

Bruce Hindmarsh 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. Grant Wacker of Duke University Divinity School. 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 at Briercrest Biblical Seminary, which is located in a small town in southern Saskatchewan. The seminary originated as the graduate school of a successful interdenominational bible college and this year has approximately 270 students enrolled in one or more courses (115 FTE). We typically provide advanced training for ministry for college graduates with experience in Christian leadership, whether lay or clerical. Geared less toward pre-ordination training than toward continuing education of Christian leaders, the seminary has also focused relatively more upon practitioner skills than upon strictly academic preparation. It began in 1983 as a summer school for those active in ministry. When year-round scheduling was instituted, the summer-school modular format was retained with the result that almost all courses are offered within two- or three-week blocks of concentrated teaching.

The seminary is confessional in theology and has an evangelical heritage and ethos. The original bible school began in 1935 as a part of a distinctive revival movement on the Canadian Prairies characterized by an emphasis upon personal holiness, the evangelization of the newly settled Prairie West, and the task of world mission. Since then, the Canadian Prairies has become less of a religious frontier, and Briercrest has likewise become less preoccupied with rural mission than with servicing a growing constituency which is more diverse and sophisticated in its needs and expectations. The seminary evolved largely to meet these needs.

The seminary is in the midst of an accreditation process with ATS and it is a time of rapid change and revision to the curriculum. One of the implications is that our degree offerings will be much more clearly distinguished between an MA (Theol. Studies) which is primarily academic in focus, and an MA in various ministry specializations which has a practitioner focus. My responsibilities lie with teaching church history and historical theology for the former degree, although I always have some students taking one or two of my courses for the latter qualification or for an M.Div. degree.

Students come from a large number of denominations, though these would be for the most part baptistic in ecclesiology, and conservative and evangelical in ethos. A quarter to a third of our students are women. While Canadian law forbids the collection of racial or ethnic data, my impression is that our student diversity is typical of the Canadian Prairies and does not include a large number of students from minority communities.

This particular course, "Studies in Christian Conversion and Spiritual Autobiography" is one which the seminary has recently added to the history curriculum at my request. My concerns in designing the course were several:

David Bebbington's widely accepted definition of evangelicalism, teased out in his *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* (London, 1989), emphasizes that conversionism was the first important trait to characterize the modern evangelical movement, and that despite the many modulations of the evangelical impulse over time and in different cultural settings, this stress upon the personally meaningful conversion has remained constant. The constituency Briercrest serves has a relatively short identity-giving past but it is self-consciously evangelical. I hope that this course can tap into a lively popular interest in evangelical conversion, but offer a larger historical perspective on the subject and connect this contemporary piety to a more critical, catholic, and ecumenical sense of Christian tradition.

I also hope that this course will serve the task of ministerial preparation in particular by both stimulating personal reflection on the student's own spiritual experience and by contributing to the development of his or her understanding of formative spirituality. In the 17th century Richard Baxter reflected on his own spiritual experience and that of the people around him and wrote, 'At last I came to realize that God breaks not all men's hearts alike.' I hope that my students will come to a similar realization.

Briercrest's constituency has sometimes been characterized by an attitude of caution, even mistrust, toward the intellect—a legacy of conservative reactions to modernist revisions of orthodoxy earlier this century and the hegemony of Protestant liberal theology in mainstream Canadian seminaries. I hope that this course can stimulate advanced critical thinking about the evangelical piety my students cherish, without being corrosive of that piety. I hope to model and advocate a constructive use of the intellect not only along the reformed lines indicated in recent books by Mark Noll and others in the American context, but also in the pattern exemplified in the best Catholic spiritual writing where prayer, spirituality, and theological reflection are held together in a community of memory and hope.

I also hope to bring my students along to an understanding of church tradition which is better related to academic discipline. By discussing the insights into conversion offered by literary criticism, moral philosophy, psychology, and sociology, and other disciplines, I hope that this course will give them a sense of the general terrain of academic discourse about religion. I also want to introduce them to specific tools and methods of research in the humanities—particularly in history—and some of the skills of critical thinking, argumentation, and academic writing. In short, I hope to make better students of them, and prepare some of them for thesis work, or further graduate studies in religion elsewhere.

