

Interpreting the Psalms for Preaching

Wycliffe College
Toronto School of Theology

Instructor Information

Instructor: The Rev. Dr. David A. R. Clark
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Course Identification

Course Number: WYP3328H
Course Format: Online: Remote/Synchronous
Class Dates/Times: Mondays, 11:00-13:00
Prerequisites: “Basics of Preaching” (WYP2301) or permission of instructor

Course Description

This course will enable students to develop the competencies necessary to interpret the Psalms for preaching. Students will explore the history and reception of the Psalms, engage in theological interpretation of the Psalms, and reflect on issues that impact preaching on the Psalms. These scholarly topics will be examined with reference to the homiletic task, thus helping students discover the challenges and possibilities of interpreting the Psalms for preaching. By the completion of the course, students will be able to construct theologically informed, textually attentive, and liturgically appropriate sermons on the Psalms.

Course Resources

Required Course Resources:

To Purchase:

- Ellen T. Charry, *Psalms 1-50: Sighs and Songs of Israel* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2015).
- Jerome F. D. Creach, *Discovering the Psalms: Content, Interpretation, Reception* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020).
- James L. Mays, *The Lord Reigns: A Theological Handbook to the Psalms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994).

To Be Provided:

- David A. R. Clark, “Bonhoeffer’s Christological Interpretation of the Psalms: Tensions, Subjectivity, and the Voice of Christ,” *Pro Ecclesia* 31, no. 2 (May 2022): 175-195.
- Ellen Davis, “Entering the World of the Psalmist” and “Holy Wanting, Holy Waiting, Holy Fear” (available from Wycliffe College via YouTube at <https://youtu.be/A6YKEyH8OBo> and at <https://youtu.be/PQLgH7PxVHk>)

Course Website

This course uses Quercus for its course website. To access it, go to the UofT Quercus login page at <https://q.utoronto.ca/> and login using your UTORid and password. Once you have logged in to Quercus using your UTORid and password, look for the **My Courses** module, where you'll find the link to the website for all your Quercus-based courses. (Your course registration with ACORN gives you access to the course website in Quercus.) Information for students about using Quercus can be found at: <https://community.canvaslms.com/docs/DOC-10701> . Students who have trouble accessing Quercus should contact the registrar's office for further help.

Course Learning Objectives/Outcomes

COURSE OUTCOMES	COURSE ELEMENT	PROGRAM OUTCOMES
By the end of this course, students will be able to	This outcome will be demonstrated through these course elements:	This course outcome corresponds to these aspects of Wycliffe's statements of outcomes (MDiv)
discuss key features of the form, history, and reception of the Psalms.	Annotated Short Sermon, Annotated Full-Length Sermon, Participation (including In-Class Interpretive Exercises)	1.1
engage competently in the theological interpretation of the Psalms.	Annotated Short Sermon, Annotated Full-Length Sermon, Participation (including In-Class Interpretive Exercises)	1.2
construct a theologically informed, textually attentive, and liturgically appropriate sermon on a Psalm selection (from the Revised Common Lectionary).	Annotated Short Sermon, Annotated Full-Length Sermon	2.3
reflect critically and constructively on the challenges and possibilities of interpreting the Psalms for preaching.	Reflection Paper, Participation (including In-Class Interpretive Exercises)	2.3

Evaluation

Requirements

The final grade for the course will be based on evaluations in four areas:

(1) Reflection Paper (20%)

In this essay, students will engage with the assigned lectures by Davis to reflect on the challenges and possibilities of interpreting the Psalms for preaching.

(2) Annotated Short Sermon (20%)

This assignment has three components: a short sermon (800-1,000 words) on an assigned Psalm selection (from the Revised Common Lectionary), a short critical introduction (300-400 words), and annotations (explanatory footnotes) addressing theological and interpretive decisions.

(3) Annotated Full-Length Sermon (40%)

This assignment, which builds on the Annotated Short Sermon, likewise has three components: a full-length sermon (1,800-2,000 words) on an assigned Psalm selection (from the Lectionary), a critical introduction (500-600 words), and annotations (explanatory footnotes) addressing theological and interpretive decisions.

