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# WO 700 Creative Preaching on the Sacraments

Lester Ruth

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Syllabus  
**Creative Preaching on the Sacraments**  
WO/PR 700  
3 hours; Monday evenings, 6:15-9:00 p.m.

**Prerequisites:** PR610 and a course in the range of WO510-549.

**Course Description:**

What are the meanings of the sacraments and how can a preacher unfold these meanings for worshippers? These are the central concerns for this course.

This course will focus on a specialized form of creative preaching on the sacraments called mystagogy. This type of preaching will be explored in both its liturgical context in the early church as well as in modern attempts to reclaim it. The goal will be to assist the students in using historical models to develop a theoretical basis to support their practice of connecting Word and Sacrament. The course will involve student preaching. The course will thus include these three dimensions: historical, theoretical, and practical.

**Professor's information:** Dr. Lester Ruth; BC (Beeson) 218; 859-858-2175 (office) or 859-219-9166 (home); [lester\\_ruth@asburyseminary.edu](mailto:lester_ruth@asburyseminary.edu); official office hours: 1:30-3:00 on Tuesdays and 9:30-10:30 on Wednesdays. Generally my availability will be much greater all day Monday, all day Tuesday, and Wednesday morning, the times I will be on the Wilmore or Orlando campuses. (Please note that I will have regular "class time" with my WO515ExL class on Tuesdays, too.) Other times can be scheduled. Telephone calls are much preferred over emails at any time and will be responded to more quickly. I will also eat lunch and dinner on the Wilmore campus on Mondays and Tuesdays; I welcome opportunities to speak with students at those times, too.

**Students completing this course will:**

- develop a theology of Word in relationship to Sacrament
- understand historically the kind of preaching associated with sacramental administration in the late patristic church
- develop the necessary skills to translate the patristic approach to these issues to a contemporary context, particularly among post-modern hearers
- increase the student's proficiency and comfort in preaching

**Textbooks:**

- Satterlee, Craig and Lester Ruth, *Creative Preaching on the Sacraments*, Discipleship Resources.
- Yarnold, Edward, *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation*, The Liturgical Press.

Additional reading from materials on reserve might include sections from the following:

- Augustine, *The First Catechetical Instruction, Homilies on the Gospel of John, Later Works*.
- Cyril of Jerusalem, *The Works of Saint Cyril of Jerusalem*.
- Danielou, Jean, *The Bible and the Liturgy*, Univ. of ND Press.
- Harkins, Paul W., *St. John Chrysostom: Baptismal Instructions*, Ancient Christian Writers 31. Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press.
- Harmless, William, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*.

**Professor's Expectations for Students:**

Because this class is held in a seminar format, attentive, consistent preparation of readings is expected. The professor also expects students to aim for the highest levels of understanding as represented by the attached statements concerning explanation, interpretation, application, perspective, empathy, and self-knowledge. Indeed, these will be the criteria by which grades are given in the first two assignments.

In addition, students are expected to participate well in class discussions. Here is how satisfactory and unsatisfactory preparation and participation are defined for this class:

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

- Missed class, arrived late, or left early for an inexcusable reason
- Did not complete all exercises and assignments 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

**Means of student evaluation:**

There are four assignments that factor into the grade:

- 1) a 20-30 minute student presentation on a sermon from the early church (10% of grade)
  - Task: to analyze one of the patristic sermons we will look at, using the same assessment sheet we will use to assess our own sermons later in the semester. (See end of syllabus.) In fact, you could use these sheets as a template for your presentation, dropping the third question.
  - What the professor will be looking for: to see how well you handle the following questions using the explanation for different levels of understanding (see the syllabus attachment): Can you explain the patristic sermon? Can you interpret it well? Can you bring perspective to the sermon, understanding it in its own context and in others? Can you feel connection with the ancient preacher and understand why he did what he did? Can you express how studying this sermon brought greater awareness about your own predispositions and assumptions concerning preaching and sacraments?
  - What to keep in account: Please preserve opportunity for discussion among our entire class as part of your presentation.
  - Grading scale: 0-10 points (expectation for B- = 8 points)
- 2) a 15-20 minute walkthrough/talk through of one of the student's own mystagogical sermons (20% of grade)
  - Task: to have thought through your own first attempt at a mystagogical sermon, talking the rest of the class through what you would like to do and assessing it by our standardized assessment sheet.
  - What the professor will be looking for: to see how well you understand mystagogy so as to be able to apply your multi-faceted understanding to a sermon suitable for today (see the attachment for the different aspects of understanding)

- What to keep in account: Don't actually preach this first sermon; pretend that you are a sport's analyst providing "color commentary" on the sermon you would preach. You can preach this sermon, if you wish, later to fulfill assignments #3 or #4.
- Grading scale: 0-20 points (expectation for B- = 16 points)

Can you discuss not only the details but back up and answer: this is what makes my sermon mystagogical?

