

CONTEMPLATION IN ACTION (RGT 3322/6322F)

Jack Costello SJ

WEEK ONE: INTRODUCTION

- a. Introductions
- b. Situating contemplation in action as a problematic in Christian spiritual theology.

Part I. Philosophical and Theological Foundations

WEEK TWO: WHAT DOES LIVING “SPIRITUALLY” MEAN?

Readings for this class:

Ron Rolheiser, *The Holy Longing*, Parts I & II. pp. 3-70.

Optional, background reading: Rolheiser’s article ‘Hope & Concern: the Millennium’

First hour: Reflections on the readings... RR’s meaning of a “spiritual” life...*Second*

hour: Intro to Macmurray’s integrated/integrating view of reason and the world.

WEEK THREE: TOWARDS AN INTEGRATED/INTEGRATING VIEW OF REASON

Readings for this class:

1. “Introduction” by J. Costello to *Reason and Emotion* (RE) by John Macmurray.
2. RE, chapters 1 & 3. “Reason in the Emotional Life I” & “III”.

WEEK FOUR: TOWARDS AN INTEGRATED/INTEGRATING VIEW OF PERSONS

Readings for this class:

1. “The Personal Life,” RE, John Macmurray, pp. 53-67.
2. “Reason and Religion,” RE, John Macmurray pp.117-128.

Optional: J. Macmurray, RE, ch.4, “Education of the Emotions” and ch.5, “The Early Discipline of Personality” [some essential elements for living spiritually discussed here].

Discussion: Macmurray’s view of ‘functional’ vs. ‘personal’ living & examining the Macmurray proposal that fully positive personal relating is, in fact, living religiously.

WEEK FIVE: PERSONS IN COMMUNION: THE HEART OF RELIGIOUS ACTION

Readings for this class:

1. “Religious Reality,” from RE, pp.129-139
2. “The Trinity and Human Rights,” from *The Fullness of Faith* by Michael Himes & Kenneth Himes, pp.55-73

First hour: Contemplation in Macmurray’s view of living ‘community’ and Himes’ view of God-as-community grounded by the imperative to become “community.”

Optional reading: John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, Intro & chap. I. pp. 15-67.

WEEK SIX: JESUS: COMPASSION AND SPIRIT IN CHRISTIAN CONTEMPLATION

Readings for this class:

John Haughey, *The Conspiracy of God*, Chap. 1, "Jesus of Nazareth and the Spirit of God.."

First hour: two students will present key issues of this reading (20 min), and open it up for discussion. Contemplation modeling itself on seeing, feeling, living as Jesus lived.

Second hour: Introduction to Thomas Merton as a contemporary contemplative

READING WEEK—NO CLASS.

Essay due at class on March 1.

Assignment: Prepare a 5-page, double-spaced essay focussing on some major theme from our authors that has added to your appreciation of the meaning of 'contemplation in action.' Say something on 'how' and perhaps 'why' your understanding has grown.

Part II: The Witness of Contemplatives

WEEK SEVEN: FALSE SELF, TRUE SELF: THOMAS MERTON. Part I

Readings for this class:

1. James Finley, *Merton's Palace of Nowhere*, pp.10-85

first part of class: Exploring Merton's notions of false self and true self.

WEEK EIGHT: FALSE SELF, TRUE SELF: THOMAS MERTON. Part 2

Readings for this class:

1. James Finley, *Merton's Palace of Nowhere*, pp.86-145.

Note: Thomas Merton develops his reflections on contemplation in many different writings, including his journals. Reading of Merton's own work will be important.

WEEK NINE: THE IGNATIAN TRADITION Part I: THE PRIMACY OF LOVE

Readings for this class:

1. "Something that Happened to Me at Manresa," *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* by Charles J. Jackson SJ, 38/2. pp.1-40.
2. Principle and Foundation, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises*, Michael Ivens. 22-32.
3. Witness's "decision," in Alan Paton's novel *Cry the Beloved Country*. (One page).

first part of class: the Ignatian mystical vision as ground of contemplation in action.

second part: The centrality of Jesus: love & freedom in Ignatian contemplation/action.

WEEK TEN: THE IGNATIAN TRADITION II: PARTICIPATION AND DISCERNMENT

Readings for this class:

1. "Contemplation for Divine Love", M. Ivens, pp.169-178.
2. The Examen as faith-reflection on personal/communal self-knowledge and action.

Recommended: Reading the whole of *Cry the Beloved Country* by Alan Paton, and

Part III: Contemplation, Discernment and Action

WEEK ELEVEN: SOCIALLY STRUCTURED VALUES: DISCERNING AND ACTING

Reading for this class:

Wendell Berry, Chapter on “Sex, Economy, Freedom and Society,” in Berry’s book by this title. [The waters we fish swim in: The culture’s influence on our seeing, feeling, knowing & acting].

First hour: drawing out cultural dimensions of shadow & light in life-based contemplation.

Second hour: Contemplation: being true at once to the facts and the vision of the Kingdom.

WEEK TWELVE: MARKING THE JOURNEY TO & IN THE REIGN OF GOD

Reading for this class:

Part III of the book *We Drink from Our Own Wells* by Gustavo Gutierrez, and some related poems and prayers.

How GG views freedom, love, solidarity with the poor, ongoing conversion, gratuitousness and gratitude, spiritual childhood and commitment, persons as sacraments. How he sees joy as a victory over suffering, and celebration of life in community as markers of authentic Christian living.

First hour: exchange on how GG’s ‘ways of being and living affect our contemplation.

Second hour: a sharing on your chosen essay topic & focus—and why.

Outcomes and Assessment

The following outcomes are expected of all students:

1. A capacity to speak meaningfully and specifically of the role of contemplation in living and working and relating to other persons and the world. Able to describe human nature and its expressions as ground for religious contemplation and action for others. Able to note the distinct yet rich overlap and co-penetration between the ‘fully human’ (Rolheiser, Macmurray) and ‘life in the Spirit.’(Merton, Ignatius & others).
2. Able to describe what Merton means by ‘true’ and ‘false’ self, and what he means by the ineffable and unanalyzable character of the former. Able to give a theological articulation of the life of friendship as a manifestation of ‘life in God’.
3. The student grasps something of the ‘nameless’ character of meeting God, yet equally grasps the very helpful role of prayer methods, discernment, and names for God as examinable and testable ways of being opened to the divine.
4. Able to identify movement of life in the Spirit through the terms analyzed by G. Gutierrez as gratuitousness and gratitude, faith and hope, poverty and solidarity, etc. .

5. Able to prepare a class on such teaching for grade school or high school-age students in our culture.

Assessment methods:

1. ***Understanding the material:*** Professor listens to students' comments, their questions to the authors, responses to one another, etc. and over several classes gets a sense and understanding of the student's ongoing grasp of the ideas and issues.

2. ***Student's understanding deepened with the one-page summary and reflection:*** This exercise reveals the student's grasp of the author's meaning in detail, in his/her capacity to separate the substance of the author's views from the less than substantial elements. It reveals the student's capacity to read carefully, sequentially, relationally, and to distill the substance into a summary of the heart of the matter. Capacity to reflect on the work by the questions or comments raised at the end of the summary

3. **The final essay is an opportunity to explore a theme raised in the course through theoretical reflection and/or to relate the course learning to an issue in work and life with development and examples.** It is an occasion to tie the writings in to deeper understanding in light of contemporary gifts and challenges. Synthesis, depth of understanding of an author's meaning, relationship of ideas to life, etc. all feature here.