

**The Catholic University of America
School of Theology and Religious Studies
The Spirituality of Psalms**

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3 credit hours

Course Description: This course is a study of the Psalms including close attention to selected psalms and the structure of the Psalter as a whole. It also involves examination of the interpretation and use of psalms in worship and liturgy.

Course goals: The course will investigate the Psalter as a canonical collection of prayers, how psalms have been interpreted through the ages, and various problems in psalm study and use (violent language, translation issues, etc).

Learning goals: At the conclusion of the course, students will be able to think and write critically about the psalms, prayer, and the psychology of religion, and be able to correlate scientific and religious studies. Students will be able to gain limited access to the original text of the psalms through various electronic and print resources that require knowledge of the Hebrew alphabet.

Required Resources:

1. Philip S. Johnston and David G. Firth (eds.), *Interpreting the Psalms: Issues and Approaches*. IVP Academic Press, 2005. An excellent collection of essays introducing scholarship on the Psalms.
2. Bernd Janowski, *Arguing with God: A Theological Anthropology of the Psalms*. Trans. Armin Siedlecki; Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 2013.
3. Internet access, including university email. Many assigned readings will be available electronically on Blackboard or from the internet, and work will typically be handed in through Blackboard.
4. Recommended: A small portable Psalter. For example, New Catholic Version (NCV), which exists only for the Psalms. A similar volume with the NIV translation is also available. The 'old' NAB Psalms is separately printed and available. The NABRE Psalms may also become available.

Course Requirements:

Participation (10%): The participation grade reflects consistent preparation for class, attendance, participation through speaking and listening during class discussion, and in-class assignments.

Homework (20%): There will be homework due for some classes, typically due by noon on days we have class. The homework may consist of short answers to questions related to the readings and/or brief informal writing.

Paper (70%): There will be a paper due (approx 20-25 pages). Topics are open, but need to be approved. You will present the content of your paper to the class near the end of the semester and hand in a rough draft to the instructor. The final draft will be due during exam week. There will be no exam.

Note on Psalm Numbering:

The Psalms are numbered differently in the ancient Hebrew and Greek manuscripts. Traditionally, Catholic Bibles (following the Latin Vulgate) used the Greek enumeration and Protestant Bibles used the Hebrew numeration. Now, everyone uses the Hebrew numeration. However, you may still see the Greek numeration used in editions of Psalm commentaries by ancient Christian commentators like St. Augustine or St. Jerome. When consulting such sources, make sure you have the right psalm since the psalm number may differ. The differences may be summarized as follows (see also *The Psalms* [New Catholic Version] introduction):

Hebrew	Greek
1–8	1–8
9–10	9
11–113	10–112
114–115	113
116	114–115
117–146	116–145
147	146–147
148–150	148–150

Furthermore, verse numbers may vary among translations because some treat the Psalms titles as the first verse of the psalm, other regard them as separate from the psalms and not numbered among the verses.

Scholars now refer to the psalms according to their Hebrew numeration unless there is reason to note the Greek numeration. When a scholar wishes to note both numbering systems in referring to a psalm, the Hebrew is given first, followed by the Greek number in parenthesis. For example, Psalm 51:3(50:3). The RSV available on Blackboard gives both numbers when they are different. Sometimes in works by or about Church Fathers (who follow the Greek numbering), the reverse order may be used. For example, Psalm 50(51).

Calendar of Readings

NOTE: This syllabus is subject to change. Check Blackboard. The announcements on Blackboard for each week will indicate the readings for each day.

In addition to the readings indicated on Blackboard, read Psalms every day of the week. Specifically:

Sunday: Psalms 1–29
Monday: Psalms 30–50
Tuesday: Psalms 51–72
Wednesday: Psalms 73–89
Thursday: Psalms 90–106
Friday: Psalms 107–119
Saturday: Psalms 120–150

By following this systematic reading of the Psalter used in Jewish tradition (something similar is used on Eastern Orthodoxy) you will become familiar with the whole Psalter (including parts omitted from the Liturgy of Hours) and the sequence of the psalms (which is dramatically disrupted in the Liturgy of the Hours). As you read, consider the sequencing and organization of the book of Psalms, which appears to have been carefully planned.

Week 1 (Jan. 14)

W: Intro; student survey; on praying psalms

Week 2 (Jan. 21)

W: Psalms 1–2; Intro to Psalms in Oxford Bible Commentary; *Interpreting the Psalms*, chaps. 1, 5, and 11; Stuhlmüller, “How to Read a Psalm”; Athanasius on the Psalter

Week 3 (Jan. 28)

W: Psalms 1–3; 2 Samuel 13–19; Janowski, chaps. 1–2; Berlin, “Hebrew Poetry”; commentaries on Psalm 3 by Goldingay, Schaefer, Jerusalem Commentary; Hood, *Psychology of Religion*, chap. 1; Park, “Religion and Meaning”; Oman, “Defining Religion and Spirituality”

Week 4 (Feb. 4)

W: *Interpreting the Psalms*, chaps. 3 and 10; Brueggemann, “Costly Loss of Lament”; Janowski chap. 3; Kirkpatrick, “Evolutionary Psychology as Foundation for Psychology of Religion”; Rimé on social sharing of emotion; Beth’s Psalm; Fallot (APA), “Religious and Spiritual Dimensions of Traumatic Violence”; Murrar-Swank (APA), “Spirituality, Religion, and Sexual Trauma”

Week 5 (Feb. 11)

W: *Interpreting the Psalms*, chap. 12-13; “Back Story of Creation”; Augustine on Psalm 137; *Reading the Bible with the Dead*, chap ?; Janowski chap. 4; Gall (APA), “Religious and Spiritual Coping”; Ladd (APA), “Prayer”

Week 6 (Feb. 18)

W: Book of Job; Bono, Preface to Psalms; Janowski chap. 5; Rimé on social support; Kirkpatrick, "Religion, Spirituality, and Attachment"; Kirkpatrick, *Attachment, Evolution, and the Psychology of Religion*, pp. 28-39 and 52-74

Week 7 (Feb. 23)

W: Janowski chap. 6; Zaleski, chaps. 1-2; Sloan, *Blind Faith* chap. 3; ANE incantations; Gellar, *Ancient Babylonian Medicine* chaps. 1-2;

Week 8 (March 2)

W: ANE incantations; Foy (APA), "Religion and Spirituality in Military Settings"; Cotton (APA) on religion and child illness; Koenig (APA), religion and acute/chronic illness

Week 9 (March 11) Spring Break**Week 10 (March 18)**

W: ANE hymns; Janowski chap. 7; Soenke (APA), "Anxiety and Fear of Death"

Week 11 (March 25)

W: Janowski chaps. 8–9; Carlisle (APA), "Gratitude and Forgiveness"; Saroglou, "Altruism"

Week 12 (April 1)

W: Janowski chap. 10; commentaries on Psalm 22

Week 13 (April 8)

W: Student presentations

Week 14 (April 13)

W: Student presentations

Week 15 (April 20)

W: Student presentations

Week 16 (April 29)

W: