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- 1 Letting Experience Touch the Psalter
- 2 The Liberation of Language
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### Test Question

The third section of the exam will ask you to write a second essay on a critical issue regarding the **theological interpretation and use of the Old Testament within the Christian tradition**. Here again you will have a choice of topics. You will also have one hour for this section.

Better essays will make specific mention of **biblical texts** and integrate information from the required secondary readings for the course, especially **Brueggemann** and Holmgren.

The Goal of this sheet is to show which Biblical texts to use when using Brueggemann.

### Chapter 1

#### How do we know about others? (p.1)

1. We pray together regularly "for all sorts and conditions of men": we pray for all those others, we pray for ourselves along with them. Thus, we share a "common lot" and are attentive to what is happening in our lives.
2. Attentive to what is written (news and literature) Thus, testimonies of print.
3. Psalms and OT.

#### What are the sorts and conditions that come to speech in the Psalms and true to all of us? (p.2)

1. Being securely oriented
2. Being Painfully Disoriented
3. Being surprisingly reoriented.

#### What are the events that fill us with passion and evoke in us eloquence? (p.4)

The events at the edge of our humanness, the ones that threaten and disrupt our convenient equilibrium. Thus, the Psalms.

#### What situations drive us to the edge of our humanness? (p.5)

Situations of extremity (filled with "rumors of angels"), givenness, threat, limitedness, value, freedom, condemnation, death, suffering, guilt, hatred, creation, joy = deep discontinuities.

### Chapter 1 (cont)

#### What does Barth say about the Psalter as important for Christians?

(p.6)

The Christian community always has good reason to see itself in this people (Psalter)... It turns to the Psalter, not in spite of the fact, but just because of it, that as the community of Jesus Christ it knows that it is established on the rock..., but on the rock which, although it is sure and impregnable in itself, is attacked on all sides, and seems to be of very doubtful security in the eyes of all men and therefore in its own.

#### What does Brueg argue as the only appropriate way to pray the Psalms? (p.8)

By people who are living at the edge of their lives, sensitive to the raw hurts, the primitive passions, and the naive elations that are at the bottom of our life.

#### What does Brueg argue as the need for the language of praise and thanks from the Psalms? (p.12)

Experiences that touch us deeply, announce God has not left the world to chaos, wonderful gifts of God's new order.

#### What do the Psalms assure us of? (p.14)

When we pray and worship, we are not expected to censure or deny the deepness of our own human pilgrimage. Rather, we are expected to submit to openly and trustingly so that it can be brought to eloquent and passionate speech addressed to the Holy One.

### Chapter 2 Scripture

Ps 22	I am poured out like water, all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my chest; my strength is dried up like a potsherd	Complaint - contains hyperbole
Ps 42	My tears have been my food day and night	Complaint - contains hyperbole
Ps 66	Every night I flood my bed with tears, I drench my couch with my weeping.	Complaint - contains hyperbole
Ps 56	My enemies trample upon me all the day long.	Complaint - contains hyperbole
Ps 57	I lie in the midst of lions.	Complaint - contains hyperbole



### Chapter 2 Scripture (cont)

Ps 47, 93, 96-99	Central Motif:	Responding assertion to complain psalms is celebration that YHWH is king, God is graciously inclined and powerfully enthroned and that because of his rule, the enemies are no threat.
Ps 23	You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies	Song of celebration - metaphor of tears (complaint) is balanced by metaphor of food/banquet/bounteous table
Ps 146	who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry	YHWH provider of food to the other creatures of the earth. Metaphor of food.
Ps 47	Clap your hands, all you peoples; shout to God with loud songs of joy!	Clapping cheer of new king, new orientation, arrival of the promised kingdom; counterpart to being trampled as motif of disorientation.
Ps 148	Praise YHWH! Praise YHWH from the heavens; praise him on the heights! Praise him...	Everything and everyone is mobilized to applaud, welcome, and receive.

