



CS 661 -1

Exploring the ‘Desert/Wilderness’ Experience in Christian Spirituality

Number of credits: 3

Prerequisite:

N/A

Semester: Winter, 2015

Dates: Feb. 17-21

Days: 9:00-4:00 pm

Room: A2141

Lab – day: N/A

Lab–Room: N/A

Instructor: Charles Nienkirchen, PhD

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Office: L2069

Office hours: By appointment

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/formatonal 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).

When we find ourselves on a desert journey who better to turn to for guidance than the ancient disciples of the desert who have physically and/or spiritually entered into these barren areas, only to emerge with wisdom to share. They learned to live more simply, gratefully, and completely. So too can we. With their guidance we can be released from unnecessary worries and tendencies to travel down fruitless paths.

We know them today as the fourth-century *ammas* and *abbas*. They were people who drew inspiration from Moses, Elijah, John the Baptist, and Jesus, the desert dwellers who lived before them. These prophetic figures knew much about what lies at the core of life. *Abbas* and *ammas* were true spiritual apprentices who appreciated the need to let go of whatever may be squeezing the air out of life either spiritually or psychologically. They were also able to welcome that which would replenish one’s soul and foster inner freedom...

The Desert fathers and Mothers emerged at a time when Christianity was in danger of losing its prophetic character.

Robert J. Wicks, *Crossing the Desert*. (2007): 23-24, 25.

Expected Learning Outcomes:

It is the aim of the course that students acquire:

1. an exposure to the prominence of the ‘desert/wilderness’ theme in the Old and New Testaments;
2. an historical/theological understanding of the major themes of ‘desert spirituality’ from the third to the mid-fifth centuries;

Important Dates:

First day of classes: Feb. 17, 2015

Registration revision period: 4:00PM of the first day of classes

Last day to request revised examination: March 2, 2015

Last day to withdraw from course: 1:00PM of the fourth (4th) day of classes

Last day to apply for time extension for coursework: One month before the final assignment is due

Last day of classes: Feb. 21, 2015

Final Exam: N/A

Time: N/A

Room: N/A

Room

3. an inspiration to develop a deeper appreciation for the formational value of certain spiritual disciplines which derive from the desert tradition;
4. guidance in the interpretation of and response to 'desert' experiences in the student's life journey.

Outline:

NOTE: no electronic recording devices of any kind are to be used in the classroom apart from professorial consent. Failure to comply could result in expulsion from the course.

Day 1- Surveying Biblical Desert Landscapes

Day 2- The Rise of the 'Desert Movement' in the Early Church/The Spirituality of the 'Desert Fathers and Mothers'

Day 3- Wilderness Time at the FCJ Centre (a one-day guided retreat/schedule to be distributed)

Day 4- Silence and Solitude as a Call to the Desert Place/The Experience of 'Darkness' as 'Desert'

Day 5- The Potential of the 'Desert' for Spiritual Growth

Requirements:

1. **a review response paper** (6-8 pages) based on Jeff Manion, *The Land Between* which incorporates the following:
 - a. an identification of the book's thesis and an explanation of its relationship to the title/subtitle (5 marks);
 - b. a discussion of the development of the book's thesis (10 marks);
 - c. an identification of 4 points of contact between the book's contents and the student's own personal journey (8 marks);
 - d. a critical assessment of the strengths (3), weaknesses (2) and overall value (2) of the book (7 marks).

The title of the assignment should be: *A Review/Response: The Land Between*

(30% of the final grade)

2. **a review response paper** (6-8 pages) based on Laura Swan, *The Forgotten Desert Mothers* which incorporates the following:
 - a. an identification of the book's thesis and an explanation of its relationship to the title/subtitle (5 marks);
 - b. a discussion of the development of the book's thesis (10 marks);
 - c. an assessment of the book's strengths (3) and weaknesses (2) (10 marks);
 - d. an identification of 5 key issues raised by the book which require further study/analysis. Be specific! (5 marks).

The title of the assignment should be: *A Review/Response:
The Forgotten Desert Mothers*

(30 % of the final grade)

3. **an autobiographical essay** (6-8 pages) using Bernardin, *The Gift of Peace* as a prompt, 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/intensified 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 must make significant and specific references to the relevance of Bernardin for understanding your ‘desert experience’.)

