

## **HNR 132 – History of Religion in the United States (Irons)**

### Teaching Context

Elon University is a selective liberal arts college in Elon, North Carolina. The University hosts several special scholars programs, the most prestigious of which is the Honors Fellows Program. Honors fellows are the very best students at Elon. They arrive with the most impressive credentials (average high school GPA of 4.34 and SAT of 2125 in 2008) and accrue the most prestigious placements and awards upon graduation. While each honors fellow must complete a thesis in his or her discipline, each also takes four core honors courses during the first two years of the program. HNR 132 is one of the courses that honors fellows can take to fulfill their freshman seminar requirement. Unlike the other honors course in the freshman core, a course on the “Global Experience,” the seminar is supposed to be firmly grounded within a discipline.

### Rationale

The readings and assignments in this course are intended to work together to expose students to some of the most fundamental debates in American Religious History, from the definitional problem of religion to questions about how to study religious practice. While coverage is broad, the course is not a comprehensive survey. Instead, emphasis is on material that engages the following six questions:

- What is religion?
- What is the relationship between religion and American culture? In other words, how have changes in American culture produced changes in religious belief and practice? Or vice-versa?
- How do we evaluate some Americans' persistent determination to identify their country as a “Christian” nation?
- What is the relationship between religion and power in American History? How have some used religion to sanctify the oppression of others—while others have used religion to resist oppression and speak truth to power?
- What “meta-narratives” have students of American religion offered to explain American Religious History, and how should we evaluate them?
- How can we connect contemporary religious practices to major trends in American Religious History?

Typical readings include pairings of primary and secondary sources. Reading these sources in tandem serves both to familiarize students with the relationship between insider/outsider approaches to religion and to help them contextualize firsthand accounts more effectively. There are five monographs for the course, each of which is useful not only for the content it conveys but also for the different approach to the study of religion which it embodies.

The assignments for this course have been especially effective at encouraging students to think critically outside of the classroom. The book reviews, for example, heighten both students' awareness of different theoretical approaches to religion and their sense of history as an exercise in interpretation. In the first of two major projects, students press these points further by analyzing classic works of religious history (e.g., Cotton Mather, Jesse Lee, Robert Baird, William Warren Sweet) in light of contemporary scholarship. The key lesson for this assignment is that historians of religion have often revealed as much about the religious currents of their own time as about the time period which they were studying. In the second assignment, students are able to turn their analytical gaze to the present by evaluating contemporary religious practice at a specific site. This is not simply an observation (which can tend towards the voyeuristic), because students are also required to interview a representative of the practitioners, to conduct secondary research on the tradition, and to use church records to supplement their field notes. The exercise of connecting what they see to what they have learned has proven to be a very rewarding one.

# **HNR 132 – History of Religion in the United States**

## **(Freshman Honors Seminar)**

**Charles F. Irons, Last Taught Spring 2009**

### **Course Description**

This course offers a selective survey of American Religious History from pre-Columbian times to the present. It emphasizes the remarkable diversity of religious belief and practice in the area that became the United States. Challenging theoretical questions about the essence of religion and the scholarly study of it are an essential part of the course.

### **Course Objectives**

***Interpretive Goals.*** In addition to becoming familiar with the major religious groups and movements in American History, we will address the following major questions:

- What is religion?
- What is the relationship between religion and American culture? In other words, how have changes in American culture produced changes in religious belief and practice? Or vice-versa?
- How do we evaluate some Americans' persistent determination to identify their country as a "Christian" nation?
- What is the relationship between religion and power in American History? How have some used religion to sanctify the oppression of others—while others have used religion to resist oppression and speak truth to power?
- What “meta-narratives” have students of American religion offered to explain American Religious History, and how should we evaluate them?
- How can we connect contemporary religious practices to major trends in American Religious History?

***Methodological Goals.*** We will think carefully about what it means to study religion from a historical perspective. This will involve mastering some elementary and some very sophisticated elements of historical inquiry. We will learn to:

- Work confidently with primary sources. In particular, students will learn how to “contextualize” sources, or to interpret them based on the specific time and place of their creation—as well as on the identity and position of the author.
- Synthesize secondary source materials. We will be reading selections from many different authors, including five monographs. Through discussion and take-home assignments, students will learn to integrate those perspectives into a coherent understanding of American Religious History.
- Complicate easy distinctions between primary and secondary sources by dissecting an older work of religious history—one itself profoundly shaped by the religious context of its creation.
- Identify and practice different theoretical approaches to the study of Religious History.
- Enhance our study of the documentary record by doing some basic fieldwork.

