

EVANGELISM AND MODERN SOCIETY

EM3353, TH4003

Spring, 2012, Wednesday 1:30-4:20 Garden Court 213

Instructor: Frances S. Adeney

Course Description: This course will assess the contemporary situation for Christian evangelism and mission in the United States. Through studying shifting paradigms of knowledge, the rise of relativism, secularization theories, religious pluralism, and individualism, students will equip themselves to understand the postmodern situation for evangelism in the West. Different cultural contexts will be explored and students will develop strategies for evangelism that suit particular congregational contexts and leadership styles, developing goals for their future work in the church.

Learning Outcomes: This course is designed to orient students to the contexts and problems for Christian evangelism in the modern world and develop strategies for change.

Students will:

- analyze questions for faith in a pluralistic society
- evaluate American traditions that augment or detract from the vitality of Christian communities in various contexts
- develop theologically sound and personally appropriate strategies for evangelism

Topics:

1. The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society
 - Faith in an Age of Incredulity
 - The Sea of Relativism
 - Secularization at Home and Abroad
 - Truth and the Scientific Method
 - The Re-enchantment of the World
2. Societal Contexts for Evangelism in the U.S.
 - Conflicting Languages: Biblicalism/ Republicanism vs Individualism
 - Religion and Politics in the Black Church
 - Women and Spirituality
3. Shifting Paradigms
 - Social Construction of Reality
 - Ecumenical and Evangelical Approaches to Evangelism and Mission
 - Spiral of Knowledge Acquisition: A New Paradigm for Knowledge
4. Strategies for Change
 - Directions and Diversity
 - Calling and Congregations
 - Faithful Evangelism in various Traditions
 - The Future of Prophetic Christianity

Requirements and Evaluation:

1. Active participation in class discussions, respectful listening, and in-class written and oral assignments that display a thorough understanding of the assigned readings is a basic expectation of this course. (10%)
2. A weekly report, 200-300 words, responding to problems for faith and challenges for evangelism covered in class discussions, readings, and lectures for the past week. (30%)
3. Each student will bring a news article or web page to class weekly. The article will describe a current event that is relevant to Christian witness in today's society. Students will write a statement addressing *one* of those issues in a congregational or public setting, e.g. editorial article or letter to the editor, sermon, lecture/debate in a public setting. 20%
4. A 3500 word paper typed, double-spaced in Times New Roman 12 point type, outlining a problem for evangelism in a particular modern context and developing a Christian response that includes a theological rationale and a prophetic and/or witness practice that includes both individual and community dimensions. (40%)

Required Texts:

- Adeney, Frances S. *Graceful Evangelism*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010.
- Bednarowski, Mary Farrell. *The Religious Imagination of American Women*. Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 1999.
- Bellah, Robert N. *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985.
- Newbigin, Lesslie. *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*. Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1989.
- Savage, Barbara Dianne. *Your Spirits Walk Beside Us: The Politics of Black Religion*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008.

Helpful Readings:

- Borgmann, Albert. *Power Failure: Christianity and the Culture of Technology*. Brazos Press, Baker Book House, 2003 ISBN1-58743-058-4(pbk)
- Coleman, Will. Tribal Talk: *Black Theology, Hermeneutics, and African/American Ways of "Telling the Story."* Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000.
- McFague, Sallie. *Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001.
- West, Cornell. *Race Matters*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1993.
- Wierenga, Dirk. *Presbyterians: A Spiritual Journey*. Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 2000.

Pamphlets from PC(USA):

Globalization of Economic Life; The Employment Effects of Free Trade and Globalization; Globalization and the Environment: Globalization and Culture; Iraq and Beyond; Resolution Calling for the Abolition of For-Profit Private Prisons; Christians and Muslims in Dialogue; Evangelism Pamphlets; God's Earth, Our Home; Witness and Evangelism Among People of Other Faiths; Interfaith Celebration.

Pamphlet from the Institute for Ecumenical and Cultural Research, Collegeville, MN, *The Gospel in Our Pluralistic Society*

NOTE: More than two absences will result in a lowered grade. Assignments turned in late will be docked one half of a letter grade if received within three days of the deadline, a whole letter grade if received within a week. Inclusive language should be used and plagiarism will not be tolerated—see LPTS Policies.

