

Eugene McCarraher 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. Philip Gleason of the University of Notre Dame. 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

The purpose of this course is to introduce students to the history of religion in the United States. They will examine the relationship of religious life to the cultural, social, economic, and political currents of American history, and consider how the history of religion shapes the way we should understand American history as a whole. Thus, they study the development of religious practices and beliefs in relation to proprietary and corporate capitalism, faith in technological progress, an increasingly pervasive market culture, changing gender conventions, racial and ethnic pluralism, and a political democracy structured, in part, by the separation of church and state. What, they ask, is "religion" in America? How have religious communities, practices, and ideas defined the course of American life?

The readings are designed to explore these questions. My brief lectures at the beginning of class are usually broadly thematic. They suggest the variety of sources and approaches in the study of religion in America, and set a context for discussion of the readings. Throughout the course, I try to cultivate in students a historical consciousness about religion, an inclination to see religion as something that exhibits both change and continuity over time. Why the change? Why the continuity? Students have the idea that identifying the historical origins of an idea or practice necessarily invalidates it a source of either great umbrage great delight. While "demystification" and "debunking" have their venerable places in historical writing and teaching, they can too often become substitutes for, even obstacles to, genuine historical understanding.

II. Introductory Course Syllabus

HISTORY 367
American Religious History

Spring 1997

Prof. Eugene McCarraher

Lectures: Monday and Wednesday 2:30-3:20 EWG 207
Discussion: Friday 2:30-3:20 EWG 207

Office: EWG 406
Office Hours: Wednesday 11:00-12:15, 1:30-2:15, and by appt.
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Course Description

Will Herberg, one of the most astute scholars of religion in the United States, observed over a generation ago that American religious life reflected a paradox: "pervasive secularism amid mounting religiosity." As he saw it, Americans used religion to sanction a larger "American Way of Life" consisting of free enterprise, national pride, practicality, and individualism. A century before Herberg, the French traveller Alexis de Tocqueville had noted that "American preachers are constantly referring to the earth" and that it was difficult to ascertain whether Americans believed that "the principal object of religion is to obtain eternal felicity" or whether they trusted in God for "prosperity in this world."

Since religions are, after all, earthly institutions -- their doctrines, rites, and ethical codes help to order the terrestrial affairs of millions of men and women -- Herberg and Tocqueville may just be wrong-headed. Still, their sense of a fundamental quandary in American religious life may not be inerrant. Protestantism and Catholicism, the two main currents of religious faith in American history, have stressed the virtues of charity, self-denial, humility, and obedience. Many Christians (along with those of other faiths) have imagined and worked to create a social order based on faith, sharing, and fellowship. Yet America has also been an experiment in what we have come to call "modernity": scientific, technological, and economic development under the auspices of capitalism; a pervasive belief in "progress;" political democracy; and an underlying faith in an ideal of "self-government" or "self-development" that recognizes few if any necessary moral or material limits. The great paradox of American religious history is that while American religious communities have often fostered this experiment in modernity, they have also preserved, in predominantly Christian forms, other standards by which to judge the condition of their country.

This conflict between "progress" and religious virtue is the main theme of this course in American religious history. How did Protestants, Catholics, and other believers both reinforce and challenge the "American way of life" as it was defined at different historical moments? How have they attempted to resolve the resulting tensions? What does American religious life tell us about the meaning of "America"? Using a combination of secondary and primary sources, we will track some of the spiritual pilgrimages Americans have made through their history, and attempt to understand how they have fared on their journeys.

Readings

The following books are required and must be purchased at the University bookstore:

- Rudolfo Anaya, *Bless Me Ultima*
- James Baldwin, *Go Tell it on The Mountain*
- Russell Conwell, *Acres of Diamonds*
- Dorothy Day, *The Long Loneliness*
- Edwin S. Gaustad, *A Religious History of America*
- Colleen McDannell, *The Christian Home in Victorian America*
- George Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*
- Robert Anthony Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street*

- Chaim Potok, *The Chosen*

Other readings (marked with an asterisk in the course schedule) will be available either in hand-out form or in the reserve room of the library. All readings must be completed by the Friday of the week designated.

Grading, Attendance, and Participation

Exams. I will assign two take-home essay examinations in the course of the semester. The first will be assigned on March 3 and will be due on March 10; the second will be assigned on May 12 and will be due at some time during the exam period. Both essays will be wide-ranging questions that will require you to synthesize a large amount of material. Each will count for 25% of your grade, for a total of 50%.

Paper. You must write a short research paper (10-15 pages in length, typewritten) that will be due on May 28. There are numerous topics in the history of religion in America, so you should not have too much difficulty in selecting one. You must, however, discuss your subject with me so that I can guide you with all the wisdom I can muster. The subject of your paper can be a person, a movement, an idea, a denomination, a controversy, etc.. Please submit your topic to me by February 26. The research paper is worth 30% of your grade.