## **Honor System**

Elon's honor pledge calls for a commitment to Elon's shared values of Honesty, Integrity, Respect and Responsibility. To be clear about what constitutes violations of these values, students should be familiar with the Judicial Affairs policies in the student handbook, including violations outlined at <http://www.elon.edu/e-web/students/handbook/violations/default.xhtml>. Students with questions about the specific interpretation of these values and violations as they relate to this course should contact me immediately. Citing correctly is an important part of effective historical writing. Violations of the academic-related areas will be documented in an incident report to be maintained in the student's judicial record, and may result in a lowering of the course grade and/or failure of the course with an Honor Code F.

## **Late Papers**

All assignments are due at the beginning of class on the due date. Papers turned in after that time—even by only a few minutes—will receive a one-letter-grade penalty per day. Once the math makes such a change favorable to the student, this penalty will give way to one-half credit.

I have this policy in order to be fair to the group and to encourage academic responsibility. Arranging for extensions is sometimes the most responsible way to proceed, however, and I will entertain requests for extensions so long as they come in person and at least twenty-four hours before the due date.

## **Learning Styles**

We all learn in different ways, and it is important that this course be accessible to students with a variety of learning styles and needs. Those with diagnosed learning differences should register with Disabilities Services in the Duke Building, Room 108 and visit me in my office as soon as possible. *Anyone* should feel free to approach me if he or she feels that the course material is inaccessible for any reason.

Students willing to serve as note-takers should visit me during office hours.

## **Accountability**

*Project I: Religious Histories (15%)* – Due on March 11. This exercise, more than any other, should help you to recognize how arbitrary the distinction can be between primary and secondary sources. You will identify a work of religious history and will evaluate it against other evidence it as both a primary and a secondary source.

*Project II: Contemporary Religious Practice in Context (20%)* – Due on May 11. Contemporary religious practice has deep roots in the past. You will make these connections yourself in this exercise, in which you will observe a contemporary worship service, research the history of the community, and set your findings in the broader context of American Religious History.

*Response Papers (15%)* – For each of the five monographs, you will write a 500-word review and will connect the book to the major course themes.

*Homework (10%)* – On several occasions, you will be required to do some outside work on the assigned readings—or to research and bring additional materials to class to enrich the in-class discussion. If preparedness becomes a problem, I may add pop quizzes to the assignments indicated on the syllabus.

*Midterm Examination (15%)* – Held during the normal class meeting on March 18. You will be accountable on the examinations for material from lecture, for the arguments contained in the assigned readings, and for all of the primary source readings.

*Final Examination (15%)* – Held on May 15. Elon University policy requires that the Department Chair approve individual changes to the day and time of the final examination.

*Participation (10%)* - I expect students to attend class and to participate in discussions. A student who misses less than three classes but who does not participate will receive a grade of “C” for this category. I will distribute progress reports at the midterm indicating participation grades to that point.

Grades will be calculated using a ten-point grading scale, as defined below:

Letter grade	Description	Numerical Range	Grade Points
A	A grade in the “A” range indicates distinguished performance in a course.	93-100	4.0
A-		90-92	3.7
B+	A grade in the “B” range indicates above-average performance in a course.	87-89	3.3
B		83-86	3.0
B-		80-82	2.7
C+	A grade in the “C” range indicates an average performance in which a basic understanding of the subject has been demonstrated.	77-79	2.3
C		73-76	2.0
C-		70-72	1.7
D+	A grade in the “D” range indicates a passing performance despite some substantive deficiencies.	67-69	1.3
D		63-66	1.0
D-		60-62	0.7
F	A grade of “F” indicates failure.	0-59	0.0

### Required Texts

Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, *Puritan Conquistadores: Iberianizing the Atlantic, 1550-1700* (Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 2006)

Anne Fadiman, *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down: A Hmong Child, Her American Doctors, and the Collision of Two Cultures* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997)

Charles F. Irons, *The Origins of Proslavery Christianity: White and Black Evangelicals in Colonial and Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008)

Robert Orsi, *The Madonna of 115<sup>th</sup> Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002)

Matthew Avery Sutton, *Aimee Semple McPherson and the Resurrection of Christian America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007)

## Topic and Assignment Schedule

All readings must be completed by the day on which they are assigned. Readings designated by an asterisk (\*) are available on Blackboard under “Required Reading.”

