

Syllabus: **Church History (Beginnings to Present)**

Winter 2020

Christian Growth Institute

Shenandoah District of the Church of the Brethren

David R. Miller, instructor (contact information is at the bottom of second page)

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Christian Growth Institute Students:

I am excited about this Church History course and I'm especially eager to meet each one of you. Church History is very important, and thank goodness, it has the added benefit of being interesting!

In this class we study the lives and circumstances of persons and communities who endeavored by their own effort and the grace of God to follow Christ and share in the life of his church. History is more than dates, timelines and wars (though there is some of that). Ultimately, this is a love story, a revolution, a conquest, a tragedy, a comedy, and a mystery all brought together. Textbook reading isn't the most exciting, but Gonzalez is a good writer and he offers a fine introduction to the subject. If you give the class a fair shot, you'll get more than you bargained for. This is the story of people who – through the power of God – turned the world upside down (Acts 17:6).

Examine this syllabus and once you get your two-volume *The Story of Christianity*, take some time to familiarize yourself with the table of contents. Don't hesitate to contact me if you have questions. I strive to involve students in class room learning

In what follows, I will layout course goals and expectations.

Goals

1. To gain awareness of and appreciation for early Christian experience and church life.
2. To survey the story of the Christian Church from the Apostolic period to the present.
3. To introduce major personalities and events of Christian history, especially in Europe and the United States.
4. To provide a foundation of historical awareness on which students may continue to build to increase their own faith and deepen their practice of ministry.
5. To see the Church of the Brethren in broader historical and Christian Church perspective.

Course Reading

The textbook for Church History:

Justo Gonzalez's *The Story of Christianity* (volumes I & II, revised edition, 2010).

Additional reading will be done in the fulfillment of each student's research project and interest.

Assignments – Church History

1. Mandatory class attendance and participation across three class meetings.
2. Basic reading for each class is Gonzalez's *The Story of Christianity*
January 11 Gonzalez, I: xv-262
February 8 Gonzalez, I: 264-431; Gonzalez II: 7-209
February 29 Gonzalez II: 229-290, 301-347, 385-530
3. Research and Presentation
Each student is responsible for a 2,000-word research paper based on a specific person and a ten-minute class presentation based on the same topic. The paper should have four components (all four matter):
 - a. offer a brief biography of the topic person;
 - b. it should place the person in historical context (politically, culturally)
 - c. be clear about why the person is significant (the issues the person confronted);
 - d. finally, how does the person's experience inform your faith?

Paper is due two weeks after your class presentation. Please have your selected persons to me by Monday, Dec. 30, 2019.

Please make a list of three persons you would like to study in order of preference. This is a first come, first selected basis. You should choose from the attached list unless you get permission to choose someone else in advance. Gonzales often will provide some information on a person. Beyond Gonzalez students should use four critical sources – sources based on historical research and primary (original) material – in preparing this presentation. Internet resources may be used, but care should be taken that these resources are reliable and critical (as opposed to being merely devotional or opinion based; avoid websites that are platforms for personal agendas or prejudice).

- a. The class presentation should be ten minutes. Please do not read the paper for your presentation. Summarize the material and look to bring your person into vivid relief for us.
- b. Students will turn in a paper with footnotes/endnotes and bibliography of sources. See the CGI Student Handbook if you have questions about how to footnote, endnote, or prepare a bibliography.
- c. **Do not cut and paste material** extensively from Wikipedia or another other online or print source. The goal here is for each student to integrate material from different resources to gain understanding about an historical person and the forces that influenced the person in his or her own time. Again, do not copy material, either that you do not attribute to its rightful source or if attributed is simply one long quote after another. I've had trouble with students simply taking material from online sources and turning it in to me as their own work. It's better to struggle writing your own paper and pass than to turn in a remarkably brilliant paper written by

someone else and fail. It's okay to quote a sentence or two with a footnote, or to summarize a source in your own words and footnote that paragraph, but please do not connect paragraph to paragraph from sources. I want to read your writing and get a sense of how you understand the material.

