



## **CS 645: Early Christian Spiritual Practices And Their Relevance for Today**

**May 9 – 13, 2011  
9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.  
Class Location: A1085-1**

**Instructor:** Carmen Maier (contact: cmaier@csbsju.edu)  
Resident Scholar, Collegeville Institute for Ecumenical and Cultural Research,  
2010-11 B.A. Religion, Rocky Mountain College, Calgary  
M.A. Theology, Saint John's School of Theology, Collegeville  
M.A. Early Christian Studies, University of Notre Dame  
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### **Course Description:**

In our week together we explore some counter-cultural ascetical practices of early Christianity rooted in the monastic movement, including silence, simplicity, chastity, and fasting. We also discover affirmative counterparts in careful speech, hospitality, friendship, and feasting. In the process, we experience the positive impact practices of abstinence and affirmation can have in our lives and in our service to others.

### **Required Texts:**

Athanasius. *The Life of Saint Anthony*. Translated by Robert C. Gregg. Classics of Western Spirituality. New York: Paulist Press, 1980.  
*Desert Wisdom: Sayings from the Desert Fathers*. Translation and Art by Yushi Nomura. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1982.  
\**The Rule of Saint Benedict*. Translated by Timothy Frye. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1982.  
\* Supplied by Instructor.

### **Course Objectives:**

- Students will be given the opportunity to study, experience, explore and discuss the Christian practices of simplicity, hospitality, chastity, friendship, silence, careful speech, fasting, and feasting.
- Students will come to understand some of the central historical, theological, and ideological impulses that led to the rise of Christian monasticism.
- Students will learn how to read classic texts of a different era with empathy and discernment.
- Students will compare and contrast spiritual practices in early Christianity with those described by Christian writers today.

- Students will gain the methodological tools to “retrieve,” “revise,” and “apply” Christian practices of a different cultural and historical milieu for Christian life and service today.

### **Course Structure:**

Each practice will be dealt with in the historical context of early monasticism as well as in today’s context. Each afternoon we will study a practice of abstinence. Each evening students will individually engage in about an hour of reflection and writing about this practice. Each morning we will learn of an affirmative counter-part to the practice. Each day will allow time for a variety of learning formats, including group discussions and lectures.

#### **Monday May 9**

Morning      Introducing Ourselves and Course Overview  
 Historical Background to Early Christian Practices  
 Afternoon      Simplicity

#### **Tuesday May 10**

Morning      Hospitality  
 (Lunch together)  
 Afternoon      Chastity

#### **Wednesday May 11**

Morning      Friendship  
 Afternoon      Silence  
 (Excerpts from Movie: “Into the Great Silence”)

#### **Thursday May 12**

Morning      Careful Speech  
 Afternoon      Fasting

#### **Friday May 13**

Morning      Feasting  
 (Lunch together)  
 Afternoon      Class presentations

### **Course Requirements:**

#### **1) Four One Page Reflection Papers (20% of grade)**

These reflections are not to exceed one page. They will be written each evening from Monday to Thursday. They will be based on short readings and specific questions supplied by the instructor. They will serve as the basis for the next day’s group discussions.

#### **2) Small Group Leadership and Class Participation (each 5% of grade)**

Each student will lead one day’s small group discussion. Each student will be granted full grades for leadership and participation except in the case of obvious carelessness in lack of preparation or attendance, or an unwillingness to contribute in one’s unique way.

**3) Five Minute Presentation on Friday (20% of grade)**

Each student will choose one practice covered in class, either of abstinence or affirmation, and based on the course contents develop a brief five minute presentation on how this practice might be formative in their own Christian life, church congregation, or the vocation they feel called to serve in.

**3) Short Paper, 5 pages (20% of grade), due Friday July 22**

Students are to identify a practice of negation with its affirmative counter-part from the practices covered in the course in one of the three course texts, *The Life of Saint Anthony*, *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, and *Sayings from the Desert Fathers*. They are to describe these practices as exemplified by the chosen text. Next, the relationship between the practice of negation and that of affirmation as presented in the text is to be explored and described. In conclusion, an evaluation will be made as to the possible relevance of each of these practices for today.

