

BI901DE THE PSALMS  
Developed by Rev. Paul CB Schenck, MA, MS, EdD.  
Syllabus

1. COURSE DESCRIPTION: BI901DE Psalms.

This course will examine the Book of Psalms, known in the Hebrew canon as *Sefer Tehillim*, or simply *Tehlim*, “Book of Praises” and in the LXX (Greek) as *Psalmos*, represents the high-point of biblical poetry. The compositions included in the five volumes retained in the Hebrew, Greek, Ethiopic and Latin canons, play a key role in the various liturgical and devotional traditions. The course will proceed along the *chumeshi* format of the *Masora* (Hebrew canon), i.e., the five volume structure. The content as well as the historical, and linguistic context will be surveyed, with attention to the distinctive interpretations of the Jewish, Eastern and Western Christian, and contemporary, schools. The usage of the Psalms in liturgies and other services will be reviewed. Course participants will be expected to read the Psalms, references, and class lectures, fulfill all the written assignments and participate in classroom discussions and virtual conferences.

Required Texts: The Book of Psalms: A translation and commentary. Robert Alter. New York: W.W. Norton & Co. 2007.

The Revised Grail Psalms: A liturgical psalter. Singing version. Benedictine Monks of Conception Abbey. Chicago: GIA Publications. 2010.

2. LEARNING OUTCOMES:

- The course participant demonstrates a basic understanding of the place of the Book of Psalms in the Bible.
- Demonstrates an understanding of the literary content of the Psalms.
- Demonstrates a clear knowledge of the theological content and interpretation of the Psalms.
- Shows an understanding of the literary and historical context of the Psalms.
- Understands the various usages of the Psalms in religious history.
- Demonstrates an understanding of the distinctions between the place and use of the Psalms in the Jewish, Catholic, Protestant and contemporary communities.
- Understands the use of the Psalms in the Liturgies of the Hours, the Liturgy of the Word, and other Catholic services and devotions.

3. COURSE SCHEDULE:

**Week 1 – Module I.** Module I is an introduction to the course and the Book of Psalms. An introductory survey of the Book of Psalms, the history and various versions of the Psalms, and the distinctions

between the various usages of Psalms in Jewish, Christian, and other religious traditions will be presented.

Class objectives:

1. Participant will know the linguistic, historical, and geographic origins of the Psalter.
  2. Participant will demonstrate a basic understanding of the place of the Book of Psalms in the Bible.
  3. Participant will demonstrate an understanding of the literary content of the Psalms.
  4. Participant will be familiar with the first division of the Psalter.
- Readings:
    - The First Book of the Book of Psalms (Pss. 1-41 in Alter & Grail).
    - Course lecture, media.
    - Alter, Introduction, Part V, pgg xxxv – xxxviii.
  - Post: Summarize, in 200-300 words, the main ideas in the lecture, media, text, reference the Psalm readings.
  - Read and respond (briefly) to two classmates' posts.

**Week 2 – Module II.** Canons and organization of the Psalms.

Module II examines the development of the Psalms, as individual compositions with their origins and context. The literary structures and styles will be surveyed. The organization of the book will be reviewed.

Class objectives:

1. Participant will know the development of the Psalms.
2. Participant will demonstrate a basic understanding of the individual compositions with their origins and context.
3. Participant will demonstrate an understanding of the literary content of the Psalms.
4. Participant will be familiar with the organization of the book.
5. Readings:

- course lecture & media.
- First Psalms of Books 2, 3, 4 & 5.
- Alter, Introduction, Part II, pgg. xviii – xx.

6. Post: Summarize in 200-300 words the development of the Psalms, and outline the assembling of the Book.

### **Week 3 – Module III.** Interpretations of Psalms.

Module III looks at the ancient purpose and use of the Psalms. The ancient Temple cultus, synagogue and Jewish devotional practices, and early Christian, including Patristic usage, will be reviewed.

Class objectives:

- Shows an understanding of the literary and historical context of the Psalms.
- Demonstrates an understanding of the literary content of the Psalms.
- Demonstrates a clear knowledge of the theological content and interpretation of the Psalms.
- Understands the various usages of the Psalms in religious history.
- Readings:
  - Course lecture & media.
  - Psalm 81 in Alter & Grail. If you can, include a reading in a language other than English.
  - Alter, Introduction, Part IV, pgg. xxviii – xxxv.
- Post: In 150-200 words explain the liturgical purpose of the Psalm, its historical and geographic context, and what type of Psalm it is.

