

## AMERICAN CHURCH HISTORY COURSE INFORMATION

### Course Overview

This course covers the birth of the European Church in Anglo-America and the dynamics that shaped the American Church over four centuries. The rise of denominations and their early leaders will be surveyed: the colonial churches, awakenings and revivalism, westward expansion on the frontier, and the rise of cults; impact of the American Civil War, the industrial revolution, and the World Wars. The roots and results of the modernist-fundamentalist dispute of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century will be considered, setting the stage for the late 20<sup>th</sup> century church in an age of post-modernism.

### Course Objectives

1. To understand why and in what forms Christianity was brought to the New World;
2. To survey the competing and cooperative efforts of early American Christianity, and to understand the success and failures of various churches;
3. To understand various American forces that shaped the American Church, particularly:
  - a. A democratic impetus focusing privilege and responsibility in the common man;
  - b. The rise of revivalism and its social impact through the centuries;
  - c. Slavery in a Protestant culture;
  - d. A growing affluence and the anti-spiritual fruits of the Age of Reason;
4. To understand the international influence of American-styled Christianity, and to understand our contemporary church in the context of its immediate and remote histories.

### Course Outcomes

1. The student will come to appreciate the motivations and costs paid by early Christian immigrants to America;
2. The student will master the dynamics leading to the spread of Christianity across North America as well as the rise and popularity of cults and experimental Christianity in order to defend orthodox Christianity.
3. The student will become familiar with the strengths and weaknesses of key American church leaders and their theologies as a touchstone for his/her own place in the church;
4. The student will know the major Presbyterian leaders and will master the points of controversy between the fundamentalists/modernists in order to keep vigilant in the defense of the faith;
5. The student will become conversant with the family trees of the major Protestant denominations to have a point of reference for quick discernment regarding contemporary church groups.

### Readings

Textbook: *A Religious History of the American People* by Sidney Ahlstrom. You may skip chapters 21,32,33,35,(49),57,58,59. Read Parts I-IV for the mid-term and Parts V-IX by the final exam.

As an alternate text, you may read *A History of Christianity in the U.S. and Canada* by Mark Noll. Skip chapter 10 on Canada. By the mid-term, read chpts. 1-8. Finish this text by the final exam. This text choice brings extra written assignments.

### Report(s)

Prepare one 8-minute **class lecture** on the event/trend or significant individual of your choice. See topic sheets for ideas, and bring your report around the same time as the relevant discussion in class.

Your lecture will include a typed outline of 2-3 pages given to the rest of the class.

Bibliography should include three sources besides the class text.

If you read Noll instead of Ahlstrom, you will bring three lectures. Each lecture will address a different century, from the 17th to the 20th, and should be delivered by the end of our discussions of that century.

### Exams

There will be two exams, one at mid-term over the 1600s/1700s, and a final exam over the 1800s/1900s.

### Grading

Exams = 55%      Reading = 25% (or 15% for Noll)      Attendance = 5%  
Report(s) = 15% (or 25% for three reports for Noll readers)