### What's the Point? Chapter 2

**What's the Point?** There are three pairs of metaphors (not the only ones) that can be useful in bringing experience to the Psalms: enemies destroy / king orders & governs  
being trampled / clapping  
tears / table

### Chapter 3

#### What does it mean to be attentive to language? (p.29)

Means cultivating the candid imagination to bring our own experience to the Psalms and permitting it to be disciplined by the speech of the Psalms. Also, means letting the Psalms address us and having that language reshape our sensitivities and fill our minds with new pictures and images that may redirect our lives.

### Chapter 3 (cont)

#### What is "liberation of language"? (p.29)

May be more free with our language - let language be liberated, not by being permissive or vulgar, but by letting it move beyond descriptive functions to evocative, creative functions in our life. Also, not only about about free speech, but about speech freeing us. We will experience new freedom that is freedom for faith.

#### What does praying the psalms mean? (p.30)

Means openness to God's pilgrimage toward us.

#### How does Paul Tournier characterize the language of disorientation and reorientation? (p.30)

In terms of 1) Finding one's place, 2) Leaving one's place for another.

#### How is the pit a description of speech of the wrong place? (p.32)

Pit - has concrete reality as a place in which to put people to render them null and void. Experience a "social death" because cut off from community, cannot exercise control over own lives; pit reduces one to powerlessness; pit as place cut off from God.

#### What are the three cries related to the pit? (p.36)

The metaphor of the pit reports movement, 1. The cry of anguish about the pit; 2. The cry of vengeance; 3. The voice of thanksgiving. The motif of the pit enables the speaker to present every posture of life to God.

#### What do the Psalms attest to us with regards to the pit? (p.36)

The Psalms attest that the life of faith does not protect us from the pit. Rather, the power of God brings us out of the pit to new life which is not the same as pre-pit experience. When one is in the pit, cannot believe or imagine any good can come again. Psalmist focuses not on the pit, but on the One who rules there and everywhere. It is the reality of God which makes clear that the pit is not the place you ought to be.

#### What is the contrasting figure for place? (p.37)

Safety of wings - being safe under the protective wings of God. Wings speak of safety, tenderness, and nurture. Reflects the yearning for safety, well-being, communion with God, new orientation. Evangelical realism - resources for life outside of self, need submission to will of another.

#### How do the images relate to Christian living?

Our lives always move between the pit and the wing, that is what our baptism is about - to die and to rise with him to newness of life. We have all been within and shall again face the pit, all have wings assured to us. We must enter the Presence of the Holy One to practice our vocation of receiving the new future God is speaking to us.

### Chapter 4 Scripture

Ps 122, 137, 147, 128	Praying with Jews	Can pray for peace of Jerusalem, set Jerusalem above highest joy, summoned to praise the Lord, Jerusalem always on the tip of the tongue.
Ps 78, 105, 106, 136	History	Of betrayal, disobedience, surprise, deliverance - becomes ours in prayer, history of victims and marginalized.
Ps 1, 19, 119	Torah	Torah center of spirituality, reminds us that the primal mode of faithfulness and knowing God is obedience.
Ps 1, 2, 50, 145	Pray with Jews means to live with them	God takes folks seriously and lets us have what we choose. Live in the danger of real judgment.
Ps 103	"YHWH is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in loyalty"	Jews know that this God who honors our ways is the same God who overrides our ways - hope of real judgment.
Ps 145	"YHWH upholds all who are falling, and raises up all who are bowed down."	Psalms are awkward in their concreteness. The "cultural despisers" of biblical faith want generalized religious consciousness and are offended by God become concrete.
Ps 139	"Do I not hate those who hate you, O YHWH?"	The true believer hates powerfully and finds a community with YHWH who also hates.

