American Christianity
Hamilton Campus

Instructor:  Dr. Garth M. Rosell  Fall Semester 2011
Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary  Thursdays, 1:15 to 4:15 p.m.

Course Description: American Christianity is designed to provide the student with an understanding of the development of Christianity in America from the early seventeenth century to the present time. Special attention will be given to a selection of important themes within American religious history. Class meetings will involve lectures, student presentations and discussions.

Textbooks:


Course Requirements: Students who are taking the course for credit are required to attend the class sessions regularly, to write two brief research papers, to complete at least 2000 pages of reading (a reading report, including the textbooks, must be submitted by 4:00 p.m., Friday, December 9) and to prepare materials on assigned topics for class presentation. Assignments will be made during the first class session. There will be no examinations.

Research Papers: Each student will be asked to write two seven page papers for the course:

**Paper I:** The first paper (due by the time of the class meeting on Thursday, October 20) should focus on one significant individual in American Religious History. Research should include the reading of at least one major biography of the person and at least one major piece of writing by that person. The paper should consist of three parts: (i) A brief five-page biographical sketch of the person you have studied; (ii) a one page annotated bibliography of the primary and secondary materials you have used; and (iii) a one page summary of specific ways (both positive and negative) in which your individual's life and work might be of help to you in your future ministry.

**Paper II:** The second paper (due by the time of the class meeting on Thursday, December 8) should focus on one significant theme or issue in American Religious History. Research should include the use of both
primary and secondary materials. The paper should consist of three parts: (i) A brief five-page description and analysis of the theme or issue you have selected; (ii) a one page annotated bibliography of the primary and secondary materials you have used; and (iii) a one page summary of specific ways (both positive and negative) in which your study might be of help to you in your future ministry.

**Class Presentations:** As a way of becoming familiar with the literature of American Religious History, students will be asked to make two or three classroom presentations. Assignments for this purpose will be made during the first class session.

**Personal consultations:** The instructor will normally be available both before and after each class session. Office hours are posted outside of my office door. I can be reached by phone at my seminary office (978-646-4139) or by e-mail <grosell@gcts.edu>

**Recommended reference works:**


**Collections of Documents:**


**Textbooks in American Religious History:**

Mark A. Noll, Nathan O. Hatch, George M. Marsden, David F. Wells and John D. Woodbridge, eds., Eerdmans' Handbook to Christianity in America (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983).
Martin E. Marty, Pilgrims in Their Own Land (Boston: Little, Brown, 1984).

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES:

September 15: INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN CHRISTIANITY
This class will serve as an introduction to the course. Class presentation assignments will be made, the course schedule will be distributed, and a brief overview of American Christianity will be provided.

September 22: THE PURITAN VISION


Discussion of Common Reading:


Class Presentations:

Leland Ryken, Worldly Saints (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986).

Recommended Reading:


**September 29: THE MISSIONARY IMPULSE**

**Background Reading:** Ahlstrom, pp. 121-259.

**Discussion of Common Reading:**


**Class Presentations:**


**Recommended Reading:**

Charles Lippy, Robert Choquette and Stafford Poole, *Christianity Comes to the Americas* (New York: Paragon House, 1992).  
October 6: Guest Lecture and Discussion
October 13 (Reading Week): No class session (but students are expected to use this time for reading and research)

October 20: THE GREAT AWAKENING
During this class we will explore the rise of religious freedom in America. Special attention will be given to the role that Baptists played in this important story. Paper I is due by the time of the class meeting.

Background Reading: Ahlstrom, pp. 261-384.

The Great Awakening Debate: Charles Chauncy vs. Jonathan Edwards:

Charles Chauncy, "Enthusiasm Described and Cautioned Against" (1742) and "Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion" (1743) in Heimert and Miller, The Great Awakening pp. 228-256 and 291-304.
(Background material can be found in Charles H. Lippy, Seasonable Thoughts: The Mind of Charles Chauncy (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1981).

Jonathan Edwards, "The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit" (1741) and "Thoughts on the Revival of Religion" (1742), in Heimert and Miller, pp. 204-213 and 263-290.
(Background materials can be found in Iain H. Murray, Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987).

Class Presentations:


Recommended Reading:


**October 27: THE COMING OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM**

**Background Reading:** Ahlstrom, pp. 385-509.

**Classroom Presentation:**


**Recommended Reading:**


November 3: **THE REVOLUTIONARY GENERATION**

**Background Reading:** Ahlstrom, pp. 511-632.

**Class Presentations:**


**Recommended Reading:**


November 7 to 11, 2011: **Reading Week (no classes but students are expected to use the time for reading and research)**

March 17: **DEMOCRATIZATION OF AMERICAN CHRISTIANITY**

**Background Reading:** Ahlstrom, pp. 633-729.

**Discussion of Common Reading:**


**Classroom Presentations:**

**Recommended Reading:**


**November 24 (Thanksgiving): No class**

**December 1: THE AGONY OF SLAVERY AND SEGREGATION**

**Background Reading:** Ahlstrom, pp. 731-872.

**Discussion of Common Reading:**


**Classroom Presentations:**

Allen C. Guelzo, Abraham Lincoln: Redeemer President (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002).

**Evangelical War Against Slavery:**

**Video:** “The Lane Seminary Rebellion”
Recommended reading:

Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War Against Slavery* (Cleveland: Case Western Reserve University, 1969).


December 8: **FUNDAMENTALISM AND AMERICAN CULTURE**

**PAPER II IS DUE BY THE TIME OF THE CLASS MEETING**

**Background Reading:** Ahlstrom, pp. 873-963.

**Discussion of Common Reading:**


**Classroom Presentations:**


**Video Clips:** “Billy Sunday” and “W. B. Riley”

**Recommended Reading:**


**December 8: Evening Class Session at the Rosell Home (17 Morgan Street, Wenham, MA 01984): THE RISE OF THE NEW EVANGELICALISM: FROM WITHDRAWAL TO ENGAGEMENT**

**Background Reading:** Ahlstrom, pp. 965-1096.

**Classroom Presentations:**


**Recommended Reading:**