(4) Participation, including In-Class Interpretive Exercises (20%)

In order to cultivate an effective online learning environment, students are expected to participate in ways that demonstrate discipline and respect. Discipline requires attending consistently, logging on punctually, and preparing adequately to take part in discussions. Respect involves gracious and charitable interactions with students and instructor, including an openness to listen and learn from others. In order to facilitate meaningful participation in online discussions, it is essential that students complete all the required readings carefully and attentively.

This evaluation will also assess participation in the In-Class Interpretive Exercises. Classes will begin with a discussion of a Lectionary selection from the Psalms (assigned in advance). Students will prepare by studying the text and the corresponding commentary by Charry. At least one student will be designated "Discussion Leader" for each In-Class Interpretive Exercise.

Course Schedule

Class 1, (January 9): Psalter and Pulpit (1 of 2)

- Creach, 1-27
- Charry, xviii-xxvi

Class 2 (January 16) The Psalms as Poetry; The Tradition of David (1 of 2)

- Creach, 28-60
- In-Class Interpretive Exercise: Psalm 1; Charry on Psalm 1

Class 3 (January 23): The Genres and Settings of the Psalms

- Creach, 61-97
- In-Class Interpretive Exercise: Psalm 2; Charry on Psalm 2

Class 4 (January 30) The Shape of the Psalter (1 of 2)

DUE Reflection Paper

- Creach, 101-119
- In-Class Interpretive Exercise: Psalm 4; Charry on Psalm 4

Class 5 (February 6) Psalmic Theology: “The LORD Reigns!” (1 of 2) and Theological Anthropology

- Creach, 120-146
- In-Class Interpretive Exercise: Psalm 5:1-8; Charry on Psalm 5

Class 6 (February 13): The Psalms as Prayers (1 of 2)

- Creach, 149-164
- In-Class Interpretive Exercise: Psalm 8; Charry on Psalm 8

No Class: Reading Week (February 20)

Class 7 (February 27): Interpreting Imprecatory Psalms

- Creach, 165-189
- Clark, “Bonhoeffer’s Christological Interpretation of the Psalms: Tensions, Subjectivity, and the Voice of Christ”
- In-Class Interpretive Exercise: Psalm 13; Charry on Psalm 13

Class 8 (March 6): Psalmic Theology: “The LORD Reigns!” (2 of 2)

DUE Annotated Short Sermon

- Mays, ix-xii and 1-22
- In-Class Interpretive Exercise: Psalm 14; Charry on Psalm 14

Class 9 (March 13): The Psalms as Prayers (2 of 2)

- Mays, 23-58
- In-Class Interpretive Exercise: Psalm 15; Charry on Psalm 15

Class 10 (March 20): The Psalms as Praise; The Tradition of David (2 of 2)

- Mays, 59-116
- In-Class Interpretive Exercise: Psalm 16; Charry on Psalm 16

Class 11 (March 27): The Shape of the Psalter (2 of 2)

- Mays, 117-145
- In-Class Interpretive Exercise: Psalm 19; Charry on Psalm 19

Class 12 (April 3): Psalter and Pulpit (2 of 2)

DUE Annotated Full-Length Sermon

- In-Class Interpretive Exercise: Psalm 20; Charry on Psalm 20

Selected Resources

Introductions and Overviews

- Brueggemann, Walter. *Praying the Psalms: Engaging Scripture and the Life of the Spirit*, 2nd ed. Eugene: Cascade, 2007.
- Crenshaw, James L. *The Psalms: An Introduction*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001.
- Davis, Ellen F. "Pain and Praise: The Psalms as Common Prayer." In *Getting Involved with God: Rediscovering the Old Testament*, 7-41. Lanham: Cowley Publications, 2001.
- deClaissé-Walford, Nancy L. *Introduction to the Psalms: A Song from Ancient Israel*. St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004.
- Sarna, Nahum M. *On the Book of Psalms: Exploring the Prayers of Ancient Israel*. New York: Schocken Books, 1993.

