Through Thomas Merton: Contemplation for Contemporary Times* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2014)

Robert Inchausti, *Thomas Merton's American Prophecy* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1998)

Recent testimony to the influence of Merton

Gray Henry and Jonathan Montaldo, eds., *We Are Already One: Thomas Merton's Message of Hope* (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2014)

Sophronia Scott, *The Seeker and the Monk: everyday conversations with Thomas Merton* (Minneapolis, MN: Broadleaf Books, 2021)

Jon M. Sweeney, ed., *What I Am Living For: lessons from the life and writings of Thomas Merton* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2018)

Kathleen Witkowska Tarr, *We Are All Poets Here: Thomas Merton's 1968 journey to Alaska, a shared story about spiritual seeking* (Anchorage, AK: VP&D House, 2018)