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## **Sacred Silence, Sacred Song**

TH 3863

An Area B Advanced Elective and an MAS Elective Course  
J term 2014

Class sessions  
Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays 6:45 – 9:30  
January 6 – 23  
Schlegel 122  
Also: Saturday January 11

### **Course description**

In the presence of divine mystery, people of faith have often found that silence is the only possible response – no adequate words can be found. So central is silence to many religious traditions that the 2013 Louisville Festival of Faiths took “Sacred Silence” as its entry into an interfaith examination of compassion. This course will look at silence in Christian theology and practice, with particular attention to Catholic and Quaker traditions.

At the same time, there is something about the life of faith which cannot “keep from singing.” Sacred song unites communities in thanks and praise; it evokes hope and strength in the face of oppression. This course will look at the theology and practice of singing in a range of Christian traditions, including singing the Psalter, hymnodies of Reformation churches and the Methodist movement, spirituals and songs of resistance.

During this intensive course, words will be surrounded by silence, and silence will be embraced by song.

Class sessions will include experience of extended silence and of singing, visits to Gethsemani Abbey and to Shaker Village, reading and writing and discussion.

### **Goals and objectives:**

For LPTS students, this course is related most closely to these Student Learning Outcome:

***MAR SLO 2; MDIV SLO3: Students will demonstrate an understanding of multiple theological perspectives, historical and contemporary.***

***SLO17: Students will develop a complex and nourishing spirituality that embraces self, others, environment, and social structures.***

***QEPSLO1: Students will demonstrate an ability to describe and articulate important characteristics of the history, traditions, practices and perspectives of at least one religious tradition other than Christianity and one Christian ecclesial tradition other than their own.***

#### Goals of this course

Through experience of silence and singing in the divine presence, students will deepen their encounter with God and their practices of prayer and reverence.

In relation to the subjects of the course, students will be able to describe the distinctive spiritual practices, emphases, gifts and challenges of traditions they have encountered and, if appropriate, relate them to the theology and practice of their own ecclesial communities;

Students will be able to articulate, with a view toward diverse audiences, their insights in relation to theological discussion and inquiry.

#### Required texts:

1. Anonymous, *Cloud of Unknowing*, ed. James Walsh, Classics of Western Spirituality series (Paulist, 1981). ISBN 978-0809 123322
2. James Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues: An Interpretation* (Orbis Books, 1992). ISBN 978-0883448434.
3. Thomas R. Kelly, *A Testament of Devotion* (HarperOne reprint edition, 1997). ISBN 978-0060643614
4. Karl Rahner, *Prayers for a Lifetime* (Crossroad, 1995). ISBN 978-0824507305
5. Don and Emily Saliers, *A Song to Sing, A Life to Live: Reflections on Music as Spiritual Practice*. (Jossey-Bass, 2006) ISBN 978-0787983772

Other readings will be posted on the class CAMS site (<http://mail1.lpts.edu/estudent>), made available on print reserve in the library, or are accessible on the internet through the URL indicated on the syllabus.

#### ***Requirements***

##### **Full and reflective participation in course activities (about 20%)**

1. Full participation (about 20%)  
Students will be prepared for active discussion of the readings and issues for each class session. They will also participate in the experiences of silence and of song, preparing as appropriate.

## **Theological engagement (about 60%)**

### **2. Journal (about 20%)**

Students will keep an electronic journal.

The discipline of writing regularly encourages reverent reflection on class experiences of silence and singing, and provides the occasion to bring these reflections into conversation with readings and class discussions.

For most class sessions, a topic is indicated for journal reflection. These topics should be engaged in a reflection of 1-2 pages (no more than 3). While the style is appropriately personal, as fits a journal, the writing should engage the question theologically, drawing on the resources of the course.

Responses will be submitted in hard copy in class on the days indicated in the schedule.

### **3. A presentation on the place of singing in one's own tradition or community (about 20%)**

As described in class, students will work in groups to present to the class the distinctive understandings and practices of singing in their tradition.

### **4. An essay on silence (about 20%)**

In consultation with the instructors, students will choose a topic for an essay of about 7 - 9 pages.

## **A performance "beyond words": 180 seconds (about 20%)**

### **5. Final performance: 180 seconds**

During the final week, students will present to the class a performance which communicates their learning during the course. In consultation with the instructors, they can do this in groups.

Students are responsible for information given during class sessions, including specifications of assignments and elaboration of readings.

Students should bring with them to class the primary texts readings assigned for that day (posted on CAMS).

## **LPTS policies:**

As with all LPTS classes, this course will honor these Seminary policies:

### **Use of Inclusive Language**

In accordance with seminary policy, students are to use inclusive language in class discussions and in written and oral communication by using language representative of the whole human community in respect to gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, and physical and intellectual capacities. Direct quotations from theological texts and translations of the Bible do not have to be altered to conform to this policy. In your own writing, however, when referring to God, you are encouraged to use a variety of images and metaphors, reflecting the richness of the Bible's images for God. For more information, see <http://www.lpts.edu/academics/academic-resources/academic-support-center/online-writing-lab/avoiding-gender-bias>.

