

CHWR4000: Church History and Hymnody in Worship
PRINCETON THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Fall 2026

Fridays, 1:00-1:50 p.m.

Professor Contact Information and Office Hours:

Professor Paul Rorem, office hours before or after class and by app't (paul.rorem@ptsem.edu)

Professor Martin Tel, office hours by appointment (martin.tel@ptsem.edu)

Course Description

A survey of church history through the lyrics and music of representative hymns from the early centuries (biblical canticles and psalms) through the twentieth century. Consideration will be given to the ways congregations might explore church history through their shared canon of congregational song. Consideration will also be given to the ways that a historical understanding of a hymn might enliven the way it is enacted in modern worship. Class meetings will consist of lectures, seminar discussions, and the singing of hymns. (No prior singing experience required.)

- This course counts toward the Practical Theology elective distribution requirement.
- Pass/D/Fail.
- 1 credit.

Course Objectives

1. This course will provide a brief survey of church history through the chronological study of representative hymn texts.
2. It will provide historical context for familiar hymns.

Student Learning Outcomes

As a result of this course, students will be able to:

1. Prepare a series of lessons (e.g., for an adult education program) exploring church history through hymnody. (MDiv 1, 3; MTS 1, 2; MA(TS) 1; MACEF 1, 2, 3)
2. Observe theological tenets imbedded in their congregation's diet of hymns and liturgical song. (MDiv 1, 3, 5; MTS 1, 2; MA(TS) 1, 2, 3, 4; MACEF 4)
3. Suggest songs for worship that represent the historical breadth of the Church. (MDiv 1, 3; MTS 1, 2; MA(TS) 2)

Course Requirements

Required Textbooks

Paul Rorem, *Singing Church History, Introducing the Christian Story through Hymn Texts* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2024). To be cited as SCH. On library reserve and as ebook.

Bring a hymnal, whether of your denomination or on loan from the Chapel Office.

Attendance

According to the *Seminary Handbook* (6.5.2), “It is normally expected that an enrolled student will attend a minimum of eighty percent of class periods. Failure to satisfy this minimum attendance requirement constitutes grounds for failure of the course.”

Assignments/Assessment of Student Learning

Weekly (25%): Readings, discussions, and initiate a discussion for one session, as assigned, on the hymn of the day (marked with asterisk), building on a suggestion in the Appendix of SCH (pp. 199–205) for that week; your prompt is due on the Brightspace discussion portal by 5pm the Thursday before that class.

Smaller (midterm) project (25%); choose one, due on November 20:

- Reflect on an old favorite “heart song” as to how your views on it have evolved in this course (2 pp).
- Compile a well-rounded list of 100 “go-to” hymns for a specific congregation, arranged in chronological order (according to lyrical source)
- Join The Hymn Society, browse its website (thehymnsociety.org), and write up your impressions including future usefulness (2 pp).
- Sign up as a user of [hymnary.org](https://my.hymnary.org). Watch the video <https://my.hymnary.org/about>. Explore the hymnary website and write up your impressions including future usefulness (2 pp).

Medium project (50%); choose one, due at the end of the term:

- Write a short church history paper on the original context and textual content of one specific hymn selected in consultation with the instructors (8 pp).
- Draft a Christian education curriculum for sharing some of the course material in congregational life, in consultation with the instructors (8 pp). Include the specific type of congregation and learning setting envisioned (i.e., a retreat or adult education series) (1 p), the schedule of sessions (i.e., introduction, specific hymns for 4-5 individual sessions, conclusion) (1 p), draft of your introductory remarks on the topic (2 pp), and lesson plans for two other sessions on specific hymns, including components of experiential learning (discussions, listening, singing) with time segments, goals, etc. (2 pp each, 4 pp).

By October 30, declare your plans for the midterm project and propose your idea for the medium final project, with reasons and some specifics such as topical bibliography or curriculum components.

Calculation of Grade

<i>Assignments</i>	<i>Percent of Final Grade</i>
Discussions, including leadership as assigned	25
Smaller final project	25
Medium final project	50

Grading Scale

The default grading for this course is Pass/D/Fail.

Course Schedule

1. September 4
Introductions; scriptural bases, esp. Psalms and Canticles as “hymns”
Psalms, such as “Out of the Depths” in Martin Luther’s version
Reading: *Singing Church History* (SCH), chapter one
2. September 11
Early Church; Nicene Christology
*Ambrose, “Savior of the Nations, Come” (p. 21)
Prudentius, “Of the Father’s Love Begotten” (p. 23)
Reading: SCH, chapter two: The Early Church, Western and Latin
3. September 18
(Early) Greek Byzantine and (Early) Latin Medieval
John of Damascus, * “Come, You Faithful, Raise the Strain” (p. 35) Or
*Attr. Rhabanus Maurus “Creator Spirit” (p. 57)
Reading: SCH, chapter three: The Eastern and Orthodox Early Church and chapter four:
The “Dark” Ages? The Early Middle Ages
4. September 25
High Medieval / Scholastic
Attr. St. Bernard, “O Sacred Head” (p. 71)
*Thomas Aquinas, “Thee, We Adore” (p. 81)
Reading: SCH, chapter five: The (High) Middle Ages; Saints Bernard, Francis, and Thomas
5. October 2
Late Medieval, Reforms before the Reformation
*Attr. Thomas à Kempis, “O Love, How Deep, How Broad, How High” (p. 91)
Reading: SCH, chapter six: Reforms Before the Reformation; The Late Middle Ages
6. October 9
Reformation
Martin Luther, “Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice” (p. 109)
Elisabeth Cruciger, “The Only Son from Heaven” (p. 113)
Reading: SCH, chapter seven: Martin Luther and the Reformation
7. October 16
Early Modern to Pietism
*P. Nicolai, “Wake, Awake” (p. 121) and “O Morning Star” (p. 125)
Reading: SCH, chapter eight: Lutherans and Pietists

BREAK

8. October 30 (Choices due)
Isaac Watts and the Wesley Brothers
Watts “O God, Our Help” (p. 135)
*C. Wesley, “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling” (p. 143)
Reading: SCH, chapter nine: Isaac Watts and the Wesley Brothers
9. NOVEMBER 6 different time: 5 PM
Guest lecture: Joyce Irwin on German Hymnody in the 18th Century
10. November 13
American Revivals and the Social Gospel
*Fanny Crosby, “Blessed Assurance” (p. 150)
H. Fosdick, “God of Grace and God of Glory” (p. 160)
Reading: SCH, chapter ten: American Revivals and the Social Gospel
11. November 20 (smaller, midterm project due)
African American Hymnody
*Spirituals and the Johnson brothers, “Lift Every Voice and Sing” (p. 166f.)
Thomas A. Dorsey, “Precious Lord”
Reading: SCH, chapter eleven, African American Hymnody

Thanksgiving Break

12. December 4
World Christianity
“Siyahamba” / “We Are Marching” (p. 181f.)
“Many and Great” (p. 188)
Summary
Reading: SCH, chapter twelve: World Christianity
and (optional) Postlude

Disclaimer

The course syllabus should not be understood as an inflexible contract with the members of the class, but the terms will be honored to the greatest extent possible (*Faculty Manual* 13.3.1).

Princeton Seminary Guidelines

Please refer to this link for the [Princeton Seminary Guidelines](#).