Liberal Evangelical Christianity

Wesley J. Wildman — Boston University — Spring, 2009 — STH TT828

Course Description

The general aim of this course is to learn about the history, sociology, theology, and ethics of the tension between liberals and evangelicals that has persisted among Protestant Christians within the United States, under various names, since early in the nineteenth century. The specific aim is to situate a variety of moderate possibilities within this tension. These range from mid-20th century movements such as Neo-Evangelicalism (represented by Billy Graham and Carl Henry, among others) and the hearty reception of famous preacher Harry Emerson Fosdick who defined himself as “liberal evangelical”; through the revolutionary social visions of evangelicals such as Ron Sider and Tony Campolo, the cultural critique of Jim Wallis and the Sojourners Community, and the Christian pacifism of Anabaptists such as John Howard Yoder; to the green evangelicals, liberal evangelicals, evangelical liberals, progressive evangelicals, and radical moderates of today.

The class is intended for masters students interested in the liberal-evangelical tension and especially in the prospects for transcending that tension both in individual faith identities and in congregational contexts. The class should help participants become more articulate communicators and more effective leaders around issues bearing on this tension. Classes will meet once a week on Wednesdays from 8:00-11:00. Each class will be conducted in the seminar discussion format with lectures given by the instructor as needed or requested.

The main product of the course will be resources (reviews, research papers, study guides, educational material for congregations, homiletical or liturgical guidance, bibliographies, etc.) bearing on the liberal-evangelical tension. These resources should be targeted for ministers, seminary students, or lay leaders of Christian churches. The production of these resources will be discussed in class and will earn the largest share of the grade (75%). The remainder of the grade is based on quality of participation, reading responses, and seminar contributions (25%). Incompletes are not allowed—except when they are. Paperwork is necessary. Plagiarism is not allowed—ever. Know the rules.

Seminar Schedule

The schedule refers to books described in the bibliographical material below. “Lost” refers to Wildman & Garner, *Lost in the Middle?* “Found” refers to Wildman & Garner, *Found in the Middle!*

**Introduction**

1/14/09 Liberalism, Evangelicalism, and Everything We Don’t See in the Religious Culture Wars

**Part I: Demographics and Experience**

Suitable Review Items: Barna, Florina, Fosdick, Marks, McLaren, Rasor, Wellman

1/21/09 Lost Parts 1-2

1/28/09 Presentations of Reviews

**Part II: Sociology and Political Theory**

Suitable Review Items: Habermas & Ratzinger, Smith, Wuthnow, Wallis

2/4/09 Lost Parts 3-4

2/11/09 Presentations of Reviews

**Part III: History**

Suitable Review Items: Gaustad, Hopkins, Marsden, Noll (*American Evangelical Christianity*), Noll (*Scandal*)

2/18/09 Lost Part 5

2/25/09 Presentations of Reviews

3/4/09 Taylor

3/11/09 No Class: Spring Break
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Part IV: Theology: God, Christ, Gospel
Suitable Review Items: Barron, Bundy, Coleman, Dorrien (vols. 1,2,3), Edwards & Stott, McDonald, Pinnock & Brown, Schaeffer, Spong, Tomlinson
3/18/09 Theology: Found Parts 1-2
3/25/09 Presentations of Reviews

Part V: Ecclesiology and Church Life
Suitable Review Items: Ammerman, Balmer, Bass, Burklo, Members (Liberal Evangelicalism), Murphy, Warner
4/1/09 Found Part 3
4/8/09 Presentations of Reviews

Part VI: Ethics and Social Action
Suitable Review Items: Campolo, Henry, Sider, Yoder
4/15/09 Found Part 4
4/22/09 Presentations of Reviews

Conclusion
4/29/09 Found Part 5; report on student resources produced during the semester

Required Books
Wildman, Wesley J.; Garner, S. Chapin. Lost in the Middle? A guide for learning to name and claim a radically inclusive, Christ-centered faith for liberals and evangelicals. Alban Institute, 2008 (978-1566993722).
Wildman, Wesley J.; Garner, S. Chapin. Found in the Middle! Theology and ethics for moderate Christians with both liberal and evangelical instincts. Alban Institute, 2009 (978-1566993814).

Books Suitable for Review