Scholarly Studies

- Brueggemann, Walter. "A Fissure Always Uncontained." In *Strange Fire: Reading the Bible after the Holocaust*, edited by Tod Linfelt, 62-75. New York: New York University Press, 2000.
- Childs, Brevard. "Psalm Titles and Midrashic Exegesis." *Journal of Semitic Studies* 26, no. 2 (Autumn 1971): 137-150.
- Clark, David A. R. "Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Prayerbook of the Bible*, and the Reichsschrifttumskammer (RSK): Reassessing the Historical Record." *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 17, no. 1 (March 2022): 1-19.
- Mandolfo, Carleen. "Psalm 88 and the Holocaust: Lament in Search of a Divine Response." *Biblical Interpretation: A Journal of Contemporary Approaches* 15 (2007): 151-170.
- Miller, Patrick D. "Trouble and Woe: Interpreting the Biblical Laments." *Interpretation* 37, no. 1 (January 1983): 32-45.
- Sweeney, Marvin A. "Complaints to G-d in Psalms and Lamentations: The Voice of the Victims." In *Reading the Hebrew Bible after the Shoah*, 167-187. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008.
- Williams, Rowan. "Augustine and the Psalms." *Interpretation* 58, no. 1 (2004): 17-27.

Preaching, Teaching, and Commentaries

- Brueggemann, Walter. "Preaching from the Psalms." In *Preaching from the Old Testament*, 111-146. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2019.
- Mays, James L. *Preaching and Teaching the Psalms*. Edited by Patrick D. Miller and Gene M. Tucker. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006.
- . *Psalms*. Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994.
- McCann, J. Clinton, Jr., and James C. Howell. *Preaching the Psalms*. Nashville: Abington Press, 2001.

Theological and Ethical Approaches

- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. "Christ in the Psalms." In *Theological Education at Finkenwalde: 1935-1937 (DBWE 14)*, edited by H. Gaylon Barker and Mark S. Bocker, translated by Douglas W. Stott, 386-393. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013.
- . *Prayerbook of the Bible: An Introduction to the Psalms*. In *Life Together and Prayerbook of the Bible (DBWE 5)*, edited by Geoffrey B. Kelly, translated by Daniel W. Bloesch and James H. Burtneiss, 141-181. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996.
- . "Sermon on Psalm 58." In *DBWE 14*, 963-970.
- Clark, David A. R. "Psalm 74:8 and November 1938: Rereading Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Kristallnacht* Annotation in Its Interpretive Context." *Scottish Journal of Theology* 71, no. 3 (August 2018): 262-263.
- McCann, J. Clinton, Jr. *A Theological Introduction to the Book of Psalms*. Nashville: Abington Press, 1993.
- Wenham, Gordon J. *Psalms as Torah: Reading Biblical Song Ethically*. Studies in Theological Interpretation. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012.

Policies

Grading System - Basic Degree Students

1000, 2000 and 3000 level courses use the following numerical grading scale (see section 11.2 of the BD Handbook):

90-100 (A+)	Exceptional
85-89 (A)	Outstanding
80-84 (A-)	Excellent
77-79 (B+)	Very Good
73-76 (B)	Good
70-72 (B-)	Acceptable
0-69 (FZ)	Failure

Late work (BD). Basic Degree students are expected to hand in assignments by the date given in the course outline. Under exceptional circumstances a student may request a short extension to be negotiated with the instructor. Instructors are not obliged to accept assignments that are late. If the instructor chooses to accept an assignment, where an extension has not been requested and approved before the due date, then **one percentage point per day will be deducted**. The absolute deadline for the submission of assignments is the examination day scheduled for the course or the last day of exam week for the semester in which the course is taught, whichever is sooner.

