

Lydia Huffman Hoyle 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.

I. Syllabus Justification

Two years ago, after contemplating what course I might offer for a Jr/Sr seminar in Religion, I decided to make a list of possible themes and distribute them to majors and minors in the department. The students then returned the list (or flagged me down on campus) to register their preferences. Every student who responded ranked "Denominationalism" as their first choice. That was the genesis of this course.

Student Profile

The size and makeup of the student body at Georgetown College made this "voting procedure" possible and contributed to the unanimous result. There are approximately 1200 undergraduate students at Georgetown. Although there are representatives from thirty-one states and seven countries, the majority of students are Kentucky natives. Most are white. (The level of racial diversity in the student body reflects the low level of diversity in the state as a whole.) Academically, the students range from moderately poor to exceptional with students pooling on each end of the range. In respect to religious background, approximately 50% are Baptist, 10% Catholic, 10% Methodist, and 10% Christian. Probably fewer than 3% would identify themselves as non-Christian. Most students hold relatively conservative religious and social views but are fairly ignorant in respect to theology (e.g. "What is Calvinism anyway?"), church history, (e.g. "Didn't Baptists start with John the Baptist?"), and a post-children's-Sunday School version of the Bible (e.g. "Didn't the disciples write the Gospels?").

The students likely to register for an upper-level course in Religion are somewhat different from those described above. All of them would have taken at least two courses in New Testament and/or Hebrew Bible. Thus, they have become comfortable with (or at least resigned to) a critical approach to the study of religion. These students also tend to be brighter than average. Because the religion department has a reputation for requiring a lot from students, below-average students rarely venture into upper-level classes. Although most students in the class will be majors or minors in Religion, they may have no background in American religious history. It was, in part, a recognition of this ignorance that apparently spurred the initial interest in denominationalism as a topic of study.

A final word regarding the likely participants in the class is needed. Upper-level religion classes at Georgetown tend to draw students who anticipate a ministry-type career. Thus, many students study with an eye toward future application. They want to understand other religious traditions, in part, because they will need to explain differences and similarities to parishioners in their own churches or because they will be counseling people from denominations other than their own. It is necessary to take into account these practical concerns in the planning of the course.

Institutional Setting

Georgetown College is a liberal arts college in central Kentucky. Founded in 1827, it is the oldest of three colleges in the state sponsored by the Kentucky Baptist Convention. (The Convention contributes approximately 5% of the college budget and retains veto power over the naming of trustees.) Although there are some broad limits on faculty (e.g. one couldn't openly engage in witchcraft), academic freedom is upheld. The institution would not expect Baptists to "win" in the course of a class on denominationalism. It is the case, however, that the Religion Department faculty is Baptist by requirement of the college.

Course Goals (or why this syllabus looks like it does)

Most of my students have been raised in the small worlds of rural Kentucky towns. They have had little exposure to people who are significantly different from themselves. Their own worldviews are not well thought-out because they have never been confronted with ideas that conflict with their own. The first goal of this course is thus to expose students to alternative ways of being Christian in America. The course requires that students visit three congregations and reflect on those visits. In addition, an enthusiastic participant in each of the nine traditions discussed will visit the class. These advocates (often local ministers) extol the virtues of their tradition. (Last year, one of our guests was a white minister at a local African Methodist Episcopal church!) A basic Baptist professor (That would be me!) could never give a lecture that would have the impact of these personal encounters. Through these class visits and their field work, the students are able to discover the differences between the textbook description of a tradition and a living example.

The "field work" also serves to meet a second goal for the course. It raises questions that the students want answered. It is my theory that it is a waste of time to be handing out "answers" to questions that no one is asking. Thus, a goal I have in every class I teach is to make students want to know more about the subject at hand. The church visits stimulate thought and inquiry. Students want to understand what they have seen and experienced.