### Chapter 4 Scripture (cont)

Ps 5, 31	Robustness and candor of Psalms are especially evident in articulation of hatred and anger.	God as well is one who is capable of hatred for evildoers.
Ps 65	"you visit the earth and water it; you greatly enrich it."	It is characteristically Jewish to hope for newness from God. Even "nature" is understood as creation, called by God to bring forth newness.
Ps 71	"For you, O Lord, art my hope, my trust, O YHWH, from my youth"	Presents the deep hope of a complaint psalm - articulate deepest hurt, anger, rage, but insistence upon and expectations from God who may and must keep promises.
Ps 1, 7, 11, 34, 92	Elect bear witness to an all-inclusive providence.	The Psalms have a passion for the righteous, for the practitioners of God's vision for justice and peace.
Ps 69, 10, 140, 34, 51	Elect bear witness to an all-inclusive providence.	The Psalms have a passion for the poor, needy, broken of spirit and heart. God's compassion not specific to an ethnic community, but towards those in special need.

### What's the Point? Chapter 4

**What's the Point?** There is a strange restlessness and shattering that belongs to Jewishness. When we learn to pray these prayers faithfully, we shall all be scandalized. Thus, at the end, conventional notions of Jewishness are also placed in question. But that is only at the end, after we have learned the passion and the patience to pray for, with, and as Jews. (p.61-62)



### Chapter 5

#### What are the two acts of realism of vengeance in the Psalms? (p.64)

- 1) The yearning for vengeance is present, without embarrassment, apology, or censor. To genuinely pray, must try to understand what is happening.
- 2) Yearning for vengeance is here, among us and within us and with power. Must not be so romantic as to imagine we have outgrown the eagerness for retaliation.

#### What are the 3 things to keep in mind about Ps as vengeance? (p.65-8)

- 1) The Ps are rhetorical practices. Provide space for full linguistic freedom where nothing is censored or precluded. It is cathartic, leads feelings, allows us to discover depth and intensity of hurt, legitimizes and affirms intense elements of rage, puts it in perspective.
- 2) Only verbal assaults of imagination and hyperbole, speaker does not do anything beyond speak. Not equated with acts of vengeance.
- 3) Characteristically offered to God, not to enemy. Vengeance is transferred from the heart of the speaker to the heart of God. I-Thou relationship maintained.

#### How do we understand vengeance and God? (p. 70-6)

- 1) Vengeance belongs to God, not human business.
- 2) Vengeance is other side of God's compassion, not an end in itself.
- 3) God practices vengeance is one way the Bible has of speaking about moral coherence and order in which God is actively engaged.
- 4) Reality of juxtaposition and assurance of moral coherence leads to affirmation that God has taken sides in history and acts effectively on behalf of "his" special partners. God's action on behalf of faithful, poor, and needy; not indiscriminate anger.

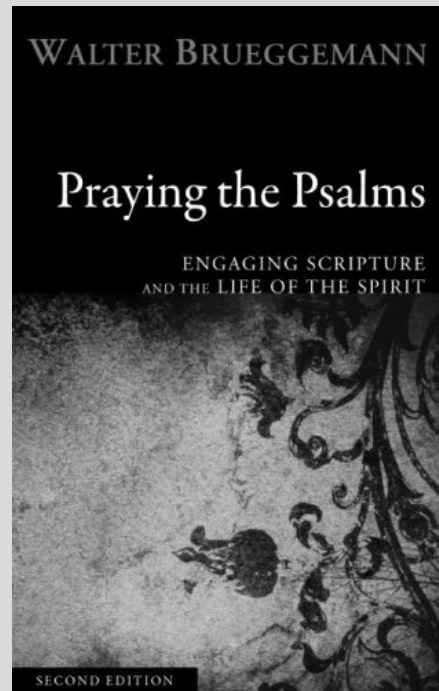
#### How does Christian faith assess these statements about the vengeance of God? (p.78-81)

- 1) We must not pretend that the NT gives a "higher" view of God in contrast to OT.
- 2) Israel understands grief of God moves beyond vengeance.
- 3) NT still makes important use of motif of God's vengeance.
- 4) Possibility of a vengeance-free ethic is rooted in the reality of God. We are driven to the crucifixion where God dealt with reality of evil. God has responded with "his" own powerful inclination for justice. No less vengeance in NT, but wrought it in "his" own person. Grace has overcome.

