**Church History in the United States: From the Founders to the Fundamentalists**

Davenant Hall Core Foundations

Summer 2021

Teacher: Miles Smith IV ([m.smith@davenanttrust.org](mailto:m.smith@davenanttrust.org))

**Course Description**

Nineteenth century religious life in the United States created what we now understand as modern American religion. There would be no so-called “Evangelicalism” without the so-called Fundamentalist/Modernist debates in the 1910s and 1920s. But more importantly there would be no Fundamentalist/Modernist debates without the explosion of American intellectual life in the nineteenth century. Attempting to protect orthodoxy, twentieth century conservative Protestant thought was pared down to the basics of soteriology and a few ethical issues (generally regarding human sexuality). It was largely dismissive of Protestant intellectual engagement with other aspects of social and civil life in the United States. Nineteenth century Protestant divines, however, engaged the great intellectual questions. Their answers represented the broad and diverse Protestant intellectual tradition.

The course will be divided thematically and will follow a broadly chronological framework. Exploring the breadth of the Protestant intellectual tradition in the nineteenth century will form a major part of this class. Many know the basic biographies of figures like Charles Hodge because they were influential, but also because of hagiographic works produced by major Evangelical publishers in the last half-century. This class will seek to avoid hagiography and treat clerics as historical figures – not to dismiss their spiritual contributions, but to contextualize them. Weekly readings will generally but not strictly be chronologically successive.

**Course Format**

The format of the course will blend short lectures and guided discussion of the assigned texts. Much of the subject matter of this course was controversial at the time, and is still controversial now, and we intend to tackle it accordingly. For each class, one student will present their findings regarding a historical controversy, or movement.

Classes will meet via Zoom for two hours each week and will be recorded for later viewing by students who cannot participate (but not for dissemination outside of class). The instructor will lecture and lead discussion for an hour, after which a student will offer their thoughts on a source or particular person/institution/controversy from the week’s theme and/or chronology and will lecture and discussion on their subject. Additional student participation and instructor interaction can take place through various digital media.

**Course Requirements:**

1. **Weekly Readings and Participation:** Participation is an expectation. Without your presence and thoughtful (as well as frequent) contributions, discussions will not work, and the benefits you gain from the course will be severely limited. This forms 20% of your grade.
2. **Written Essay Tests:** You will submit three historical review essays over the course of the class. These are designed for you to interact with a given primary source and offer a thesis driven engagement with that source. Each essay comprises 20% of your final grade and should be between ca 800 words.
3. **Research Paper:** Your final research paper should be a thesis driven engagement with a historical question regarding Protestantism in the United States during the chronology of the class. Your papers should be ca 3500 words. Please use Turabian citation style.

**Course Texts**

***To purchase:***

Ahlstrom, Sydney A Religious History of the American People, reprint (Yale University Press, 2004).\*

Noll, Mark A. *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (Oxford University Press, 2002).

\*Ahlstrom available digitally at Internet Archive.

***Recommended:***

Esbeck, Carl and Den Hartog, Jonathan eds., *Disestablishment and Religious Dissent: Church-State Relations in the New American States, 1776-1833* (University of Missouri Press, 2019).

***All other works are available available in GoogleBooks or provided digitally by the instructor.***

**Course Schedule**

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| **Week** | **Key Topic** | **McGrath Reading** | **Primary Reading** |
| 1 | United States, not American; Protestant, not Reformed | Chapter 1 | Timothy Dwight IV, *The Conquest of Canaan*  Noll*, America’s God* Chap 7-8  John Witherspoon, *The Dominion of Providence Over the Passions of Men* |
| 2 | Disestablishment | Chapters 2-3 | Alexander McLeod, *Messiah, Governor of the Nations of the Earth*  Noll, Chap 8-9 |
| 3 | Religion in the States and Jeffersonian religion | Chapter 4 | Timothy Alden Jr, *The Glory of America: A Century Sermon*  William Linn*, Serious Considerations on the Election of a President* |
| 4 | Protestant republic | Chapter 5 | Ezra Styles Ely, *The Duty of Christian Freemen to Elect Christian Rulers*  John Williamson Nevin, *The Scourge of God: A Sermon Preached in the First Presbyterian Church, July 6, 1832, on the Occasion of a City Fast, Observed in Reference to the Approach of the Asiatic Cholera*  Joel Parker, *The Signs of the Times*  Noll, Chap 10-11 |
| 5 | Revivalism and the Second great Awakening | Chapter 6 | John Williamson Nevin, *The Anxious Bench*  John K. Converse, *The Relation of Christianity, and of the Several Forms of Christianity, to the Republican Institutions of the United States*  Noll, Chapter 12-15 |
| 6 | Scripture, authority, and the natural order in Early Republic religion | Chapter 7 | Charles P. McIlvaine, *Justification by Faith*  John H. Agnew, *Woman’s Offices and Influences*  Noll, Chap 16-18  John Bachman, *The Doctrine of the Unity of the Human Race*, Chap IV and V |
| 7 | Slavery and the Civil War | Chapter 8 | Bishop Stephen Elliott, “Pastoral Letter” in *Sermons*, pp567-580  Angelina Grimke, *An Appeal to the Christian Women of the South*  David Root, *A Fast Day Sermon on Slavery*  Noll, Chap 19,20, 21 |
| 8 | The Rise of Liberal Christianity | Chapters 9, 11 | Horace Bushnell, *A Letter to His Holiness Pope Gregory XVI*  Thomas Wentworth Higginson, *The Sympathy of Religions*  Ahlstrom, Chap 46-48 |
| 9 | Protestantism triumphant and the end of war | Chapters 12-13 | Gamble, *The War for Righteousness,* pp 1-23  Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis* Chap 1 and 2  Ahlstrom, Chap 52 |
| 10 | Fundamentalist/Modernist Controversy | Chapters 14-17 | Henry Emerson Fosdick, “Shall the Fundamentalists Win?”  J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*  Ahlstrom, Chap 53 |