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CA 660 Song Lyrics and Theology

Lester Ruth

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Syllabus

Course: CA660 W1 (SP 2009)
Title: Song Lyrics and Theology
Hours: 3.00
Published: Yes, on 11/06/2008
Prerequisites:

ST501
 - or -
 DO501

Department: Worship
Faculty: Dr. Lester Ruth



Email: lester.ruth@asburyseminary.edu
 Office: BC
 SPO: 937

Meetings:

During 02/09/2009 to 05/22/2009 on Wednesday from 6:15p to 9:00p in BC223.

Maximum Registration: 6

Catalog 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 (i.e., 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 profoundness and suitability for the church's worship of the God revealed in Jesus Christ.

Objectives:

Syllabus

Syllabus
 Song Lyrics and Theology CA660/WO660 (3 hours)
 Wednesdays 6:15-9:00 p.m.
 Class size: limited to 12 students
 Dr. Lester Ruth

Course Description:

In this course, 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. Students are not expected to compose tunes, just lyrics. In addition to two complete songs to be composed, students will also have lyrical writing assignments nearly every week.

Among the historical material to be reviewed will be worship songs by Charles Wesley (British, 18th century), Prudentius (a Western poet from the late patristic period), Ephrem the Syrian (an Eastern poet from the late patristic period), Romanos the Melodist (an Eastern poet from the early Byzantine period), Isaac Watts (British, 18th century), as well as a sampling of other Western and Eastern texts for Christmas, Lent, Holy Week, and Easter.

Course Objectives

Students completing this course will be able to:

- 1) read historic poetic or 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: Wednesdays 2:30-5:30. Other times can be scheduled. Telephone calls are much preferred over emails at any time.

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. The student is also expected to keep up with the readings and be eager for discussion when she/he comes to class.

Course requirements:

This class is a writing-intensive course. Writing is the main requirement. The course grade will be by contract based on the number of assignments completed. See below for a fuller description on each type of assignment. The chart below also indicates the varied due dates.

Here are the various kinds of assignments:

- Ø Weekly lyrical writing assignments (10 maximum)
- Ø Complete song texts with theological commentary and scriptural documentation (2 maximum)
- Ø Reading of required books (3 books maximum)
- Ø Written reviews of supplemental reading (4 maximum)

For a D, a student must complete:

- ü 6 out of 10 weekly lyrical writing assignments
- ü 1 complete song text with theological commentary and scriptural documentation
- ü Finished reading 1 of the 3 required books

For a C, a student must complete:

- ü 8 out of 10 weekly lyrical writing assignments
- ü 2 complete song texts with theological commentary and scriptural documentation
- ü Finished reading 2 of the 3 required books

For a B, a student must complete:

- ü 10 out of 10 weekly lyrical writing assignments
- ü 2 complete song texts with theological commentary and scriptural documentation
- ü Finished reading 3 of the 3 required books

For a B+, a student must complete:

- ü 10 out of 10 weekly lyrical writing assignments
- ü 2 complete song texts with theological commentary and scriptural documentation
- ü Finished reading 3 of the 3 required books
- ü 1 review of supplemental reading materials

For an A-, a student must complete:

- ü 10 out of 10 weekly lyrical writing assignments
- ü 2 complete song texts with theological commentary and scriptural documentation
- ü Finished reading 3 of the 3 required books
- ü 2 reviews of supplemental reading materials

For an A, a student must complete:

- ü 10 out of 10 weekly lyrical writing assignments
- ü 2 complete song texts with theological commentary and scriptural documentation
- ü Finished reading 3 of the 3 required books
- ü 4 reviews of supplemental reading materials

Due Dates and Times for Various Assignments

What	When
Weekly lyrical writing assignments	Post on the class website by noon Tuesday before Weeks 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12
Complete song text, etc.	Post on the class website by noon Tuesday before Weeks 7 (song #1) and 13 (song #2)

Reading of required books	Books must be read in full by class in week 13
Written reviews of other reading	Material must be read and reviews written by class in week 13

Note: Retain your own copies of whatever you post on the class website. On the last class day in week 13, double check to make sure that you are turning in everything you intent to turn in. To receive credit for a certain grade, all of the materials for that grade level must be turned in by the due date and time. Tardy material will not be accepted and will not count unless arrangement is made with the professor prior to the due date and time. Everything for a grade level must be received by the due date and time to be considered for that grade level.

