

COURSE SYLLABUS

CH503: The History of Christianity in America

Course Lecturer: John D. Hannah, PhD, ThD

Distinguished Professor of Historical Theology at Dallas Theological Seminary

About This Course



This course was originally created through the Institute of Theological Studies in association with the Evangelical Seminary Deans' Council. There are nearly 100 evangelical seminaries of various denominations represented within the council and many continue to use the ITS courses to supplement their curriculum. The lecturers were selected primarily by the Deans' Council as highly recognized scholars in their particular fields of study.

Course Description

“It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible.” So said George Washington, reflecting early America’s regard for divine providence. This course examines the church in America from its continental beginnings to the current day, emphasizing the influences that have forged the contemporary religious scene. Starting with the nature of Christianity in British colonies prior to the Revolution, the course traces the development of Christianity throughout its tumultuous history in America, including the effects of the Civil War and the Great Awakenings. The goal of the course is to see the workings of God throughout American history and to gain insight into the state of Christendom today.

Course Objectives

Upon completion of the course, you should be able to do the following:

- Trace the history of Christianity in the United States beginning with its roots in British colonialism.
- Think critically about the nature and meaning of the American political experiment.
- Be spiritually enriched through an understanding of your evangelical heritage, particularly through the lives and ministries of selected major figures.
- Trace the shift in American religious thought from Calvinistic Puritanism to Evangelicalism to Liberalism.
- Gain insight and understanding into Christendom today.
- See the sovereign, merciful workings of God throughout the history of the nation.

- Understand how and why movements were started and trace their effect on history.
- Explain the causes, developments in, reactions to, and criticism of nondenominational evangelicalism since 1858.
- Gain insight into present day issues in the American church.
- Obtain basic bibliography for further study.

Course Lecturer



John D. Hannah, PhD, ThD

Education:

- Yale University, Postdoctoral Fellowship in American Studies
- University of Texas at Dallas, PhD
- Southern Methodist University, MA
- Dallas Theological Seminary, ThM and ThD
- Philadelphia College of the Bible, BS

Teaching Career:

- Distinguished Professor of Historical Theology, Dallas Theological Seminary
- Chairman of the Department of Historical Theology, Dallas Theological Seminary (1980)
- Adjunct Professor, Westminster Theological Seminary
- Instructor, Plano University
- Winner of numerous awards, including Dallas Theological Seminary's Award for Faculty Excellence

Other Career Highlights:

- Considered a tremendous communicator and an expert in the works of Jonathan Edwards and John Owen
- Pastor in various church ministries in Dallas, TX
- Founder of Granbury Bible Church in Granbury, TX and the Terrell Bible Church in Terrell, TX
- Teacher/staff member at Campus Crusade for Christ, the Navigators, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, and Summit Ministries
- Member of the Board of Directors of Scripture Film Incorporated
- Elected Chairman of the Board of the Scofield Christian School in Dallas, TX
- Member of numerous historical and theological societies in the United States and United Kingdom
- Presented various papers, including one on prayer revival at the Conference of Evangelical Awakening
- Led several tours to Israel and Europe
- Frequent conference speaker in the United States and abroad

Publications:

- Contributions to several historical and Christian publications, including *Bibliotheca Sacra* and the *Grace Theological Journal*
- Various Bible-study software programs
- Numerous books, including *The Glory of God Alone*, *The Kregel Pictorial Guide to Church History*, and *Our Legacy: A History of Christian Doctrine*

Course Texts

A note about the course texts:

Due to the nature of publishing, books frequently go in and out of print. For the student's benefit, a list of several texts is provided. The student is encouraged to acquire a text that seems most appealing of those available at the time. Currently all the below listed works are in print and most are available in paperback. The books can be acquired at any good Christian bookstore. If the texts you have selected are not in stock the bookstore will normally order them for you. Books may also be borrowed from a local college or university library.

Dr. Hannah recommends:

Noll, Mark A. *Eerdmans' Handbook to Christianity in America*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1983.

Standard Textbooks:

Ahlstrom, Sydney E. *A Religious History of the American People*. 2nd edition. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004.

Gaustad, Edwin and Leigh Schmidt. *The Religious History of America: The Heart of the American Story from Colonial Times to Today*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2002.

Hudson, Winthrop S. *Religion in America*. 7th edition. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, 2004.

Marty, Martin E. *Pilgrims in their Own Land: 500 Years of Religion in America*. London: Penguin Books, 1985.

Noll, Mark A. *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992.

Recent Area or Theme Texts:

Choose three of the following works; one from group A, one from group B, and one from group C.

Group A – Choose ONE of the following books.

Kuklick, Bruce. *Churchmen and Philosophers: From Jonathan Edwards to John Dewey*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985. (Traces the relationship between early American theology and scientific philosophy.)

May, Henry F. *The Enlightenment in America*. New ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1978. (Focuses on the Enlightenment and the religious influences at the time of the Revolutionary War in America.)

