

THEO 6332: Thought of Wendell Berry

North Park Theological Seminary
Elective for MATS, MACF, MACM / Interdisciplinary Elective for MDiv
January 9-13, 2012
8 a.m.-12; 1-4:30 p.m.

I. Instructor Information:

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II. Course Description:

An exploration of Berry's wisdom through representative reading in his fiction, poetry and essays. The course engages key Berrian themes and explores the compatibility and contribution of Berry's vision to contemporary Christian life and thought. Three hours credit.

III. Textbooks:

Wendell Berry, *The Art of the Commonplace: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, ed. Norman Wirzba (Counterpoint, 2003). Read all.

Wendell Berry, *Citizenship Papers* (Counterpoint, 2005). Omit pp. 63-76, 113-26 (these 2 essays are in the text above). Read all the rest.

Wendell Berry, *That Distant Land: The Collected Stories* (Counterpoint, 2004). Try to read all, but omit pp. 124-44, 164-95, 210-49 if you must.

Wendell Berry, *A Timbered Choir: The Sabbath Poems 1979-97* (Counterpoint, 1998). Read all.

Shuman, Joel and Roger Owens, eds., *Wendell Berry and Religion* (University of Kentucky Press, 2009). Omit 190-208. ISBN 978-0-8131-2555-8

IV. Requirements:

Course requirements are threefold: before, during and after the week of class.

Before Class

1. Read all assigned pages from textbooks listed above. (If it becomes clear that you cannot do this, be sure to contact one of the instructors immediately for advice on how to proceed.)
2. Submit an initial response to your encounter with Berry (2 typewritten pages, double-spaced). This response will indicate your impression of Berry, identify key issues and themes you find in his work, pose questions that you hope to investigate or answer during the class. Due **via email** to both instructors no later than January 6. This assignment is pass/fail.
3. Sign up via email with Prof. Phelan to lead one class session (see #3 in the next section).

During Class

1. Attend and participate in class. Our conversation together is the heart of this course. **10%**

2. Read less than 100 pages of additional material as assigned on Blackboard or distributed during the course. (Some of this will be posted on Blackboard so that it can be read before the course if students wish. It will be used as a basis for class discussion.)
3. Each student will be asked to lead discussion of one topic by explaining the issues and questions involved and suggesting a direction for our conversation. This is not a presentation, but a 'closer reading' of one essay. (A list of topics will be posted on Blackboard in mid-November) **10%**

After Class

1. In consultation with the instructors, students will read an additional book by or about Wendell Berry. In most cases, this will be one of Berry's collections of essays or a novel or a book of poetry. This additional reading, along with assigned course reading and class discussions, will be the source of the two course papers, due dates to be announced.
2. Write a 10 page paper pursuing a key theme in Berry's writing. **45%**
3. Write a 5 page reflection on a) the significance of Berry for your vocation/ministry goal, or b) the contribution Berry can make to the church. **35%**

Accommodations. Students with a disability who believe that they may need accommodations in this class are encouraged to contact Academic Services. Please do so as soon as possible to better ensure that such accommodations are implemented in a timely manner. If needed, appointments can be relocated. For further information please review the following website:

www.northpark.edu/Home/index.cfm?northpark=ada.ada_main

Certain accommodations can also be made for students whose first language is not English.

Thought of Wendell Berry
Schedule of topics.

This class schedule indicates readings and sometimes topics being considered during our week together. The numbers indicate sequential class sessions, 2 each morning and 3 each afternoon. See the last page of this handout for a schematic.

Students are required to present one session (instructions follow), so please choose from sessions 3-24. You may email your choices to Jay, who will keep track and let you know which one you are actually assigned. We'd recommend responding early if you want the best chance of getting your top choice. Any student who doesn't respond will be assigned a session. The table of abbreviations follows. (Note that we will consider the poetry of *A Timbered Choir* in session 16.)