Further Details on the Various Assignments:

ü Weekly lyrical writing assignments

Each week the class will review historical lyrical or liturgical material that explores some important Christian theological theme as expressed in poetic form. The professor will lead the class, having read the material ahead of time, in discussing how poetic form facilitated the articulation of Christian theology. The student will be asked to create a short lyrical piece (1 or 2 stanzas at most) inspired by the historic material. The student must complete these creations by noon on the following Tuesday so that she/he can post them on the class website by that time.

The professor will review all of the postings prior to the class on the next Wednesday (students are invited to look at each other's creations, too, although this is not required) and select the ones which reviewing as a group would reinforce the original historic example. Be aware that the professor's decision to not select any one student's piece is not an indication that the student's contribution was a poor one.

ü Complete Song texts with additional material

Twice during the semester the student will be asked to turn in two complete songs texts with supplemental materials. Only the lyrics need to be written. No music must be composed or provided.

The songs should be new compositions inspired by material considered the semester, either directly or indirectly.

The song should attempt to sing of some important aspect of Christian theology and not merely be a testimony of the student's personal Christian experience or opinion of the Lord. (The relationships between personal experience and Christian theology will be discussed when looking at Charles Wesley early in the semester.)

In addition to the lyrics themselves, the student should provide a prose commentary on which aspect of Christian theology is embedded and expressed through the song. Imagine writing a one page summary of the doctrine for a theology class or encyclopedia of Christian thought. The opening paragraphs in each of the chapters in John Lawson's book, *A Thousand Tongues*, provide a model.

The other supplement piece for the complete song texts is a listing of scriptural quotes, allusions, and echoes embedded in the song text. Again, use the presentation format for Wesley's hymns in Lawson's book as a guide. The goal is to use scriptural language as the language of worship in an appropriate manner.

The songs with supplemental material should be posted on the appropriate spot on the class website on the Tuesday prior to the Wednesday meetings in weeks 7 and 13. The posting should be done by noon, Tuesday. Students should look at their classmates' contributions prior to attending class on those days. Each student should bring paper copies of his or her song to those classes, too.

ü Reading of required books

Because the review of historical examples in class will not be able to cover all of the wonderful materials found in the required books, the student will be asked to read over the course of the semester each of these books in full. (See the list of required books elsewhere in the syllabus.) Although the reading report is not due to the last class day, the student is encouraged to read these books gradually over the course of the semester so that the material can be savored more fully and so that insights from these readings can be spoken in class.

ü Written reviews of other reading

A bibliography of other helpful reading and/or media presentations is found elsewhere in this syllabus. The materials cover a range of related background issues. The student is asked to select up to four items from this list in order to further her or his development as a lyrical theologian.

For each piece read, the student should write a 2-3 page review (single space, 12 point type) which covers these points: What did the author/speak say? Why did the author/speak make this point? How was this material helpful for developing me as a lyrical theologian/songwriter?

Grading and assessment:

Although the semester grade will be based on the amount of work completed, the professor will provide constructive comments and assessment on each student assignment turned in on time.

Required texts and materials including the following materials:

The student should purchase the following books:

- 1) St. Ephrem the Syrian. *Hymns on Paradise*. Translated by Sebastian Brock. Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press.
- 2) Lawson, John. *A Thousand Tongues: The Wesley Hymns as a Guide to Scriptural Teaching*. Atlanta: Paternoster Press, 2007.
- 3) Wybrew, Hugh. *Orthodox Lent, Holy Week and Easter: Liturgical Texts with Commentary*. Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press.

