

# Eleanor J. Stebner Course Syllabus

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

Eleanor J. Stebner  
The University of Winnipeg

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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 seminardiscussions, 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.

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## I. Syllabus Justification

Context: The city of Winnipeg is located on the vast prairies in the interior of the North American continent. With a population of approximately 650,000, it is the metropolitan center of Manitoba. It contains a large number of distinct European immigrant communities, the largest French and Metis communities in western Canada, and the largest aboriginal urban population in Canada. In addition to having a reputation for long, cold winters ("Winter-peg") and periodically destructive floods, the city is known for its progressive politics, arts communities, and sporting events. The closest major city to Winnipeg is Minneapolis/St Paul.

The University of Winnipeg is located in the downtown core area, adjacent to the bus depot and across the street from the Army Surplus store. It is one of three publicly supported universities in the province of Manitoba and has an enrollment of around 6500 students. The university developed from various merges and alliances. Its roots are traced to Presbyterian and Methodist colleges first formed in 1871. These institutions merged into United College with the formation of the United Church of Canada in 1925. In 1967, United College was reformed and given a public charter to become The University of Winnipeg. Today, it is primarily an undergraduate institution, has a Jewish woman president, and draws a high percentage of part-time and mature students.

While the university is a public institution, the Faculty of Theology (where I teach) retains its connections to the United Church. Within United Church structures, it has two major areas of responsibility: (1) to provide post-MDiv education for clergy and other professionals (accomplished through Master of Sacred Theology and Master in Marriage and Family Therapy degrees), and (2) to provide theological education for lay-people (accomplished through a Certificate in Theology program and various continuing education programs). United Church students enrolled in other United Church theological programs, such as the diaconal ministry program, the In-Community Based Program for Ordination, and an Aboriginal Ministry Training Centre regularly take courses in our Faculty. The Faculty coordinates Clinical Pastoral Education throughout Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario, and offers distance education courses in Brandon, Manitoba, and in Thunder Bay, Ontario.

The Faculty of Theology grants the Master of Divinity degree through cooperation with a number of church-related colleges and ecclesiastical bodies. The consortium is currently comprised of colleges

representing the General Conference Mennonites, Mennonite Brethren, Salvation Army, Ukrainian Orthodox, Anglican, and Sisters of St. Benedict. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada cooperates through its synod, and talks are currently underway regarding formal cooperation with the Unitarian Universalists. Because of the small size of full-time teaching faculty, the consortium arrangement enables the offering of a full MDiv program.

Course Design: The courses I teach are designed primarily for MDiv and STM students. An elective course such as this one has an enrollment of eight to twelve students. Students range in age from mid-twenties to mid-sixties, with most students being somewhere in their forties. Most students are part-time and engaged in some kind of professional ministry or labour. In a seminar elective I taught last academic year, students came from Baptist, Roman Catholic, Salvation Army, United Church, Lutheran, Mennonite, and Christian Reformed traditions. Most students are of white European heritage, though a substantial number reflect recent immigrant groups from the Philippines, Caribbean, and Asia. Students vary immensely in their academic abilities. Their theological perspectives vary as well, though most students identify themselves as middle-of-the-road, liberal, or liberationist.

This course is designed for mature graduate students who are self-motivated yet often function under severe time constraints. Overall themes and movements are highlighted, with opportunities for students to explore specific topics in greater depth. Since MDiv students are required to take courses in the history and faith of their particular tradition, this course provides an overview from which they can place their own experience of Christianity. While most elective courses operate on a strict seminar format, I have found that this teaching style is not as useful as one which combines lecture and seminar discussion. In the lectures, I provide a mostly narrative historical interpretation, making particular use of primary resources and texts. The seminar papers/leadership requirement enables students to use and develop their own leadership skills.