The intensity of the modular format presents some unique challenges in course design, the most obvious of which is the danger of giving the students more information than they can process in a short period of time. One of my students once described the experience as being like trying to take a drink from a fire hydrant. As one concession to this format, I have tried to design this course with an even balance between lecture and other methods and media, and to include a good amount of discussion of primary sources and specific articles which sharply focus certain issues of scholarly debate. Some of my lectures are more thesis-driven than others, but I have tried to include easily accessible narrative history, biography, and anecdote, on the one hand; and an introduction to select issues, analytical approaches, and scholarly debates, on the other. My choice of subjects looks something like taking 'core samples' from different periods, and the figures and texts I have focused upon are for the most part the traditional, even canonical, ones of church history. However, my intention is not to introduce a Whig interpretation of conversion. In some ways it is the opposite: I hope to historicize the evangelical conversion narrative, not to discredit it, but to show the way in which it has appeared as a particular witness to the gospel in the modern period as one important part of a longer story of Christian proclamation and response.

II. Introductory Course Syllabus

BRIERCREST BIBLICAL SEMINARY

BT764 STUDIES IN CHRISTIAN CONVERSION AND SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

scheduled for Summer 1998
two-week modular format (40 hours)
Mon.–Fri., 9.30–12.00, 1.00–2.30

Dr. Bruce Hindmarsh
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Office hours: by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

I have designed this course to stimulate you to think in a disciplined way about the nature of Christian conversion through the study of a number of historical examples. We will focus most intently in the second half of the course on the early evangelical tradition of spiritual autobiography or 'conversion narrative', though we will set this within—and sometimes against—the larger history of the response of women and men to Christian proclamation through the centuries. Attention will be paid chiefly to theological themes in the literature studied, but this will be augmented by some discussion of interdisciplinary perspectives on the conversion experience. We will explore the relevance of all of this to our experience of faith and ministry in the contemporary world, and you will be encouraged to think through your own theology of conversion.

OBJECTIVES

I want you to reflect upon the nature of God's work in the lives of those he calls to follow him. I hope you will more carefully consider the teaching of Scripture on conversion for having seen historical examples of Christian experience which compare or contrast with your own in various ways. Again, because of the historical contexts we will be exploring, I hope you will be able to relate the concept of conversion to theological tradition in a more careful way than is often the case.

I would like you to be able to describe in outline the nature of some of the most notable examples of Christian conversion in the history of the church. I would also like you to be able to describe the similarities and differences between these.

You should be able to explain why the medieval period produced almost no conversion narratives of the kind with which we are familiar. I hope this will give you occasion to consider the influence of 'Christendom' on the nature of conversion, and to think about our own 'post-Christendom' context for ministry.

I want you to be able to explain why there was such an efflorescence of spiritual autobiography in the 17th and 18th centuries and throughout most of the modern period—Why then?

I want you in particular to be able to describe some of the features of conversion in the period when evangelicalism as a modern movement originated. Wesley, Whitefield, and Edwards have been the subject of renewed interest today, and I want you to understand their lives and ministries in outline, the revivals in which they took part, and the patterns of conversion which became typical for evangelical Christians.

You should be able to describe various patterns of conversion as you analyze the many examples you read and hear about in class.

I would like you to be able to identify some of the most important issues pertaining to narrative self-identity which are discussed in an overlapping way in contemporary debate in moral philosophy, critical theory, sociology, and psychology.

I hope that you will be more personally committed to proclaiming the good news about Jesus Christ, being more convinced than ever that through the work of his Spirit, God graciously changes the lives of ordinary people. I hope that you will likewise have a stronger desire to be fully converted into the image of Christ yourself—to go in for the whole treatment, as C. S. Lewis once put it.

TEXTBOOKS

- St. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin, Penguin, 1961.
- Hugh Kerr and John Mulder, *Famous Conversions*, Eerdmans, 1985.
- Jonathan Edwards on Revival, *Banner of Truth*, 1965.
- Lewis R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, Yale University Press, 1993.

Secondary source readings for BT764 on reserve in the library (marked * below).

PRE-READING (please note)

Because this is a modular course it is important for you to read Augustine's *Confessions*, Kerr and Mulder's *Famous Conversions*, and Rambo's *Understanding Religious Conversion* before the first day of class. Read also, before class, the reserve article: Larry W. Hurtado, "Convert, apostate or apostle to the nations: The 'conversion' of Paul in recent scholarship," *Studies in Religion*, 22, no. 3 (1993): 273-84.

