

Course Syllabus

Course Number & Title: 414 – American Church History – 2 credit hrs.

Semester: Fall 2025

Professor: Steven Brinegar

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Course Description: 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; the 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 20th century will be considered, setting the stage for the late-20th-century church in an age of postmodernism.

Delivery: In-person, 16-week semester schedule

Course Objectives

1. To understand why and in what forms Christianity was brought to the New World;
2. To evaluate the competing and cooperative efforts of early American Christianity, and to understand the successes and failures of various churches;
3. To analyze various 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;
 - e. The role of technology in shaping American Christianity;
4. To evaluate the international influence of American-styled Christianity

Student Learning Objectives:

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 be able to describe 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 become conversant with the family trees of the major Protestant denominations to develop a point of reference for quick discernment regarding contemporary church groups.
5. Explain the historical, theological, political, and cultural circumstances that contributed to the introduction and development of Christianity in the New World and identify the various forms and traditions of Christianity established in early America.
6. Analyze the competing, cooperative, and sometimes conflicting efforts of early American churches and denominations, and evaluate the successes, failures, and lasting influence of their ministries.
7. Analyze the major social, intellectual, political, and economic forces that shaped American Christianity, including:
 - a. Evaluate the influence of democratic ideals in transferring religious privilege and responsibility toward the common person.
 - b. Analyze the development and social impact of revivalism from the colonial period through subsequent centuries.
 - c. Assess the theological and social challenges posed by slavery within a predominantly Protestant culture.
 - d. Analyze the effects of increasing affluence, rationalism, and the intellectual movements associated with the Age of Reason upon American Christianity and spirituality.
 - e. Assess the development and international influence of American-style Christianity, and evaluate its contributions, strengths, weaknesses, and continuing influence on Christianity worldwide.
8. Evaluate major developments in American church history from a biblical and theological perspective, distinguishing between historical developments that strengthened the church's biblical mission and those that contributed to doctrinal, spiritual, or cultural decline.

9. Synthesize historical, theological, and cultural evidence to formulate informed conclusions concerning the development of American Christianity and its significance for the contemporary church.

Course Requirements

1. **Required Texts:** *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 by October 20 and Parts V-IX by the final exam.
2. **Recommended Texts:** Noll's *History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* and Matthew Sutton's *Chosen Land*.
3. **Course Schedule:** Every Tuesday at 2 pm. No class on September 22. Paper is due on October 20. Oral report is due on December 8. The final exam is December 15.

Assignment Descriptions

1. **Required Reading**
2. **Papers:** One 10-page biography on an important figure from American Church History due by the Midterm Exam.
3. **Oral Report:** A 12-minute report based on the subject of your biography on a particular aspect of theology, in which your subject made a significant contribution.
4. **Quizzes:** Each class will start with a review quiz based on the previous lecture.
5. **Exam:** A comprehensive exam.
6. **Class Participation** is encouraged and expected.

Grading

- Final Exam @ 25%
- Reading @ 20%
- Paper @ 20%
- Oral Report @ 15%
- Quizzes @ 15%
- Attendance/class participation @ 5%

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