Attendance and Participation. Since class discussion is essential to this course, attendance and participation are required. For each Friday, you will be assigned a number of questions for reflection. You must write brief answers to these questions, which I will collect and which will serve as the bases for discussion. Class participation counts for 20% of the final grade.

Course Schedule

Week one: Introduction

Gaustad, 3-11

February 12: Introduction and Blessing

February 14: Before the Encounter: European Christianity in 1492 and Native American Spiritualities

Week Two: The European Heritage

Gaustad, 12-50, 99-108

February 17: Spanish and French Catholics

February 19: Religion and Slavery in the Colonial South

Week Three: The Celestial City of Colonial America

*John Winthrop, "A Modell of Christian Charity"

*David Hall, ed., *The Antinomian Controversy*

*John Woolman, *Journal*

February 24: The City on a Hill:

Puritanism and the New England Way

February 26: The City in a Valley:

The Society of Friends and "Holy Conversation"

Week Four: Revivalism and Revolution

Gaustad, 109-27

- *Jonathan Edwards, "The Nature of True Virtue"
- *Ezra Stiles, "The United States Elevated To Glory and Honor"
- *Richard Allen, Life Experience and Gospel Labors
- *Documents on lay trusteeism

March 3: The First Great Awakening

March 5: Republican Christianity

March 7: No discussion section

Week Five: Awash in a Sea of Faith

Gaustad, 128-63

- *Charles Grandison Finney, Lectures on Revivals
- *Brigham Young, Sermons
- *Elizabeth Peabody, "The West Roxbury Community"
- *Pierrepoint Noyes, My Father's House

March 10: The Second Great Awakening

March 12: The Communitarian Impulse in American Spirituality

Week Six: American Religion and the Domestic Ideal

McDannell, The Christian Home in Victorian America

March 17: Protestant Domesticity

March 19: Catholic Domesticity

Week Seven: The Bright and Morning Star

Gaustad, 164-77

- *Angelina Grimke, "An Appeal to the Christian Women of the South"
- *Sojourner Truth, Narrative

March 24: Evangelicalism, Reform, and Civil War

March 26: The Religion of the Slaves

March 31--April 4: SPRING RECESS

Week Eight: The Specter of Modernity

Gaustad, 178-97, 255-80

Marsden, 1-27

Russell Conwell, Acres of Diamonds

April 7: The Evangelical Empire

April 9: Liberalism, Modernism, and Neo-Scholasticism

Week Nine: The Modern Cure of Souls

Gaustad, 198-207

*Charles Sheldon, In His Steps

*Mary Baker Eddy, Science and Health

*John A. Ryan, A Living Wage

*Walter Rauschenbusch, Christianizing the Social Order

April 14: The Soul as Individual: Psychological Religion and The Therapeutic Ethic

April 16: The Soul as Social: The Social Gospel

Week Ten: The Anti-Modern Reply

Marsden, 27-61, 122-52

Orsi, Madonna of 115th Street

Chaim Potok, The Chosen

April 21: Fundamentalist Evangelicalism

April 23: Catholic Devotionalism

Week Eleven: American Religion Between the Wars

Day, The Long Loneliness

*Harry Emerson Fosdick, Adventurous Religion

*Reinhold Niebuhr, Moral Man and Immoral Society

*William Jennings Bryan's speech to the jury at the Scopes Trial

April 28: The Depression and the Search for a New Social Gospel

April 30: The Depression and the Search for a New Social Gospel

Week Twelve: The New Deal in American Religion

Baldwin, Go Tell it on The Mountain

*Will Herberg, Protestant, Catholic, Jew

*Martin Luther King, Jr.,

"Pilgrimage Toward Non-Violence"

*Thomas Merton, Seeds of Contemplation

May 5: Cold War, "Pluralism," and the Surge in Piety

May 7: Out of the Ghettos

Week Thirteen: The Earthly City of the 1960's

Gaustad, 311-51

*Harvey Cox, The Secular City

*Garry Wills, Bare Ruined Choirs

*Malcolm Boyd, Are You Running With Me, Jesus?

*Mary Daly, The Church and the Second Sex

*James Cone, Black Church, Black Theology

May 12: The Secular City Rises

May 14: The Secular City Falls

Week Fourteen: Awash in a Sea of Faith, Again

Rudolfo Anaya, Bless Me Ultima

Marsden, 153-81

*Anne Morrow Lindbergh, Gift from the Sea

*Hal Lindsey, The Late Great Planet Earth

*Robert Bellah, et. al., Habits of the Heart

May 19: The Fragmentation of the Major Denominations,

The New Old-Time Religion, and The "New Age"

May 21: Discussion and Blessing