CA 660 Song Lyrics and Theology

Lester Ruth

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Syllabus

Song Lyrics and Theology CA660/WO660 (3 hours; Credit/No Credit)
Class size: limited to 12 students
Dr. Lester Ruth

Course Description:

From old song to new song. That will be the method and aim of this course. In it students will follow the footsteps of John and Charles Wesley in using theological training to develop songs for worship. This seminar-type course will explore various collections of classic worship materials, including Wesleyan hymnody, to uncover profound theological themes and motifs. Students will be expected to show theological enrichment by composing lyrics for new worship songs to be shared with the class. Other poetic or liturgical expressions (e.g., a consecratory prayer for the Lord’s Supper) are negotiable with the professor.

Students’ compositions will be evaluated not on the basis of musical quality but on their theological profundness and suitability for the church’s worship of the God revealed in Jesus Christ.

Course Objectives

Students completing this course will be able to:

1) read historic poetic and liturgical texts with a discerning theological eye shaped by a Wesleyan perspective;
2) interpret historic liturgical material, articulating its meaning and significance and placing it within its historical context;
3) use historical material to enrich their own song composition by applying insights gained from contemplating this material.

Prerequisite: ST501 or DO501

Professor’s information:

Dr. Lester Ruth; BC (Beeson) 218; 859-858-2175 or 859-219-9166; lester_ruth@asburyseminary.edu; Office hours: XXX. Other times can be scheduled. Telephone calls are much preferred over emails at any time. I will also eat lunch in the cafeteria several times a week and welcome opportunities to converse then.

Student information:

The student is expected to come with an open heart and mind. Humility, too, to approach and appreciate worship expressions of previous Christians will also be necessary. A playful, creative spirit, soaked in seeking prayer, will prove helpful to produce the required compositions. A thick skin and the ability to laugh at one’s self probably would not hurt either as we evaluate each other’s compositions. The ability to offer gentle, yet insightful, critique will be invaluable, too.
Course requirements:
Each student must complete the following in order to receive credit for the course:
1) attendance and reading to the end that the student can participate fully and well in class discussions (see description of expectations for preparation and participation in Appendix A);
2) 3 individual class presentations (see immediately below);
3) 3 song compositions;

For the three individual class presentations, the student must do the following:
--select material from the historic sources from those pages listed below in the course schedule;
--do a careful reading of the historic text;
--be prepared to introduce this text to the class in a 15-20 minute presentation, including the following elements: a) a review of the major theological theme(s) and perspective of the text; b) an interpretation of the material within its larger collection; c) and an estimation of how this piece could inform or enrich the worship of Christians today.
The professor will evaluate these presentations as to whether the student makes an accurate appraisal of the historic text. He reserves the right to have students redo presentations severely deficient in one or more traits listed above.

For the song compositions, the student must do the following:
--write an original piece to be presented to the class (leading the class in performing the piece is preferred);
--provide an interpretation of the piece including the following elements: a) a review of the major theological theme(s) and perspective of the piece; b) an appraisal of the Wesleyan character of the piece; c) a description of how the student used historical material to inform her or his composition; and d) an estimation of appropriate use of the piece in Christian worship.
The professor will evaluate these presentations as to whether the student makes a viable case that the composition is theologically appropriate for God’s people worshiping the Triune God.

If a student wishes to express appropriation of the historical material in another artistic form, this alternative can be negotiated with the professor.

Grading:
The class is offered credit/no credit. To receive credit for the class the student must complete all the requirements listed above in a timely and full manner. The class cannot be passed with more than 2 unexcused absences.

Required texts and materials:
An anthology of public domain texts from the patristic era (course packet); 3 pages


Wybrew, Hugh. *Orthodox Lent, Holy Week and Easter: Liturgical Texts with Commentary.* Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press.


Students will be expected to read all the pages specified in the weekly schedule below. The first category (common reading) represents the material we will discuss jointly. The second category (available for student presentations) represents material you should read so as to develop your individual presentations as discussed above.

**Class time schedule:**

We will use the class time in the following manner. The first segment of class will include discussion of the texts assigned for the entire class. The second segment of class will consist of individual student presentations on selections from our sources not covered as common texts. The third segment of class will be time for students to share and explain their own compositions.

