

Stephen Prothero Course Syllabus

Prepared for the Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture by:

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The Center is pleased to share with you the syllabi for introductory courses in American religion that were developed in seminars led by Dr. Katherine Albanese of the University of California, Santa Barbara. In all of the seminar discussions, it was apparent that context, or the particular teaching setting, was an altogether critical factor in envisioning how students should be introduced to a field of study. The justification of approach, included with each syllabus, is thus germane to how you use the syllabus.

I. Syllabus Justification

I teach this course in a philosophy department at Georgia State University, a commuter school located in the heart of downtown Atlanta. There are no dorms, and many of our students are married, have children and work full time. Almost all of them are paying their college freight themselves. The school has a large black population and many international students. The quality of the student body fluctuates wildly. Some students can barely read and most cannot write. But a few are as capable and as highly-motivated as the best students at top-notch academic institutions.

The diversity of the student body is a blessing, but it presents my most serious challenge in the classroom. How in one class do you keep the attention of both students who can't recall whether Buddha founded Buddhism or Hinduism and more advanced students who want to know to what standards we might appeal in adjudicating cross-cultural and interreligious disagreements? My tentative answer to this question is that you lecture a little and discuss a lot. Hence my course, which I run basically on the seminar model. By allowing students latitude to steer the classes (and hence the course) in their own directions, I hope to make a place for the interests, questions and abilities of as many students as possible.

I have another reason for focusing on the discussion of primary readings rather than on lectures supplemented by a textbook. I have found that students are exceedingly reluctant here to interpret texts for themselves (or, at least, to admit that they are doing so). I suspect this is a holdover from being brought up, as many of my students have, in religious traditions that emphasize accepting rather than interpreting a sacred text. (It may also be the result of earlier education that emphasizes memorizing facts rather than interpreting texts.) Students come to class, therefore, expecting to accept what they encounter in the professor's "sermons" and in the assigned "sacred text." They expect me, in turn, to give them good grades if they spew back names and dates. I try my best to subvert both of these expectations. Typically, I lecture little and do not assign textbooks. This time, however, I will experiment with Hudson and Corrigan, and will see how that goes. But I will intentionally downplay the textbook, emphasizing to my students that they should use it for background information and not as "gospel."

One other format note: Georgia State operates on a system of four ten-week quarters. Since I have not in my two years here been able to push through a two-quarter sequence in American religious history (we

only have two professors in religious studies, so I have to teach New Testament, World Religions, etc.), I am faced with the ridiculous task of compressing our field into ten weeks. For a Tuesday-Thursday course, that means twenty meetings. When I do this course on the T-T schedule, I end with the World's Parliament of Religions in 1893. I hope that students might be "introduced" to religion in twentieth-century America through another course we offer on "Contemporary Religious Thought." I have presented here the simpler M-W-F schedule, which affords me a whopping 28 meetings, and enables me to fit in favored topics such as "All-Star Wrestling."

CONTENT

I have tried to respond both to my interests and to the demographics of my classroom by including in many of my courses multiple opportunities to reflect on religion and ethnicity and religion and race. If I did not offer a separate course on "African-American Religion," I would probably include more materials in black religious history. A task as yet undone (because of my continued ignorance) is to integrate into this syllabus more materials on religion in the American South.

As you can see, I haven't yet traded in chronology for groups, history for sociology. I still cling to the old-fashioned belief that at least at certain moments in American religious history there is a story to tell. The theme I rely on here is conflict -- within, between and across competing groups. Thanks to my indoctrination at the hands of New Left teachers in American Studies during my undergraduate days, I use a conflict model both in understanding and in teaching American religious history. Throughout the course I underscore encounters among and between religious groups and argue that American religious history is to a great extent the story of those conflicts. Much is undoubtedly lost in my approach. I make no attempt to cover all the standard topics or to cover all the important groups. My students leave the course knowing nothing about many things. But they do have a sense, I trust, of the essentially pluralistic and contested nature of American religious history.

ASSIGNMENTS

The short papers are intended to spur discussion, and I have found that they work quite well. On any given day, two or three students will have written discussion papers, and I typically rely on them to guide the discussion as our "experts" for the day.

There is a "fieldwork" assignment in the "World Religions" course I offer, so I have decided to skip that here. I have taken a hint from my colleagues, however, and decided to experiment with a "scrapbook" assignment. I am keenly interested in equipping my students critically to interpret the culture that surrounds (invades?) them, and I think a scrapbook with required commentary is an appropriate way to do that.