Bibliography for optional written reviews:

From these titles, the student can choose to write up to 4 reviews as described above. These materials will be made available on the class website. Physical media (e.g., the Begbie CD) are available on 2 hour reserve from Information Commons in the seminary library. Note that some of the following items are chapters of books. Read the designated chapter, not the whole book.

- Baloche, Paul et al., "What Makes a Great Worship Song?" in *God Songs: How to Write and Select Songs for Worship*
- Berger, Teresa. "The Essence of Doxological Speech and Its Relationship to Theological Reflection." Chapter 4 in *Theology in Hymns? A Study of the Relationship of Doxology and Theology According to A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists (1780)*.
- Begbie, Jeremie. CD: Music, Words, and the Future of Theology (Regent College Audio).
----- "Two Theological Musicians." Chapter 7 in *Resounding Truth: Christian Wisdom in the World of Music*.
- Brock, Sebastian. "St. Ephrem's Theological Approach." In *The Luminous Eye*.
- Campbell, Ted. "Charles Wesley, *Theologos*." In *Charles Wesley: Life, Literature & Legacy*.
- Kimbrough, Jr., S. T. "Lyrical Theology: Theology in Hymns" *Theology Today* 63, 1 (April 2006): 22-37
----- "Charles Wesley and Biblical Interpretation." In *Charles Wesley: Poet and Theologian*.
- Marini, Stephen. "Hymnody as History: Early Evangelical Hymns and the Recovery of American Popular Religion." *Church History* 71,2 (June 2002): 273-306.
- Newport, Kenneth. "Charles Wesley in Historical Perspective: Poet, Priest, and Theologian," lecture available at <http://www.gresham.ac.uk/event.asp?PageId=45&EventId=647>.
- Owens, Jimmy and Carol. "Where Does the Song Come From?" In *Worship and Music*
- Parsons, Mark David. "Text, Tone, and Context: A Methodological Prolegomenon for a Theology of Liturgical Song." *Worship* 79, 1 (January 2005): 54-69.
- Ruth, Lester. "How Great is our God." In *The Message in the Music: Studying Contemporary Praise and Worship*. Edited by Robert Woods and Brian Walwrath.
- Wilt, Dan et al. DVD: *Songwriting for Worship* (Vineyard Worship Resources)
- Wren, Brian. "'Echoes of the Gospel': How Hymns Do Theology." Chapter 10 in *Praying Twice: The Music and Words of Congregational Song*.

Schedule information**Class time schedule:**

We will use the class time in the following manner. The first segment of class will include discussion of those students texts, based on the previous week's historical material, which the professor feels would be beneficial for the class to examine. The latter part of class will focus on new historical material. Weeks 7 and 13 will be entirely dedicated to reviewing the complete song texts written by students.

Weekly schedule:

Note: The following schedule is a basic outline of what sources of lyrical material will be considered on what week as well as which weekly lyrical writing assignment is due. The professor is still in the process of selecting particular historical examples. A more detailed schedule will be available in January.

Week 1, 2/11/08: Course Introduction; looking at material from Charles Wesley

Week 2, 2/18: Material from Charles Wesley; review of student examples of weekly lyrical writing exercises based on week 1 material

Week 3, 2/25: Material from Charles Wesley; review of student examples based on week 2

Week 4, 3/4: Material from Charles Wesley; review of student examples based on week 3

Week 5, 3/11: Material from Ephrem the Syrian; review of student examples from week 4

Week 6, 3/18: Material from Ephrem the Syrian; review of student examples from week 5

Week 7, 3/25: Review of first complete songs by students

Week 8, 4/8: Material from Isaac Watts; review of student examples based on week 6

Week 9, 4/15: Material from Romanos the Melodist; review of student examples from week 8

Week 10, 4/22: Material from Orthodox Lent and Easter (the Wybrew book); review of student examples from week 9

Week 11, 4/29: Material from Orthodox Lent and Easter (the Wybrew book); review of student examples from week 10

Week 12, 5/6: Material from various Christmas texts; review of student examples from week 11

Week 13, 5/13: Review of second complete songs by students

The following is information regarding the technical online aspects of the course.