COURSE CONTENT

The course will include lectures, discussion of source documents, video, and small group assignments. The main headings below refer to principal lecture topics, and the bulleted points, to discussions of documents or articles, tutorials, and small group sessions.

First Week—Christian Conversion from the Apostolic Period to the Reformation

Monday Conversion in New Testament theology

Hurtado article* on the apostle Paul's conversion (cf. Kerr & Mulder, 1-3)

Conversions from Judaism and Paganism in Early Christianity

conversions in the Acts of the Apostles

conversion of pagans from elite and popular levels of society: excerpts from Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, from Arnobius, and from the *Life of St. Gregory Thaumaturgus*

Tuesday

The Controversial Conversion of Emperor Constantine and its Implications
the account in Eusebius (Kerr & Mulder, 4-10)

revitalization theory of Anthony Wallace

The Three Conversions of St. Augustine: Mani, Plotinus, and Christ the tolle lege episode in the garden
(Augustine, 157-179; Kerr & Mulder, 11-14)

Wednesday

The Temporal Dimension of Conversion: the Origins of the Penitential System
the problem of post-baptismal sin, lapsed Christians, and penitence in early Christianity: handout with
excerpts from Shepherd of Hermas and Augustine

The Conversion of the Barbarians and the Christianization of Europe
excerpts from Gregory of Tours, History of the Franks, on the conversion of Clovis, and from the Life of
Boniface, on the conversion of the Saxons.

Video: Kenneth Clark, "By the Skin of Our Teeth," from the BBC Civilisation series

Thursday

Conversion in the high Middle Ages: sacramental conversion, conversio as the taking of religious vows,
and the development of ascetical and mystical theology excerpts from Bernard of Clairvaux, On
Conversion

Martin Luther on Conversion

his 'tower experience' from the 1545 autobiographical fragment

excerpts from Luther on conversion from Bondage of the Will, "Sermon on the Afternoon of Christmas
Day", and the Ninety-Five Theses.

Friday

John Calvin on Conversion

his 'sudden conversion' mentioned in the Preface to Commentary on the Psalms (Kerr & Mulder, 24-28)

excerpts from Calvin on conversion from the Institutes

Catholics and Radicals on Conversion in the 16th Century

comparing and contrasting the experience of Ignatius Loyola and Teresa of Avila (Kerr & Mulder, 15-23)

Excursus on William James, Varieties of Religious Experience

the ecstatic conversion experience and James' pragmatic test. Question of patterns or typologies of
conversion.

Second Week—Conversion since the Reformation

Monday

The Autobiographical Moment: the Narrative of Conversion among the English Puritans and Continental Pietists

discussion of John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding* and Richard Baxter's *Autobiography* (Kerr & Mulder, 29-35, 48-53); and a handout with an excerpt from August Hermann Francke's *Autobiography*.

The Formalization of an 'Order of Conversion'

Alleine's *Alarm to the Unconverted*, and Baxter's *Call to the Unconverted*

Jerald C. Brauer, "Conversion: From Puritanism to Revivalism," *Journal of Religion* 58 (1978): 227-43.*

Tuesday

Conversion and the Protestant Evangelical Revivals of the 18th century

discussion of the conversion of John Wesley, George Whitefield, and Jonathan Edwards (Kerr & Mulder, 54-70)

small group session: visualizing the evangelical pattern of conversion

Narrative Self-Identity in the Early Modern Period: the cultural context for the flourishing of evangelical autobiography

discussion of modern self-consciousness based upon Georges Gusdorf, "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography," in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, ed. James Olney (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 28-48.*

Video: John Wesley as Preacher, a dramatic reconstruction of one of his sermons

Wednesday

Conversion and Social Order: narratives by women, slaves, and the poor or uneducated

discussion of David George's narrative in Grant Gordon, *From Slavery to Freedom: the Life of David George* (Hansport, Nova Scotia: Lancelot Press, 1992), 168-83.

discussion of transcript of Elizabeth Hinsom's ms. account of her conversion in early Methodism

Evangelical Conversion in the Second Great Awakening/Evangelical Revival

discussion of Charles Finney's conversion (Kerr & Mulder, 103-112) and the question of how discursive theology translates into first-person plot lines

small group session on revival and revivalism, reacting to J. I. Packer, "The Means of Conversion," in *With Heart, Mind, & Strength*, ed. Donald M. Lewis (Langley, BC: Credo, 1990), 63-79.*

Thursday

A few modern cases of conversion

John G. Stackhouse, Jr., "Billy Graham and the nature of conversion: A paradigm case," *Studies in Religion* 21, no. 3 (1992): 337-50.*

Conversion and the Modern Missionary Movement

Alan R. Tippett, "Conversion as a Dynamic Process in Christian Mission," *Missiology* 2 (1977): 203-21.*

Friday

Workshop discussion of Rambo, *Understanding Conversion*. Each person in the course will be assigned a chapter of Rambo's book to review for class discussion. We'll spend most of the morning working through his model of conversion and discussing its relevance and applicability to contemporary faith and ministry.