Noll, Mark A., Nathan O. Hatch and George M. Marsden. *The Search for Christian America*. Expanded edition. Colorado Springs, CO: Helmers & Howard, 1989. (Studies the Christian heritage of America.)

Shelley, Bruce L. *The Gospel and the American Dream*. Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1989. (Follows the

American dream from Puritanism to paganism.)

Group B – Choose ONE of the following books.

Bloesch, Donald G. *The Future of Evangelical Christianity: A Call for Unity amid Diversity*. Colorado Springs, CO: Helmers & Howard, 1988. (Examines contemporary evangelicalism and presents a vision for unity rather than diversity.)

Horton, Michael Scott. *Made in America: The Shaping of Modern American Evangelicalism*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991. (Traces the influences that formed contemporary evangelicalism.)

Marsden, George M. *Religion and American Culture*. 2nd edition. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2001. (Focuses on the relationship between Christianity and culture in America.)

Marsden, George M., ed. *Evangelicalism and Modern America*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans' Publishing Co., 1984. (Series of essays looking at how culture has impacted Christianity and how Christianity has impacted culture in America.)

Group C – Choose ONE of the following books.

Barna, George. *The Frog in the Kettle: What Christians Need to Know about Life in the Year 2000*. Ventura, CA.: Regal Books, 1990. (Presents the precarious yet important place of the church in America today.)

Bloom, Alan. *The Closing of the American Mind*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988. (Traces some causes of and some solutions to the decline of university education in America.)

Groothuis, Douglas R. *Unmasking the New Age*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986. (Good survey of the New Age movement.)

Nash, Ronald H. *Evangelical Renewal in the Mainline Churches*. Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1987. (Directs attention toward the composition of and the challenges of the big denominations in America.)

Suggested Reading:

A bibliography of suggested books is included for each lesson in the Course Schedule at the end of the syllabus for the student to do further reading. These suggested books coincide with the topic of the recorded lecture.

Textbooks can be ordered through our online store at CUGN.org, through your local bookstore, or through your preferred eReader when available.

Course Requirements

1. Time: The student must complete the course requirements within a 6-month period unless the particular institution requires the completion of all work within the framework of the semester

or quarter. During this time, the student is expected to devote a minimum of 120 hours to the completion of the course.

2. **Recorded Lectures:** The student is required to listen to all 24 audio lectures recorded by Dr. Hannah.
3. **Required Reading:** Complete the required reading according to the instructions in the Course Texts section and the Course Schedule below.
4. **Written Work:** Three other books must be reported on. Choose one from Group A, one from group B, and one from group C in Course Texts above. These books are to be read thoroughly and thoughtfully. The student must prepare a brief report on each, 7-9 pages in length. The book report should consist of: (1) a 2-3 page summary of the thesis and key points of the book; (2) a 2-3 page critical evaluation of the book's main ideas; and (3) a 2-3 page application arising from studying the book.

The student should take note that some of these works were not written by conservative evangelicals. Rather, these works have been selected to raise the student's awareness and stimulate his or her thinking more broadly.

5. **Spiritual Formation Project**

RATIONALE: Ministry preparation and the Christian life require more than academic exercises. Learners also need personal, spiritual formation, which involves theological reflection and critical thinking on their current practices and assumptions. This process occurs as learners engage in self-reflection and interaction in a community of learning. With this in mind, CUGN includes in all courses a capstone project addressing these issues and facilitating interaction beyond the formal learning environment (ATS schools, note Standards 3.2.1.3; 4.1.1; 10.3.3.3).

Write a **five-to-six page reflective essay** and **interview a mentor**, discussing the spiritual impact of this course on your life. Identify your mentor early in the course, and submit the essay to your grader when you take the final exam. This last project should not be a summary of course content, but an application of course principles. Complete the following:

A. Personal Reflection and Evaluation: Reflect on the course – To integrate your academic studies with your walk of faith, reflect on the content of the course and evaluate your life in light of what you learned.

- i. Follow these steps in your reflection:

Step 1: What one theme, principle, or concept in the course is the most significant to you personally? Why is it significant?

Step 2: What portion(s) of the course brought this theme/principle/concept to light?

Step 3: Think about your past. Why is it vital now for you to deal with and apply this theme/principle/concept?

Step 4: How should this affect your thoughts and actions, and what specific steps should you take to concretely apply what you have learned?

- ii. Write your answers to the above questions in full paragraph form. (Recommended length for this reflection: approximately three pages)
- iii. Give a copy of this reflection to your mentor (see #2).

B. Community Reflection and Interaction: Interview a mentor – Since the Holy Spirit uses the input of others to guide and form His people, interview a mentor according to the following guidelines:

- i. Who should you interview? (1-3 are required; 4-6 are recommended)
 1. Someone with whom you have a reasonably close relationship.
 2. Someone who is a mature Christian ministry leader (i.e. a pastor).
 3. Someone who is not your grader or a family member.
 4. Someone who values the spiritual formation process.
 5. Someone who is familiar with and values the subject of the course.
 6. Someone who has experience using the content of the course in ministry.

