History and Polity of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

School for Theology and Ministry – Seattle University
Spring, 2011
Rod Parrott, Instructor

This course explores the origins and development of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) as a distinctive North American denomination. Particular attention is given to the ways in which its life and thought have been shaped in relation to changing social and political contexts, and to the persons who have led in that creativity and adaptation. Students are expected to critically engage historical sources, including primary ones, to assess the information provided by them and to explore what contemporary Disciples may learn from them.

Required texts

. Cummins, D. Duane. ***The Disciples: a struggle for reformation.*** St. Louis: Chalice, 2009. 353 pp.

Boring, M. Eugene. ***Disciples and the Bible: a history of Disciples biblical interpretation in North America.*** St. Louis: Chalice, 1997. 450 pp.

Kinnamon, Michael and Jan Linn. ***Discviples: reclaiming our identity, reforming our practice.*** St. Louis: Chalice, 2009. 146 pp.

Heltzel, Peter Goodwin (ed.), ***Chalice Introduction to Disciples Theology***. St. Louis: Schalice, 2008. 384 pp.

Jha, Sandhya. ***Room at the Table: struggle for unity and equality***. St. Louis: Chalicer, 2009. 96 pp.

Course Requirements

Course assignments are based on the expectation that students will spend approximately 3 hours in preparation for each 1 hour in class.

The course consists of faculty presentations on two weekends, student readings (texts and on-line), some on-line (e-mail) discussion, and one written project. ***Students must satisfactorily complete all the requirements in order to receive academic credit***.

1) Participation in the class sessions. Active participation in the two weekend sessions is critical to the course. Faculty input will be provided principally at those sessions, and students will have the opportunity (and obligation) to engage one another in discussion as well. There

will be some correspondence by e-mail between the two sessions, as needed to bridge between the on-campus sessions.

2) Readings. Five books are **required** reading. In addition, for the early period, the syllabus includes suggested readings from primary sources in the wider Stone-Campbell/Restoration Movement that have been digitized and made available on-line at http://www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/ (abbreviated in syllabus as **R/Msite**). Other resources may be sent by e-mail between the two course sessions.

3) An original research paper or project on some aspect of the history, theology or polity of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Students are encouraged to be creative; projects may be done collegially, and/or designed with specific uses in ministry in view (e.g., church membership class, adult study/discussion, heritage celebration). Projects intended for immediate use in pastoral situations must be accompanied by a graduate-level discussion of the historical, theological and practical reasons for the project's shape and design.

> **Note: seminary faculty in Disciples history and polity are invited annually to submit an outstanding student paper in Disciples history to the annual Lockridge Ward Wilson Award competition sponsored by the Disciples of Christ Historical Society. Students are invited to keep that competition in mind when selecting a topic for the paper.**

A two-paragraph subject proposal, along with a preliminary bibliography, is due **Sunday, May 8**. Students are advised to begin thinking about the paper/project topic early in order to identify and acquire the necessary resources. A copy of the completed paper/project must be "published" to the instructor and other students by e-mail attachment (.pdf) no later than **Monday, June 6.** The paper/project will count for 1/3 of the course/letter grade calculation.

Grades and Class Policies

Students seeking academic credit must complete all course requirements with the equivalent of a C grade. Failure to complete any course requirement will result in an Incomplete (if arranged), a Fail or an F.

Quality participation in the weekend sessions--asking questions, sharing views, probing implications, etc.– is required in order to earn a C or above.

A superior letter grade (B or A) will be awarded for term projects which meet the minimum requirements, and further show careful reading of and engagement with the primary documents, disciplined use of the scholarly tools, substantial conversation with recognized scholars in the field, and evidence of clear, independent, and creative thinking.
Written work must conform to the standards of academic integrity. Any work showing evidence of plagiarism is unacceptable, and will be returned to the student for re-writing. If plagiarism persists into final versions of written work, that work will be assigned a failing grade.

Course Schedule and Readings

Saturday, April 9
Readings: Cummins, Jha
(plus items from the R/M website)

9-10:30 – ***Introduction to the Course***
Initial suggestions about the purpose and function of history in religious communities, with special attention to potential uses among Disciples. Presentation of the course syllabus, with discussion of the course plan, goals, and approach.

10:45-12:00 – *Backgrounds and Origins 1775-1800*
Exploration of the Scots-Irish, English, and colonial backgrounds of 19th century American religion. Exploration of Disciples beginnings in the context of the religious and social world of Europe and the US in the early 19th century.

R/Msite: Elias Smith, "Address to the Public," "Revival of Religion"
Abner Jones, "My Creed" et al.
Rice Haggard, "An Address to the Different Religious Societies...."
James O'Kelly, "Plan of Christian Union"

1:00-2:30 ***The Founders***
Focus on the early activity of Barton Stone, Thomas Campbell and Alexander Campbell, and Walter Scott. Special attention to the ***Declaration and Address****, as well as to Alexander Campbell's predominant influence on the development of Disciples to 1866.*

R/Msite: T. Campbell, *Declaration and Address*
A. Campbell, "The Bible" (*Christian System,* ch. 2)
A. Campbell, "The Body of Christ" (*Christian System, ch. 24*)
Campbell, "The Christian Ministry," *(Christian System*, ch. 25)
W. Scott, "To the Editor of the Christian Messenger"
Barton W. Stone, "Apology for Renouncing the Jurisdiction of the Synod of Kentucky," "Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery"
David Purviance, "Observations on the Constitution, Unity and Discipline of the Church of Christ"
Richard McNemar, "The Kentucky Revival...;" "Observations on Church Government"
Robert Marshall and John Thomson, "A Brief Account of Sundry Things...."