My greatest challenge in designing this course is related to how to teach it from an integrated North American perspective. As Mary Jo Leddy wrote in her book, *Reweaving Religious Life* (1990), Canada has always been a "colony of some empire: first of France, then of England, and now of the United States" (8). I find that the books which purport to discuss Christianity in North America do so from the perspective of the United States. Canada is then used as a tool of comparison to the U.S. "norm". This perspective is legitimate (and very helpful) when teaching in the United States, but is not useful when teaching from a Canadian context. I could have simply offered a course on the church in Canada. And yet this solution becomes as parochial as only focusing on the United States. As someone who is a born and raised Canadian and a naturalized citizen of the United States, I have come to hold that Christianity in both nation-states is better understood by the perspective of the continent itself. (If I knew more about Mexico, I would intentionally widen the focus to include that nation-state, too.)

I decided to use two main texts, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (1992), and *A Concise History of Christianity in Canada* (1996). Neither text is fully satisfactory. The first study is wonderfully written yet over-emphasizes the evangelical tradition; the second study is not written as accessibly, but provides solid analysis of Canadian Christian history. The seminar texts were chosen from various criterion including academic solidness and content; when possible, Canadian content and even Canadian authors were given priority. A variety of theological, social, and political positions are represented by the seminar books, and draw upon historical and sociological disciplines. The goal of these choices is to facilitate useful, thoughtful, and diverse discussion.

## II. Introductory Course Syllabus

This course provides a study of the history of religious life and practice in Canada and the United States from the time of European colonization to the present. It includes the study of select individuals, church and state relations, and comparisons between the Canadian and U.S. nation-states. Various denominations and sects that comprise the North American religious milieu are highlighted, as are significant movements

such as evangelicalism, fundamentalism, feminism, and ecumenism. Historical analysis will inevitably lead to discussions regarding Christianity within our current time and contexts. A combination of lecture and seminar format is utilized.

This course is intended to meet several objectives:

1. To acquaint students with the history of Christianity and church institutions within the North American context, with special emphasis on the differences between Canada and the United States.
2. To enable students to ask critical questions regarding the relationships between the Christian religion, its leaders, movements, and theologies, and that of societal transformations.
3. To equip students to better understand and work within our contemporary cultures as theologically trained individuals concerned about issues regarding church and ministry.

**BOOKS (All titles are available at the United Church Book Room. Full-time students receive a discount on book purchases.)**

#### **TEXTS**

- Terence Murphy and Roberto Perin, eds., *A Concise History of Christianity in Canada*, 1996.
- Mark Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, 1992.

TWO OF THE FOLLOWING TITLES (Readings to be determined the first class meeting. Some of these books are available in the library and may not require purchase.)

- Reginald W. Bibby, *Unknown Gods: the ongoing study of religion in Canada*, 1993.
- Bruce C. Daniels, *Puritans at Play: Leisure and Recreation in Colonial New England*, 1995.
- Marta Danylewycz, *Taking the Veil: An Alternative to Marriage, Motherhood, and Spinsterhood in Quebec, 1840-1902*, 1987.
- Betty DeBerg, *Ungodly Women: Gender and the First Wave of American Fundamentalism*, 1990.
- Rosemary Gagan, *A Sensitive Independence: Canadian Methodist Women Missionaries in Canada and the Orient, 1881-1925*, 1992.
- John Webster Grant, *Moon of Wintertime: Missionaries and the Indians of Canada in Encounter since 1534*, 1984.
- Elizabeth Gillan Muir, *Petticoats in the Pulpit: The Story of Early Nineteenth-Century Methodist Women Preachers in Upper Canada*, 1991.
- Albert Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The Invisible Institution in the Antebellum South*, 1978.

- Eleanor J. Stebner, *The Women of Hull House: A Study in Spirituality, Vocation, and Friendship*, 1997.
- Harry S. Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism*, 1991.
- Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith Since World War II*, 1988.

## **EVALUATION AND GRADING**

To successfully complete this course, students are to fulfill several requirements:

1. Prepare for class gatherings by completing assigned readings.
2. Attend class gatherings and participate in discussions.
3. Present one seminar paper, as scheduled.
4. Submit seminar paper, book review, and final paper, as scheduled.

Attendance/participation - 20%

Book Review - 20%

Seminar leadership/paper - 30%

Final paper - 30%

## **WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS**

Written work is evaluated on clarity of communication, significance of content, and evidence of critical analysis.