1. 4 February (Wednesday) – Course Introduction / What is Religion?
2. 9 February (Monday) – Academicians Confront Religion: Scholarly Approaches to Religious History

Reading: Cañizares-Esguerra, *Puritan Conquistadors*, 1-34.

Orsi, *Madonna of 115th Street*, ix-xxxiv.

\* George M. Marsden, “Introduction,” in *Religion and American Culture* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich: San Diego, 1990), 1-6.

\* Peter Donovan and Peter Bryne on Neutrality and Methodological Agnosticism, in *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion*, ed. Russell T. McCutcheon, 215-20, 235-59 (London: Cassell, 1999).

\* Timothy Fitzgerald, “Religion, Religions, and World Religions: Religious Studies—A Critique,” in *The Ideology of Religious Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 3-32.

## HOMEWORK DUE: APPROACHES TO AMERICAN RELIGIOUS HISTORY

3. 11 February (Wednesday) – American and European Antecedents

Reading: Cañizares-Esguerra, *Puritan Conquistadors*, 35-119.

\* “Dekanawida Myth and the Achievement of Iroquois Unity” (est. 1500s).

\* Martin Luther, “Preface to the Letter of St. Paul to the Romans” (1545).

4. 16 February (Monday) – False Dichotomies within False Dichotomies: New England and the Chesapeake

Reading: Cañizares-Esguerra, *Puritan Conquistadors*, 120-214.

\* John Winthrop, “Model of Christian Charity” (1630).

\* John Page, “A Deed of Gift to My Son” (1687) in *Spreading the Gospel in Colonial Virginia: Preaching Religion and Community*, ed. Edward L. Bond, 75-97 (USA: Lexington Books, 2005).

5. 18 February (Wednesday) – Indians and Africans

Reading: Cañizares-Esguerra, *Puritan Conquistadors*, 215-33.

Irons, *Origins of Proslavery Christianity*, 1-54.

\* Jacques Marquette, Excerpts from *The Mississippi Voyage of Joliet and Marquette* (1673).

\* Mary Rowlandson, Excerpts from *The Narrative of the Captivity* (1682).

\* Olaudah Equiano, Excerpts from *An Interesting Narrative* (1789).

**RESPONSE PAPER DUE: *PURITAN CONQUISTADORS***

6. 23 February (Monday) – The (So-Called) First Great Awakening

Reading: \* Thomas S. Kidd, “Introduction,” in *The Protestant Interest: New England after Puritanism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 1-28.

\* John Wesley, Excerpts from the *Journal* (dated 1738).

\* George Whitfield, “Letter to the ‘Inhabitants of Maryland, Virginia, North and South Carolina’ in Regard to Slavery” (1740).

\* Excerpts from Tennent, Cole, Coccom, and Heaton Regarding the Revivals in New England (1740-41).

7. 25 February (Wednesday) – Religion and Revolution

Reading: Irons, *Origins of Proslavery Christianity*, 55-96.

- \* Nathan O. Hatch, “The Democratization of Christianity and the Character of American Politics,” in *Religion and American Politics from the Colonial Period to the Present*, ed. Mark A. Noll and Luke E. Harlow, 93-120 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).
- \* Charles Woodmason, Excerpts from the *Journal* (1766).
- \* Phyllis Wheatley, “On the Death of the Rev. Mr. George Whitefield” (1770)
- \* John Witherspoon, “The Dominion of Providence Over the Passions of Men” (1776).
- \* “Declaration of Independence” (1776).

**PROGRESS REPORT FOR PAPER ONE DUE: ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY, THESIS PARAGRAPH, AND OUTLINE**

8. 2 March (Monday) – Church and State

Reading: \* Forum on Jefferson’s “Wall of Separation,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 56, n. 4 (1999): 775-824.