ACP	<i>The Art of the Commonplace:</i>
CP	<i>Citizenship Papers</i>
TDL	<i>That Distant Land: The Collected Stories</i>
WBaR	<i>Wendell Berry and Religion</i>

Monday

1. Introduction to Berry [Jay and Brent]
2. Discuss "Introduction" and "A Native Hill" (ACP); "Is Life a Miracle?" (CP); "Discovery of Kentucky" (TDL)
3. Discuss "Sex, Economy, Freedom and Community" (ACP)
4. Discuss "Watch with Me," "Are You All Right," "The Inheritors" (TDL)
5. Discuss "A Jonquil for Mary Penn," "It Wasn't Me," (TDL); Laytham (WBaR)

Tuesday

6. Discuss ACP 195-261; "Watershed and Commonwealth" (CP)
7. Creation: "Gift of Good Land" (ACP); F. Bahnson, Davis (WBaR)
8. Discuss "Feminism, the Body and the Machine" and "The Body and the Earth" (ACP); E. Bahnson (WBaR)
9. Marriage in Berry's thought: Discuss "Men and Women in Search of Common Ground" (ACP); fiction and poetry
10. Childhood in Berry's thought: "A Long Job, Too Late to Quit" (CP); "The Hurt Man," "Don't Send a Boy" (TDL)

Wednesday

11. Discuss "Christianity and the Survival of Creation" (ACP); "The Boundary," "That Distant Land" (TDL)
12. Discuss "The Unsettling of America" (ACP); "The Agrarian Standard," "Still Standing" (CP);
13. Discuss "The Use of Energy" (ACP); "Conservationist and Agrarian," "Tuscany" (CP)
14. Vocation: Hauerwas and Volck (WBaR); "Going to Work" (CP); "A Friend of Mine" (TDL)
15. Health: Discuss "Fidelity" (TDL); "Health Is Membership" (ACP); "Twelve Paragraphs on Biotechnology" (CP); Shuman (WBaR)

Thursday

16. Discuss Sabbath Poems
17. Race: Racism and the Economy" (ACP); "The Prejudice against Country People" (CP)
18. Discuss "In Distrust of Movements" (CP); "Think Little" and "A Bad Big Idea" (ACP); Pinches (WBaR)
19. Politics as Sustaining Community: "It Wasn't Me," "The Wild Birds" (TDL); Church (WBaR)
20. Discuss pp. 1-32 of CP

Friday

21. Discuss “The Burden of the Gospels” (online); cf. part V of ACP; Wirzba (WBaR)
22. Lessons for the Church?: “Let the Farm Judge” (CP); F. Bahnson, Williams, Owens (WBaR)
23. Discuss “Pray Without Ceasing” (TDL); cf. Childress (WBaR)
24. Thinking Like/With Berry: “People, Land, and Community” and “Solving for Pattern” (ACP); “A Long Job...,” “Stupidity in Concentration,” “Two Minds” (CP)
25. Conclusions

Instructions for Discussion Introduction

The course syllabus stipulates that

Each student will be asked to lead discussion of one essay by explaining the issues and questions involved and suggesting a direction for our conversation. This is not a presentation, but a ‘closer reading’ of one essay

Here are further guidelines

- The student will begin the discussion with a brief introductory presentation (5 to 10 minutes; no longer!)
- The purpose of the introduction is to highlight key themes, issues or ideas in the assigned text. (It may help you to imagine completing such sentences as “I think the most important issue here is ...” Or “We can’t read this piece without discussing ...”
- The introduction will be strengthened by drawing connections to other key essays, poems or fiction of Berry that is relevant. (In some cases, it may also be useful to connect to non-Berry texts or to other relevant information. An example: a student provided a list of faith-based agricultural resources in the Chicago area.)
- Students will probably want to transition from introductory presentation to discussion by posing a question or set of questions to begin the discussion. You should give a typed copy of the questions to the instructors. *At this point, the student’s responsibility to lead and guide discussion ends.* However, we hope that the student will be one of the key contributors to the discussion that follows.
- Students sometimes create handouts to accompany their presentation. If you choose to create one, please limit it to one page.

