

# Writing 100: Does God Choose Sides? American Politics and the Bible

Spring 2008 Tues, Thurs 10:20-11:30 COM 213



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## Course Description:


Exit polls following the 2004 presidential election indicated that religious beliefs and issues greatly influenced its outcome and the lead up to the 2008 election looks no different. Matters such as healthcare, war, abortion, gay marriage, the death penalty, and euthanasia set off conversations, often heated, about where God stands on these issues. People of faith continue to read the same Bible yet often draw opposite conclusions concerning what these sacred texts say about social and political issues. This course will provide opportunities to read, discuss, and write about how politics and religious rhetoric are interwoven in today's American society.

By the end of this course you should have obtained the following:

-  A sampling of the Bible's influence in American Politics
-  An understanding of the various ways religious traditions, particularly Christians (because 85-90% of US Citizens identify themselves as such) use the Bible to make their decisions on social and moral issues
-  A taste of how biblical scholars across the spectrum read the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures
-  A comprehensive review of Writing and language skills
-  An ability to communicate using several voices through written and oral means
-  Practice in using technology for research and writing and citing them in an academic style

## Required Texts:

-  Hacker, Diana. *The Bedford Handbook. 6<sup>th</sup> edition*. Boston: St. Martins Press, 2002.
-  Wallis, Jim. *God's Politics. Why the Right Gets it Wrong and the Left Doesn't get it*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005.
-  Domke, David and Kevin Coe. *The God Strategy. How Religion became a Political Weapon in America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
-  Access to a Bible (there are copies in the library or online, e.g.: <http://nccusa.org/welcome/sitemap.html> )

 Assigned articles scanned and available on blackboard

## Course Requirements:


Each assignment except the portfolio and the group presentation will go through the following process (drafts before the final work that will be work-shopped with a peer group and in consultation with me). Below is the workshop process:


### Writing Workshop Process


You will be a member of a group with two or three other students who will serve as your peer mentors and reviewers throughout the semester. Following a paper's draft deadline you will have class time to work with your group on each others' papers. Therefore every student must have his/her draft ready to exchange with his/her group **by class time on the draft due date**. Each reader will prepare comments and HELPFUL critiques to be shared individually with the writer during the workshop and **these must be prepared by the day of the workshop and handed in with the portfolio**. Remember, writing is a process. Please be respectful and helpful. If your drafts or final papers are late, it impacts the entire group and writing process. Lateness not approved by the instructor (abduction by aliens is not a valid excuse unless you can show proof), your grade will be penalized. Sharing work is a very vulnerable thing to do. Please inform me immediately of any concerns that arise from this process. Collegiality will also be reflected in the overall course grade. Drafts will not receive a letter grade (but your hard work will be reflected in your final writing assignment grade). At the end of the semester you will evaluate your group members as well as yourself in a peer evaluation, which will be explained and distributed later in the semester and will be considered in the grade.


### 20% Class Participation (total of 500 possible points)


This grade will also be based on the following:

 **Individual meetings with the instructor** (15-30 minutes) at least 2 times this semester if not more. (20 points each meeting)

 **Class attendance and participation (with all assignments on time):** no more than 3 excused absences; 5 total. Each absence after 3 will be reflected in your final grade (10 points a class with 5 automatic points for just showing up and a scale of 1-5 points a class for more class involvement—a total possible 150 points allowing for 3 missed classes- but extra credit for perfect attendance!)

 **Active involvement in class writing workshops** (see above for details) Total of 15 points a workshop and 75 possible

 **Writing Center:** Each student must provide evidence that she/he has worked with the writing tutor and that the feedback was integrated into the written project **NO LATER THAN FEBRUARY 15<sup>th</sup>**. Those who visit the writing center more than once during the semester will receive the following (forgiveness on a missed class, or forgiveness of a late paper-one time deal). You may take a paper from ANY CLASS to the tutor. (25 points for one visit)

 **Weekly posting to the blackboard threaded discussion** During the semester class members will post to blackboard's threaded discussion area a 2-3 paragraph

reaction to a reading, assigned podcast or example that you came across that week (via newspaper, music, movies, tv) in which religion and politics intersect. In addition, each student should respond to the postings of two your peers EVERY WEEK. Your first post should be posted by Wednesday morning at 9 am and response postings by Fridays at 9 am. While this assignment is required and will significantly impact your participation grade, it will not receive a letter grade. **Keep in mind to not participate will severely lower your class participation grade.** Each student will serve one week this semester as a web monitor (see attachment for directions) to make sure that the discussions are respectful and do not attack another's personal beliefs or politics. (15 points a week—total 210 points)