There will also be time for a general review of the course and a discussion of the assignments. Bring along preliminary drafts of any written work you have done if you would like feedback or critique which can be incorporated into your final revisions.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

Interpretative Book Review 20%

Write an interpretative review of one important spiritual autobiography other than Augustine's *Confessions*. Get to know it well, think about it, tell me about it. Use critical introductions and reference books to get a handle on the context. Refer to periodical indices and secondary sources only after you've wrestled with the text yourself. Use parenthetical references for your main source. Quote sparingly. 1,200 words. Note: I'd like you to check out your choice of source material with me before you proceed. Your reading of Augustine should help to inform your review and you may want to note points of comparison or contrast.

Essay (from textbooks) 30%

Write an essay integrating your reading of Edwards and of *Famous Conversions* by Kerr and Mulder. Note first with especial care the 'distinguishing marks' Edwards develops to attempt to discern a true work of God. Describe these and explain the context of the Northampton revival out of which Edwards was writing. Then, secondly, I would like you to attempt to do something similar to what Edwards did by reflecting upon the narratives in Kerr and Mulder. Do these narratives get a passing grade by Edwards' criteria? What about by your own criteria? I'm not interested in which narratives confirm your theological prejudices (!), but I am interested to see if you can evaluate several of these narratives from the perspective of an articulate theological method. Carefully integrate historical case studies with biblical theology. Do not proof-text. Total length of essay to be not more than 2,500 words.

Article File 30%

I will place an article file on reserve in the library. These are all relatively short, specialized pieces, and I would like you to read and report on six of them. These articles are listed in the bibliography and under Course Content and will be referred to in my lectures, or used in class discussions. These articles must be read and reviewed prior to class for the particular day on which they are assigned. This is an exercise in close, careful reading. Your written summary and reaction to each article must be no more than 300 words each, so make every word count.

Conversion Typology 20%

Based upon the course readings, lectures, and discussions, I would like you to respond to the model of conversion in Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*. Another similar model, based upon a more narrow anthropological study may be found in Alan R. Tippett, "Conversion as a Dynamic Process in Christian Mission," *Missiology* 2 (1977): 203-21 (on reserve in the article file). Both of these models are phenomenological, that is, they are attempts based loosely on the social sciences to generalize religious experiences into a typical sequential pattern, or to analyze religious experiences into a kind of taxonomy of distinctive species. I'd like you to critique Rambo's model and Tippett's and/or propose an alternative. 1,200 words.

Please Note: All assignments are due one month after the last day of class, with the exception of the article reading reports, which are due on the day of class for which they are assigned. Please note the essay grading sheet attached below for the criteria which I shall use to evaluate assignments 1, 2, and 4.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Article File

- Jerald C. Brauer, "Conversion: From Puritanism to Revivalism," *Journal of Religion* 58 (1978): 227-43.
- Georges Gusdorf, "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography," in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, ed. James Olney (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 28-48.
- Larry W. Hurtado, "Convert, apostate or apostle to the nations: The 'conversion' of Paul in recent scholarship," *Studies in Religion* 22, no. 3 (1993): 273-84.
- J. I. Packer, "The Means of Conversion," in *With Heart, Mind, & Strength*, ed. Donald M. Lewis (Langley, BC: Credo, 1990), 63-79.
- John G. Stackhouse, Jr., "Billy Graham and the nature of conversion: A paradigm case," *Studies in Religion* 21, no. 3 (1992): 337-50.
- Alan R. Tippett, "Conversion as a Dynamic Process in Christian Mission," *Missiology* 2 (1977): 203-21.

General Reference

There is a detailed bibliography on conversion in your text, Lewis R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 209-234. See also the literature review by the same author in "Current Research on Religious Conversion," *Religious Studies Review* 8, no. 2 (1982): 146-159.