Online Section Descriptions and Communication Guidelines

The Virtual Classroom is built upon the open-source Moodle platform. By logging into <http://one.asburyseminary.edu> and clicking on the Virtual Campus tab (upper right corner) you will have access to this course and be able to collaborate with participant-colleagues and me throughout the course. The following are functions with which you should familiarize yourself:

1. The **Course Information Center** contains many features to be used throughout the semester:
 - a) **Course News and Announcements**, where I will post items important for the entire class;
 - b) **Syllabus**, where a copy of the syllabus is provided;
 - c) **To Professor**, which is a way for you to post a message directly to me and we can discuss an issue privately;
 - d) **Course Questions**, which is a public forum where you can publicly post any questions you have regarding the course so others may see your message and respond. Anytime you have a question or comment about the course, the schedule, the assignments, or anything else that may be of interest to other participants and me you should post it to the Course Questions Forum;
 - e) **Prayer Forum**, which is a public forum where you can post prayer concerns and praises for all to see. This is a way for us to build community;
 - f) **Open Forum**, which is a public forum where you can post anything that is not course-related for all to see. Examples include someone getting married, an upcoming birthday, discussions on topics not course-related, etc. This is a way for us to build community.
2. **Modules**, which are located below the Course Information Center, will contain forums where group discussions will take place, documents or other files to download or view online, and assignment links where you will post your assignments to me. Modules will be clearly labeled so you can follow along during the semester.
- 3.

Virtual Support Contact Information

For **technical support, library research support, library loans, and Virtual media** contact Information Commons:
Info_Commons@asburyseminary.edu Phone: (859) 858-2233; Toll-free: (866) 454-2733

For **general questions and administrative assistance regarding the Virtual program**, contact Dale Hale:
ExL_Office@asburyseminary.edu Phone: (859) 858-2393

Accessing Information Commons Materials

1. General Questions:
 - a. The Information Commons is a "one-stop shop" for all student research, circulation and technical needs. The Information Commons hours are posted here: <http://www.asburyseminary.edu/information/hours.htm>
2. Materials Requests:
 - a. To search the library catalog for available materials, click here: <http://www.asburyseminary.edu/information/index.htm>
 - b. Virtual Students may request books, photocopies or emailed attachments of journal articles/portions of reference books from Asbury Seminary's Library. Please allow 3-10 business days for all requests to be filled. Contact the Information Commons for costs and instructions on how to make requests.
 - c. Virtual students are encouraged to make use of local library resources. Students who live within a 50 mile radius of either the Florida or the Kentucky campus should come to campus to obtain their materials.
3. Research Questions:
 - a. Virtual students are encouraged to contact the Information Commons for research assistance including help determining the best sources to use for a paper, finding book reviews, or research questions about using the online databases or any other library materials.

4. Online Databases:

a. To access the online library resources including the library catalog and full-text journal databases, go to <http://www.asburyseminary.edu/information/index.htm> and enter your 10-digit student ID# number in the login box. Your student ID# is provided on the biographical information section of the student registration webpage. Add a 2 and enough 0's to the front to make a 10-digit number (20000XXXXX where XXXXX = your student id).

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Appendix A
Reading Report: Required Books

Due date: Week 13 class date.

Name: _____

I have read the following books in their entirety (check all that apply):

___ St. Ephrem the Syrian. *Hymns on Paradise*.

___ Lawson, John. *A Thousand Tongues: The Wesley Hymns as a Guide to Scriptural Teaching*.

___ Wybrew, Hugh. *Orthodox Lent, Holy Week and Easter: Liturgical Texts with Commentary*.

Student's signature

Appendix B
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 C
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)