

## **HIST 515: GOD, MONEY, AND THE RISE OF THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL**

Kate Bowler  
May 26-30, 2014  
8:00-11:00 am  
1 or 2 graduate credit hours



**Please Note:** The Course Information Sheet is meant to assist in selecting courses.  
The official syllabus should be consulted for more detailed information.  
Syllabi are available to Regent students at <http://www2.regent-college.edu/courses/login>

### **Course Description**

This course introduces students to the major figures and features of the twentieth-century American prosperity gospel. It traces its late nineteenth-century metaphysical roots through black and white Pentecostalism to post-war revivals where it took shape. We shall consider its effect on megachurches, televangelism, New Age, self-help, Pentecostalism, and pop religion as it spread across racial and economic divides. Additionally, we shall examine how expectations of preachers changed as a result.

### **Class Outline**

Monday, May 26	Faith: The Power of the Mind in the Late 19 <sup>th</sup> Century
Tuesday, May 27	Health: Pentecostal Itinerants and the Gospel of Health
Wednesday, May 28	Wealth: The Golden Age of Televangelism
Thursday, May 29	Victory: The Spread of the Prosperity Gospel
Friday, May 30	A Global Faith: The Age of the Rich and the Poor

### **Assignments**

#### 1. Fieldwork Assignment

You will move from the classroom to the world of fieldwork to investigate an aspect of the prosperity gospel. This ethnographic exercise consists of straightforward description, written promptly after first-time attendance at your chosen event. In essence, I'd like you to describe the setting and scene in a way that invites readers to imaginatively step into the event with you. This should be a "first impressions" portrait, a thick description of context, sequence, and feelings about your involvement. Don't wait until the event has faded in memory to write this essay; do so immediately after returning home, when impressions and emotions are still fresh. The result, in essence, should be an edited version of your field notes (the notes you take at the time), accompanied by reflections on your feelings about the

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experience. Your field reflections should be at least 4 to 5 pages in length (approx. 1,000 – 1,250 words).

DUE: Monday, July 14, 2014

2. Biographical Assignment (*1-credit student will write 750 words; 2 credit students will write 1,000 words*)  
Pick a single “prosperity” televangelist that will be your sustaining interest. If possible, try to steer clear of the most famous personalities in favor of lesser-known figures. Write a 500-word biography of the televangelist you have chosen.

One-credit students will commit to watching at least 5 programs and having read at least 1 of the preacher’s written works. Also, they will write an additional 250-word introduction to this biography defending why you identified this person. In what way does this figure address the themes of faith, health, wealth, and victory?

Two-credit students will commit to watching at least 5 programs and having read at least 2 of the preachers’ written works. Also, they will write an additional 500 word introduction to this biography defending why you identified this person. In what way does this figure address the themes of faith, health, wealth, and victory? Particular attention to the way this figure interprets scripture and addresses (or avoids) certain moral concerns should be considered.

Due: Monday, July 14, 2014

**Evaluation**

	1 cr hrs	2 cr hrs
Participation	20%	20%
Fieldwork	35%	35%
Biography	45%	45%

**Required Reading**

Bosworth, F.F. *Christ the Healer*. Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1973. ISBN: 97800794576.

Bowler, Kate. *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. ISBN: 9780199827695.

Conwell, Russell H. *Acres of Diamonds*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002.

Listen: <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/rconwellacresofdiamonds.htm>

Copeland, Kenneth. *The Laws of Prosperity*. Greensburg, PA: Mann Christian Outreach, 1974. P.9-37.

Trine, Ralph Waldo. *In Tune with the Infinite* (esp. Prelude, The Supreme Fact of the Universe, The Supreme Fact of Human Life, Plenty of All Things, The Basic Principle of All Religions) Online: [www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/23559](http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/23559)

Deadline for dropping the course with refund is 4:30 pm on May 26, 2014 (100% refund) or 4:30 pm on May 27, 2014 (75% refund). There is no refund of any tuition fees after the 75% refund deadline, but the course may be dropped, changed to audit, or reduced in credit hours up until 4:30 pm on May 30, 2014 (no refunds).