### **Academic Honesty**

All work turned in to the instructors is expected to be the work of the student whose name appears on the assignment. Any borrowing of the ideas or the words of others must be acknowledged by quotation marks (where appropriate) and by citation of author and source. Use of another's language or ideas from online resources is included in this policy, and must be attributed to author and source of the work being cited. Failure to do so constitutes plagiarism, and may result in failure of the course. Two occurrences of plagiarism may result in dismissal from the Seminary. Students unfamiliar with issues related to academic honesty can find help from the staff in the Academic Support Center. For the Seminary policy, see the Policy for Academic Honesty in the Student Handbook.

### **Citation Policy**

Citations in your papers should follow the Seminary standard, which is based on these guides:

Turabian, Kate L., Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations: Chicago Style for Students and Researchers*. 8th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013.

*The Chicago Manual of Style*. 16th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010.

Copies of these guides are available at the library and in the Academic Support Center.

### **Special Accommodations**

Students requiring accommodations for a documented physical or learning disability should be in contact with the Director of the Academic Support Center ([kmapes@lpts.edu](mailto:kmapes@lpts.edu)) during the first two days of class (or, even better, before the class begins) and should speak with the instructors as soon as possible to arrange appropriate adjustments. Students with environmental or other sensitivities that may affect their learning are also encouraged to speak with the instructors.

### **Attendance Policy**

According to the Seminary catalog, students are expected to attend class meetings regularly. In case of illness or emergency, students are asked to notify the instructors of their planned absence from class, either prior to the session or within 24 hours of the class session. Missing more than 25% of the class sessions may result in a low or failing grade in the course.

### **Tentative Schedule of Classes:**

This schedule is subject to change; brief additional reading assignments will be added.

**During each class we will expect to have about 30 minutes of silence.**

**Wednesday January 8**

**Introduction: silence and song**

**Reading:**

Rahner, pp 1-129

**Assignment:**

Identify a piece of vocal music which conveys your relation to "sacred song." This should be a work that has an important place in your spiritual life — to be "sacred" in that sense — but it doesn't need to be church music (although of course it could well be) or to be overtly "religious." If possible, bring a copy to share. Then be prepared to explain briefly why you have chosen this piece.

**Thursday, January 9**

**Song and silence**

**Reading:**

Saliers, chapters 1-3, 7-8

**Assignment:**

Prepare a paragraph (no more than one page!) which describes an experience with silence which has been spiritually significant for you. Make a first effort at interpreting this experience theologically. (Rahner may help you with this, or other resources important for you.) You will return to these themes at the end of the course.

**Saturday, January 11**

**Trip to Shaker Village and Gethsemani Abbey**

**Reading:**

Martin Tel, "Necessary Songs: The Case for Singing the Entire Psalter," *Christian Century* 131.1, January 8, 2015, 20-3;  
<http://www.christiancentury.org/article/2013-12/necessary-songs>.

**Monday, January 13**

**Singing as resistance and transformation**

**Reading:**

Cone, pp. 1-77

On CAMS:

Cheryl A. Kirk-Duggan, "African-American Spirituals: Confronting and Exorcising Evil through Song," in *A Troubling in My Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil and Suffering*, ed. Emilie M. Townes (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993), 150-171).

**Assignment:**

Bearing in mind the distinctive emphases and understandings of your tradition which are particularly important for you, choose a hymn from your tradition to bring to class; identify resources you know which would help you to characterize your tradition.

**Wednesday, January 15**

**Reading:** Cone, pp. 78-130

**Bring the *Cloud of Unknowing* with you to class tonight.**

**Assignment:** Informed by the readings and by what you saw at Shaker Village and Gethsemani Abbey, develop your understanding of the role of practices of singing in resisting sin and oppression.

**Thursday, January 16**  
**Reading:** **Singing and community: An evening with Patrick Evans**  
 Saliers, chapters 4-6, 9-10

**Assignment:** Drawing upon your prior work on hymnody in your tradition, reflect on what you find most valuable, troubling, or puzzling about your own encounters with music in church.

**Monday, January 20** **MLK Holiday: no class**

**Wednesday, January 22**  
**Reading:** **Silence & the mystery of God**  
*Cloud of Unknowing*. 115-66

**Assignment:** **Class presentations on hymnody in Christian traditions**

*Descriptions of topics for the paper on silence will be distributed today.*

**Thursday, January 22**  
**Reading** **Silence and community**  
 Kelly

**Assignment:** Revisiting the paragraph on silence you wrote in the first week, and using guiding questions given in class, develop a statement of your understanding of the significance of silence for the life of faith. Be sure to attend to both personal and communal practices of silence.

**Monday January 27** **What have we learned?**

**Reading:** Kelly

**Assignment:** **Presentations of 180-second performances**

**Friday, January 31**

**Paper on silence due to instructors by email ([scraigo-snell@lpts.edu](mailto:scraigo-snell@lpts.edu); [kjohnson@lpts.edu](mailto:kjohnson@lpts.edu)).**