Students with documented medical or compassionate difficulties or exceptional reasons (e.g., a death in the family or a serious illness) who are unable to submit their work by the end of the term are requested to consult with their instructor and request an SDF. The form is available on our website at this link

<https://www.wycliffecollege.ca/sites/default/files/Basic%20Degree%20Request%20For%200Extension.pdf> or can be collected from the registrar's office. An SDF request must be submitted, with instructor approval and with an agreed deadline, to the registrar's office no later than the last day of the exam week or the last day of class in which the course is taken. The SDF, when approved, will have a mutually agreed upon deadline that does not extend beyond one year. If a student has not completed work and has not been granted an SDF, a final mark will be calculated that reckons a grade of zero for that component of work that was not submitted.

Course grades. Consistently with the policy of the University of Toronto, course grades submitted by an instructor are reviewed by a committee of the instructor's college before being posted to ACORN. Grades are not official until they are posted to ACORN. Course grades may be adjusted where they do not comply with University Assessment and Grading Practices Policy found at <https://governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/secretariat/policies/grading-practices-policy-university-assessment-and-january-26-2012>, policies found in the TST conjoint program handbooks, or college grading policy.

Accessibility. Students with a disability or health consideration, whether temporary or permanent, are entitled to accommodation. Students in conjoint degree programs must register at the University of Toronto's Accessibility Services offices; information is available at <http://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/as>. The sooner a student seeks accommodation, the quicker we can assist.

Plagiarism. Students submitting written material in courses are expected to provide full documentation for sources of both words and ideas in footnotes or endnotes. Direct quotations should be placed within quotation marks. (If small changes are made in the quotation, they should be indicated by appropriate punctuation such as brackets and ellipses, but the quotation still counts as a direct quotation.) Failure to document borrowed material constitutes plagiarism, which is a serious breach of academic, professional, and Christian ethics. An instructor who discovers evidence of student plagiarism is not permitted

to deal with the situation individually but is required to report it to his or her head of college or delegate according to the TST *Basic Degree Handbook* and the Graduate program Handbooks linked from <http://www.tst.edu/academic/resources-forms/handbooks> and the University of Toronto *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters* <https://governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/secretariat/policies/code-behaviour-academic-matters-july-1-2019>. A student who plagiarizes in this course will be assumed to have read the document “Avoidance of plagiarism in theological writing” published by the Graham Library of Trinity and Wycliffe Colleges: <https://www.trinity.utoronto.ca/library/research/theology/avoiding-plagiarism-in-theological-writing/>

Other academic offences. TST students come under the jurisdiction of the University of Toronto *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters* <https://governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/secretariat/policies/code-behaviour-academic-matters-july-1-2019>.

Back-up copies. Please make back-up copies of essays before handing them in.

Obligation to check email. At times, the course instructor may decide to send out important course information by email. To that end, all students in conjoint programs are required to have a valid utoronto email address. Students must have set up their utoronto email address which is entered in the ACORN system. Information is available at www.utorid.utoronto.ca. The course instructor will not be able to help you with this. 416-978-HELP and the Help Desk at the Information Commons can answer questions you may have about your UTORid and password. Students should check utoronto email regularly for messages about the course. **Forwarding** your utoronto.ca email to a Hotmail, Gmail, Yahoo or other type of email account is not advisable. In some cases, messages from utoronto.ca addresses sent to Hotmail, Gmail or Yahoo accounts are filtered as junk mail, which means that emails from your course instructor may end up in your spam or junk mail folder. Students in non-conjoint programs should contact the Registrar of their college of registration.

Email communication with the course instructor. The instructor aims to respond to email communications from students in a timely manner. *All email communications from students in conjoint programs must be sent from a utoronto email address.* Email communications from other email addresses are not secure, and also the instructor cannot readily identify them as being legitimate emails from students. The instructor is not obliged to respond to email from non-utoronto addresses for students in conjoint programs. Students in non-conjoint programs should only use the email address they have provided to their college of registration.

Writing: Style and Conventions Written work should conform to Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 9th edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018). A useful “Quick Guide” can be accessed at: <https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/turabian/turabian-notes-and-bibliography-citation-quick-guide.html>

An additional guide, entitled “Citation and Bibliographic Formats for Theological Papers,” can be found here:

<https://www.trinity.utoronto.ca/library/research/theology/citation-and-bibliographic-formats-for-theological-papers/>