**20% Portfolio: total of 500 points and** should contain:

- Bedford selected handbook exercises (these should be completed on line or handwritten) – 50 points
- A third draft of one of your shorter papers that includes the instructor's feedback. Include with this copies of your peers' feedback, writing center feedback, and your drafts of the paper. 100 points
- A final draft of your academic paper that includes the feedback of both your peers and your instructor. Include your first draft and the feedback. 250 points
- Peer review sheets (evaluate each group member including yourself) 100 points


The final portfolio is due **No later than April 25<sup>th</sup> by 6:00 PM in my office. Please place box # or home address so these can be returned to you (or get them from my office)**


**10% Personal Voice Paper: (250 points)** This **2-3 page paper** (double spaced) should respond to the following:

- What role do you think that religion should play in American politics? Back up your response with some concrete examples that have helped to form your opinion including the class readings.

**Draft Due Jan 29 ; Workshop Jan 31; final due Feb 4**

**10% Editorial article – 3-4 pages (double spaced; 250 pts)** (Audience: popular. Aim for *Rolling Stone*, *Newsweek*, and so forth). You can go several ways with this assignment and don't forget to name your audience:

 Create a political cartoon, poem, story, an essay, a piece of art, or song that integrates religion and politics in the United States with regard to the environment. Make certain that this work includes at least one page that explains the writing and its relationship to religion and politics. Feel free to be creative.

 Focus on a political speech that deals with the **environment** (political rally, campaign speech, etc.) and write an editorial highlighting how religion or religious values are invoked by the speaker to forward a political objective concerning the **environment**. The editorial could focus on the Environmental teach-in on the 31<sup>st</sup> and the local politicians if desired or reflect on the movie "An Inconvenient Truth." Allow the insights of your course reading to strengthen your article.

**Draft Due Feb 12<sup>th</sup> , workshop Feb 14<sup>th</sup> , Final due Feb 19<sup>th</sup>**


**10% Critique Paper (250 points; 4-5 pages) (audience- Academic Journal)**


Choose one of the following articles:

- Meacham, Jon. *American Gospel. God, the Founding Fathers, and the Making of the Nation*. New York: Random House, 2006, 3-35.
- Domke and Coe, 1-70
- Or another of the class readings or connected to the class material that you choose to critique. **This article must be cleared by the instructor first.**

and offer a critique of its argument (or thesis) keeping in mind the following:

 What are the major arguments addressed in the article?

 On what evidence or logic does this argument rely?

 How is or isn't the argument convincing? Feel free to offer a counter argument.

Make certain to consult the *Bedford Handbook*, Part IX on Critical Thinking

**Draft due Feb 26<sup>th</sup> , Workshop Feb 28, Final due March 11<sup>th</sup>**

**10% Group Writing Presentation** (Audience: this class; 20-25 minutes; 250 points). Prepare a presentation based on a section of the syllabus material that interests you and has not been covered. Use some form of multimedia (Power Point; Music; Poetry, Film, Video, Create a blog or Wiki—feel free to create your own; integration of technology media is key here!)

**Presentations will take place the weeks of March 18 and 25.**

**20% Research Paper** (Academic Voice: 10-12 pages; 500 points) Choose one of the following to research:

- Track a 2008 Presidential candidate and follow him/her through the primaries paying special attention to how he/she employs biblical rhetoric to further a political (or religious) agenda. Your paper should include a discussion of the biblical issues that drive this person's public policy and agenda to be elected. (Get to know the issue(s) as well as the candidate, his/her religious beliefs, speeches, writings, sermons, voting records—does he/she “practice what she/he preaches?” It might be necessary to focus on one or two aspects or issues in the campaign if there is too much information. All of the candidates have websites, many have biographies and/or autobiographies. Check newspaper articles, PBS files like “Speaking of Faith,” “Democracy Now” and other resources that will be unfolded throughout the semester. Use your understanding of the course material as well as your research to support your thesis.
- a political issue that has religious implications (or vice versa). Research how politicians and religious personnel have used biblical texts to make their points and to impact American culture. Some possible issues: euthanasia, Shiavo case, the ten commandments in court rooms, death

penalty, gay marriage, abortion, war, slavery, manifest destiny, founding of the US, racism, suffrage movements, etc. This site could be helpful:  
<http://pewforum.org/religion08/>

**Draft due April 10<sup>th</sup> ; Workshop April 15<sup>th</sup> ; Final paper due April 25<sup>th</sup> on blackboard**

