



## CS 661 Exploring the 'Desert/Wilderness' Experience In Christian Spirituality (3)

Ambrose University College  
February 21-25/2011

**Instructor:** Prof. Charles Nienkirchen Ph.D.

**Office Hours:** By appointment

**Class Times:** M-F 9:00-4:00

**Office:** L2069

**Office Phone:** 410-2000 Ext 5905

**Location:** TBA

**Email:** [cnienkirchen@ambrose.edu](mailto:cnienkirchen@ambrose.edu)

**Website:** [www.downancientpaths.com](http://www.downancientpaths.com)

### Course Description

The course seeks to examine the theme of the 'desert/wilderness' experience in various traditions of Christian spirituality. An integrated biblical/historical/theological/formational approach to the subject will be adopted with a view to helping the student to understand the nature and purpose of the 'desert/ wilderness' experience in the spiritual life of the church and the individual. As a special feature, the course will also include a one-day guided silent retreat. (Class limit - 20 persons)

### Course Objectives

- expose the students to the prominence of the 'desert/wilderness' theme in the Old and New Testaments;
- provide the student with an historical/theological understanding of the major themes of 'desert spirituality' from the late third to mid-fifth centuries;
- inspire in the student a deeper appreciation for the formational value of certain spiritual disciplines which derive from the 'desert' tradition;
- offer guidance in the interpretation of and response to 'desert' experiences in the student's life journey

## Required Texts

Jeff Manion, The Land Between. (Zondervan/2010)  
Laura Swan, The Forgotten Desert Mothers. (Paulist/2001)  
Joseph Cardinal Bernardin, The Gift of Peace. (Doubleday/1997)  
William Elliott, Falling into the Face of God. (Thomas Nelson/2006)

## Course Schedule

- Day 1 a.m. - Into the Wasteland: A Personal Experience of Midlife ‘Convergence’  
- Surveying Biblical Desert Landscapes  
p.m. - Surveying Biblical Desert Landscapes (cont’d)
- Day 2 a.m. - The Rise of the ‘Desert Movement’ in the Early Church  
p.m. - The Spirituality of the ‘Desert Fathers and Mothers’
- Day 3 - Wilderness Time (a one-day guided silent retreat/schedule to be distributed)
- Day 4 a.m. - Silence and Solitude as a Call to the ‘Desert’  
p.m. - The Experience of ‘Darkness’ as ‘Desert’
- Day 5 - The Potential of the ‘Desert’ for Spiritual Growth

## Assignments & Grading

1. **A review/response paper** (6-8 pages) based on Jeff Manion, The Land Between which incorporates the following:
  - a. a discussion of the significance of the book’s title/subtitle as it pertains to the book’s contents (5 marks);
  - b. a discussion of the development of the book’s thesis (10 marks);
  - c. an identification of points of contact between the book’s contents and the student’s own spiritual journey (8 marks);
  - d. an assessment of the strengths, weaknesses and overall value of the book (7 marks).**(30 % of final grade)**

2. A review/response paper (6-8 pages) based on Swan, The Forgotten Desert Mothers, which incorporates the following:

- a. an explanation of the relationship between the title and the thesis/contents of the book (5 marks);
  - b. a discussion of the development of the book's thesis (10 marks);
  - c. an assessment of the book's strengths and weaknesses (10 marks);
  - d. an identification of 5 key issues raised by the book which require further study/analysis. Be precise. (5 marks)
- (30% of final grade)**

3. An autobiographical essay (6-8 pages) using Bernardin, The Gift of Peace as a prompter, on a personal 'desert experience' which does the following:

- a. describes the circumstances whereby the experience entered your life (5 marks);
- b. explains how the experience progressed in your life (5 marks);
- c. reflects on the self-knowledge gained as a result of the experience (5 marks);
- d. reflects on how your knowledge of God and your life were affected by the experience (5 marks).

**(To be eligible for an 'A' range grade, your essay needs to make significant and specific references to the relevance of Bernardin for understanding your own 'desert experience'.**

**(20% of final grade)**

4. **Reports** on the following readings (to be distributed) which includes an identification of 2 major themes in, 2 insights gained from, and 2 personal reflections on each reading. Each report should be approximately 2 pages in length:

William Elliott, Falling into the Face of God.

Kenneth Leech, Experiencing God, pp.127-161.

Douglas Burton-Christie, The Word in the Desert, pp.7-23, 76-98

Padraigan Clancy ed. Celtic Threads, pp.51-61

Andrew Louth, The Wilderness of God, pp.26-41

**(20% of final grade)**

**DUE DATE FOR ALL ASSIGNMENTS: MONDAY, APRIL 11/2011**

**(No extensions will be granted except for very extenuating circumstances which must be discussed and approved by the professor!)**

## Grading Schedule

<b>Excellent</b>		<b>Very Good / Good</b>	<b>Satisfactory</b>	<b>Minimal Pass</b>			
96-100	A+	82-85	B+	68-71	C+	56-59	D+
91-95	A	75-81	B	63-67	C	50-55	D
86-90	A-	72-74	B-	60-62	C-		
						<b>Failure</b>	
						<50	F

## Important Notes:

- A. **Any student who is absent for more than one day of the course will not be eligible to receive a passing grade. All assignments must be completed and turned in to be eligible to receive a passing grade for the course.**
- B. **All late assignments which have not received an officially approved extension will be granted the highest possible failing grade. Extensions will be considered only in cases such as a death in the family, the hospitalization of yourself or a member of your immediate family, or a prolonged illness for which you required treatment by a physician. All requests for extensions must be received in writing at least seven days prior to the due date. Factors such as assignments for other courses, computer software difficulties, or computer printer malfunctions are not sufficient grounds for requesting an extension. If an extension has been granted it is your responsibility when submitting the paper to attach a note indicating the date to which the extension was granted and the date on which the paper is actually submitted. Retain for yourself a copy (software or hard copy) of each paper.**
- C. The title page of **ALL** assignments should include the course name and number, the professor's name, the student's name, student ID number and mailbox number. This is imperative!
- D. **No assignments will be received by electronic transmission.**
- E. Minimum standards of writing will be observed in all type-written essay assignments.
- F. **The cost of the one-day silent retreat at the FCJ Centre on Wednesday, February 23/2011 is \$30. Students are responsible to pay this fee at Financial Services before Wednesday, February 23/2011.**
- G. Students are responsible to check their Ambrose e-mail accounts regularly. E-mails may be used to notify students of cancelled classes or other important details relating to the course.
- H. Use of cell phones, recording devices, head phones, and all other non-essential technology is prohibited.  
Lap top computers, when not used exclusively for taking class notes, are often a distraction to classmates and even the individual user. Their use is discouraged. The instructor reserves the right to prohibit electronic devices in the classroom should they prove to be a distraction. If this becomes the case, students should be prepared to take handwritten notes. Laptops used

- for purposes unrelated to taking lecture notes are prohibited. Violators will be asked to leave the class. Repeat offenders will be directed to the Dean's Office.
- I. Students are expected to respect the learning environment of the classroom and to exhibit courtesy and civility at all times. Make every attempt to be on time. Keep unnecessary conversation to a minimum, as it is distracting to both the instructor and fellow classmates, and often deleterious to a student's performance in class.

### **Additional Information**

It is the responsibility of all students to become familiar with and adhere to academic policies as are stated in the Student Handbook and Academic Calendar.

Plagiarism is a serious offence and carries with it serious penalties.

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).