### What's the Point? Chapter 5

**What's the Point?** The Ps "tell it like it is" with us. For those troubled with the Psalms, there is a way beyond them. It is the way of crucifixion, accepting the rage and grief and terror of evil in ourselves in order to be liberated for compassion toward others. Way through, not around them. Grace has overcome. Harsh Ps must be fully embraced as our own. Fully own and express rage then yield to mercy of God.

### Cover



### Chapter 1 Scripture

Ps 22	"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me"	Complaint Psalm - desperate, edge of life, share experience of dislocation
Ps 88	"Your anger has swept over me; your dread assaults destroy me. The surround me like a flood... You have caused me friend and neighbor to shun me; my companions are in darkness."	Complaint Psalm - angriest, most hopeless, ends in unreserved, unrelieved gloom
Ps 103	"Bless YHWH, O my soul, and all that is within me his holy name. Bless YHWH, O my soul, and do not forget any of his benefits"	Hymn/Song of Thanksgiving - asserts abiding rule of God
Ps 30	"I will exalt you, O YHWH, for you have pulled me up, and you did not allow my enemies to rejoice over me. O YHWH, my God, I cried out to you for help, and you have healed me."	Hymn/Song of Thanksgiving - announces surprising intrusion of God who just now makes things good.

### Chapter 1 Scripture (cont)

Ps 96	"Proclaim to the foreigners: "YHWH is king!"	Hymn/Song of Thanksgiving - announces God is King
Ps 97	"YHWH is king! Let the earth rejoice!"	Hymn/Song of Thanksgiving - announces God is King
Ps 99	"YHWH is king! Let the peoples tremble!"	Hymn/Song of Thanksgiving - announces God is King

### What's the Point? Chapter 1

**What's the Point?** The Psalms move with our experience. They take us beyond our own guarded experience into the more poignant pilgrimages of sisters and brothers. (15)

### Chapter 2

#### What does praying the psalms depend on? (p.17)

1. What we find when we come to the Psalms that is already there
2. What we bring to the Psalms out of our own lives.

#### What is useful language? (p. 18)

In our culture we have a positivistic understanding of language - one-dimensional in that it only reports and describes. It is useful, but not the language of the Psalms. Appropriate to science, engineering, and social sciences; but, when used in the arena of human interaction it tends to be conservative, restrictive, limiting.

#### What is the language of the Psalms? (p.18)

Language we can faithfully pray, evokes into being what does not exist until it has been spoken, resists discipline, shuns precision, delights in ambiguity, creative, exercise in freedom. Speech of liberation, is dangerous and revolutionary. [Totalitarian regimes fearful of the poet.]

#### What is the function of complaint speech? (p. 20-21)

To create a situation that did not exist before the speech, to create an external event that matches the internal sensitivities. Help people to die completely to the old situation, old possibility, old false hopes, old lines of defense and pretense. With the speech, the dislocation becomes visible event that exists between prayer and God, God is compelled to notice.

#### How can we understand complaint psalms as Christians?

In a quite concrete way as an act of putting off the old humanity that the new may come (Eph 4:22-24).

### Chapter 2 (cont)

#### How do we understand the three ways of speaking in Psalms of celebration?

1. Assertion YHWH is king, God is graciously inclined and powerfully enthroned, enemies are not a threat.
2. Metaphor of tears is balanced by the metaphor of food, banquet, and bounteous table.
3. In contrast to the metaphor of being trampled, songs of celebration have clapping to cheer the new king, new orientation of the arrival of the promised kingdom.

