

# Christopher Evans Course Syllabus

Prepared for the Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture by:

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The Center is pleased to share with you the syllabi for introductory courses in American religion that were developed in seminars led by Dr. Grant Wacker of Duke University Divinity School. In all of the seminar discussions, it was apparent that context, or the particular teaching setting, was an altogether critical factor in envisioning how students should be introduced to a field of study. The justification of approach, included with each syllabus, is thus germane to how you use the syllabus.

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## I. Syllabus Justification

DR 351 United Methodist History and Theology is a course that I teach every year at Colgate Rochester Divinity School. It is required of all seminarians preparing for ordination in the United Methodist Church, and I've taught this course at CRDS since the 1994-95 academic year.

CRDS is an ecumenical seminary, affiliated with the American Baptist Churches. However, over one-third of the students in the M.Div program are United Methodists (the largest denomination represented at the seminary). Consequently, the sections I offer in this class tend to be large. I had almost 30 students in my first year, and just under 20 students last year. The vast majority of the students are second-career, ranging in age from 40-60. Additionally, most of these students are commuters, sometimes driving as far as two hours one-way to attend class. Over 90% of my students are pastors in small, rural churches. Despite the constraints on their schedules, the quality of student academic work is generally good. I have found, however, that student expectations as to what constitutes "relevant" classroom knowledge at times are not very high. Theologically, the students are diverse, ranging from very conservative to very liberal.

## Syllabus Layout

Although DR 351 is a denominational studies course, it represents for many students one of the few classes they take that deals with topics in American religious history. Consequently, many students possess little knowledge on general subjects in church history when they enter the classroom. This factor can pose a significant problem as a teacher, because it often forces me to "improvise" in class streamlining syllabus topics to meet the level of classroom knowledge (for example, often I have to do "primers" on Reformation and American church history, because students don't come to class in possession of "survey course" knowledge in these areas). The syllabus breaks down into three sections, beginning with Methodism's origins in the theology of John Wesley, shifting to a discussion of United Methodist growth in America, and concluding with an assessment of United Methodism's role in a global ecumenical context. Most of the class emphasis is on the first two sections. A few years ago, I introduced the study of United Methodist hymnody to the course. I begin each session with the class singing and discussing a hymn that relates to the assigned topic. I find this practice an excellent teaching tool, as it gives students a clear focus on the historical/theological themes to be discussed in class.

My teaching method is based primarily on lecture, however, ample room is left for discussion and feedback. I place great weight on class participation, because I find it the best way for students to integrate important theological themes into the historical topics. Grading for the class is based upon the completion of two written assignments usually a takehome midterm and a major research paper as well as participation in class discussions. Twice a semester I usually utilize guest lecturers and/or videotape presentations. When I started teaching at CRDS as an adjunct with limited time oncampus, I did not keep posted office hours. I did, however, have an "open door" policy with students, in terms of scheduling appointments and meeting informally with students over coffee or meals. This practice had its advantages and disadvantages. I got to know students quite well, but I also discovered how easily time got absorbed, tending to student needs that often transcended classroom issues. As I begin a fulltime teaching position at the seminary, I need to reassess this aspect of my teaching style and adapt a more formal policy regarding student contact hours.

## **Assessment**

DR 351 enables me to address how the study of church history accentuates significant theological themes, movements, and voices within a specific denominational tradition. As a teacher of this course I hold up the objective of exposing students to the depth of their theological tradition especially emphasizing how the underrepresented voices of women and African Americans contribute to a larger theological tapestry. Most students respond favorably to this method. A few students, however, have reminded me that their expectations of what I need to cover are quite different. Two years ago at semester's end, I was approached by a student who was not happy with my topic selection. While she complimented me on my knowledge of American church history, she complained that the class did not help her prepare for her upcoming encounter with her annual conference board of ordained ministry. She summed up, "In a course of this nature, you need to decide what material is relevant to the diverse needs of the class, and what material needs to be discarded." Her comments have been very important to me as I've developed this class since.