- \* Robert Bellah, “Civil Religion in America,” first appearing in *Dædalus, Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 96, n. 1 (1967): 1-21.
- \* James Madison, *Memorial and Remonstrance against Religious Assessments* (1785).
- \* Thomas Jefferson, *Statute for Religious Freedom* (drafted 1779) and “Letter to the Danbury Baptists” (1802).

**HOMEWORK DUE: COLONIAL CHARTERS AND THE NATION’S FOUNDING DOCUMENTS**

9. 4 March (Wednesday) – The Second Great Awakening: Evangelical Consensus and Reform

Reading: Irons, *Origins of Proslavery Christianity*, 97-132.

- \* Louis B. Gimelli, “‘Borne upon the Wings of Faith’: The Chinese Odyssey of Henrietta Hall Shuck,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 14, n. 2 (1994): 221-45.
- \* Charles Grandison Finney, “What a Revival of Religion Is” (1834).

10. 9 March (Monday) – The Second Great Awakening: Evangelical Fragmentation and Innovation



Reading: Irons, *Origins of Proslavery Christianity*, 133-68.

\* “Extract from the History of Joseph Smith, the Prophet,” in *The Pearl of Great Price* (Originally published c. 1842, 2008 online ed.)

\* Jarena Lee, “The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee,” in *American Spiritualities: A Reader*, ed. Catherine L. Albanese, 203-22 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001).

#### 11. 11 March (Wednesday) – Schisms and the Sectional Conflict

Reading: Irons, *Origins of Proslavery Christianity*, 169-210.

\* Excerpts from *Journal of the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (1844 and 1848) and *Journal of the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (1850).

#### **PAPER ONE DUE (FINAL DRAFT): RELIGIOUS HISTORIES**

#### 12. 16 March (Monday) – A Religious Civil War and Religious Reconstruction

Reading: Irons, *Origins of Proslavery Christianity*, 211-60.

\* Edward J. Blum, “The Apostles of Forgiveness: Religion and National Reunion in Northern Society, Popular Culture, and National Politics, 1865-1875,” in *Reforging the White Republic: Race, Religion, and American Nationalism, 1865-1898* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 87-119.

\* Abraham Lincoln, Second Inaugural Address (1865).

\* A. W. Wayman, Chapters 22 and 23, in *My Recollections of African M. E. Ministers* (1881).

#### **RESPONSE PAPER DUE: ORIGINS OF PROSLAVERY CHRISTIANITY**

#### 13. 18 March (Wednesday) – **MIDTERM EXAMINATION**

23 AND 25 MARCH: SPRING BREAK (NO CLASS)

#### 14. 30 March (Monday) – Cities as Sites of Religious Conflict and Innovation (Introduction)

Reading: Orsi, *Madonna of 115<sup>th</sup> Street*, xxxix-xlix, 1-162.

\* Jane Addams, "The Subjective Necessity for Social Settlements," in *Twenty Years at Hull House* (1910), 113-28.

15. 1 April (Wednesday) – Immigration and Religion

Reading: Orsi, *Madonna of 115<sup>th</sup> Street*, 163-232.

\* Michael Gold, Excerpts from *Jews Without Money* (1930).

**RESPONSE PAPER DUE: MADONNA OF 115<sup>TH</sup> STREET**

16. 6 April (Monday) – Social Gospels

Reading: \* Doug Rossinow, "The Radicalization of the Social Gospel: Harry F. Ward and the Search for a New Social Order, 1898-1936," *Religion and American Culture* 15, n. 5 (2005): 63-106.

\* Walter Rauschenbusch, "The Social Gospel," in *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1908), 230-86.

17. 8 April (Wednesday) – Pentecostalism

Reading: Sutton, *Aimee Semple McPherson*, 1-89.

\* Inaugural issue of *The Apostolic Faith* (Sept. 1906).

**PROOF OF VIABILITY FOR PAPER TWO DUE**

13 APRIL (Monday) – EASTER HOLIDAY (NO CLASS)

18. 15 April (Wednesday) – Fundamentalism

Reading: Sutton, *Aimee Semple McPherson*, 90-151.

\* Kathryn Lofton, "The Methodology of the Modernists: Process in American Protestantism," *Church History* 75, n. 2 (2006): 374-402.