- 3) a first mystagogical sermon preached to the class (35% of grade)
  - Task: preach a mystagogical sermon on some aspect of worship appropriate for a congregation of your choosing today
  - What the professor will be looking for: see the included mystagogy checklist at the end of the syllabus
  - What to keep in account: would one of our patristic preacher's recognize what you do and say "amen"?
  - Grading scale: 0-35 points (expectation for B- = 28 points)
- 4) a second mystagogical sermon preached to the class (35% of grade)
  - Task: to preach another mystagogical sermon on a different aspect of worship
  - What the professor will be looking for: see above.
  - What to keep in account: see above.
  - Grading scale: 0-35 points (expectation for B- = 28 points)

Note: While the professor will be asking for peer evaluation on assignments, he will be basing the grades on these assignments on his own assessments and observation. He will use peer evaluations to see if there are areas of strength or weakness he has overlooked, that is, to inform his own assessment. Peer evaluations on sermons will be returned to students anonymously in order to be able to see how a range of people heard the sermons.

#### Course Schedule:

Note: The reading schedule is not predetermined. The pace of reading and specific readings will be determined as the class unfolds. If a student misses a class, it is the responsibility of the student to find out the readings for the following week. Generally the following is what should be expected. Please note that sufficient time will be given for each student to deliver at least two sermons.

Date	Topic
Class 1 (Sept. 13)	Course introduction: current and patristic preaching
Class 2 (Sept. 20)	Exploring the patristic method of sacramental preaching: patristic preaching
Class 3 (Sept. 27)	Patristic preaching and the symbolic nature of worship
Class 4 (Oct. 4)	Patristic preaching
Class 5 (Oct. 11)	Patristic preaching (1 <sup>st</sup> assignment for half of class)
Class 6 (Oct. 18)	Patristic preaching (1 <sup>st</sup> assignment for half of class)
Class 7 (Oct. 25)	Patristic preaching; student presentations (2 <sup>nd</sup> assignment for those preaching Nov. 8)
Class 8 (Nov. 1)	Patristic preaching; student presentations (2 <sup>nd</sup> assignment for those preaching Nov. 15)
Class 9 (Nov. 8)	Student preaching: first round
Class 10 (Nov. 15)	Student preaching: first round
Class 11 (Nov. 29)	Student preaching: second round
Class 12 (Dec. 6)	Student preaching: second round

Mystagogical Checklist for \_\_\_\_\_'s sermon

First question: What makes the sermon mystagogical preaching?

Rooted in big biblical story as expressed in smaller biblical stories; there is a large cohesive story that crosses Testaments

Connection to this story from the very Beginning

Participation in this story now, e.g., ongoing conflict with Satan

Participatory perspective: the cosmic God with a cosmic metanarrative is working in the church's worship now; this is what we are experiencing and participating in

Uses biblical, cultural, and natural images to articulate this participation

Uses a surplus of images

Tends to be organized by the rite itself, i.e., is intimately connected to what we saw, heard, and tangibly sensed in the order of worship

Purpose: brings to light the meaning behind the obvious sacraments; to see beyond what our eyes can see, to discern participation in the Kingdom and the spiritual world

Purpose: explaining the experience; provide a lens for interpreting worship experience; reveal (metanarrative) meaning beyond the obvious

Comments:

First question: scale: 0-15 points; points assigned:

Second question: What makes the sermon good mystagogical preaching?

Taps into biblical, cultural, and natural images that already reside within the listeners

Explores but doesn't explain away

Poetic, not discursive

Abundance of images piled together

Transforms the experience; heightens expectation in worship; anticipates and builds

Calls for action/decision in light of the experience of an active God in worship

Goes beyond expository preaching in that it is not really a matter of accepting or rejecting cognitive interpretation but draws people into participating in the mystery of the biblical story

Tethered

Appropriately triggered (not overused)

Comments:

Second question: scale: 0-15 points; points assigned:

Third question: What makes the sermon good preaching?

Handling of body

Mannerism

Understanding of congregation and connection to them

Rhetorical power; handling of words

Good oral quality

Trustworthiness of witness to the Gospel

Comments:

Third question: scale: 0-5 points; points assigned:

Total points assigned: \_\_\_\_ (first question) + \_\_\_\_ (second question) + \_\_\_\_ (third question) = \_\_\_\_\_  
(out of 35 possible points)

In my estimation this sermon as an example of mystagogy was (circle one) exceptional, good, acceptable, marginal, or unacceptable.