### **Week 4 – Module IV.** History & timeline of the psalms.

Module Four will examine the history and timeline of the psalms and organize the psalms along the timeline.

Class objectives:

- Demonstrates a clear knowledge of the theological content and interpretation of the Psalms.
- Shows an understanding of the literary and historical context of the Psalms.
- Readings:
  - Course lecture & media.

- Alter, Alter, Introduction, Part I, pgg. xiii – xviii.
- Post: In 200-300 words summarize the historical periods and the range and type of psalms within those periods.

### **Week 5 – Module V. Psalm 119**

Module V is a study of Psalm 119. Psalm 119 incorporates many of the characteristics, styles, and elements of the psalms. Psalm 119 is an acrostic and was used liturgically and catechistically.

Classroom objectives:

- Demonstrates an understanding of the literary content of the Psalms.
  - Demonstrates a clear knowledge of the theological content and interpretation of the Psalms.
- Shows an understanding of the literary and historical context of the Psalms.
- Reading: Psalm 119 in Alter (with notes) & Grail. If you can, include a language other than English.
- Post: Explain in 200-300 words how Psalm 119 might be used catechistically.
- 500-750 word essay due in Module VII. Choose a Psalm and write an introduction to it, survey its linguistic/historical context, mention various interpretations, and tell of its use in a specific liturgy ( i.e., Hours, Liturgy of the Word, Anglican/Episcopal Book of Common Prayer, Jewish *Tehillim* or Siddur, etc.) Due in Module VII.

### **Week 6 – Module VI. Psalms in the Temple.**

Module VI will examine the usage of Psalms in the liturgy of the Second Temple in Jerusalem. The Temple liturgy will be explored as foundational to the use of the Psalms in Christian liturgy.

Class objectives:

- Understands the various usages of the Psalms in religious history.
- Demonstrates an understanding of the distinctions between the place and use of the Psalms in the Jewish, Catholic, Protestant and contemporary communities.
- Reading:
  - Course lecture with media.

- Psalm 27 (with notes) in Alter, pgg. 91-94; Psalms 130-134 (with notes) in Alter, pgg. 435 – 456.
- Post: In 200-300 words, explain how the Psalms might have been used in the Second Temple.

### **Week 7 – Module VII.** Psalms as lyrics.

Module VII will examine the *mizmor*, the psalms as the libretto, or as lyrics, to songs and as poems.

- Demonstrates an understanding of the literary content of the Psalms.
- Demonstrates a clear knowledge of the theological content and interpretation of the Psalms.
- Shows an understanding of the literary and historical context of the Psalms.
- Understands the various usages of the Psalms in religious history.
  - Reading:
    - Course lecture & media.
    - Alter, Introduction, Part III, pgg. xx – xxviii.
    - Grail Psalms, Introduction, pgg. xix – xx.
- Post: In 200-300 words summarize what you have learned about psalms as songs.

### **Week 8 – Module VIII.** Psalms as prayers.

The Psalms entail a spectrum of expressions of prayer. The psalms are designed to ascribe praises to God and to implore God for aid. Module VIII will look at the Psalms as compositions of prayer and the use of psalms as prayer in Judaism and Christianity.

Class objectives:

- Demonstrates a clear knowledge of the theological content and interpretation of the Psalms.
- Shows an understanding of the literary and historical context of the Psalms.
- Understands the various usages of the Psalms in religious history.
- Demonstrates an understanding of the distinctions between the place and use of the Psalms in the Jewish, Catholic, Protestant and contemporary communities.
- Reading:
  - Course lecture & media.

- Psalm 90 in Alter with notes & Grail.
- General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours, Chapter III, The Different Elements in the Liturgy of the Hours, I – V.
- Post: Choose a psalm in Alter & Grail and examine the elements of prayer. Identify the different parts of prayer in your psalm, and share a brief reflection of 2-3 sentences how the psalm expresses your prayer. Note the distinctions between the two versions.
- Read and respond to one of your classmate's post.

**Week 9 – Module IX.** Psalms as catechesis. The Psalms contain dogmatic, didactic, theological and anthropological content. This module will explore that content, as well as the way the Psalms have been used in catechesis in different traditions.