**My Expectations for all research papers---I want:**

- A clear thesis statement that lays out the primary issue including the position that will be argued throughout the paper.
- Support for this position through a good integration of primary and secondary source material (articles, books). Use 8-10 legitimate sources (discussed in class and in the library meeting) and only 2 from internet sites (articles taken from Library online journals do not count as internet sources)
- A well written paper with careful attention to grammar, sentence structure, flow of argument, use of footnotes and bibliographical notation.
- **DO NOT USE WIKIPEDIA ONLINE- USE LEGITIMATE SOURCES!!! WITH AUTHORS AND REPUTABILITY**

**Make certain to consult the *Bedford Handbook*, Part X on Research Writing**

**Extra Credit Opportunities:** Moravian College and Seminary hosts amazing speakers and several of them relate to our class topic. The following lectures are announced and eligible for extra credit:

- Jan 13- Feb 14<sup>th</sup> in Eiffe Gallery HUB  
Stephen Shames, Art Exhibit: “Facing Race: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Americans”
- January 29<sup>th</sup> in Prosser at 7:30  
MLK lecture: Cheryl Kirk-Duggan, “From the Corrosive Cancer of Hate to the Compelling Call to Compassion”
- January 30<sup>th</sup> in Dana Lecture Hall  
Webcast on the Environment
- January 31<sup>st</sup> Round Table Discussion on the Environment (Place TBA)  
Starring Mayor John Callahan of Bethlehem and other officials
- February 5<sup>th</sup> in Prosser  
Stephen Shames lecture on exhibit
- February 6<sup>th</sup> in Prosser  
Shakti Butler 4:00 Screening of “Mirrors of Privilege: Making Whiteness Visible” and 7:00 lecture
- March 13-16 “The Laramie Project” (Drama Department)
- More events to come and any others you come across

If there is a community lecture that deals with politics and religion, you may attend it if you get it approved by Deborah. Each event is worth 10 points, which will be added to your grade once a one page response to the lecture is turned in to me no later than one week after the event.

## Writing Deadlines:

<u>Assignment</u>	<u>Draft Due</u>	<u>Workshop Date</u>	<u>Final to Deborah</u>
Personal Voice	January 29	January 31	February 4
Editorial Article	February 12	February 14	February 19
Critique Paper	February 26	February 28	March 11
Group Writing Presentation			Weeks of March 18 and 25
Research Paper	April 10	April 15	April 25
Portfolio			April 27
Lebensfeld Paper			April 28

## Course Outline

### Jan 16, 18 What Is The Bible? Why Do Politicians Care?

Readings:

- Wallis, xiii-xxiv
- Meacham, Jon. *American Gospel. God, the Founding Fathers, and the Making of the Nation*. New York: Random House, 2006, 3-35.
- Moravian Best Writing Booklet- Choose 2 essays

Answer the following for the first week of the discussion board: What makes these essays good writing?

### Jan 22, 24 Is God Political? Do Politics and Faith Mix?

Readings:

- Domke and Coe, 1-70 (skim the statistics)
- **Bedford xxi-xxviii (do tutorials 1, 2, 4)**

Recommended:

- Wallis, 3-42 (skim)

### Jan 29, 31 Environmental Politics and Religion; Racism

Readings:

- Wallis, 307- 320.
- Obama, Barak."Race" *The Audacity of Hope. Thoughts on Reclaiming The American Dream*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2006, 227-270.
- Democracy Now Podcast: Al Gore's Nobel Speech on the Environment, December 11, 2007  
[http://www.democracynow.org/2007/12/11/it is time to make peace](http://www.democracynow.org/2007/12/11/it_is_time_to_make_peace)

Optional:

- View "An Inconvenient Truth" or any other film on the environment.
- Lectures on Racism and Environment

- Democracy Now, Michael Eric Dyson, Racism, the N Word, July 2007  
[http://www.democracynow.org/2007/7/18/professor\\_and\\_preacher\\_michael\\_eric\\_dyson](http://www.democracynow.org/2007/7/18/professor_and_preacher_michael_eric_dyson)

## **Feb 5, 7 Intelligent Design and Darwin**

Readings:

- Genesis 1-4
- Flowers, Ronald. *That Godless Court? Supreme Court Decisions On Church-State Relationships*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005, 99-128
- Intelligent Design Network, “Intelligent Design for Dummies,”  
<http://www.intelligentdesignnetwork.org/ID%20for%20Dummies.pdf>
- <http://pewforum.org/religion08/compare.php?Issue=Education> where the candidates stand; Jan 14, 2008
- <http://pewforum.org/docs/?DocID=215> candidates on evolution
- **Review Bedford Chapter 3**

Recommended Reading:

- Wallace 43-86.

