"This guide should be required reading for every student in introductory religion and theology courses at the college level. Drawing from significant experience teaching such courses, Rapela Heidt provides helpful and clearly written advice on how to avoid the most common errors of basic writing, punctuation, and citation, as well as step-by-step directions for tackling the research paper. More important, she provides a unique and much-needed resource by walking students through the basics of the Abrahamic faiths and other world religions. Professors who assign this guide will undoubtedly find the papers they grade more gratifying to read."

—M. Therese Lysaught, associate professor of theology, Marquette University

"Mari Rapela Heidt has produced a much-needed and welcome resource for undergraduate theology majors and minors whose professors require them to follow the writing style presented in the *Chicago Manual of Style*. I would highly recommend this book to my theology students."

—Shawnee M. Daniels-Sykes, SSND, assistant professor of theology, Mount Mary College

A Guide for

Writing About

Theology and Religion

Mari Rapela Heidt

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To Larry,
a math guy who knows how to use words,
and
to all of my students
who have ever written about
the "Profit Isaih"

Author Acknowledgments

This book responds to my experiences reading papers written by college students. As such, my first thanks goes to my students, who have inspired this work. I am especially grateful to those motivated to learn about religion and those who worked on making their writing clear and communicative.

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Preface

TO STUDENTS

Religion and theology are complex and fascinating subjects that can lead to many new discoveries. Most of the work assigned in theology and religion courses requires some kind of formal writing. This book is intended to help you meet that requirement. Learn the material in this book, and you will be able to complete writing assignments more easily and quickly, and you may see an improvement in your grades.

This guide covers the basics of grammar and punctuation and includes sections on several additional topics that are essential when writing about theology and religion. Topics include drafting thesis statements, avoiding plagiarism, and using inclusive language, as well as various issues associated with writing about a wide range of religions. The guide also includes rules for citing sources and provides numerous sample notes and bibliographic entries. The guide's two appendices provide a checklist for successful paper writing and a list of additional resources. Finally, the index will serve as a handy reference tool for using this guide.

Flag icons in the guide identify particularly important tips and warnings. Single flags, marked with the symbol ▶, indicate tips that warrant special attention. Double flags, marked with the symbol ▶▶, indicate warnings that will help you avoid serious mistakes in your writing.

Keep this book handy as you work on your papers. Use it to help improve your writing and particularly to communicate your ideas about religion and theology clearly and effectively.

TO PROFESSORS

This little book grew out of my experiences with student writing at the college level. Like many professors, I found reading papers frustrating and difficult, not because of the ideas in those papers, but because the ideas were not clearly expressed and the papers themselves were full of grammatical, spelling, punctuation, and usage errors. Many of my students were unaware that they were making multiple mistakes in their papers, primarily because they had never learned the rules of language and formal writing. After many discussions with students about their written work, I began developing computer files about writing to post on the online sites for my courses. These files were essentially crash courses on writing topics, including punctuation, citation, and word usage. These files proved useful: student work improved, especially when students made a determined effort to write better. This book has developed from the files I gave to my students. It is intended, as those first files were, to improve undergraduate writing in religion and theology courses.

The first three chapters of this guide address issues that are particular to the study of religion. Most of these issues revolve around citing texts in various religious traditions, including citing the Bible and the Qur'an, referring to people and rituals properly, and maintaining respect for religious traditions. These chapters are handy for students because they bring together an array of topics—those related most closely to undergraduate study—in one location. This guide leaves discussion of more complex matters to other works. Some of these works are listed in appendix B, Helpful Resources.

Chapter 4, Citing Sources, addresses citation. It explains and illustrates the two different systems of documentation preferred by the University of Chicago Press—the note-bibliography system and author-date system—but gives more attention to the first because that is the system most frequently used in writing about theology and religion. Chapter 4 also notes the difference between a system of documentation and a style. The latter governs the use of mechanics such as punctuation, abbreviations, and parentheses when writing a citation. The sample citations in the author-date system provided in this guide follow the style set forth in *The Chicago Manual of Style* sixteenth edition; however, the citations in a note-bibliography

system are illustrated using two different styles: the style set forth in *The Chicago Manual of Style* and a simplified style adapted from the Chicago style. The adaptations in the simplified style were made mainly to make citation more logical and complete while retaining all of the information necessary to meet the goals of citation. In many cases, the only adaptations that have been made are those that streamline typing and make citation less of a chore, such as the elimination of parentheses. Chapter 4's numerous examples of both the Chicago style and the simplified style in the note-bibliography system are clearly distinguished, so students can easily follow one or the other.

I have also given a great deal of thought to the citation of materials from the Internet and have developed some ideas that eliminate a lot of the useless strings of numbers and letters in URLs (web addresses) while still making materials easy to locate. This information is provided in chapter 4.

This guide also includes two brief chapters on grammar and punctuation. These chapters will be a review for some students, but others will need to refer to these chapters repeatedly. You will notice that the chapters are not comprehensive. This is because the guide's material is directed at undergraduates and reflects the typical errors professors see in student writing.

The guide concludes with two appendices—a paper-writing checklist for students and a list of additional resources—and an index that makes the guide a handy reference tool.

I hope that this book will be useful for you and your students and will mitigate some of the frustration that comes from reading papers with significant errors. As noted above, I also hope that this makes writing about religion and theology easier and less frustrating for students, so that they too may find joy and wonder in these subjects.