Select List of Other Sources Mentioned in Lectures

- Baxter, Richard. *The Autobiography of Richard Baxter*. Edited by J. M. Lloyd Thomas. Everyman edition (abridged from the *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, 1696) ed. London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1931.
- Bebbington, David. "Evangelical Conversion, c.1740-1850." Paper presented at the North Atlantic Missiology Project, Cambridge 1996.
- Bebbington, David. *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*. London: Unwin Hyman, 1989.
- Bullock, Frederick William Bagshawe. *Evangelical Conversion in Great Britain, 1696-1845*. St Leonards on Sea: Budd & Gillatt, 1959.
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- Edwards, Jonathan. *Religious Affections*. Edited by John E. Smith. Vol. 2, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959.
- Elliott-Binns, L. E. *The Early Evangelicals: A Religious and Social Study*. London: Lutterworth Press, 1953.
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- Gordon, Grant. *From Slavery to Freedom: the Life of David George, Pioneer Black Baptist Minister, Baptist Heritage in Atlantic Canada*. Hansport, Nova Scotia: Lancelot Press, 1992.
- Haller, William. *The Rise of Puritanism*. 1st edn., 1938; repr. New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1957.
- Hambrick-Stowe, Charles E. *The Practice of Piety: Puritan Devotional Disciplines in Seventeenth-Century New England*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1982.
- Heffernan, Thomas J. *Sacred Biography: Saints and Their Biographers in the Middle Ages*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.
- Hefner, Robert W., ed. *Conversion to Christianity: historical and anthropological perspectives on a great transformation*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.
- James, William. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. rev. edn ed. London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1902.
- Lewis, Donald M., ed. *The Blackwell Dictionary of Evangelical Biography, 1730-1860*. 2 vols. Oxford: Blackwell, 1995.
- Mascuch, Michael. *Origins of the Individualist Self: Autobiography and Self-Identity in England, 1591-1791*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997.

- Miller, Perry. "'Preparation for Salvation' in Seventeenth Century New England." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 4 (1943): 253-86.
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- Noll, Mark A., David W. Bebbington, and George A. Rawlyk, eds. *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles, and Beyond, 1700-1990*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Norris, John N. *Versions of the Self: Studies in English Autobiography from John Bunyan to John Stuart Mill*. New York: Basic Books, 1966.
- Nussbaum, Felicity A. *The Autobiographical Subject: Gender and Ideology in Eighteenth-Century England*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989.
- Nuttall, Geoffrey G. "Methodism and the Older Dissent: Some Perspectives." *United Reformed Church Historical Society Journal* 2 (1981): 259-74.
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- Stoeffler, F. Ernst. *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism, Studies in the History of Religions*, 9. Leiden, 1971.
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- Watkins, Owen. *The Puritan Experience: Studies in Spiritual Autobiography*. London: Schocken Books, 1972.
- Wessels, Anton. *Europe: Was it Ever Really Christian?* Translated by John Bowden. London: SCM, 1994.

Essay/Research Paper Grading Sheet

Course: _____

Assignment: _____

Student: _____

Grade: _____

1. Grammar and Style (25%)

Is the text clean of spelling mistakes?

Is the text punctuated correctly?

Does the sentence structure consistently adhere to basic rules of good grammar?

Does the footnote/bibliographic apparatus follow Turabian consistently?

Is the paper written in a clear, straight-forward style of academic prose (e.g., the guidelines in Strunk and White)?

2. Organization (25%)

Is the subject of the paper clearly delimited? Is it significant, but still manageable?

Does the subject correspond to what was assigned in the syllabus?

Does the paper have a well-designed thesis statement and outline?

Does the running text of the paper adhere to the outline, and are the larger divisions of the paper clearly signposted?

Are the sentences and paragraphs of the text linked together clearly and in such a way that the thought of the student builds throughout the paper with continuity and coherence?

3. Clarity and Force of Argument (25%)

Is a convincing case made to support the thesis statement?

Is the evidence marshaled to support the argument used judiciously?

Where the student provides exposition or summary, does she do so succinctly and objectively?

Is there evidence of mature Christian reflection on the subject matter?

4. Research (25%)

Does the paper draw on primary sources for its main evidence?

Are the secondary sources selected and used judiciously?

Does the paper demonstrate sufficient depth and breadth of research, given the nature and level of the assignment?