Faith of Freedom:
A Survey of Christianity in America

CLASS 13
Modern Trends
- Megachurches
- Televangelism
- Non-Denominational/Independent Churches
Megachurches

- Although the concept goes back to the 1800s, the ‘megachurch’ has seen a considerable increase in number and size over the last 30 years.
- Megachurches typically have a regular weekly attendance over 2,000, but the largest are upwards of 20,000 members.
  - Lakewood Church; Houston, TX – 43,500
  - North Point CC; Alpharetta, GA (multi-site) – 30,600*
  - Life.Church; Edmond, OK (online) – 30,000*
- Typified by charismatic and authoritative leadership, social outreach ministry, and contemporary performance worship

Televangelism

- Though many Christian preachers have used media to their benefit, deregulated media in America has permitted many to use radio and television to spread their message.
  - The first use of the term was in 1952, by Time magazine referring to Roman Catholic Bishop Fulton Sheen.
  - Trinity Broadcasting Network / The God Channel
- Because of their dependence on contributions from TV and radio audiences, many ‘televangelists’ incorporate some form of ‘prosperity’ teaching into their message.
- This has led to widespread criticism of this type of ministry as self-serving and exploitative.
Non-Denominational Christianity

Non-Denominational/Independent Churches

• Over the last 40 years, the number of Protestant Christians identifying as non-denominational has risen by over 400%. This corresponds to a decline in many traditional Protestant denominations.

• This trend corresponds to a growing skepticism of institutional religion represented by large church organizations. Many see denominational ties as sociological markers which they prefer to avoid.

• These non-denominational churches prefer to retain a character of ‘simple’ Christianity that is unaffiliated to broader religious structure.
REVIEW

➢ Characteristics of American Christianity
➢ Scriptural Reflection

CLASS SCHEDULE

• CLASS 1 – European Reformation and Expansion
• CLASS 2 – Puritan Life and Faith
• CLASS 3 – The ‘Great Awakening’
• CLASS 4 – Faith During the American Revolution
• CLASS 5 – Protestant Growth on the Frontier
• CLASS 6 – The Restoration Movement
• CLASS 7 – ‘Outsider’ Forms of Christianity
• CLASS 8 – Churches in the Civil War
• CLASS 9 – African-American Religious Experience
• CLASS 10 – Rise of the Social Gospel Movement
• CLASS 11 – Intellectual Challenges and Fundamentalism
• CLASS 12 – The New Christian Right
• CLASS 13 – Modern Trends
6 Characteristics of American Religion
- Edwin Scott Gaustad

• **Individualism** – political and geographical self-sufficiency, manifested religiously in the belief of personal relationship with God

• **Experimentalism** – a wave of new Bible interpretations, denominational churches, and worship activities

• **Nativism** – a sense of pride in the divine support of all things ‘American’

• **Primitivism** – a (counter-)characteristic effort to return to the natural/original form of religion, typically defined by the Bible

• **Probabilism** – a trend that people who question restrictions upon their actions generally chose the path of greater liberty

• **Denominationalism** – ecclesiastical organization which only claimed segmented participation in ‘the Universal Church’ and in the life of its members

Scriptural Reflection

• **Deuteronomy 28:1-10** – Why do you think so many Americans identified themselves with Israel? What is dangerous about that idea?

• **Matthew 28:19** – What measures have American Christians taken in the name of ‘making disciples’? How are those consistent/inconsistent with the mission of the church?

• **1 Corinthians 1:26-28** – How have ‘disadvantaged’ or ‘outsider’ groups in America used Christian faith form an identity?

• **2 Timothy 3:16** – What are positive and negative examples from Christians in America in their use of Scripture?

• **John 17:20-22** – Why is there such a history of division among churches in America? Why do efforts to unite often fail?

• **Galatians 5:13** – In what ways has Freedom of Religion in America given an opportunity to the flesh?