DR 351 balances two competing sets of expectations, in which I am accountable to "two masters." On one hand, I expect students to satisfy academic criteria laid down by a graduate theological setting a school with a pluralistic mission statement. On the other hand, students are expected to master material to satisfy specific criteria laid down by denominational boards of ministry.

As a religious historian, I carry a desire to push students to engage the study of history in a critiquevaluative fashion; that is, to enable students to adapt the critical tools of the historian. Seminarians, however, are often motivated by suppositions of their roles as students and ministers that are unique and distinctive from other graduate or undergraduate students. In particular, I am accustomed to hearing throughout the semester the question, "What does this have to do with the local church?"

I believe this is a legitimate question for a professor on the seminary level to address. Given the fact that most of my students are serving in local churches, I challenge them to integrate historical insights into their specific ministerial contexts. For example, in discussing the topic, "women in Methodist history," I am able to introduce classes to different historical models of lay ministry. This approach enables students to see how the historicaltheological past of their tradition relates to the church's ministrymission in the present.

At the same time, I am aware that sometimes the question, "What does it have to do with the local church?", can be used by students to distance themselves from any critical assessment of their tradition. The fine line one walks in a denominational studies course is how to raise critical questions related to the study of history and theology, while not losing sight of the churchrelated relationships that are the main reasons for students taking your class.

## **II. Introductory Course Syllabus**

United Methodist History & Theology  
Colgate Rochester Divinity School

DR 351 Tuesday, 2:15 5 pm Fall 1997  
Instructor: Christopher Evans 271-1320/Ext. 253  
email: cevans@crds.edu

## **Course Description**

The United Methodist Church represents many distinctive historical and theological currents. This course will trace United Methodism's historical and theological growth from the Wesleys to the late 20th century. Attention will be paid in the course to United Methodism's roots in the theology of John Wesley. However, the course will also focus on the denomination's growth from a series of predominantly American movements into a global church.

## **Course Objectives**

The course's central purpose is to increase student knowledge of the varied historical and theological currents that comprise the tapestry of the United Methodist Church. In this regard, the course centers on three objectives: 1) to enable students to grasp basic themes in the theology of John (and Charles) Wesley, and to understand how these themes influenced United Methodism's later historical / theological development; 2) to acquaint students with major antecedent denominations of United Methodism in the 19th and 20th centuries; and 3) to increase awareness of theological movements that influenced United Methodist development after the Wesleys.

## **Required Texts (Available in the Bookstore)**

- Rosemary Skinner Keller, ed. *Spirituality and Social Responsibility: Vocational Vision of Women in the United Methodist Tradition*.
- Thomas Langford, *Practical Divinity: Theology in the Wesleyan Tradition*.
- Grant Shockley, ed, *Heritage & Hope: The African American Presence in United Methodism*.
- Frederick Norwood, *The Story of American Methodism*.

Optional (Available in the Bookstore)

- Richard Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*.
- Heitzenrater and Albert Outler, eds. *John Wesley's Sermons*.

Please consult with the instructor concerning additional readings on reserve in the library

## **Requirements and Grading**

All students are expected to attend class regularly and to complete assigned readings on time. Class participation will count 10% of the final grade. There are two written assignments: 1) a 10 page takehome midterm examination (40% of the final grade), and a 15-20 page research paper covering a topic of the student's choice due at the end of the semester (50% of the final grade). Term paper topics are limitless. Please feel free to consult with the instructor concerning possible topics. (Both the midterm and the final

paper are to be typed, doublespaced.) Late assignments will not be accepted without the instructor's permission. Students are asked to bring a copy of the United Methodist Hymnal to class each week.

## Course Schedule

Week One (September 9): Historical and Theological Roots of the United Methodist Tradition

- A) Introductions; overview of course syllabus.
- B) The significance of United Methodist history and theology: a contemporary assessment.
- C) United Methodism's roots in the Protestant Reformation.

Week Two (September 16): The Birth of the Wesleyan Tradition

- A) Wesley's early life.
- B) Theological Foundations.

Readings: Langford, chapter 1; Norwood, chapters 1 and 3. Class Hymn: "O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing."

Week Three (September 23): Organizing for Success: Distinctive Features of the Wesleyan Revival in the 18th Century.