NOTE: Identify your mentor early in the course, and give him/her the page entitled “Guidelines for Mentors.”

- ii. Focus of the interview – Your interview should focus on the issues and questions you raise in your essay. For example:
 - What feedback can your mentor give in response to your essay?
 - In light of the course content, are the conclusions you made appropriate? Why or why not?
 - What additional advice, deeper insights or broader applications might he/she suggest from his/her own life and ministry?

NOTE: Conduct this interview either in person (preferred) or over the phone. Do not use electronic communication (i.e. email, instant messenger, etc). Suggested length: 45 minutes.

C. Synthesis and Application: Draw your final conclusions – Having reflected on the course and the discussion with your mentor, synthesize what you have learned in these three sections:

- i. Section 1: Begin your essay with the personal reflection from #1 above. This should be exactly what you gave your mentor for the interview.
- ii. Section 2: Comment on your interview, explaining what you discussed and the insights you gained from your mentor. Include the following:
 - What were the mentor’s comments regarding your essay?
 - What advice did he/she give?

- How did his/her comments expand or correct your application of the course?
- Include the person's name, occupation, and the length of the interview.

iii. Section 3: Conclude with a synthesis of what you have learned. Answer the following:

- If your mentor corrected any thoughts in your "Personal Reflection and Evaluation", how do you feel about these corrections? Do you agree or disagree? Why?
- Synthesizing your thoughts from section one and your mentor's insight in section two, what final conclusions have you reached? How is this different from section one?
- In light of the interview and further reflection, what additional, specific changes need to occur in your life and what concrete steps will you take to implement them?

NOTE TO STUDENTS: Your effort in this assignment will determine its benefit. If by the end of this course you have not yet reflected critically on your life in light of what you have studied, allow this assignment to guide you in that process. The instructor for this course will not score your essay based on the amount of spiritual fruit you describe; so do not exaggerate (or trivialize) what you have learned. The primary grading criteria is that you have thoughtfully considered the principles of the course and realistically sought to apply them to your life. If you have done this and met the minimal requirements (as noted above), you will earn the full points for this assignment.

Note on confidentiality: Perhaps the Holy Spirit is dealing with you in some very personal areas of your life. Because of this, your grader will keep your essay entirely confidential and either return or discard it.

Objective: to stimulate reflection and interaction on course principles in order to enhance personal spiritual formation.

6. Examinations: Three exams must be taken, closed book and without notes. The first exam should be taken following Lecture #8. The second exam should be taken following Lecture #16. The third exam should be taken following the last lecture.

The exams will cover the material from the recorded lectures and the textbook which the student has selected to read. The textbook should be read in accordance with the schedule of lectures as outlined in this syllabus (i.e., assigned pages should be read along with the listening to each lecture). There will be a place on each exam for the student to record the completion of this reading.

Course Grading

Your grade for the course will be determined as follows:

Reading	20% of Course Grade
Book Reports	25% of Course Grade
Spiritual Formation Project	10% of Course Grade
First Exam	15% of Course Grade

Second Exam	15% of Course Grade
Third Exam	15% of Course Grade
Total	100%

Student Name: _____ Course: _____ Interview
Date/Time: _____

Guidelines for Mentors

(Students, give this sheet to your mentor for the Spiritual Formation Project.)

Thank you for your involvement in this student's CUGN coursework. We believe the Christian life is more than an academic exercise, so we encourage students to critically reflect on their life in light of what they learn and then apply those insights to the daily life of faith.

Therefore, students taking CUGN courses are required to complete a final assignment called the "Spiritual Formation Project." This assignment involves two parts: an essay and an interview:

The ESSAY: After completing their coursework, students reflect on the content of the course, evaluate their lives, and discuss the one theme, principle or concept that is most significant to them and why. Students are to identify specific ways this theme/principle/concept should apply to their lives and what action steps they plan to take in order to make these changes a reality.

The INTERVIEW: After writing this reflection, students give a copy to their mentor and meet with him/her to discuss their thoughts and get feedback. The goal of this interview is to facilitate the student's growth through interaction with a mature believer.

NOTES ON THE INTERVIEW:

- You do not need to be familiar with the course to participate in this interview. You will primarily respond to the thoughts of the student. (However, general knowledge of the subject matter of the course and/or experience applying it to ministry is valuable.)
- Prior to meeting with the student, read his/her "Personal Reflection and Evaluation" and prepare to discuss the following:
 1. What feedback can you give the student in response to his/her essay?
 2. Are the student's conclusions from the course appropriate? Why or why not?
 3. What additional advice, deeper insights or broader applications would you suggest from your own life and ministry?
- Meet with the student either in person (preferred) or over the phone. Do not use electronic communication (i.e. email, instant messenger, etc.).
- Suggested length of the interview: 45 minutes

Thanks again for participating in this project! You have a real opportunity to guide this student in the application process and to help him/her connect academics to life – *a valuable process for all who wish to grow in Christ.*

NOTE: If the student's school makes any changes to this assignment, their requirements should replace those described here.