

## NORTH PARK THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

HSTY 6256, The Bible in American Life  
Spring Term 2010\*

Stephen R. Graham, Professor  
E mail: sgrahamats@gmail.com  
Phone: (412) 337-6192

### **Course Description:**

This online seminar shall examine the function, use, and status of the Bible in American culture. While some attention may be paid to the academic study of the Bible, the primary focus of the course is the ways in which the Bible has been used in various movements, by particular groups, and by important individuals in the Christian community. Because this course is in the history field and not the biblical field, its purpose is not exegesis. Rather the purpose of this seminar is to examine historically some of the ways that the Bible has been used (and abused!) by Americans as an artifact, a symbol, a weapon, an icon, and an object of dispute. Our study will shed light on the ways we and our contemporaries use—and perhaps abuse—the Bible.

### **Required Readings:**

The required texts are:

Paul C. Gutjahr, *An American Bible: A History of the Good Book in the United States, 1777-1880* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).

Peter J. Thuesen, *In Discordance with the Scriptures: American Protestant Battles Over Translating the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

In addition to readings from the required texts, significant readings will be required from sources made available on the course site, that, for various reasons, may not be available for purchase. In order to benefit fully from the course, students are encouraged to become acquainted with the basics of the history of Christianity in America through reading a survey text such as: Mark A. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*; Martin E. Marty, *Pilgrims In Their Own Land: 500 Years of Religion in America*; Winthrop Hudson, *Religion in America*; Edwin Gaustad, *A Religious History of America*; or, for the more ambitious, Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*.

### **Course Requirements:**

This seminar will involve some introductory presentations by the professor to provide case studies of ways that the Bible has functioned in the lives of some individuals, within movements, and as part of controversies in American society. There will also be opportunities for “discussion” of common readings on the Discussion Board. The remainder of the course will provide an opportunity for presentations and online discussion of student research projects. Each

---

\* While the required textbooks, due dates, and amount of work required for the course are set, some reading assignments and presentation topics may be changed in the final version of the syllabus.

student will choose a particular topic, movement, person, or group and investigate their particular use(s) of the Bible. The research projects, due on **April 19** will be posted on the web site by the professor and thus made accessible to all members of the class. It is essential that all students submit their projects by the due date so that other members of the class will have enough time to read them and comment on the assigned project. Because of the nature of this course and the significant part of the course played by common reading of research projects, there will be no incompletes allowed for the course.

*Research Projects: (50% of the course grade.)*

The focus of research should be on primary source materials, with necessary interaction with secondary sources. The final project should be 2,500-3,000 words. Grades for the final papers will be based on the strength of the thesis, the quality and use of evidence, and the clarity of argument. Early in the term, students should interact with the instructor via e mail to discuss proposed topics and sources. Notes should follow the guidelines in Kate Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. It is expected that all members of the seminar will use inclusive language in both discussions and written work.

*Responses to Research Papers: (20% of the course grade.)*

Students will prepare a 1,000-1,250 word response to one of the research projects written by their peers. Responses should interact with the thesis of the paper and evaluate the use of evidence to prove the thesis.

*Discussion Board Postings: (30% of the course grade.)*

Each week, students will be required to post 400-500 word reflections on the week's assigned readings, including the professor's presentations. These reflections will be posted on the Discussion Board and will therefore be available for reading by all students. While all students will read all postings, you are required to interact in writing with *two* postings each week. The instructor will note both postings and interactions and offer reflections on the reflections each week. Postings are due on the Monday morning after each week (that is, the posting for week one is due on Monday, February 8; that for week two is due Monday, February 15, and so forth). Because of spring break week, there will be no posting due on March 15. There is also no posting due on April 26. Reflections on research papers are due on May 3.

Class Schedule:

**WEEK ONE:**

**February 1**

***Introduction to the Course.***

***Presentation: "The Bible: American Icon, American Enigma"***

***Discussion of:***

1. Mark A. Noll, "The Bible in American Culture," in Encyclopedia of the American Religious Experience, vol. 2, pp. 1075-87.
2. Martin E. Marty, "Scripturality: The Bible as Icon in the Republic," in Religion and Republic: The American Circumstance (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987), chap. 7, pp. 140-65.