The relative proportion of each week’s class time given to each segment will shift as we progress through the semester. Expect to spend more time in each class doing common readings and individual presentations through the first 2/3 of the semester.
The 3 individual student presentations must be completed by week 10. Only 1 such presentation can be given in any single class period by an individual student. (That means you must start to give individual presentations by week 8.)

**Weekly schedule:**
- **Week 1:** A Wesleyan method for lyrical theology  
  Common reading: Chilcote article; Parsons article

- **Week 2:** A Wesleyan method for lyrical theology  
  Common reading: Berger book

- **Week 3:** Wesleyan hymnody  
  Common reading: Hildebrandt and Beckerlegge, pp. 1-22, 79-157  
  Available for student presentations: choose 50 pages from pp. 201-307

- **Week 4:** Wesleyan hymnody  
  Common reading: Hildebrandt and Beckerlegge, pp. 308-397  
  Available for student presentations: choose 50 pages from pp. 398-500

- **Week 5:** Wesleyan hymnody  
  Common reading: Hildebrandt and Beckerlegge, pp. 501-605  
  Available for student presentations: choose 50 pages from pp. 606 to end of hymns

- **Week 7:** Patristic and Eastern texts  
  Common reading: the anthology in course packet, Romanos the Melodist, pp. 3-111  
  Available for student presentations: lingering presentations from Wesley hymnal and from Romanos the Melodist, pp. 155-230

- **Week 8:** Lent/Holy Week/Easter: Eastern  
  Common reading: Wybrew, pp. 23-26, 30-40, 79-88, 101-118  
  Available for student presentations: remainder of book; lingering presentations from Romanos the Melodist

- **Week 9:** Anabaptists and Suffering  
  Common reading: Riall, 47-106  
  Available for student presentations: choose 50 pages from Riall 107-206

- **Week 10:** Anabaptists and Suffering  
  Common reading: Riall, 207-261  
  Available for student presentations: choose 50 pages from Riall 263ff

- **Week 11:** Christmas/Epiphany: Western  
  Common reading: Huck and Simcoe, pp. 4-69, 105-113, 144-149

- **Week 12:** Isaac Watts  
  Common reading: Watts, pp. 289-401 (Hymns 1 through 150 in Book One)
Week 13: Isaac Watts
Common reading: Watts, pp. 402-451 (Hymns 1 through 68 in Book Two); pp. 521-548 (all of Book Three)
Appendix A
Criteria for Preparation and Participation

**Satisfactory** preparation and participation by a student shows the following characteristics:

- Attended all of class
- Has completed all the exercises and assignments assigned for the class
- Demonstrates engagement and interest with the class and the material
- Can show going beyond mere repetition of the material to be read and reviewed by asking questions or making comments that show her or his own insights on the material; this can be shown by insightful integration of today’s material with other course material; can discuss viewpoints with intensity but without combativeness or abusiveness
- Facilitates learning by others on the material by asking key questions, making helpful explanations or insights, and/or providing useful summary
- Can listen well and at the right time

**Unsatisfactory** preparation and participation by a student shows the following characteristics:

- Missed class, arrived late, or left early for an inexcusable reason
- Did not complete all exercises and assignment assigned
- Acts dismissive, uninterested, or abusive toward the material, the class, or other class members; perhaps combative
- Shows no familiarity with the material or only the most rote, preliminary sort of repetition of the material to be read or reviewed; perhaps shows no ability to think beyond pre-formed opinions
- Does not help the learning of others or actually detracts from the learning of others
- Does not listen well and at the right time
Appendix B
Covenant (To be completed by each student)

Understanding that a class of this sort—with in-class performance subject to the
verbal review of others—is an intimidating situation, I commit myself, in union with my
classmates, to the terms of the following covenant:

• All critique of others is to be given with gentleness and graciousness, genuinely
offered in the hope that his or her improvement will be of ultimate benefit to God's
church; and

• All critique of myself is to be received with graciousness, humility, and humor,
genuinely accepted in the hope that my improvement will be of ultimate benefit to God's
church.

Signed: __________________________________________

Date: __________________________

(to be filled out by each student at the beginning of the semester)