## **Feb 12, 14 Valentines Day: Make Love not War?**

Readings:

- Wallis 108-36; 159-171.
- Domke and Coe, 99-128

Recommended:

- Bailey, Wilma. “*You Shall Not Kill*” or “*You Shall Not Murder*”? *The Assault on the Biblical Text*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005, 1-25.
- Smock, David. *Religious Perspectives on War*. Washington DC: US Institute for Peace, 2002, 3-45.

## **Feb 19, 21 Religion’s Role in Choosing Supreme Court Justices**

Readings:

- Flowers, Ronald. *That Godless Court? Supreme Court Decisions On Church-State Relationships*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005, 1-20.
- Domke and Coe, 71- 98
- Wallis, 87-107

## **Feb 26, 28 A Consistent Ethic of Life: Abortion**

Readings:

- Wallis 297-306
- Strickland, Ruth. “Abortion: Pro-choice versus Pro-life.” *Moral Controversies in American Politics*. R. Tatalovich et al., eds. London: Sharpe, 2005, 3-35 (skim)

- **Bedford, Chapter 53 (review)**

Recommended:

- History of Abortion in Religious groups  
[http://www.religioustolerance.org/abo\\_hist.htm](http://www.religioustolerance.org/abo_hist.htm)

**Mar 4, 6    **SPRING BREAK: HAVE FUN!!!!!!****

**Mar 11, 13 A Consistent Ethic of Life: Capital Punishment**

Readings:

- <http://pewforum.org/death-penalty/>
- Domke and Coe, 128-156

**Mar 18, 20 One Nation Under God? Imperialism, God, and Politics**

Readings:

- Wallis 137-58
- Cornel West. *Democracy Matters. Winning the Fight against Imperialism.* New York: Penguin Press, 2004, 1-24.
- **Bedford, Part IX Critical Thinking**

**Mar 25, 27 Global Justice and 8<sup>th</sup> Century Prophets**

Readings:

- Wallis, 270-296.
- **Bedford, Chapter 49**
- Sachs, Jeffrey. *The End of Poverty. Economic Possibilities for Our Time.* New York: Penguin Press, 2005, xv-25.
- DeCarlo, Jacqueline. *Fair Trade. A Beginner's Guide.* Oxford: One World, 2007, 43-64.

**Apr 1, 3    Blessed Are the Poor?!!!**

Readings:

- Wallis, 209-41
- Michael Eric Dyson. *Come Hell or High Water. Hurricane Katrina and the Color of Disaster,* 178-212.
- Townes, Emily. *In a Blaze of Glory. Womanist Spirituality as a Social Witness.* Nashville: Abingdon, 1995, pages TBA.
- Sachs, Jeffrey. *The End of Poverty. Economic Possibilities for Our Time.* New York: Penguin Press, 2005, 347-68.
- **Bedford, Chapter 51**

**Apr 8, 10 Middle East: The Palestinian and Israeli Conflict**

Readings:

- Wallis, 172-186
- Ronald Young, "American Jews, Christians, and Muslims Working Together for Peace in the Middle East." *Interfaith Dialogue and Peace*



*Building*. Ed. by David R. Smock. Washington DC: US Institute of Peace Press, 2002, 63-72.

Recommended:

- Lerner, Michael. *Healing Israel/Palestine. A Path to Peace and Reconciliation*. Berkeley, Tikkun, 2003, 171-244. (skim)

### **Apr 15, 17 Homosexuality and Gay Marriage**

Readings:

- Wallis, 307-42
- <http://hrc.org> (A comprehensive site on these issues)
- Gagnon, R and D. Via. *Homosexuality and the Bible. Two Views*. Minneapolis: Fortress,
- **Bedford, Research and Documentation**

Recommended:

- <http://pewforum.org/gay-marriage/>

### **Apr 22, 24 Global Aids Crisis and Health Care Justice**

Readings:

- Wallis, 307-42
- Dube, Musa. “Andrinka! Four Hearts Joined Together. On Becoming Healing-Teachers of African Indigenous Religion/s in HIV & AIDS Prevention.” *African Women, Religion, and Health*. Isabel Phiri and S. Nadar, ed. Mary Knoll: Orbis, 2006, 131-156.
- <http://globalinitiativeonaids.com/flash.shtml>

#### Evaluation:

A student’s final grade will be determined by the level of commitment he or she has to the writing process. A grade of B will be awarded to every student who meets all deadlines, fully participates in the workshops, attends class, and completes all of the other assignments listed above.

