

HOM/HB5/711 Psalms and the Christian Imagination
Jason Byassee VST spring 2022 Tuesdays 2-5 pm
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“You are throned on the praises of Israel”

This course will look at the psalms and praises of Israel through the lenses of millennia of Jewish and Christian experience in prayer and praise. The psalms are the songbook of Israel, and must be studied in their own historical context. They have unmatched psychological power, attested in John Calvin’s treatment of the Psalms as the “anatomy of the soul,” the mirror to realign our affections. As Christians our only access to these praises is in Christ, the one who died with psalms on his lips. How do they sound different when their ubiquitous “I” includes Jesus of Nazareth, and in him, also us? St. Augustine will be a key interlocutor for the last claim.

We will attend to the history of use (and abuse) of psalms in the church, to critiques of those uses and abuses, and then we will deploy them ourselves. Assignments will include creative reappropriation of the psalms in our own day and various ministry contexts. We will emerge, one hopes, with a renewed love for the psalms of David, a more biting ability to curse like the bible does, wisdom about how to handle imprecations, and ebullience in offering such raucous praise as the 150th Psalm.

Competencies

- 1-To track the various layers of Psalm interpretation through the church’s centuries of witness
- 2-To understand and explain the church’s, especially Augustine’s Christological exegesis in a way that is Israel-honouring
- 3-To interpret the psalms well for your own academic or ecclesial context
- 4-To speak well to God’s people from the poetry of the psalms. Preaching is not merely the referral of information. It is shaping hearers’ lives. Sermons will seek to match the poems’ emotional tenor for the blessing of God’s people.

Assignments (note: this is tentative and subject to change)

- 1-Lead the class discussion on a psalm of your choosing. Be sure to consult sources ancient (Athanasius, Chrysostom, Augustine, Wesselschmidt) and modern. At key points identify interpretive crossroads and describe why you chose the interpretation you did. Presentation will last 30 minutes.

2-Present on another psalm another day in class. The psalms are songs and praises and sighs, and even curses. They open themselves up and practically demand artistically creative interpretation. Present one such rendering for the group, whether in liturgy, song, poem, sermon, fine arts – the list of possibilities is infinite.

Or

Present on a novel hermeneutical approach to the psalms, drawing on the resources listed below or others of your choosing (with instructor permission).

3-Final paper. Write an exegesis paper on a psalm or portion of a psalm that draws on both ancient and contemporary insights and exegetical instincts. 15 pages for most; 25 pages for Th.M. students.

or

Write a sermon series on the Psalms, emphasizing any of the theological themes touched on in the class. For the first sermon, turn in a recording, manuscript, and exegetical notes to me. For the subsequent sermons, outline the content with enough detail that you could stand and preach from them, but no need for manuscript, recording, or notes.

Texts

To buy:

Robert Alter *The Book of Psalms: Translation with Commentary* (New York: Norton, 2009).

Jason Byassee *Psalms 101-150* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2018).

Thomas Merton *Praying the Psalms* (Martino, 2014).

For reference:

Augustine *Expositions of the Psalms 99-120 and Expositions of the Psalms 121-150*, trans. Maria Boulding OSA. *Works of Saint Augustine III/19 & 20* (Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City Press, 2003 & 2005).

St. Basil "Homily 10: A Psalm of the Lot of the Just Man," trans. Sr. Agnes Clare Way, in *Exegetic Homilies* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1963).

____. Homily 15 "A Psalm in Praise of the Power and Providence of God (On Psalm 32) in *ibid.*, 227-245.

____. "Homily 17: Unto the End for Those Who Shall Be Changed, for the Sons of Core for Understanding," on Psalm 44, in *ibid.*, 275-295.

Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds. *The Jewish Study Bible*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

Hans Boersma "The Church Fathers' Spiritual Interpretation of the Psalms," in Jason Van Vliet, ed. *Living Waters from Ancient Springs: Essays in Honor of Cornelis Van Dam* (Eugene, Or.: Pickwick, 2011).

Walter Brueggemann *Psalms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

_____. *The Psalms and the Life of Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995).

Michael Cameron *Christ Meets Me Everywhere: Augustine's Early Figurative Exegesis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

Ellen Charry "Introduction" to *Psalms 1-50* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos, 2015)

St. John Chrysostom *Commentary on the Psalms* Vol. 2. Translated by Robert Charles Hill (Brookline, Mass.: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1998).

St. Gregory of Nyssa *On the Inscriptions of the Psalms* (Brookline, Mass.: Hellenic College Press, no date given).

Robert C. Hill "The Spirituality of Chrysostom's Commentary on the Psalms," in *Journal of Early Christian Studies* Vol. 5, No. 4 (Winter 1997), 569-579.