**4) Research Paper&Practicum, approx. 15 pages (30% of grade), due Fri.Aug.5**

From a select bibliography designed by the instructor to aid, but not limit, students, students will choose an early Christian text and focus on one practice described therein. Students will be encouraged to select texts and practices beyond those covered in class. (For example, Augustine's *Confessions* and the practice of autobiographical writing, or Ephrem the Syrian's *Hymns on Paradise* and the practice of praying with scripture [*lectio divina*]). The first third of the paper will be devoted to understanding this practice in context: the practice will be described as it is exemplified and/or described by the early Christian writer, and based on historical research a rationale is to be offered as to why this practice may have been deemed relevant to that writer's historical life situation. The second part of the paper will provide a theological and contextual rationale for the application of this practice today. It will answer why this practice is valid today, how it may require revision, and a specific context for its application is to be described. The final third of the paper will be reserved for description of the practicum. The practicum will involve the student in actually doing the practice, either alone or in community. The experience is to be written up as the third section of the paper. Questions to be addressed include: where did the practice take place, who participated, what happened, and why or why would you not recommend this practice to be regularly incorporated into your individual/communal Christian life? What might you do differently next time?

**In addition, students are expected to observe these guidelines provided by Ambrose:**

“Important Notes/Dates:

Registration and payment in full is open up to the morning of the first day of class.

Students may drop this class and receive a full refund only prior to the second class session (i.e., before 1 pm on Tuesday, on the first day of class). No tuition refund will be issued after this deadline.

Students may voluntarily withdraw or change their registration from credit to audit, without academic penalty, only prior to completing 70% of the course (i.e., before 1pm on Friday, or the fourth day of class). Withdrawal from courses after the

Registration Revision period will not be eligible for tuition refund. 'W' grades are not included in grade point average calculations. A limit on the number of courses from which a student is permitted to withdraw may be imposed. Students wishing to withdraw from a course, but who fail to do so by the applicable date, will receive the grade earned in accordance with the course syllabus. A student obliged to withdraw from a course after the Withdrawal Deadline because of health or other reasons may apply to the Registrar for special consideration.

All registration changes must be made through the Registrar's Office by completing a Registration Revision Form. Forms are available in the Registrar's Office or on the website at [www.ambrose.edu/registrar](http://www.ambrose.edu/registrar).

### Electronic Etiquette

Students are expected to treat their instructor, guest speakers, and fellow students with respect. It is disruptive to the learning goals of a course or seminar and disrespectful to fellow students and the instructor to engage in electronically-enabled activities unrelated to the class during a class session. Please turn off all cell phones and other electronic devices during class. Laptops should be used for class-related purposes only. Please do not use iPods, MP3 players, or headphones. Do not text, read or send personal emails, go on Facebook or other social networks, search the internet, or play computer games during class. The professor has the right to disallow the student to use a laptop in future lectures and/or to ask a student to withdraw from the session if s/he does not comply with this policy. Repeat offenders will be directed to the Dean. If you are expecting communication due to an emergency, please speak with the professor before the class begins.

### Academic Policies

It is the responsibility of all students to become familiar with and adhere to academic policies as stated in the Student Handbook and Academic Calendar. Personal information, that is information about an individual that may be used to identify that individual, may be collected as a requirement as part of taking this class. Any information collected will only be used and disclosed for the purpose for which the collection was intended. For further information contact the Privacy Compliance Officer at [privacy@ambrose.edu](mailto:privacy@ambrose.edu).

### Extensions

Although extensions to coursework up until the final assignment deadline are at the discretion of the instructor, students may not turn in coursework for evaluation after July 15, 2011 unless they have received permission for a "Course Extension" from the Registrar's Office. Requests for course extensions must be submitted to the Registrar's Office by June 30. Course extensions are only granted for serious issues that arise "due to circumstances beyond the student's control."

### Academic Integrity

We are committed to fostering personal integrity and will not overlook breaches of integrity such as plagiarism and cheating. Academic dishonesty is taken seriously at Ambrose University College as it undermines our academic standards and affects the

integrity of each member of our learning community. Any attempt to obtain credit for academic work through fraudulent, deceptive, or dishonest means is academic dishonesty. Plagiarism involves presenting someone else's ideas, words, or work as one's own. Plagiarism is fraud and theft, but plagiarism can also occur by accident when a student fails or forgets to give credit to another person's ideas or words. Plagiarism and cheating can result in a failing grade for an assignment, for the course, or immediate dismissal from the university college. Students are expected to be familiar with the policies in the current Academic Calendar and the Student Handbook that deal with plagiarism, cheating, and the penalties and procedures for dealing with these matters. All cases of academic dishonesty are reported to the Academic Dean and become part of the student's permanent record.

Students are advised to retain this syllabus for their records.”