**WEEK TWO:**

**February 8**

**Reflection on Week One materials due.**

**Presentation:** *"The Bible in the 'City Set on a Hill': A Case Study of the Puritans"*

**Discussion of:** Mark A. Noll and Nathan O. Hatch, ed., The Bible in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), Introduction and chaps. 2 and 3.

**WEEK THREE:**  
**February 15**

**Reflection on Week Two materials due.**

**Presentation:** *"'The Almost Chosen People:' The Bible and American Presidents"*

**WEEK FOUR:**  
**February 22**

**Reflection on Week Three materials due.**

**Discussion of:** Gutjahr, An American Bible, entire.

**WEEK FIVE:**  
**March 1**

**Reflection on Week Four materials due.**

**Presentation:** *"Preachers Present Arms: The Bible and American Wars"*

**WEEK SIX:**  
**March 8**

**Reflection on Week Five materials due.**

*Fall Break – No assignment*

**WEEK SEVEN:**  
**March 15**

**No Reflection due.**

**Presentation:** *"'Only Trying to Save the Bible': Nineteenth-Century Disputes"*

**WEEK EIGHT:**  
**March 22**

**Reflection on Week Seven materials due.**

**Presentation:** *"The Twentieth-Century Battle for the Bible"*

**Discussion of:**

1. J. Gresham Machen, Christianity and Liberalism (New York: Macmillan, 1924), "Introduction," pp. 1-16.
2. Harry Emerson Fosdick, The Modern Use of the Bible (New York: Macmillan, 1932), chap. 1, pp. 1-31.

**WEEK NINE:**  
**March 29**

**Reflection on Week Eight materials due.**

*Discussion of:* Thuesen, In Discordance with the Scriptures, entire.

**WEEK TEN:**  
**April 5**

**Reflection on Week Nine materials due.**

*Presentation: Women and the Bible*

*Discussion of:* Barbara Brown Zikmund, "Biblical Arguments and Women's Place in the Church," chap. 4 in Ernest R. Sandeen, ed., The Bible and Social Reform (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982).

**WEEK ELEVEN:**  
**April 12**

**Reflection on Week Ten materials due.**

*Presentation: African-Americans and the Bible.*

*Discussion of:* Peter J. Paris, "The Bible and the Black Churches," chap. 6 in Sandeen, ed., The Bible and Social Reform.

**WEEK TWELVE:**  
**April 19**

**Reflection on Week Eleven materials due. Research papers due.**

*Presentation: "The Bible and American Pentecostals"*

**WEEK THIRTEEN:**  
**April 26**

**Work on Responses to Research Papers.**

(Your response will be to the paper written by the person whose name follows yours on the alphabetical class roster. The last person on the list will respond to the paper written by the first person on the list.)

**WEEK FOURTEEN:**  
**May 3**

**Responses to Research Papers due.**

### Some Possible Areas for Research Projects

1. The Bible and American Law
2. The Bible and American Business
3. The Bible and American Science (E.g., Evolution vs. Creation debate)
4. The Bible and American Restorationism
5. Pentecostals/Charismatics/Third Wavers and the Bible
6. The Bible and Popular Culture
  - a. American humor
  - b. folklore
  - c. music
  - d. popular conceptions
7. The Bible and American Literature
8. Bible Publishing/Translations
  - a. Scofield Bible
  - b. KJV, RSV, NIV, NRSV, Living Bible, Cotton Patch version, etc.
  - c. Bible Societies
  - d. Marketing the Bible
9. The Bible and Education
  - a. higher education
  - b. The Bible in the public schools
  - c. Bible colleges
  - d. The Bible and American Sunday Schools
10. The Bible in the American Social Gospel Movement
11. The Bible and American Millenarianism
12. The Bible in American Pietism
13. The Bible in New Religious Groups
14. The Bible in American Roman Catholicism
15. Baptist (Boisterous?) Bible Battles
16. The Bible and Aspects of the Fundamentalist/Modernist Controversy
17. The Bible and American Politics
18. The Bible and American Wars
19. The Bible and Slavery/Abolitionism
20. The Bible and Renewal Movements in America
21. The Bible and the "Health-wealth" Movement
22. Devotional Use of the Bible
23. "Elites" vs. "Common" People and the Bible
24. The Bible and the Civil Rights Movement
25. Contextual Approaches to the Bible in America
  - a. Feminist
  - b. Black/Asian/Hispanic-American
  - c. Native American
26. The Bible and the Ecumenical Movement in America