II. Course Syllabus

PHILOSOPHY 420/620: RELIGION IN AMERICA

Stephen Prothero 324-S
Philosophy Department 10:50-12:20

Office Hours: Tuesday, Thursday, 2-3:30 651-2277

This course surveys the history of religion in the United States from the colonial period to the present. It focuses on a series of religious controversies that highlight the pluralistic and conflictual nature of

American religious history. In an effort to get back as close as possible to these controversies, we will read almost exclusively from primary documents produced by the disputants themselves.

My job is to begin each class period with a 10-15 minute "minilecture" that sets the day's discussion in its historical context. Your job is twofold: (a) to read and reflect on the primary documents and relevant "background" from our textbook; and (b) to discuss those primary documents sympathetically yet critically in class.

Students should be aware that this is a discussion rather than a lecture course. Your task is not so much to listen to me as to interpret for yourselves and for one another certain events in the history of American religion. You should leave the course, therefore, not only with greater understanding of the complexities and ambiguities of religion in American culture but also with more refined skills in reading and interpreting texts.

Requirements

- Attendance and Class Participation
- Scrapbook on Religion in Atlanta and America. (Notebook with Clippings of Articles, Photos, etc. followed by one-paragraph comments and criticisms. This will be collected three times during the quarter.) 20%.
- Three 1-2 page discussion papers on the readings assigned for a particular class period (due at the beginning of the relevant class). You may write a paper on any sets of readings that you choose. 20%.
- Midterm. 30%.
- Final (for undergraduates) or 10-12 page final paper (for graduate students). 30%

Required Reading

- Course Packet available from Alphagraphics.
- Winthrop S. Hudson and John Corrigan, *Religion in America* (5th edition; New York: Macmillan, 1992).

INTRODUCTION

1. Introductions: Religious Pluralism in American Culture(s)

COLONIAL PERIOD

2. The Contemporary Debate over the Columbian Myth

Reading: Selections from Newsweek 32 (Fall/Winter Special Issue) 32.

3. European Background

Reading: Thomas More, *Utopia* (1551); Martin Luther, "Address to the German Nobility" (1520); Francis Bacon, "The New Atlantis" (1627).

4. Puritan Dominance: Constructing a "New" World on Indian Soil

Reading: John Winthrop, A Modell of Christian Charity (1630); Cotton Mather, Magnalia Christi Americana (1702); Alexander Whitaker, "Good Newes from Virginia" (1613); William Penn letter (1681).

5. Native American Resistance

Reading: Henry W. Bowden and James P. Ronda, Eliot's Indian Dialogues (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980) 120-44; Mary Rowlandson, "The Sovereignty and Goodness of God" (1682).

6. Puritans and Free Will: Anne Hutchison and the Antinomian Controversy in "New" England

Reading: John Davenport, The Covenant of God's Free Grace (1645); John Winthrop, "Journal" (1636-37).

7. Witch-Hunting and Popular Religion Among the Puritans

Reading: David D. Hall, Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England (1991).

8. The Great Awakening

Reading: Gilbert Tennent, "The Danger of an Unconverted Ministry" (1742); Charles Chauncey, "Ministers Exhorted and Encouraged" (1744); Jonathan Edwards, A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections (1746).

9. Eighteenth-Century Female Utopians: Ann Lee and the Shakers

Reading: Selections Regarding Mother Ann Lee

Video: "Hands to Work, Hearts to God"

REVIVALISM, REASON, ROMANTICISM AND REFORM

10. The Cult of Reason and the Cult of Revelation

Reading: Benjamin Franklin, "Articles of Belief and Acts of Religion"; Thomas Paine, "Of the Religion of Deism Compared with the Christian Religion" (1804); Thomas Jefferson, letters; Timothy Dwight, "A Discourse, on Some Events of the Last Century" (1801).

11. The Unitarian-Transcendentalist Debate

Reading: William Ellery Channing, "Unitarian Christianity" (1830); Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Divinity School Address," (1838) and "Nature" (1836).

12. Conversion or Character?: The Second Great Awakening and its Liberal Despisers

Reading: Charles Finney, Lectures on Revivals of Religion (1835); William Ellery Channing, Self-Culture (1844); Manual of Self Education (1842).

13. MIDTERM EXAMINATION

14. Slave and Slaveholder Religion

Reading: Jarena Lee, *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee* (1836); Frederick Douglass, "Slaveholding Religion and the Christianity of Christ" (1845).

15. The Biblical Debate Over Slavery

Reading: Richard Furman, *Exposition of the Views of the Baptists* (1823); James Thornwell, "The Christian Doctrine of Slavery" (1850); David Walker, *Walker's Appeal* (1829).