The title of the assignment should be: *An Autobiographical Essay*

(20% of the final grade)

4. **a reading report** on 5 scholarly, peer reviewed articles of the student’s choice on the subject of desert spirituality which includes the following:
- a. a summary of the thesis of each article;
 - b. a brief discussion of the main themes developed in each article;
 - c. an identification of 3 issues/subjects related to the content of each article which require further research/study on your part.

Note: each article can be reviewed in approximately 2 pages

The title of the assignment should be: *A Reading Report:
Scholarly Articles*

(15% of the final grade)

5. **a reading report** (2-2 ½ pages) on ‘The Life of Antony’ in Wilson-Hartgrove, *The Wisdom of the Desert Fathers and Mothers* which evaluates the relevance/irrelevance of its contents for contemporary Christianity.

The title of the assignment should be: *A Reading Report:
The Life of Antony*

(5 % of the final grade)

The due date for all assignments is April 8th/2015. (No extensions will be granted except for extenuating circumstances to be determined by the professor.)

Submission of Assignments:

All assignments should be submitted in hard copy to the professor.

Attendance:

Students are expected to attend each day of week module classes.

Evaluation:

Review Response Paper #1 (30 %)

Review Response Paper #2 (30%)

Autobiographical Essay (20%)

Reading Report #1 (15 %)

Reading Report #2 (5%)

Grade Summary:

The available letters for course grades are as follows:

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

Please note that final grades will be available on student registration system. Printed grade sheets are no longer mailed out.

Textbooks:

Jeff Manion, *The Land Between*. (Zondervan/2010)

Laura Swan, *The Forgotten Desert Mothers*. (Paulist/2001)

Joseph Cardinal Bernardin, *The Gift of Peace*. (Doubleday/1997)

Bradley Nassif, *Bringing Jesus to the Desert*. (Zondervan/ 2012)

Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, *The Wisdom of the Desert Fathers and Mothers*. (Paraclete/2010)

Policies:

All students have received an Ambrose e-mail account upon registration. It is the student's responsibility to check this account regularly as the Ambrose email system will be the professor's instrument for notifying students of important matters (Cancelled class sessions, extensions, requested appointments, etc.) between class sessions. If students do not wish to use their Ambrose accounts, it is highly recommended that they forward all messages from the Ambrose account to the other account.

During the **Registration Revision Period** students may to enter a course without permission, change the designation of any class from credit to audit and /or voluntary withdraw from a course without financial or academic penalty. These courses will not appear on the student's transcript. Courses should be added or dropped on the student portal by the deadline date, please consult the List of Important Dates. After that date, the original status remains and the student is responsible for related fees.

Students intending to withdraw from a course after the Registration Revision Period must apply to the Office of the Registrar by submitting a Request to Withdraw from a Course by the **Withdrawal Deadline**, please consult the List of Important Dates. Withdrawal from courses after the Registration Revision period will not be eligible for tuition refund. A grade of "W" will appear on the student's transcript.

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.

Students, who find a conflict in their exam schedule must submit a **Revised Examination** Request form to the Registrar's Office by the deadline date, please consult the List of Important Dates. Requests will be considered for the following reasons only: 1) the scheduled final examination slot conflicts with another exam; 2) three final exams within three consecutive exam time blocks; 3) the scheduled final exam slot conflicts with an exam at another institution; 4) extenuating circumstances. Travel is not considered a valid excuse for re-scheduling or missing a final exam.

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 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.

Extensions

Although extensions to coursework in the semester are at the discretion of the instructor, students may not turn in coursework for evaluation after the last day of the scheduled final examination period unless they have received permission for a "**Course Extension**" from the Registrar's Office. Requests for course extensions or alternative examination time must be submitted to the Registrar's Office by the deadline date, please consult the List of Important Dates. Course extensions are only granted for serious issues that arise "due to circumstances beyond the student's control".

Appeal of Grade

An appeal for change of grade on any course work must be made to the course instructor within one week of receiving notification of the grade. An appeal for change of final grade must be submitted to the Office of the Registrar in writing within 30 days of receiving notification of the final grade, providing the basis for appeal. A review fee of \$50.00 must accompany the appeal to review final grades. If the appeal is sustained, the fee will be refunded.

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 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. Students are expected to be familiar with the policies in the current Academic Calendar 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 strongly advised to retain this syllabus for their records.