2:45-4:00 – ***The Middle Period***

Attention to the development of Disciples from the death of Alexander Campbell (1866) to the creation of the International Convention in 1917, with special emphasis on the periods of scholasticism and theological controversy. Attention to the impact of changing social circumstances: civil war, urbanization, modernization, globalization, etc.

R/Msite: Isaac Errett, "Our Position"
John W. McGarvey, "Cooperation in Mission Work"
Benjamin Franklin, "The Church: its identity"
Moses Lard, "Do the Unimmersed Commune?"
Tolbert Fanning, "Capital Punishment No. 2"
Robert Milligan, "The Safety and Security of the Christian"
Stephen Corey, "The Brotherhood and the Challenge of World Conquest"
W.K. Pendleton, "Christmas Day"
Robert Richardson, "Principles and Purposes of the Reformation"
D. L. Dungan, "Things Which Help Us Understand...."
Herbert Willett, "Thomas Campbell and the Principles...."
E. V. Zollars, "The Church and the College"
Peter Ainslie, "The Heresy of Christendom" (1910); *The Scandal of Christianity* (1929) 1-19, 173-212

Sunday, April 10

9:00-10:30 – ***Toward the Christian Church***
An examination of the dynamics leading from the International Convention to the process of restructure and the adoption of the Provisional Design at the International Convention at Kansas City in 1968.

10:45-12:00 – *The Design of the Christian Church I – The Church in Congregations*
An overview of the Design of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the three manifestations of the church outlined there. Particular attention to the structure and life of congregations, including models of organization, structure and leadership. The Design is available on-line at

1:00-2:30 –***The Church in Regions and General Assembly***
An examination of the roles of regions and the General Assembly in the Design, and of the function of "covenant" as a connecting link. Consideration as well of their program and administrative structures. Attention will be given to sections of The Design of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and to the Special Rules of Procedure for the General Assembly. Selected diagrams will be provided at class time.

2:45-4:00 – Restructure at 40+
An appraisal of restructure and the denominational life of Disciples, with particular attention to questions of diversity, inclusiveness and wholeness.

May 6-8
Readings: Boring, Heltzel, Kinnamon/Linn
Term project proposal due

Friday, May 6

6:00-7:30 – ***Disciples and the Bible I***
A look at a central Disciples interest, with attention to ways Disciples have viewed and used scripture during different periods of their history. Includes a correlation of Disciples activity with the course of biblical scholarship in the wider church.

7:45-9:00 – Disciples and the Bible II
Consideration of Boring's concluding suggestions about Disciples' biblical theology and those of Kinnamon and Linn. Ideas about Disciples as a reading church..

Saturday, May 7

9:00-10:30 – ***Disciples and Theology***
An examination of four periods of theological "synthesis," from the founders to the present focus on 'covenant.' Discussion of selected essays from Heltzel.

10:45-12:00 – ***Disciples and Ecumenism***
A look at the Disciples' historic focus on the visible unity of the churchm, with attention to important persons and issues, as well as strategies for contemporary Disciples..

1:00-2:30 – ***Word and Sacrament I: baptism***
Examination of Disciples understanding and practice of baptism in the context of ecumenical convergences. Includes suggestions for the administration of baptism, confirmation, and the renewal of baptismal vows, including resources in ***Chalice Worship****..*

2:30 - 4:00 – ***Word and Sacrament II: the Lord's Supper***
A look at meanings and observance of the Lord's Supper in Disciples congregations, with some attention to differences from and similarities to Reformed and Catholic practice.

Sunday, May 8
Term Project Proposal Due

9:00-10:30 – ***Worship and Ministry among Disciples***
A brief general discussion of ways Disciples worship, followed by an examination of Disciples patterns of ministry, beginning with Alexander Campbell's rejection of early 19th century models, and including recent changes and current expectations. Special attention to the role(s) of the pastor among the Disciples, and to the shared ministries of pastors and members of congregations.

10:45-12:00 –*Preparation for Ministry*
A review of recent documents from the General Committee on Ministry of the General Assembly, including "Theological Foundations and Policies and Criteria for the Ordering of Ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)," effective August, 2011.

1:00-2:30 –*Contemporary Themes and Programs among Disciples*
Attention to goals, mission statements, and programs recently adopted by the General Assembly, including church transformation, new church establishment, and anti-racism, pro-reconcilation initiatives.

2:45-4:00 – *Retrospect and Future*
A look back at the journey Disciples have been on, and an assessment of Disciples strengths and a view of their place in the religious life of 21st century North America (and the world).

Monday, June 6
Term papers published to class participants (e-mail)
Class evaluation

Bibliography

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On-line Resources

A number of documents from the wider Stone-Campbell / Restoration Movement are available on-line at http://www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/. The Disciples web site is http://www.disciples.org