16. New Religions for a New Nation: Mormonism

Reading: Drusilla Hendriks, "Firm in the Faith"

17. New Religions for a New World: Spiritualism and Theosophy

Reading: Margaret Fox, "Certificate" (1848); Horace Greeley, *Recollections* (1868); H.P. Blavatsky, *The Key To Theosophy* (1889).

MODERNISMS AND ANTI-MODERNISMS

18. The Social Gospel and the Gospel of Wealth

Reading: Russell H. Conwell, "Acres of Diamonds" (1890); Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum novarum* (1891).

19. American Judaism: Reform and Zionism

Reading: "Pittsburgh Platform" (1885); "Columbus Platform" (1937); Teodor Herzl, *The Jewish State* (1896); Arthur Hertzberg, *Being Jewish in America* (1979).

20. Americanist and Modernist Controversies in Roman Catholicism

Reading: Samuel Morse, *Imminent Dangers* (1835); *Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk* (1836); John Ireland, "Preface" to Walter Elliott, *The Life of Father Hecker* (1891); Pope Pius X, *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* (1907).

21. Protestant Modernism and Fundamentalism

Reading: Charles Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (1923); Shailer Mathews, *The Faith of Modernism* (1924).

RELIGION IN MODERN AMERICA

22. The World's Parliament of Religions and the Pluralist Explosion

Reading: Selections from John H. Barrows, ed. *The World's Parliament of Religions* (1893); W.E. Hocking, *Re-thinking Missions: A Layman's Inquiry* (1932).

23. Asian Religious Traditions in the United States: Buddhism

Reading: Henry S. Olcott, *Buddhist Catechism*

Video: Selections from "The Simpsons"

24. Dr. King vs. Malcolm X: An Ongoing Debate

Reading: Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" (1963); Elijah Muhammad, "What the Muslims Want" and "What the Muslims Believe" (1990).

25. Feminist and Womanist Theology

Reading: Mary Daly, "After the Death of God the Father"; Delores S. Williams, "Womanist Theology" (1989).

26. Civil Religion as an Antidote to Pluralism

Reading: Robert Bellah, "Civil Religion in America" (1967); Convention Speeches of Clinton and Bush.

27. Cultural Religion: Myth and Ritual

Reading: William Black Tyrrell, "Star Trek as Myth and Television as Mythmaker" (1977); Bruce Lincoln, "All-Star Wrestling" (1989).

THE DAY OF RECKONING

28. FINAL EXAM

TABLE OF CONTENTS, READER IN PHILOSOPHY 420/620: AMERICAN RELIGIOUS THOUGHT

1. Selections on Columbus from Newsweek 32 (Fall/Winter Special Issue 1991).
2. Thomas More, *Utopia* (1551), in Giles Gunn, ed., *New World Metaphysics: Readings on the Religious Meaning of the American Experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981) 15-18.
3. Martin Luther, "Address to the German Nobility," in Edwin Scott Gaustad, *A Documentary History of Religion in America* (2 vols.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982) I.29-33.
4. Francis Bacon, *The New Atlantis* (1627), in Gunn, 33-36.
5. John Winthrop, "A Modell of Christian Charity" (1630), in H. Shelton Smith et. al., eds., *American Christianity: an Historical Interpretation With Representative Documents* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963) I.97-102.
6. Cotton Mather, "Magnalia Christi Americana" (1702), in Gunn, 83-86.
7. Alexander Whitaker, "Good Newes from Virginia" (1613), in Smith, I.45-48.
8. William Penn letter regarding Indians (1681), Gaustad, *Documentary History*, I.123-24.
9. Henry W. Bowden and James P. Ronda, *Eliot's Indian Dialogues* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980) 120-44.
10. Mary Rowlandson, "The Sovereignty and Goodness of God" (1682), Gaustad, *Documentary History*, I.189-92.
11. John Davenport, *The Covenant of God's Free Grace* (1645), Smith, I.107-14.
12. John Winthrop, "Journal" (1636-37), Smith, I.114-23.
13. David D. Hall, *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991) 61-73.
14. Gilbert Tennent, "The Danger of an Unconverted Ministry" (1742), Smith, I.321-28.
15. Charles Chauncy, "Ministers Exhorted and Encouraged" (1744), Smith, I.398-407.
16. Jonathan Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* (1746), Smith, I.339-349.