4. Discussion Circles

A portion of class meetings two and three will include discussion circles. All students will participate. Discussion circles will be based on key passages from the Gonzalez text and will be allowed about 30 minutes in each of the last two class meetings. This practice of cooperative learning will be explained during the first class meeting. I'm looking forward to this kind of reading and discussing. Each student will complete and submit a brief written assignment based on their preparation for the discussion circle for a total of two assignments: one for class 2, one for class 3.

Brethren Academy and CGI Policy on Plagiarism¹

Integrity is central to life in community. In the Christian academic community, integrity means giving proper credit to people for the ideas and information we receive from them. It also means that the work we submit and represent as our own is really work we ourselves have done. The Church of the Brethren 2008 Annual Conference Ethics in Ministry Paper (2008) Part III Code of Ethics for Ministerial Leaders states: "I will give credit for all sources quoted or extensively paraphrased in sermons and prepared papers. I will honor all copyrights" (p.8, Letter M).

Plagiarism is using the work of other people without giving them credit, whether in written assignments, oral reports and sermons. A glaring example of plagiarism would be submitting an entire essay or preaching a sermon written by someone else and claiming it was your own. It is also plagiarism to use, without giving credit, someone else's ideas or phrases. This definition applies to words and images, to manuscripts, and to ideas gleaned from spoken communication.

The consequences for plagiarism will vary according to the extent of the offense. These may range from rewriting the assignment, non-crediting the assignment, or non-crediting the course. The instructor will report any instance of plagiarism to the student and to those supervising the instructional programs. Students who wish to challenge the charge of plagiarism could contact their district executive and/or the Church of the Brethren Office of Ministry.

¹ ¹ The Plagiarism policy for this course is taken verbatim from the CGI Handbook.

Discussion Circles

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Discussion Circles, adapted from Harvey Daniels, *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice, 1994*. (Thanks to Hood Frazier, formerly of JMU, for this resource.)

In this style of cooperative learning students contribute to an informed conversation by carrying out an assigned role. Each discussion will take about 30 minutes and we will most likely have two discussion groups for each of the last two classes. In a discussion circle, a group will focus on an assigned reading from Gonzalez – 15-20 pages. During that discussion each student will carry out a role assigned to them in the previous class session. The student then contributes to the discussion through that role. This is not acting. Assignments for each role will be clear and specific. We will use six basic roles in the Church History class:

- a. Discussion director: prepares a series of questions to start the discussion.
- b. Passage master: chooses five important sections/paragraphs from the reading that the group can look back on.
- c. Vocabulary enricher: identifies 7-8 key words used in the text and investigates the importance of the words to the text as a whole.
- d. Connector: makes connections or finds relationships between the reading and the wider world and/or his or her own life. This approach can be contemporary or historical.
- e. Illustrator/artist: uses the imagination to create some kind of visual portrayal of the key ideas in the section. It can be a two or three-dimensional product, a graph, a time line, anything that will bring the passage to life in a new way.
- f. Investigator: investigates some aspect of the text that he or she finds personally interesting and would like to know more about. The investigator does a little extra research on the topic but not a formal research project.

Written assignments for each role should be one typed page, single spaced. The discussion director will prepare six discussion questions to spark discussion with the circle; also, a paragraph on what he or she found most interesting about the passage. The Passage master will list the five key paragraphs/passages – page and paragraph number – and a brief rationale about selecting the passage. The vocabulary person will list and define the words he or she chooses (7-8) using dictionaries and other resources. The connector should write a page showing how they made the connection; were the idea was encountered before, etc. The Illustrator produces the visual and can turn that in as the assignment. The Investigator turns in his or her research notes.

David R. Miller
Email: drmiller.cob@gmail.com
Cell: 540 578 0241