William Holladay *The Psalms Through 3000 Years: Prayerbook of a Cloud of Witnesses* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996).

Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Eric Zenger *Psalms 3: A Commentary on Psalms 101-150*. Trans. Linda Maloney. In *Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011).

Hans-Joachim Kraus *Psalms 60-150: A Continental Commentary*. Trans. Hilton C. Oswald (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993).

James Limburg *Psalms* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2000).

Martin Luther *Luther's Works: First Lectures on the Psalms II*. Ed. Hilton Oswald (St. Louis: Concordia, 1976).

James Mays *Psalms in Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster, 1994).

Charles Spurgeon *The Treasury of David: Spurgeon's Classic Work on the Psalms. Abridged in One Volume*. Ed. David O. Fuller (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1976).

Roger Van Harn and Brent Strawn *Psalms for Preaching and Worship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009).

Quentin Wesselschmidt *Psalms 51-150 in the Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*. Ed. Thomas C. Oden (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2007).

Articles (massive hat tip to Chris Green of Southeastern University for many of these references)

Athanasius "Letter to Marcellinus," in Robert C. Gregg, ed *Athanasius: The Life of Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus* (New York: Paulist, 1980), 101-130.

Sarah Coakley "On the Fearfulness of Forgiveness: Psalm 130.4 and its Theological Implications," in Andreopoulos, et. al. *Meditations of the Heart: The Psalms in Early Christian Thought and Practice: Essays in Honour of Andrew Louth* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2011), 33-51.

Brian Daley "Is Patristic Exegesis Still Usable? Reflections on Early Christian Interpretation of the Psalms." *Communio* 29 (Spring 2002), 185-216.

Ellen Davis "Feeling Your Way: Preaching the Psalms" in *The Clergy Journal* 82/2 (November/December 2005), 3-5.

____. "Witnessing to God in the Midst of Life," in *Preaching the Luminous Word* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 23-28.

Chris Green "Hearing God's Word in the Presence of our Enemies: Protest, Compassion, and Reconciliation," in Blaine Charette and Robby Waddell, eds. *Spirit and Story: Pentecostal Readings of Scripture: Essays in Honor of John Christopher Thomas* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2020), 135-151.

____. "'I Am Finished,' Christological Reading(s) and Pentecostal Performance(s) of Psalm 88 in *Pneuma* 40 (2018), 150-166.

Lee Roy Martin "Delighting in the Torah: The Affective Dimension of Psalm 1," in *Old Testament Essays* 23/3 (2010), 708-727.

Patrick Miller "Gregory of Nyssa: The Superscriptions of the Psalms" in K. Dell et. al. *Genesis, Isaiah, and Psalms: A Festschrift to Honour Professor John Emerton for his Eightieth Birthday* in *Vetus Testamentum, Supplements*, vol. 135 (2010), 215-229.

Kathleen Norris "The Paradox of the Psalms" in *Cloister Walk* (New York: Riverhead, 1997), 90-107.

Eric Sarwar, "The Missional Singing of the Psalms in Islamic Contexts," *International Bulletin of Mission Research* Vol. 44 No. 2 (2019), 164-173.

Brent Strawn "The Psalms: Types, Functions, and Poetics for Proclamation," in Roger E. Van Harn & Brent Strawn, eds. *Psalms for Preaching and Worship: A Lectionary Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 3-23.

Kallistos Ware "Forgive Us . . . As We Forgive': Forgiveness in the Psalms and the Lord's Prayer" *Incommunion* (Oct. 2013):

<https://incommunion.org/2013/10/01/kallistos-forgiveness/>

Robert Wilken "Seek His Face Always," in *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought: Seeking the Face of God* (New Haven, Ct.: Yale University Press, 2005): 80-109.

Rowan Williams "Augustine and the Psalms" *Interpretation* 58 no. 1 (January 2004), 17-27.

____. "Christological Exegesis of Psalm 45," in Andreopoulos, op. cit., 17-32.

Jeremy Worthen "Praying the Psalms and the Challenges of Jewish-Christian Relations: Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Thomas Merton" in *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* (2014), 1-23.

Schedule (note: this is tentative and subject to change)

January 18 Come to class having read Merton, Byassee introduction, & Charry introduction

January 25 Read in advance: Strawn, Ware, Daley, Davis, and a patristic sermon of your choice (the ones listed above are excellent)

February 1 Psalms 101-105 and relevant material in Alter & Byassee

February 8 Psalms 106-110 "

February 15 Psalms 111-115 "

February 22 Psalms 116-120 "

March 1 (no class, reading week)

March 8 Psalms 121-126 "

March 15 Psalms 127-133 "

March 22 Psalms 134-141 "

March 29 Psalms 142-150 "

April 5 Conclusions. Present on research thus far for final paper or sermon series and get peers' and instructor's feedback.