#### What is the work of prayer?

Explore and exploit metaphors in terms of our own experience. Psalms are our partners in prayer.

### Chapter 3 Scripture

Ps 28	Be like those who go to the pit	Pit refers to the experience of being rendered powerless, means to be silent, forgotten, dead.
Ps 30	What profit is there in my death, if I descend into the pit? Will the dust praise you? Will it proclaim your faithfulness?	Pit is a place cut off from God so that God may neither help nor be praised.
Ps 55	Let death come upon them; let them descend alive into Sheol; for evil is in their homes and in their hearts.	Sheol - place of undifferentiated, powerless, gray existence where one is removed from joy, and discourse with God.
Ps 86	You have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol.	Psalms of thanksgiving - pit and Sheol used not only to describe hopeless situation and offer counter-wish for one's enemies; suggests also that there is real movement in its use.



### Chapter 3 Scripture (cont)

Ps 17	Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings.	Favorite image of Israel for a safe place with God is to speak of being safe under the protective wings of God. The concrete reference becomes a metaphor, figure that yearns for safety, well-being, communion with God, a new orientation.
Ps 61	Lead me to the rock that is higher than I; for you are my refuge, a strong tower against the enemy. Let me dwell in your tent for ever! O to be safe under the shelter of your wings!	Two images - protective wing and refuge - occur together. Contrasts current state of need. Openness to new purpose, submission to the will of another.
Ps 36	The children of men take refuge in the shadow of your wings	Effect of vetoing the claim of the pit, denying the pit the capacity to terrorize completely.
Ps 91	He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High, who abides in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to YHWH, my refuge and my fortress, my God in whom I trust.	Two positive images come together in psalm of trust. To use while still in the pit is an act of profound hope which permits new life.

### What's the Point? Chapter 3

**What's the Point?** Psalms are subversive literature, gives us new eyes to see and new tongues to speak. To risk such prayer is to repent of the old orientation to which we no longer belong. It is to refuse the pit which must first be fully experienced for the sake of the wings which may be boldly anticipated. (p.41)

### Chapter 4

#### Why are the Psalms awkward for Christians? (p.43)

The Psalms are relentlessly Jewish in their mode of expression and in their faith claims. And with our best intent for generosity and good faith, the different nuances of Jewish and Christian faith are not to be overlooked or easily accommodated.

### Chapter 4 (cont)

#### Why are the Psalms a "collection"? (p.43-4)

Jerusalem temple in monarchal period generator of Psalms, Second Temple period guilds of "temple singers," (1-2 Chron) produced more Psalms. Outside Jerusalem, other prominent sanctuaries produced Psalms (Gilgal, Bethel, Shiloh). End product, altogether Jewish, is ecumenical achievement that drew together variety of local traditions.

#### What are the characteristic modes of Christian avoidance? (p.44-6)

- 1) Highly selective and make use of those Psalms that are most congenial to us and contain least objectionable "Jewishness." (Avoid Ps 109 or 137)
- 2) Claim that Christianity, especially NT, evolved from and is superior to OT Jewishness (Supersessionism, can disregard "objectionable parts"). Another practice is to treat Ps as claims to Jesus (See Augustine)

#### What is the alternative to avoidance? (p.45)

"Spiritualizing" tends to tone the Ps down and avoid the abrasive and offensive elements. The alternative is to avoid "spiritualizing" and engage the Ps as poetry about our common, particular humanness. A second way is to link Jewish ways of praying and christological interpretation. The centrality of Jesus can never be far separated from the Jewish character of the material.

#### What does it mean to "Pray for Jews"? (p.47)

It means to bring to utterance the deepest longings, echoes, and yearnings of the Jews, for Jews are a paradigm of the deepest longings and yearnings of all of humanity. Means to recognize how pervasive the zeal for Zion in the Ps. Forms: pray for peace of Jerusalem, set Jerusalem above our highest joy, summoned to praise the Lord, Jerusalem on the tip of our tongue. Means the practice of a solidarity in concrete hope that is old, deep in our faith.