A third goal of the course is to make the students active participants in the learning process. This is not a course that is primarily geared toward hour-long lectures. A lot is expected of the students. They are to read in preparation for class discussions. They are to become "class experts" on a particular tradition. They are to engage in independent research. The students are not merely unwrapping a completed work of art produced by their insightful professor. They are co-producers of the course. Like their professor, they are seeking to understand so that they can help others to do the same.

Because students in the course will have little or no background in Religion in America, a fourth goal must also be that they gain a basic grounding in the historical development of denominational traditions in Europe and America. This is provided by the textbook and by brief introductory lectures. Although I'm still a little uncomfortable with the "Baptist week, Methodist week, Catholic week" structure, it seemed necessary to organize the central portion of the course in this way. It would be enjoyable to spend more time on broader issues and to organize the course thematically but I think the students would be lost. Students become frustrated when they are asked to re-envision a subject that they have yet to view at all. When I last taught this class, I found, however, that the structure ultimately worked well as students

"discovered" common threads and recurring themes in the many stories that make up the story of denominationalism in America.

A final goal is to expose students to scholarship on denominationalism from other disciplines--especially sociology. Sociologists are interested in the organization and structure of social groups. Thus, they have written extensively on the subject of religious organizations. (See the brief bibliography for examples.) These writings provide insight for lecture preparation and also stimulate class discussions.

II. Introductory Course Syllabus

RELIGION 450

Denominationalism in America

Instructor: Lydia Hoyle

Office: 312 Pawling Hall

Phone: 8125

Office Hours: Tues/Thurs 12:00-2:00 or by appointment

Textbooks:

- Richard W. Wentz. Religion in the New World. Fortress, 1990.
- Library Reserve Readings (as assigned on Course Outline)

Course Description:

This course will explore:

1. the nature and sources of denominationalism in America;
2. the genesis, development, theology, and practice of nine denominational families in America;
3. the changing face of denominationalism in America today; and
4. issues in denominationalism.

Course Objectives:

Upon completion of this course, the responsible student will be able to:

1. discuss possible reasons why America was particularly well-suited for the development of multiple sects and denominations.
2. discuss the importance of the Reformation in setting the stage for the development of denominations.
3. distinguish between nine major denominational traditions in respect to origins, belief, and behavior and distinguish differences between major groups within denominational families.
4. discuss one denominational tradition in depth.

5. discuss issues related to denominationalism in America (e.g. interreligious hostility, the quest for religious unity, etc.)
6. discuss the relevance (or irrelevance) of denominationalism in understanding contemporary religion in America.
7. discuss the present status and likely future of denominationalism in America.
8. research and write a critical paper on a topic of interest within the range of this course.

Course Requirements/Evaluation:

Following the due dates listed on the course outline, the student will:

15% 1) make a presentation (of approximately 20 minutes) to the class on the historical theology and distinctive practices of a particular denomination in one of the nine denominational families studied this term. Two students will work together to prepare most presentations. In preparation for the presentation, the students should become "experts" by reading a minimum of 200 pages on the denomination. They should produce an outline of their presentation to be distributed to the class. In addition, the students will arrange for a guest speaker, film presentation, etc. to help give the class a sense of the experience of contemporary participants in this denomination. (It is the students' responsibility to ensure that there is minimal overlap between her/his presentation and that of a guest speaker or film presentation. The students should provide questions and topics for the guest.)

15% 2) attend services at three churches that represent three different denominational families. (This can not include your own denomination.) Observations should be written down in 2-3 page typewritten papers due on the dates listed on the syllabus. A list of questions from Field Research in Religion will help to guide your thoughts. Samples of "Church Reviews" from the Journal of Anglican and Episcopal History should help you organize your papers. How to be a Perfect Stranger: A Guide to Etiquette in other People's Religious Communities ed. By Arthur J. Magida might also be of help. All will be on library reserve.

