

American Church History
The New York School of Ministry
Winter, 2017
With the Reverend Steven D. Johnson, Ph. D.

Syllabus

Overview: This course will survey important events, people and ideas in American Church History from Colonial times through the first decade of the 21st Century. Though students can expect to encounter materials from a wide range of religious perspectives there will be an emphasis on events, people, and ideas that have had a particular impact on the development of the United Church of Christ.

Required Text: *The Religious History of America*, Revised Edition, by Edwin Gaustad and Leigh Schmidt, HarperOne, copyright 2002.

Presentation: This class will be provided using the Zoom platform. All students must have access to a computer that can connect to Zoom with both camera and microphone. Classes will be held on Wednesdays from 6:30 to 9 PM. Sessions will be recorded for students who cannot make the Wednesday sessions. There will be a discussion session with Dr. Johnson for any students who aren't able to participate in any Wednesday session. Timing and duration of discussion sessions will be negotiated in advance by Dr. Johnson and the students involved.

Basic Components and Expectations: All students will be expected to read chapters from the required text in advance of the discussion schedule listed below. All students will be expected to participate in class discussions on Wednesday or as arranged with the Instructor. Essay exams will be made available at the end of each session and will be due at the beginning of the next session. Students will be required to take 4 of the 8 exams. In addition, students will be required to write one five-page essay that demonstrates research beyond the assigned text on a topic from the history of the United Church of Christ. These essays will cover material not covered by the 4 exams you chose take.

Expectations for papers and exams: Due dates for exams and papers are listed below and will be adhered to. Each exam will consist of a set of four proposed questions. You will be required to answer two of those questions. I expect each answer to be at least two pages long. Papers should be approximately 5 pages long. To receive a B in the class you must provide me with a total of at least 18 pages of written work. You must proof read each exam and paper before submission. Though this is not an English class, poor spelling and grammar make it much more difficult for me to determine what you mean to say. I suggest you get someone else to read your paper before you send it to me. Where pertinent, I expect you to use inclusive language in your writing. When you are talking about people in general and not the male of the species in specific you will avoid using the word "men." When writing about God you will not always use the pronoun "he" nor always refer to God as "Father." You must balance masculine images with feminine images. You may avoid such images altogether. This does not include direct quotations. Then you are expected to use the words of the original author, including their biases.

You are to submit your exams and papers to me in either a Word document or an rtf file. You will submit them as an email attachment sent to stevej2home@netscape.net.

Grades will be based on my assessment of your grasp of the material we cover and your ability to apply that material to your present situation. You cannot receive an A in this course if you cannot demonstrate in your writing that you understand the implications of the events and ideas we study for the situation of the United Church of Christ or your local congregation today. Broadly speaking grades will indicate the following:

F: If you don't understand why you failed then we do have a problem.

D: You did not meet the minimum requirements of this class. That could mean that your answers were too short or hard to understand. It could mean that you didn't participate as actively in the discussion session as is required. Most likely, it means some combination of these things.

C: You did the bare minimum of work required. You answered questions briefly and with little insight. You demonstrated an adequate grasp of the materials we covered, but showed little understanding of how that material applies today.

B: You fulfilled all the requirements of this class fully. Your written work was clear and understandable. It demonstrated that you have a firm grasp of the material we have studied in its historical context. You were an active participant in our discussions and went beyond the bare minimums on a regular basis.

A: You exceeded the requirements of this class. Your written work was not only clear and understandable, but also demonstrated true insight into the historical context of the material. In addition, you demonstrated an ability to apply those insights to your present situation. You participated actively in our discussions. You demonstrated a mastery of the material through exams and papers.

Dates on the following Discussion Schedule are probable but may change due to changes in my wife's work schedule. She is an Interim Minister in the United Church of Christ and we are anticipating changes in early 2017.

Discussion Schedule:

Wednesday, January 18: Please read Chapters 1-2 of *The Religious History of America*. We will discuss the arrival of the first Christians in the Americas.

Wednesday, January 25: Please read Chapter 3-5. We will discuss the second wave of Christian colonists to North America, including the Puritans in New England (the ancestors of the Congregational churches) and reformed Germans in Pennsylvania (the ancestors of the German Reformed Church).

Wednesday, February 1: Please read Chapters 5-7. We will discuss the revival movements of the Great Awakenings and the influence of Enlightenment ideas, including Deism, on the development of the church in the formation of the United States of America and the development of theology in the Congregational churches, especially the arguments on Unitarianism.

Wednesday, February 8: Please read Chapters 8-9. We will discuss arguments over slavery and their impact on the Church in America. We will pay particular attention to the Amistad event and the development of the American Missionary Association. We will discuss the arrival of Germans who were influenced by the Evangelical Union in Prussia and the formation of the German Evangelical Synod in North America. We will discuss the consequences of the Civil War for the Churches in America.

Wednesday, February 15: Please read Chapters 10-12. We will discuss the Social Gospel and its impact on our churches as well as the Mercersburg Theology and its impact on the German Reformed.

Wednesday, February 22: Please read Chapters 13-14. We will discuss the development of fundamentalism in America as well as the impact of other theological debates on religion in America. We will discuss the impact of the Holiness movement as well as the increased immigration of non-Christians to America. We will discuss the changing face of evangelism and the debates fostered by the First World War. We will pay particular attention to the ideas of “Christian Realism” and “Neo-orthodoxy” as they impacted the ancestors of the United Church of Christ.

Wednesday, March 8: Please read Chapters 15-16. We will discuss issue regarding the separation of Church and State and other issues related to the interaction of the churches and governments.

Wednesday, March 15: Please read Chapter 17-18. We will discuss the various civil rights movements including those of blacks, women, and homosexuals. We will discuss the growth and decline of the influence of the Christian Church and the role of religion in politics. We will briefly discuss the formation of the United Church of Christ and discuss some of the foci of the Church during its first 50 years.

April 1: All UCC History Papers are due. (See above) All exams are due at the beginning of the next session except exams on the final session which are also due on April 1.