

Liberal Evangelical Christianity

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

Course Description

The general aim of this course is 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 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 pacificism 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

Taylor, Charles. *A Secular Age*. Bellknap Press, 2007 (978-0-6-7402676-6).

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

Ammerman, Nancy Tatom. *Pillars of Faith: American Congregations and Their Partners*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005.

Balmer, Randall. *The Kingdom Come: How the Religious Right Distorts the Faith and Threatens America: An Evangelical's Lament*. Basic Books, 2006.

Barna, George. *Revolution*. Tyndale House Publishers, 2005.

Barron, Robert. *Bridging the Great Divide: Musings of a Post-Liberal, Post-Conservative Evangelical Catholic*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2004.

Bass, Diana Butler. *Christianity for the Rest of Us: How the Neighborhood Church is Transforming the Faith*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006.

Bundy, Edgar C. *How Liberals and Radicals are Manipulating Evangelicals: The Drift of the Neo-Evangelicals to the Left and Away from New Testament Theology*. Church League of America, 1982.

Burklo, Jim. *Open Christianity: Home by Another Road*. Rising Star Press, 2000.

Campolo, Tony. *Speaking My Mind: The Radical Evangelical Prophet Tackles the Tough Issues that Christians Are Afraid to Face*. W Publishing Group, 2004.

Coleman, Richard. *Issues of Theological Warfare: Evangelicals and Liberals*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1963.

Dorrien, Gary J. *The Making of American Liberal Theology, vol. 1: Imagining Progressive Religion, 1805-1900*. Westminster/John Knox Press, 2001.

Dorrien, Gary J. *The Making of American Liberal Theology, vol. 2: Idealism, Realism, and Modernity, 1900-1950*. Westminster/John Knox Press, 2003.

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- Dorrien, Gary J. *The Making of American Liberal Theology*, vol. 3: *Crisis, Irony, and Postmodernity: 1950-2005*. Westminster/John Knox Press, 2006.
- Edwards, D.L.; Stott, J. *Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue*. Hodder & Stoughton Religious, 1988.
- Florina, Morris P.; with Samuel J. Abrams and Jeremy C. Pope. *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*. Pearson Longman, 2004.
- Fosdick, Harry Emerson. *The Living of these Days: An Autobiography*. New York: Harper, 1956.
- Gaustad, Edwin S.; Noll, Mark A. *A Documentary History of Religion in America since 1877*, 3rd ed. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003.
- Habermas, Jürgen; Ratzinger, Joseph. *The Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion*. Ignatius Press, 2007.
- Henry, Carl F. H. *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003.
- Hopkins, Mark; Rowell, Geoffrey. *Nonconformity's Romantic Generation: Evangelical and Liberal Theologies in Victorian England*. Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2007.
- Marks, John. *Reasons to Believe: One Man's Journey Among the Evangelicals and the Faith He Left Behind*. Ecco, 2008.
- Marsden, George M. *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991.
- McDonald, Gregory. *The Evangelical Universalist*. Cascade Books, 2006.
- McLaren, Brian D. *Generous Orthodoxy: Why I am a Missional, Evangelical, Post/Protestant, Liberal/Conservative, Mystical/Poetic, Biblical, Chrismatic/Contemplative, Fundamentalist/Calvinist, Anabaptist/Anglican, Methodist, Catholic, Green, Incarnational, Depressed-Yet-Hopeful, Emergent, Unfinished Christian*. Zondervan, 2006.
- Members of the Church of England. *Liberal Evangelicalism: An Interpretation*. Hodder & Stoughton, 1940.
- Murphy, Nancey. *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda*. Trinity Press International, 1996.
- Noll, Mark A. *American Evangelical Christianity: An Introduction*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2001.
- Noll, Mark A. *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995.
- Pinnock, Clark; Brown, Delwin. *Theological Crossfire: An Evangelical/Liberal Debate*. Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1998.
- Rasor, Paul. *Fatih Without Certainty: Liberal Theology in the 21st Century*. Skinner House Books, 2005.
- Schaeffer, Francis A. *The Great Evangelical Disaster*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1984.
- Sider, Ron. *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience: Why Are Christians Living Just Like the Rest of the World?* Baker Books, 2005.
- Smith, Christian. *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1998.
- Spong, John Shelby. *Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism: A Bishop Rethinks the Meaning of Scripture*. San Francisco: HarperOne, 1992.
- Tomlinson, Dave. *The Post-Evangelical*. Zondervan, 2003.
- Wallis, Jim. *God's Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005.
- Warner, R. Stephen. *New Wine in Old Wineskins: Evangelicals and Liberals in a Small-Town Church*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990.
- Wellman, James K., Jr. *Evangelical vs. Liberal: The Clash of Christian Cultures in the Pacific Northwest*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Wuthnow, Robert. *The Struggle for America's Soul: Evangelicals, Liberals, and Secularism*. Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1989.
- Yoder, John Howard. *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972.