- A) Wesley's theology: from prevenient grace to sanctification.
- B) Methodist Discipline: class meetingsocietyannual conference.

Readings: Langford, chapter 2; Norwood, chapters 2, 4, 5. Class Hymn: "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling."

Week Four (September 30): Early Methodist and Pietist Traditions in America

- A) The First Methodists in America.
- B) The Christmas Conference and the birth of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

Readings: Norwood, chapters 6-10. Class Hymn: "And Are We Yet Alive?"

Week Five (October 7): Growing Pains: Methodism's Growth in Frontier America

- A) Reforming the continent and beating the Devil: the growth of American Methodism, 1784-1850.
- B) Organizational Identity: from class meeting to General Conference.

Readings: Norwood, chapters 11-12, 14, 16; Langford, chapter 4, Article, Nathan Hatch, "The Puzzle of American Methodism." Class Hymn: "All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name."

No class October 14 Midterm Due: Tuesday, October 21.

Week Six (October 21): Racism in American Methodism (I)

- A) African Americans in early Methodism.
- B) Racial schisms within American Methodism, 1784-1844.

Readings: Shockley, chapters 1 and 2 ; Norwood, chapters 17 and 18. Class Hymn: "Stand By Me."

Week Seven (October 28): Historical and Theological Currents in Mid-19th Century Methodism

- A) Becoming a "national church." Institutional changes in American Methodism, 1800-1865.
- B) Theological tensions at midcentury: the Holiness movement.

Readings: Langford, chapter 6; Keller, Introchapter 1; Norwood, chapter 21. Class Hymn: "Blessed Assurance."

Week Eight (November 4): "Christianizing" America and the World: Methodism from 1865 to 1900

- A) Institutional Challenges: women in late 19th-century American Methodism.
- B) The Evangelical Association and United Brethren in the 19th century.

Readings: Keller, chapters 36; Norwood, chapter 28. Hymn of the Day: "The Church's One Foundation."

Week Nine (November 11): The Social Gospel in American Methodism, 1880-1920

- A) Historical and theological sources of the social gospel in American Methodism.
- B) The emergence of social gospel "radicalism."

Readings: Langford, chapter 8; Norwood, chapters 33-34; Keller, chapter 10, Article: Jean Miller Schmidt, "Reexamining the Public/Private Split." Class Hymn: "Where Cross the Crowded Ways of Life."

Week Ten (November 18): Racism in American Methodism (II)

- A) Racial issues and church mergers, 1876-1939.
- B) "Separate but equal," the emergence of the Central Jurisdiction.

Readings: Shockley, chapters 3, 5, 7; Keller, chapter 7. Class Hymn: "Lift Every Voice and Sing."

Week Eleven (November 25): United Methodist Missions Guest Lecturer: Bishop HaeJong Kim, Episcopal Leader, New York West Area of the United Methodist Church. Readings TBA.

Week Twelve (December 2): United Methodism and the Ecumenical Movement Guest Lecturer: Dr. Sudarshana Devadhar, District Superintendent, North Central New York Conference of the United Methodist Church. Readings TBA. Class Hymn: "Hope of the World."

Week Thirteen (December 9): The Emergence of a Contemporary Church

A) The Formation of the United Methodist Church (1939-1968).

B) Issues in United Methodism since 1968.

Readings: Norwood, chapters 35-36; Langford, chapters 10-12. Class Hymn: "Here I Am, Lord."

Final Paper Due: Friday, December 19.

Selected Bibliography: United Methodist History & Theology

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*The Works of John Wesley* (Bicentennial Edition in 35 Volumes). Nashville: Abingdon, 1984.

Tuttle, Robert G. Jr. *Mysticism in the Wesleyan Tradition*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989.

Weems, Lovett H. Jr. *John Wesley's Message Today*. Nashville: Abingdon.

### IV. Studies in United Methodist Theology Since Wesley

Harkness, Georgia. *Understanding the Christian Faith*. New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1947.

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Muelder, Walter G. *Methodism and Society in the Twentieth Century*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1961.

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