Book Review (two to three pages): DUE on date discussed

The purpose of this short essay is to engage in simple and succinct critical reflection. State the purpose and scope of the select book, using examples as necessary. Then analyze the author's arguments, sources, and content. Because this paper is limited in length, you need to focus your thought. Limit your discussion to questions related to historiography, overall significance and merit, and readership audience.

Seminar Leadership/Paper (no more than ten pages): DUE on date discussed or one week later

The purpose of this assignment is to present the argument and study of a select book, place it within the historical context, and raise questions and issues for discussion. Since not all students will be reading the book, you will have to provide an overview of the study, clearly stating the major theme(s) it enhances. Then you will need to explore some of the questions the study raises, both within the historical time period and in contemporary times.

Final Paper (no more than fifteen pages): DUE at the final class meeting

The purpose of this assignment is to enable you to study a theme of your interest. You may choose any topic within the scope of this course. You may decide to do more work on a topic raised by either your book review or seminar paper. You may decide to do a formal research paper or more of a project (eg. some kind of oral history, art or architectural analysis, archival analysis, hymnody study).

## **TENTATIVE CLASS AND ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE**

Session #1 Introduction to the study of the church in North America

Noll, pages 1-6; Murphy & Perin, ix -xi

Session #2 Spanish Catholics, English Puritans, and Alternatives

Noll, p 7-82

Seminar discussion: Daniel's Puritans at Play

Session #3 Catholic missions, First Nations, and Protestant beginnings in New France

Murphy and Perin, p 1-106

Seminar discussion: Grant's Moon of Wintertime

Session #4 Revivals and Revolutions in the United States

Noll, pages 83-162

Seminar discussion: Stout's Divine Dramatist

Session #5 Protestantism in British North America

Murphy & Perin, pages 108-189

Seminar discussion: Muirs's Petticoats in the Pulpit

Session #6 Evangelicalism, Slavery, and Sectarianism

Noll, pages 163-244

Seminar discussion: Raboteau's Slave Religion

Session #7 Protestant Proselytism and Catholic Piety

Murphy & Perin, pages 190-260

Seminar discussion: Danylewycz's Taking the Veil

Session #8 Civil War, Social Gospel, and Emerging Pluralism in the U.S.

Noll, pages 286-310

Seminar discussion: Stebner's The Women of Hull House

Session #9 Denominational Consolidations, Revivalism, and Foreign Missions

Murphy & Perin, pages 261-359

Seminar discussion: Gagan's A Sensitive Independence

Session #10 Political, Social, and Religious Wars

Noll, pages 335-421

Seminar discussion: DeBerg's Ungodly Women

Session #11 Christianity and Multiculturalism

Noll, p 423-500

Seminar discussion: Wuthnow's Restructuring of American Society

Session #12 Ecumenism, Secularization, and Pluralism

Noll, pages 531-553; Murphy and Perin, 360-369

Seminar discussion: Bibby's Unknown Gods

Session #13 Final discussion on Christianity in North America

Dialogue on students' final papers

## **SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- Ahlstrom, Sydney E., *A Religious History of the American People*, 1972.
- Albanese, Catherine, *America: Religion and Religions*, 1991.
- Allen, Richard, *The Social Gospel in Canada*, 1975.
- Butcher, Dennis L., et al, *Prairie Spirit: Perspectives on the Heritage of the United Church of Canada in the West*, 1985.
- Dolan, Jay P., *The American Catholic Experience*, 1985.
- Grant, John Webster, ed., *The Churches and the Canadian Experience*, 1963.
- Hatch, Nathan D., *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 1989.
- Lippy, Charles et al, *Christianity Comes to the Americas, 1492-1776, 1994?*
- Mead, Sidney E., *The Lively Experiment: The Shaping of Christianity in America*, 1976.
- Muir, Elizabeth Gillan and Marilyn Fardig Whiteley, eds., *Changing Roles of Women within the Christian Church in Canada* , 1995.
- Rawlyk, G.A., ed., *The Canadian Protestant Experience, 1760-1990*, 1990.
- Ruether, Rosemary Radford and Rosemary Skinner Keller, *Women and Religion in America* . 3 vols.. 1981-1986. (or *In Our Own Voices*, 1995)
- Semple, Neil, *The Lord's Dominion: History of Canadian Methodism*, 1996.

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