#### What does it mean to "Pray with Jews"? (p.49)

Our prayer life is tempted to individualism or at least parochialism, but we are urged by God's spirit to pray alongside and be genuinely ecumenical. Pray with Jews is to be aware of solidarity with chosen of God whom the world rejects.

#### What are the 3 points Brueg makes about Praying with Jews?(p.50)

- 1) It tilts us toward a very specific history as our history in prayer (a minority history), may lead us to another, converted identity.
- 2) Torah at center of spirituality deliver us from excessive romanticism or mysticism or subjectivity, reminds us that primal mode of faithfulness and knowing God is obedience.
- 3) Means to live with them in the hope and danger of real judgment. God gives us permission to choose our futures and at the same time, God chooses a future, gracious, beyond our choosing.

### Chapter 4 (cont)

#### What is the uneasiness of claiming we might be permitted to pray as Jews? (p.52)

It is impossible to identify Jewishness, too bold to say what it is to be "as Jews" 2) Becoming a Jew takes many gens & centuries.

#### What are the five dimensions of Jewishness that mark the Ps? (p.53-59)

1) The Psalms are awkward in their concreteness. 2) There is no or little slippage between what is thought/felt and what is said. 3) The robustness and candor of the Psalms are especially evident in the articulation of hatred and anger. 4) Israel is not able only to rage with abandon. Israel has equal passion for hope. 5) The practice of concreteness and candor, of anger and hope, is carried out with exceeding passion in the Ps.

#### What do the Ps invite us to do for Christian spirituality? (p.59)

Invitation to transform our piety and liturgy in ways that will make both piety and liturgy somewhat risky and certainly abrasive.

#### What are elements of the Ps that belong to Jewishness? (p.61)

Passion for righteous, passion for poor and needy.

### Chapter 5 Scripture

Ps 139	"O YHWH you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I arise; you discern my thoughts from afar."	Mystery of human personhood is celebrated. Vengeance belongs to any serious understanding of human personality.
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Ps 139	"Do I not hate those who hate you, O YHWH? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you?"	Expresses the capacity for hatred. Capacity for hatred belongs to the mystery of the personhood.
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Ps 109	Engages in "overkill" in wishes and prayers against the "wicked"	After long recital of rage, intensity is spent, speaker must return to the reality of heart and fear and helplessness. Rage is a prelude to the real agenda of attitudes about one's self.
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### Chapter 5 Scripture (cont)

Ps 109	Begins with an address to God, v.21 turns "But you" from venom to self-reflection.	Speech of vengeance characteristically offered to God, not directly to humans. Appeal for God to act. Vengeance is transferred from heart of speaker to God. Ends with doxology of final confidence in God.
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Ps 136	"to him who smote the first-born of Egypt, for his steadfast love endures forever... to him who smote great kings, for his steadfast love endures forever."	Killing does not sound like "steadfast love," not perceived as such by any Egyptian. But that is steadfast love if one is an Israelite. Such an action is necessary to liberate, though from another perspective, it is ruthless vengeance. [Vengeance of the dark side]
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Ps 58	"The righteous one will rejoice when he sees vengeance; he will bathe his feet in the blood of the wicked one. A human will say, "Surely there is a reward for the righteous one; surely there is a God who rules in the land."	Benefactor of God's compassion/vengeance is not Israel in any mechanical way. Rather, God's action is taken on behalf of the faithful who keep the Torah (righteous, obedient).
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Ps 94	O Lord, thou God of vengeance, ... O Lord, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked exult? ... They slay the widow and the sojourner, and murder the fatherless.	Benefactor of God's compassion/vengeance is not Israel in any mechanical way. Rather, God's action is taken on behalf of the poor and needy who are objects of "his" special concern.
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