\* "A Panoramic View of the Bible," from *Scofield Reference Bible* (1917 ed.).

\* Excerpts from *State of Tennessee v. Scopes* (Darrow examines Bryan) (1925).

19. 20 April (Monday) – Gender in Twentieth-Century American Religion

Reading: Sutton, *Aimee Semple McPherson*, 152-211.

- \* Mark Chaves and James Cavendish, “Recent Changes in Women’s Ordination Conflicts: The Effect of a Social Movement on Intraorganizational Controversy,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 36, n. 4 (1997): 574-84.
- \* Mary Daly, Excerpts from *Beyond God the Father* (1973), in *American Religious History*, ed. Amanda Porterfield, 301-304 (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2002).
- \* Fr. Eric Doyle, OFM, Foreword, Section IV, and Section V of the Paper Submitted to the Working Group on the Ordination of Women (1975).

20. 22 April (Wednesday) – Communism, Fascism, and Militant Christianity

Reading: Sutton, *Aimee Semple McPherson*, 212-82.

- \* Reinhold Niebuhr, “Christian Faith and the World Crisis” (1941).
- \* J. B. Matthews, Excerpts from “Reds and Our Churches,” in *American Mercury* (July 1953).  
Cartoons by Jack Hamm.

**RESPONSE PAPER DUE: AIMEE SEMPLE MCPHERSON**

**PROGRESS REPORT FOR PAPER TWO DUE: PRELIMINARY OBSERVATION NOTES,  
INTERVIEW NOTES, AND BIBLIOGRAPHY**

21. 27 April (Monday) – Religious Dimensions of the Civil Rights Movement

Reading: \* Paul Harvey, “Religion, Race, and Rights,” in *Freedom’s Coming: Religious Culture and the Shaping of the South from the Civil War through the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 169-217.

- \* Charles Sherrod, Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee Memorandum (1961).
- \* Martin Luther King Jr., “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” (1963).

22. 29 April (Wednesday) – Buddhism, Paganism, New Age, and a Broader Pluralism

Reading: Fadiman, *Spirit Catches You*, 1-77.

- \* Sarah M. Pike, “The 1960s Watershed Years,” in *New Age and Neopagan Religions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 67-90.
- \* George Blueeyes, “Sacred Mountains,” in *Home Places: Contemporary Native American Writings from Sun Tracks*, ed. Larry Evers and Ofelia Zepeda, 7-12 (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1995).
- \* Starhawk, Excerpts from *The Spiral Dance* (1979), in *American Spiritualities: A Reader*, ed. Catherine L. Albanese, 156-76 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001).

**HOMEWORK DUE: “THE PLURALISM PROJECT”**

**PROGRESS REPORT FOR PAPER TWO DUE: ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY, THESIS PARAGRAPH, AND OUTLINE**

23. 4 May (Monday) – The Religious Right and American Evangelicalism

Reading: Fadiman, *Spirit Catches You*, 78-209.

- \* Darren Dochuk, “Evangelicalism Becomes Southern, Politics Becomes Evangelical: From FDR to Ronald Reagan,” in *Religion and American Politics from the Colonial Period to the Present*, ed. Mark A. Noll and Luke E. Harlow, 297-326 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).
- \* Ralph Reed, Excerpts from *Active Faith* (1996), in *American Religious History*, ed. Amanda Porterfield, 324-27 (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2002).

24. 6 May (Wednesday) – Competing Narratives: Secularization, Pluralization, and Evangelical Ascendance

Reading: Fadiman, *Spirit Catches You*, 210-88.

- \* Randall Balmer, “Purpose Driven,” in *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: A Journey into the Evangelical Subculture in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 322-34.
- \* Janet R. Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini, “Introduction: Times Like These,” in *Secularisms* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 1-38.
- \* Diana L. Eck, “Prospects for Pluralism (AAR Presidential Address)” (2006).

**RESPONSE PAPER DUE: *THE SPIRIT CATCHES YOU AND YOU FALL DOWN***

25. 11 May (Monday) – Student Presentations and Tentative Conclusions

**PAPER TWO DUE (FINAL DRAFT): CONTEMPORARY RELIGIOUS PRACTICE IN  
CONTEXT**

**15 May 2009 (Friday) FINAL EXAM – 3:00-6:00 p.m.**