15% 3) prepare a 10-12 page research paper on one topic of interest within denominationalism. The topic will be selected in consultation with the professor. (Please come by my office to discuss the topic no later than February 27.) Your paper can not simply be descriptive. You must have a clear argument.

45% 4) take three exams. The dates are noted on the syllabus. Although other adjustments may be made on the syllabus, these will not be changed without the general agreement of the class.

10% 5) attend class and participate in class discussions. Three grace absences will be allowed. Any additional absences will lower the student's attendance/participation grade by five points. Verbal participation in this class is expected and required.

Course Outline and Assignments:

(Due to the nature of this course, some adjustments to this outline will probably be necessary. If you miss a class, please contact a fellow student regarding upcoming assignments.)

Jan 12 Course Introduction

Jan 14 Who and what are we studying?

Reading: Wentz-ch.1

Jan 16 Why denominationalism?

Reading: Niebuhr 3-25 (The Social Sources of Denominationalism)

Jan 19 The Reformation

Reading: Wentz-ch.3

Jan 21 The American Environment

Reading: Wentz-ch.2

Jan 23-28 Baptists and the Puritan Tradition

Reading: Wentz-ch.5

Jan 30-Feb 4 Episcopalians

Reading: Wentz-ch.6

Feb 6-11 Presbyterians

Reading: Wentz-ch.7

Feb 13 Site visit discussion: Our discussion will focus on the worship environment (physical structure, use of symbols, etc.)

Site visit observation paper #1 due

Feb 16 Exam #1

Feb 18-23 Lutherans

Reading: Wentz-ch.8

Feb 25-Mar2 Roman Catholics

Reading: Wentz-ch.9

Mar 4-9 Methodists

Reading: Wentz-ch.10

Mar 11 Site-Visit Discussions: Our discussion will focus on congregational participation and behavior.

Site-visit observation paper #2 due

Mar 13 Interdenominational Hostility

Reading: Chapters 3&4 from *Uncivil Religion: Interreligious Hostility in America* ed. By Robert N. Bellah & Frederick E. Greenspahn.

Excerpts from Maria Monk's *Awful Disclosures of the Hotel Dieu Nunnery of Montreal*

S P R I N G B R E A K

Mar 23-27 "Christians"

Reading: Wentz-ch.13

Mar 30 Exam #2

April 1 The Quest for Denominational Unity

Reading: H. George Anderson, "Ecumenical Movements." In *Altered Landscapes* ed. David W. Lotz.

April 3-8 African/American Denominations

Reading: Wentz-ch.16

April 10 Good Friday - No Class

April 13-17 Holiness/Pentecostal Denominations

Reading: Wentz-ch.18

April 20 Site-visit Discussions: Our discussion will focus on the leadership and the "content" of the service.

Site-visit observation paper #3 due

April 22 The Changing Face of Denominationalism in America/Alternative Paradigms for Understanding Religion in America

Reading: Robert Wuthrow. *The Struggle for America's Soul: Evangelicals, Liberals, and Secularism*. Ch.2.

April 24 Informal Discussions of Research Papers

Research Papers Due

April 27 Final Ruminations (continuation of discussion on April 22)

April 30 Final Ruinations (9:00-11:00)

Some Additional Resources (On Library Reserve)

- J. Gorton Melton, ed. *Encyclopedia of American Religions*
- Frank S. Mead, *Handbook of Denominations in the United States*
- Charles H. Lippy and Peter W. Williams, ed. *Encyclopedia of the American Religious Experience*
- Daniel Reid, ed. *Dictionary of Christianity in America*
- Thomas Robbins and Dick Anthony. *In God's We Trust: New Patterns of Religious Pluralism in America.*
- Andrew Greeley. *Religious Change in America.*
- Wade Clark Roof and William McKinney. *American Mainline Religion: Its Changing Shape and Future.*
- Charles H. Lippy. *Being Religious, American Style: A History of Popular Religiosity in the United States.*
- Thomas Tweed, ed. *Retelling U.S. Religious History.*