Hartford Seminary

American Religious History (HI-571)

Fall 2015

Online Course, beginning week of September 1

Instructor: William McKinney Adjunct Professor in Religion and Society and past president of Pacific School of Religion, Berkeley, California

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Overview

In God we trust. If America is the most religious country in the world, how did we get that distinction? This course is designed to offer students a glimpse at the rich diversity of religious history of the United States. The readings, lectures and online discussion will highlight major movements and religious figures that shaped the distinct forms of faith in our society. We will explore the relationship between American culture and its religious life with particular attention to New England. The course will pay special attention to the impact religion has had on our nation’s history and inversely how religious traditions have been shaped by their encounter with American culture.

The course is offered on-line. Beginning on September 1 and continuing for 15 weeks the instructor will upload a new unit of material on Monday of each week. An introduction to the topic of the week will be posted along with some discussion questions related to the readings for the week. The assigned readings and the introduction should be read by Thursday of that week. Comments should be posted by Saturday and responses to another student’s post should be posted by Sunday. All the weekly assignments should be completed by 5 pm every Sunday. While the conversation from one week to another may overlap I expect to begin the new topic each Monday. This will require students to keep up with the course schedule.

The course will involve a lot of reading. I have included two books and two collections of documents by representative religious thinkers over the course of the history of religion in America. Some supplementary materials will be available on-line and on reserve in the Hartford Seminary Library.

Background for the Course:

This is a course for graduate credit and assumes a broad familiarity with the basic contours of American history. It also assumes some familiarity with the history of Protestant Christianity in the West. An excellent introduction to the latter is Roland Bainton’s classic book, The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century (Beacon Press, 1952).

Course Objectives:
1. To familiarize students with the broad sweep of the history of religion in America, with particular attention to Protestant Christianity in New England.

2. To focus in some depth on about a dozen representative religious thinkers of diverse backgrounds in the context of their social, religious and public settings.

3. To sharpen students’ ability to think historically and theologically about the past as a resource for understanding their own time and setting.

Assignments and Grading

Weekly reading summaries posted to the website: 30 percent

Mid-term (due October 25) and final exam (due December 13): 20 percent each

Term paper (15 pages) on an approved topic: 30 percent (due December 31)

Plagiarism Warning

Plagiarism is the failure to give proper credit for the words or ideas of another person, whether published or unpublished, and is strictly prohibited. Credit will not be given for written work in this course containing plagiarism, and plagiarism may result in a failing grade for the entire course.

Required Texts

Martin Marty, Pilgrims in their Own Land Penguin Books, 1984


Supplementary Readings Available Online

Session Outline and Readings (tentative)

1. European and American Origins (September 1-7)

Martin E. Marty, Pilgrims in Their Own Land (Pilgrims), chapters 1-5

Conrad Cherry, “Introduction,” in God’s New Israel, pp. 1-21

John Winthrop, “A Modell of Christian Charity,” in God’s New Israel, pp. 37-41
2. Puritan Beginnings: Boston, Hartford, New Haven (September 7-14)
   Thomas Hooker, “The Activity of Faith,” in Supplementary Reader

3. Early Dissenting Voices (September 14-21)
   Pilgrims chapters 6-7
   Roger Williams, “Letter to the Town of Providence on the Limits of Religious Liberty,” in American Religions, pp. 75-76
   Roger Williams, The Bloody Tenent (sic) of Persecution for Cause of Conscience,” in Supplementary Reader
   “The Examination of Mrs. Anne Hutchinson,” in American Religions, pp. 37-62

4. Great Awakening and Jonathan Edwards (September 21-27)
   Edwin S. Gaustad, The Great Awakening in New England
   Pilgrims chapters 8-9
   Jonathan Edwards, “The Latter-Day Glory is Probably to Begin in New England,” in God’s New Israel, pp. 54-60

5. New England Theology (September 27-October 4)
   Pilgrims chapters 10-12
   Nathaniel William Taylor, “Advice to the Clergy,” in Supplementary Reader
   Lyman Beecher, “A Plea for the West, in God’s New Israel, pp. 122-130

7. More Dissenting Voices (October 4-11)
   Pilgrims, chapter 13
   William Ellery Channing, “Unitarian Christianity,” in Supplementary Reader
Joseph Smith, “The Articles of Faith” and “Revelation,” in American Religions, pp. 164-172

Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The Divinity School Address,” in American Religions, pp. 172-182

8. Slavery and the Civil War (October 11-18)


Frederick Douglass, “Narrative of the Life of an American Slave,” in American Religions, pp. 213-219

David O. White, “The Fugitive Blacksmith of Hartford: James W.C. Pennington,” in Supplementary Reader


MID-TERM EXAM DUE OCTOBER 25

9. Horace Bushnell (October 18-25)

Horace Bushnell, “Our Obligations to the Dead,” in God’s New Israel, pp. 203-214

View tour of Hartford’s North Cemetery: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BMRtwCflWJ8

9. Hartford’s Nook Farm (October 25-November 1)


Harriet Beecher Stowe, “Selections,” in Supplementary Reader

Isabella Beecher Hooker, “Memorial of the Connecticut Woman Suffrage Association to the Constitutional Convention of 1902,” in Supplementary Reader

10. Social Gospel (November 1-8)

Pilgrims chapters 14-16


11. Confronting Modernity: Liberals and Fundamentalists (November 29-December 6)

Pilgrims, chapter 17


Alexis Toth, “Meeting with Archbishop John Ireland,” in American Religions, pp. 382-383

J. Gresham Machen, “Christianity and Liberalism,” in Supplementary Reader

12. World War II and Revival (November 8-15)

Pilgrims chapters 18-20

Will Herberg, “From Protestant-Catholic-Jew,” in American Religions, pp. 518-533

READING WEEK

13. Neo-Orthodoxy and the Niebuhrs (November 29-December 6)

Harry Emerson Fosdick, “Shall the Fundamentalists Win?” in American Religions, pp. 418-423


Reinhold Niebuhr, “Anglo-Saxon Destiny and Responsibility,” in God’s New Israel, pp. 296-300

SECOND EXAM DUE DECEMBER 13

14. Social Crisis and the 1960s (December 6-13)

Martin Luther King, Jr. “Letter from Birmingham Jail, in God’s New Israel, pp. 343-355

Malcolm X, “The Ballot or the Bullet,” in God’s New Israel, pp. 356 -371

15. Final Thoughts and Future Projections (December 13-20)

FINAL PAPER DUE FRIDAY, DECEMBER 31