17. Selections Regarding Mother Ann Lee, Rosemary Radford Ruether & Rosemary Skinner Keller, *Women and Religion in America. Volume 2: The Colonial and Revolutionary Periods* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983) 305-12.
18. Benjamin Franklin, "Articles of Belief and Acts of Religion," Smith, I.393-98.
19. Thomas Paine, "Of the Religion of Deism Compared with the Christian Religion" (1804), Smith, I.507-13.
20. Thomas Jefferson letters (1821, 1822), Smith, I.513-16.
21. Timothy Dwight, "A Discourse, on Some Events of the Last Century" (1801), Smith, 529-39.
22. William Ellery Channing, "Unitarian Christianity" (1830), Gaustad, *Documentary History*, I.283-90.
23. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Divinity School Address," (1838), Smith, II.136-140.
24. Charles Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* (1835), Gaustad, *Religious Issues in American History* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968) 105-18.
25. William Ellery Channing, *Self-Culture* (1844), David Brion Davis, *Antebellum American Culture: An Interpretive Anthology* (Lexington, MA: C.D. Heath, 1979) 69-70.
26. William Ellery Channing, *Manual of Self Education* (1842), Davis, 70-72.
27. Jarena Lee, *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee* (1836), Milton C. Sernett, ed., *Afro-American Religious History: A Documentary Witness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1985) 160-79.
28. Frederick Douglass, "Slaveholding Religion and the Christianity of Christ" (1845), Sernett, 100-09.
29. Richard Furman, *Exposition of the Views of the Baptists* (1823), Smith, II. 182-86.
30. James Thornwell, "The Christian Doctrine of Slavery" (1850), Gaustad, *Religious Issues*, 164-72.
31. David Walker, *Walker's Appeal* (1829), Sernett, 188-195.
32. Drusilla Hendriks, "Firm in the Faith," in Kate B. Carter, ed., *Our Pioneer Heritage*, Vol. 20 (Salt Lake City: Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1977) 242-72.
33. Margaret Fox, "Certificate," in *A Report of the Mysterious Noises Heard in the House of Mr. John D. Fox* (1848), Gaustad, *Documentary History*, I.376-78.
34. Horace Greeley, *Recollections of a Busy Life* (1868), Gaustad, *Documentary History*, I.379-81.
35. Helena P. Blavatsky, *The Key To Theosophy* (1889), Gaustad, II.237-39.
36. Russell H. Conwell, *Acres of Diamonds*, (1890), 5-63.
37. Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum novarum* (1891), Smith, II.383-91.
38. "Pittsburgh Platform" of Reform Judaism (1885), Gaustad, *Documentary History*, II.400-01.
39. "Columbus Platform" (1937), Gaustad, *Documentary History*, II.402-04.
40. Theodor Herzl, *The Jewish State* (1896), Gaustad, *Documentary History*, II.442-45.
41. Arthur Hertzberg, *Being Jewish in America* (1979), Gaustad, *Documentary History* II.445-48.
42. Samuel Morse, *Imminent Dangers* (1835), Gaustad, *Documentary History*, I.459-62.
43. *Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk* (1836), Gaustad, *Documentary History*, I.462-63.
44. John Ireland, "Preface" to Walter Elliott, *The Life of Father Hecker* (1891), Gaustad II.385-90.
45. Pope Pius X, *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* (1907), in Gaustad, II.390-93.
46. Charles Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (1923), Smith, II.345-49.
47. Shailer Mathews, *The Faith of Modernism* (1924), Smith, II.238-45.
48. John H. Barrows, ed. *The World's Parliament of Religions* (1893), Gaustad, *Documentary History*, II.85-91.
49. W.E. Hocking, *Re-thinking Missions: A Layman's Inquiry* (1932), Gaustad, *Documentary History*: II.178-80.
50. Henry S. Olcott, *Buddhist Catechism* (1881; Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 1985).
51. Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" (1963), Sernett, 430-445.
52. Elijah Muhammad, "What the Muslims Want" and "What the Muslims Believe," reprinted in *Muhammad Speaks* 7.4 (1990).
53. Mary Daly, "After the Death of God the Father," in Carol P. Christ & Judith Plaskow, *Womanspirit Rising* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979) 53-62.
54. Delores S. Williams, "Womanist Theology," in Judith Plaskow and Carol P. Christ, *Weaving the Visions* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1989) 179-186.

55. Robert Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," *Daedalus* (Winter 1967).
56. Convention Speeches of Clinton and Bush
57. William Black Tyrrell, "Star Trek as Myth and Television as Mythmaker" *The Popular Culture Reader* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1978) 79-88.
58. Bruce Lincoln, "Dialectic Manipulations and Preservation of the Status Quo: 'AllStar Wrestling,'" in *his Discourse and the Construction of Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989) 149-59.