Class objectives:

- Demonstrates a clear knowledge of the theological content and interpretation of the Psalms.
- Shows an understanding of the literary and historical context of the Psalms.
- Understands the various usages of the Psalms in religious history.
- Demonstrates an understanding of the distinctions between the place and use of the Psalms in the Jewish, Catholic, Protestant and contemporary communities.
- Readings:
  - Course lecture & media.
  - Read Psalms 40, 76, & 147 in Alter (with notes) & Grail.
  - Post: Choose 3 Psalms with doctrinal content and in 150-300 words explain what the psalms teach about God, heaven, etc.

**Week 10 – Module X.** The Psalms in the Church.

Module X will look at the different arrangements and numeration of the Psalms in the various canons: Ancient, Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and English, and the Jewish, Orthodox, Oriental, Catholic, and Protestant Bibles.

Class objectives:

- Demonstrates an understanding of the literary content of the Psalms.
- Demonstrates a clear knowledge of the theological content and interpretation of the Psalms.
- Shows an understanding of the literary and historical context of the Psalms.
- Understands the various usages of the Psalms in religious history.
- Demonstrates an understanding of the distinctions between the place and use of the Psalms in the Christian communities.

Reading: Review the comparative list of Psalms from the various canons.

Compare the numbering & list in the LXX: <https://oca.org/liturgics/outlines/septuagint-numbering-psalms> , the Vulgate & the Masora:

<b>Hebrew numbering (Masoretic)</b>	<b>Greek numbering (Septuagint &amp; Vulgate)</b>
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

Post: In 150-300 words explain in what ways are the Psalters in the various canons similar, and in what ways do they differ?

### **Week 11 – Module XI.** The Psalms in the Hours

Module XI will examine the place the Psalter holds in the Liturgy of the Hours, the Liturgy of the Word, and in other liturgies and services.

- Class objectives:

Understands the use of the Psalms in the Liturgy of the Hours, the Liturgy of the Word, and other Catholic services and devotions.

Reading: General Instruction of the Roman Missal, General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours. Introduction to the Revised Grail Psalms.

Week 12 – Module XII. Final review. **Final exam** (2 Essays, 250-300 words each).

Module XII will be a comprehensive review of the material presented in the course.

### 5. COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Two Essays are required. The first essay of approximately 500 words is due in week 5. The paper must be in Turabian (or Chicago) style, with a bibliography of at least 3 sources (not including the Bible).

Discussion Posts: Discussion posts consist of 150-300 words (unless otherwise stated) responses to the prompts or topics. Ordinarily the one posting replies to two others.

**Final Exam** (2 Essays): The **final exam** will consist of two essays on topics selected from a list of 10 from the field of pastoral theology.

6. EVALUATION: Posts will be evaluated on the bases of a precise, concise statement in response to the prompt which demonstrates an understanding of the topic, an engagement with the material (lectures, readings, resources), and an ability to apply that material in a practical way. Essays will be evaluated as to content (including word count), style, and references. Failure to conform to the proper style (Chicago or Turabian) or word count will result in automatic loss of points (-1 pt. for every major style or grammatical error, and -1 pt for every 10 words under/over the word count after 450 and 550 words, and -5 pts for missing references in the bibliography). Posts and essays must be on time, one point being deducted for each day late, and a 0 being assigned after 5 days, unless otherwise arranged with the instructor.



6. POLICIES: See the JDI website or manual.

7. YOUR DEVELOPER/FACILITATOR:

Father Paul Chaim Benedicta Schenck is a priest in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Harrisburg (central Pennsylvania). Father Schenck is a former Anglican priest who was admitted to Catholic priesthood through the Pastoral Provision begun by Pope St. John Paul II. He has served as a youth minister, pastor, rector, upper school headmaster, college and seminary professor, public interest legal advocate and diocesan official. He is currently Director of Formation for the Permanent Diaconate in the Diocese of Harrisburg and parochial vicar in St. Elizabeth Ann Seton parish in Mechanicsburg, PA. Raised Jewish, Fr. Schenck attended Hebrew school as a youth, the Institute of Jewish Studies in the State University of New York, and Baltimore Hebrew University. In Christian formation, he graduated the Elim Bible College, Luther Rice University, The Institute for the Psychological Sciences (now Divine Mercy University), Holy Apostles College and Seminary, the Graduate Theological Foundation, and obtained the doctorate in educational leadership from St. Thomas University. He holds degrees in biblical studies, religious studies, theology, bioethics, psychology, pastoral counseling, and education.