



Chalmers Summer School 2007

3/19/2006

Oceans of Becoming; Deserts of Life: Voyaging in the Celtic Tradition

Dr. Jonathan Wooding

July 9-13; 1:30-4:30

Course Description

This workshop in Celtic theology will explore the idea of life as a *peregrinatio* from the early Greek accounts of Celtic cosmology, through the 'Spirituality of Exodus' in the early church, and into the Celtic tradition of monastic voyage tales. We will reflect on the contemporary meaning of the voyage idea through the twentieth-century interpretations of the St Brendan story by Thomas Merton, C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien.

Course Format

This course will integrate academic and experiential learning, with lectures, group discussion of primary sources and personal appropriation of material through contemplative reading.

Class Outline

Monday July 9

The Ocean of Becoming

In session One we explore encounters with the sea from the Pre-Socratic tradition, through Stoic conceptions of the Ocean and narrative tales of Antiquity. How did the Ocean represent beginning and ending, a realm of the Gods, and an unfallen world? In what ways were ancient voyagers changed by their encounters with the Ocean?

Texts: Readings from Plutarch, Pomponius Mela and other ancient authors (provided)

Tuesday July 10

Voyaging with Saint and Hero

In session Two we read from two Irish texts: the Voyage of Bran and the Voyage of St Brendan. Though the Voyage of Bran is often presented as a 'pagan' text, it in fact embodies much that is similar to the very Christian, monastic vision of the St Brendan tale. Both tales symbolize our continuing existence in the 'desert'—life, like that of Exodus, between the captivity of earthly existence and the promise of the [New] Jerusalem.

Texts: The Voyage of Bran (at: <http://www.lamp.ac.uk/celtic/BranEng.htm>); and
The Voyage of St Brendan (at: <http://www.lamp.ac.uk/celtic/Nsb.htm>)

Wednesday July 11

The Desert in the Ocean

In session Three we reflect on the nature of *peregrinatio*. For St Augustine, *peregrinatio* (exile) was our life on earth. For St Patrick, *peregrinatio* was the exile from his homeland that empowered his preaching to the Irish. For St Fursey, *peregrinatio* was the teaching of others nations after he had outgrown his own. *Peregrinatio* for

all these saints was a powerful vision of leaving behind their early life to become an exile for Christ. This is still a journey with meaning for anyone who finds inspiration in monastic ideas.

Texts: Selected readings (provided). Life of St Fursey (at <http://www.lamp.ac.uk/celtic/VitaSFursey.htm>)

Thursday July 12

Through Sea and Cloud

In session Four we explore Eucherius of Lyon's idea that Paradise is always accessible from the desert. The desert of the Irish voyages is the desert of the Pentateuch, the desert of Moses and the desert of the fathers. In the Würzburg glosses on 1 Corinthians the glossator talks of the 'desert of life'. How does this compare with Heraclitus's 'ocean of becoming and passing'?

Texts: Selected readings (provided)

Friday July 13

Looking into Aslan's Country

The Irish voyages have inspired a modern spirituality known to nearly every young person. In session Five we find that C.S. Lewis's *Voyage of the Dawn Treader* and J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* depict journeys to understanding of the cosmos that are based on the Voyage of St Brendan. These tales help us to explore the spirituality of Exodus without even knowing it.

Readings: C.S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*; J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*.

Required Course Texts: (Students expected to read these texts prior to course)

1. W.R. Barron and G. Burgess, *The Voyage of St Brendan* (paperback Exeter UP 2004)
2. T. O'Loughlin, *Celtic Theology* (Continuum 2000)
3. Lewis, C.S.. *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. Any edition.
4. Tolkien, J.R.R.. *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Any edition.
5. Selected readings – J. Wooding Translation:
 - The Voyage of Bran See Website: <http://www.lamp.ac.uk/celtic/BranEng.htm>
 - The Voyage of St Brendan See Website: <http://www.lamp.ac.uk/celtic/Nsb.htm>
 - Life of St Fursey See Website: <http://www.lamp.ac.uk/celtic/VitaSFursey.htm>

Recommended Reading:

- T.O'Loughlin, *Living Between Worlds* (Darton Longman Todd 2001)
- M. Atherton, *Celts and Christians* (University of Wales Press 2002)
- J. Wooding (ed.) *The Otherworld Voyage in Early Irish Literature* (Four Courts Press 2000) *possibly out of print*

Course Requirements

1. All participants are expected to attend class daily and engage the learning process for classroom lectures and seminars. Attendance is mandatory for credit students.
2. All students (credit and audit) are expected to do pre-reading of primary texts for the course, and do limited reading of handouts between classes (approximately one hour per day).
3. In order to receive credit for the course, all students taking the course for any type of credit must read three of the assigned texts.
4. For those taking the course for degree credit, (Diploma, M.Div., M.A.T.S., M.A.R.E., Th.M.), see "**Summer School Degree Credit Evaluation Information**" handout for paper requirements.
5. For those taking the course for Chalmers Institute Summer School Continuing Education credit, see handout, "**Summer School Continuing Education Credit Information**," for requirements.
 - For all credit students there will be an extra one-hour meeting with the course grading tutor, additional to class time, for each course, to review credit requirements and decide on an appropriate research topic.

Jonathan Wooding is the Director of the Centre for the Study of Religion in Celtic Societies at University of Wales Lampeter. He has published widely on religious travel, the Voyage of St. Brendan, and tales concerning the Celtic ‘otherworld’.

**All books will be available from the UBC Bookstore after May 14th.
604-822-2665; Toll-Free Canada 1-800-661-3889**