This means that those who find writing difficult will be rewarded for working hard to improve their skills even if their writing continues to need improvement. In addition, many past writing students have asked to be graded on individual assignments in order to see how their work would be graded in regular classes. Therefore I will give letter grades on final papers and not drafts. Those who are concerned about the A range will have a better feel for where their grade stands overall on PAPERS ALONE. Attendance, deadlines, workshops, and so forth are factored into the final grade. If you have questions about your performance, do not hesitate to ask me!! I will grade each FINAL PAPER based on the following:

#### General Grading Rubric

<b>Grade Range</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Definition</b>
A	100-93	Signifies an exceptional and sophisticated level of achievement with a superb command of the course material

<b>A-</b>	92-90	that is creatively applied to oral and written class assignments; given to students who present insightful and novel views of subject matter whose arguments are critical, well-written, inventive and fully supported.
<b>B+</b>	89-87	Indicates high achievement; given for work that examines issues thoroughly and critically and that demonstrates a good grasp of the material while creatively applying it at most levels; arguments are well written, well supported and display some novel thinking; work includes correct citation and an accurate bibliography.
<b>B</b>	86-83	
<b>B-</b>	82-80	
<b>C+</b>	79-77	Represents an adequate level of achievement and only a narrow mastery of the material; uncritical about tacit assumptions; arguments reflect the subject matter but evidence is sometimes insufficient, inadequate, or poorly written.
<b>C</b>	76-73	
<b>C-</b>	72-70	
<b>D+</b>	69-67	Indicates little understanding of the subject matter and lack of awareness of critical and differing views; arguments are superficial and merely descriptive.
<b>D</b>	68-63	
<b>D-</b>	62-60	
<b>F</b>	59-0	Represents no comprehension of the material and a lack of ability or willingness to engage in the class. May also be given in cases of plagiarism

**Cheating, plagiarism, disruptive classroom behavior and all that other ugly stuff:** I encourage you to study in groups with other students, as well as to do additional research on your own. There is a wealth of material available about religion and politics. You may use any books, websites, and other resources to facilitate your learning. However, all work you turn in must be your own. When citing someone else's idea, please use proper documentation (see *Bedford Handbook*). Please consult the student handbook for more information concerning what constitutes plagiarism. There are severe consequences for such activities.

As religious beliefs are often at the core of one's values and outlook on life, some of the topics dealt with in class may be sensitive issues to you or your classmates and may evoke strong opinions. We will most likely encounter a wide range of differences of viewpoints. Questioning and disagreeing is fine, but hostile behavior and intolerance is not. It is essential, therefore, for us to respect the opinions and viewpoints of one another. Anyone who is disrespectful and disrupts the learning process will not be tolerated and may incur disciplinary action and/or removal from class.

Need Assistance?

- If you have questions or problems in terms of doing research or writing a research paper, consult with me and the writing center
- If you have learning disabilities, you need to let the professor know about your situation and to follow the following procedures:

### Special Learning Needs

It is the responsibility of students with disabilities to identify themselves and request accommodations through the appropriate office.

For health, physical, mobility, hearing, visual, mental health/psychiatric, or drug and alcohol disabilities, contact the director of counseling, 1307 Main Street; 610 861-1510. For disabilities that affect cognition (learning disabilities and attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder or ADHD), contact the director of learning services, 1307 Main Street; 610 861-1510.

The student must provide documentation of a disability and a rationale for the requested accommodations from a professional with expertise in the condition. The documentation must include a specific diagnosis and a thorough report. Required documentation for learning disabilities and attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder must include the results of a comprehensive psychoeducational assessment (including all subtest scores) that evaluates the intellectual functioning, achievement, and information-processing domains of cognitive functioning. The diagnosis must be based on DSM-IV diagnostic criteria. In addition, documentation for ADHD should include evidence of both early and current impairment, a diagnostic interview with third-party input (teachers or parents), and an interpretive summary that explains how the disability is a substantial limitation to learning. Testing should be recent (administered within the past three years prior to enrollment) for learning disabilities and ADHD.

It is the responsibility of the student to request accommodations well in advance of need in order to give the College a reasonable amount of time to evaluate the documentation and implement the accommodation.

<For further information, see the Student Handbook>

List of Presidential Candidates as of January 15, 2008:

**Republican:** Rudy Giuliani, Mike Huckabee, Duncan Hunter, Alan Keyes, John McCain, Ron Paul, Mitt Romney, Fred Thompson

**Democratic:** John Edwards, Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama, Mike Gravel, Dennis Kucinich, Chris Dodd, Joe Biden

**Independent:** Mike Bloomberg (?), Ralph Nader (?), Terry "Tee" Barkdull

If there are others that you know about and want to track, this is fine. I listed the top vote getters