

The Sacred Art of Reading

*a D.Min. cohort through
the Eugene Peterson Center for Christian Imagination
at Western Theological Seminary*

“Christian reading is participatory reading, receiving the words in such a way that they become interior to our lives, the rhythms and images becoming practices of prayer, acts of obedience, ways of love.”
—Eugene Peterson

“The white in the margins of the Bible, that emptiness which surrounds the writing, that unsaid which borders and fringes the said, is the place not built but always buildable...”
—Jean-Louis Chretien

“If the Law of Moses contained nothing written with a deeper meaning, the prophet would not have said in his prayer to God: ‘Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.’”
—Origen of Alexandria



Lead Faculty: Chris EW Green

Length and Launch: A three-year program, plus additional time for the writing and defense of the D.Min. Final Project. The cohort will launch October 4 – 7, 2023

Location: Western Theological Seminary (Holland, MI), with one off-campus monastery retreat.

Schedule: Six required seminars over the course of three years, targeted in October and May.

Application deadline: June 30, 2023 for US citizens and others not requiring an entry visa.

PURPOSE & RATIONALE The Sacred Reading cohort will be dedicated to collaboration in “the forbidding discipline of spiritual reading,” confident that such an undertaking cultivates the loving attentiveness, prophetic discernment, and childlike openness to surprise that characterize what St. Paul calls the faith that works by love.

Such work is always needed, of course, for the church to fulfill its mission. But it is perhaps especially needed now, when dominant cultural and political forces incentivize and accelerate conflict, playing up the most extreme voices, pressuring us to attend only to what troubles or offends us, acclimatizing us to all kinds of violence, so that it becomes harder and harder to engage in good faith. Under such conditions, thinking deteriorates, and we find ourselves speaking up only to rebuke or refute those we

feel are wrong.

Bearing these challenges in mind, the Sacred Reading cohort is designed to cultivate an alternative awareness, one shaped by the slow, painstaking work of collaborative interpretation. And to that end, the heart of the program is the reading of the Christian Scriptures. The aim will be both philosophical and devotional, critical and celebratory, mystical and pastoral. No one reading method will be stipulated, but students will be encouraged to find ways to honor the traditions of the communities in which they learned to argue, to muse, and to pray.

Besides Scripture, the cohort will engage a wide range of texts including poems, memoirs, essays, treatises, sermons, and stories old and new, familiar and strange, sacred and “worldly,” in part and in whole, not so much in order to “plunder the Egyptians” as to bear glad witness to the wonder that God is never left without a witness because all truth, truly received, trues.

SCHEDULE Each year will revolve around a pair of intensives, one in late September or early October, and the other in late Spring. There will be at least one whole-cohort meeting via Zoom between the intensives, and mentor will host several other Zoom gatherings with smaller circles as well.

Year One

In addition to determining student projects, the first year will be dedicated to close reading of select Old Testament narratives (especially the Abraham, Moses, and David stories), as well as the following primary texts:

- Peterson’s *Eat This Book* and *As Kingfishers Catch Fire*;
- Robert Alter’s *The Hebrew Bible*;
- Elie Wiesel’s *Messengers of God*;
- Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg’s *Moses: A Human Life*;
- Daniel Berrigan’s *Exodus: Let My People Go*;
- Frances Young’s *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture*;
- Robert Jenson’s *Canon and Creed* and *The Triune Story: Collected Essays*;
- Kate Sonderegger’s *Systematics Vol 1: The Doctrine of God*;
- Jean-Louis Chrétien’s *Under the Gaze of the Bible*;
- René Girard’s *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*;
- George Saunders, *A Swim in the Pond in the Rain*;
- Claude Atcho, *Reading Black Books*.

Year Two

The second year will be focused on biblical poetry and wisdom literature, especially the Psalms, Job, and passages from the prophets, as well as these primary texts:

- Peterson’s *Answering God* and *Leap Over a Wall*;
- Robert Alter’s *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (rev. ed.);
- Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg’s *The Murmuring Deep*;
- David Sheehan’s *The Psalms of David*;
- Rowan Williams’ *The Edge of Words*;
- Kevin Hart’s *Poetry and Revelation*;
- Jean-Louis Chrétien’s *Spacious Joy*;
- Daniel Berrigan’s *Jeremiah: the World the Wound of God*;
- Origen’s Homilies on the Psalms (Codex Monacensis Graecus 314.)

Year Three

The third year will engage the Gospels, the Apocalypse, and these primary texts:

- Peterson's *Reversed Thunder*;
- David Bentley Hart's *The New Testament (rev. ed.)*;
- Amy Jill Levine's *Short Stories by Jesus*;
- John Behr's *John the Theologian and His Paschal Gospel*;
- Michel Henry's *Words of Christ*;
- Howard Thurman's *Sermons on the Parables* and *Jesus and the Disinherited*;
- Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis' *Fire of Mercy, Heart of the Word Vol 1*;
- Beverly Roberts Gaventa's *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus*;
- Shusako Endo's *A Life of Jesus*;
- Origen's *Homilies on the Gospel of Luke*.

FINAL PROJECT For their thesis, students will write a substantial, original work that articulates the need for the sacred art of reading (perhaps as it relates to a particular text, author, or genre or as it relates to a method or mode for reading), examining the implications for Christian understandings of ministry. The work will be presented before the faculty advisor and readers and may follow a standard five-chapter thesis format (including an original contribution supported by a literature review; biblical, theological, and historical foundations; and suggestions for future research; as well as an annotated bibliography) or, with approval and in consultation with the director, mentor, and faculty advisors, a more creative design.

PROPOSED SCHEDULE OF SEMINARS:

Course	Dates*	Location
DM950	October 4 - 7, 2023	Holland, MI
DM951	May 13 – 17, 2024	Holland, MI or monastery retreat TBD
DM960	October 2024	Holland, MI
DM961	May 2025	Holland, MI or monastery retreat TBD
DM970	October 2025	Holland, MI
DM971	May 2026	Holland, MI
Commencement	May 2027	Holland, MI

*Fall intensive dates will occur just before or just after the annual [Doxology Conference](#) hosted by the [Eugene Peterson Center for Christian Imagination](#), to facilitate conference attendance if desired.

Tuition: \$2,880 per semester for six semesters (\$17,280 total.) Students are also responsible for program fees, travel expenses, and off-campus retreat costs.

For more information visit: <https://www.westernsem.edu/academics/degrees/doctor-ministry-degree/>
or contact:

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