**COS 422 – Theological Heritage IV: The Wesleyan Movement**

Part I: August 1-2, 2025, by Zoom

Part II: August 22-23, by Zoom

Instructor: William McDonald

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*Detractor: “The Lord has directed me to tell you that while you know both Greek and Hebrew, He can do without ‘book larnin’.”*

*John Wesley: “The Lord doesn’t need your ignorance, either.”*

**Course Description:**

This course covers the significant individuals, decisive events, and theology of the Methodist movement. Utilizing categories of grace, faith, and holiness, the student will appropriate the Wesleyan heritage.

**Course Objectives:**

Students will be able to:

1. Understand and reflect on the movements, major figures, and events that led to the eighteenth-century revivals, especially the lives and ministries of John and Charles Wesley.
2. Understand and articulate the vision of holiness and the theology of grace as it shaped the Wesleys, and the structures of the Methodist movement.
3. Identify and discuss significant theological and historical developments in American Methodism, including ordination and episcopacy.
4. Reflect theologically on their Wesleyan heritage and identity.

**Required Texts:**

Richard Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists* (Abingdon, 2013). ISBN: 978-1426742248.

Russ Richey, Ken Rowe, Jeanne M. Schmidt, *American Methodism: A Compact History* (Abingdon, 2012). ISBN: 978-1426742279.

*The United Methodist Hymnal*

**Supplementary Texts (encouraged, but not required):**

[*http://wesley.nnu.edu/*](http://wesley.nnu.edu/) A source for many of the Wesley’s writings

Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology*

John Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm*

**Course Schedule and Assignments**:

*Students should reserve Fridays 5:30-8:30 pm and Saturdays 8:00 am-3:30 pm for both weekend sessions of the class*

**Prework – *Methodism Past:*** Submit a book review of *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*. Book reviews should be from 4-6 pages, typed and double-spaced. Reviews should cover the entire book. Please don’t copy and paste large quotations from the book. Reviews should be written in a narrative style. Please do not submit a review that consists of an outline or bullet point statements. Finally, students should conclude their reviews with a paragraph that indicates the single theme or issue from the book that they would most like to discuss in class.

**Prework must be emailed to the Instructor** by July 31 as a Word document attachment sent to the email above.

**Weekend #1** (August 1-2) – On the first weekend, we will focus our time and discussion on John and Charles Wesley and the evangelical revival in eighteenth century England. Specifically, we will consider the cultural and religious milieu which saw the rise of Methodism, and the formation of the Wesleys’ theology and practice. Bring your hymnals. We will sing and analyze how the Wesleys’ theology was put into poetics through the hymns, primarily those of Charles Wesley.

**Midcourse Assignment – *Methodism in our Present (American) Context:* This assignment is due the Thursday before weekend #2 (August 21).** Like the first assignment, it should be submitted as a Word doc attachment to the instructor.

On the second weekend, we will focus our time on the Methodist movement in America. Students must read *American Methodism: A Compact History* prior to coming to class. Students must also submit a written review of this volume. The book review should be 4-6 pages typed and double-spaced. Reviews should cover the entire book. They should describe these themes or issues in their own words. Pay attention to how the authors narrate ways in which Methodism adapted and changed in the American context. Please do not simply copy and paste large quotations from the book. Reviews should be written in a narrative style. Please do not submit a review that consists of an outline or bullet point statements. Finally, students should conclude their reviews with a paragraph that indicates the single theme or issue from the book that they would most like to discuss in class.

**Weekend #2** (August 22-23) – This time, on Zoom, will be devoted to discussion and lecture on Methodism in America and how it transformed and adapted to the American scene. This was not a passive adaptation, though. Methodism did much to set the tone for American religious life, given its wide cultural influence until recently. Keep your hymnals handy, because we will sing and analyze several hymns from 19th-20th century U.S. authors who reflect Wesleyan theological developments. Time will be devoted to an overview of Methodism’s global presence and ecumenical commitments. Our “liturgy” for the evening and day will feature lecture-discussion-singing broken by periodic breaks.

**Final Assignment – *Methodism’s Future in Light of Its Past****:* Address the question of Methodism’s future in light of its past (4-6 pages typed, double-spaced). You may proceed in several different ways in answering this question. Here are some possibilities for you to consider. You are not limited to them, but they should get you thinking about what you might write about:

* Given Methodism’s evolution from Wesley’s movement through its later theological developments, how can/should Wesleyan theological convictions be shared in a 21st century milieu? A paper on this topic should draw on some of Wesley’s sermons on “The Scripture Way of Salvation” while taking into account later developments such as Phoebe Palmer’s understandings of entire sanctification, liberal theology, the quadrilateral, pluralism, etc.
* Methodism has a long history or “social holiness.” What might social holiness look like in the 21st century, using Wesleyan understandings? You might take cues from sources such as the Wesley’s anti-slavery writings, hymnody, Holy Club and class and band practices, etc. What do these milestones in Methodism offer for thinking about holiness in the 21st century? Remember: you are being asked to bring the past in conversation with the future!
* Once again, Methodism has suffered a schism. This is not the first time it has happened in its history. What do past instances of division teach us about the present and future? A paper on this topic should think about one of more of the following: Wesley’s decision to ordain elders in 1784, the north-south split in 1844, other schisms and divisions, and Wesley’s sermons “Catholic Spirit” and “On Schism” (both may be found online at <http://wesley.nnu.edu/> >John Wesley>John Wesley’s Sermons). How do Wesley’s perspectives apply today?
* You may well think of other approaches to take. These are meant to get you thinking about possibilities. The paper will be graded on clarity, form and grammar, and accuracy.

**Honor Code:**

The honor code of the ALPS-Memphis/Tennessee/Holston Course of Study can be found on the website (alpsumc.org). Please be certain to print, fill out, sign, and attach the cover sheet to each assignment. When turning in an assignment via e-mail attachment, you can fulfill this requirement by including the following statement in the body of the e-mail: “I have read the plagiarism definition on the ALPS-Memphis/Tennessee/Holston Course of Study Honor Code, and I affirm that the attached assignment represents my own work, except where credit is given.” I will not accept your paper if you have not included the cover sheet or included the statement above in your e-mail.

Plagiarism is theft of another person’s work and lying by claiming to have written something that you didn’t write. If I discover that a student has plagiarized, they will have two choices:

• I will offer the student an opportunity to rewrite the paper and will deduct 20 points from the grade of the rewritten paper for plagiarism on the original.

• If the student does not wish to rewrite the paper, I will assign it a grade of zero.

• For a good explanation of plagiarism and ways to avoid it, see the following web page: https://www.plagiarism.org/article/what-is-plagiarism

**Grading:**

Pre-course assignment: 30%

Mid-course assignment: 30%

Final Paper: 30%

Participation: 10%

Tardiness in turning in assignments or the final exam will result in a reduced grade.

A 10-point scale is used, where 90-100= A, 80-89=B, etc.