CHAPTER

1

WRITING ABOUT THEOLOGY AND RELIGION

This chapter provides some general information about college-level writing assignments for religion and theology courses. The chapter begins with an overview of formal writing, which includes guidelines for and a discussion of the types of formal writing assignments college students may encounter. Then the chapter provides in-depth information about research papers, the largest writing assignments most college students will complete. The chapter concludes with some discussion of three topics worthy of college students' special attention: avoiding plagiarism, writing with respect for people, and employing sound word usage.

Keep in mind that although this chapter's guidelines are intended to help you navigate writing assignments with greater efficiency and success, for any writing assignment the best source for clarification about expectations, research, sources, and language will be your professor or teaching assistant. They create and grade the assignments and are there to help you learn, so go to them for help with your projects. Librarians and other resource people can offer similar assistance with sources and research. Many schools also have writing centers or writing labs that offer peer-to-peer help with writing.

OVERVIEW OF FORMAL WRITING

Most religion and theology writing assignments call for formal writing. This differs from informal writing, which includes blogs,

Internet postings, journaling, texting, and letters. Formal writing is more objective and less personal than informal writing. It is typically more serious than informal writing in both content and presentation.

Many students think formal writing is stuffy and pretentious, using technical terms and stilted language. Although these faults may be common, the goal of formal writing is to communicate with readers, not to bore them. Formal writing need not be dull. The conventions and structures of formal writing serve to help writers communicate their knowledge about and interest in a topic effectively so that readers will find the work informative and satisfying to read.

General Guidelines for Formal Writing

To write formally, follow these general guidelines:

- Approach writing as a conversation with people who are interested in the subject matter. Recognize that the primary audience (usually your professor) knows something about the topic. Present information in a way that builds on the existing knowledge of the audience. This means that you don't have to define every word and explain every principle.
- Be objective and strive to communicate facts and information, not emotions. Aim to persuade through reasoned arguments, not through emotional appeal.
- Use standard English and avoid dialects and regional speech differences (unless quoting from sources that use such language). Remember that your paper is not a speech and using the conventions of spoken English will make for a poor paper. For example, the term *y'all* is common in some areas of the United States and is associated especially with the South. Such colloquialisms should be avoided in papers.
- Use active voice as much as possible. This involves choosing active rather than passive verbs.
- Write complete sentences and express ideas clearly.
- Don't strive to use "important" words or keep a thesaurus by your side to look up long and sophisticated-sounding words.

A common word that communicates well is better than an unfamiliar word that you risk using incorrectly. Clear communication is the goal, not the number of syllables in your words. Do use words that clearly communicate your meaning.

- Limit the use of *I*, *we*, and *you*. The use of *I* and *we* draws attention to your personal perspective, making your presentation subjective when it should be objective. Similarly, the use of *you* makes a direct, personal appeal to the reader, or indicates unjustified assumptions about the reader ("You would be surprised at how many people shop at the mall on Sunday instead of attending church"), which are also out of place in a paper that strives for objectivity. Occasionally no other words will communicate as well as these pronouns, or there may be situations when eliminating these words will make a sentence awkward. If there really is no better alternative, go ahead and use them.
- Limit the use of contractions, like *can't*, *don't*, and *won't*. Spell out most contracted words: *cannot*, *will not*, and *do not*. As above, though, there may be times when eliminating the contraction makes the sentence sound stiff or awkward. Use the contraction if it sounds better, but typically contractions are frowned upon in formal writing.
- Avoid the use of nonstandard abbreviations, emoticons (such as a smiley face), profanity, slang, and other conventions of e-mail and blogging.
- Grammar, spelling, punctuation, and usage are important. Proofread, check your work, and proofread again. Consider reading your writing aloud. This will help you identify poorly constructed sentences. Don't always trust your computer's spelling and grammar checkers. They miss errors and can actually add errors to your papers, such as mistakenly accepting *their* when *there* is required, as in, "He went their not knowing what he would find." Only you can really determine what you are trying to say in your paper. Errors seriously detract from your paper.
- Relax and enjoy writing. When you face challenges, recognize that this is part of learning and contributes to your overall education.

Types of papers

College students studying religion and theology encounter several different types of writing assignments. The purposes of the various types differ, so clarify your assignment before you begin writing. Talk to your professor if you are not sure what is expected.

Research papers typically are the most involved formal writing assignments that undergraduates complete. A research paper presents a thesis or claim and provides an argument that supports the thesis. A thesis statement is not a topic or report subject, such as "The Sacred Texts of Hinduism." A thesis statement articulates a claim or position about some aspect of a topic. For example, you might decide to explore why the Mahabharata, one of Hinduism's two major epics, is so important to many in India. The answers you discover through your research become the basis for your paper's position or thesis. Your thesis may shift as you research and write, so be ready to re-evaluate your thinking as you work. An undergraduate thesis, a long piece of writing that is the capstone to study within a major, is an extended research paper. See the next page for more detailed information about research papers.

An analysis paper asks you to break down a topic or an argument and evaluate each of the parts. The paper then presents this breakdown and your thinking about it. Analysis papers follow the same rules as any other type of formal writing.

A review is essentially an analysis paper focused on a performance, specific piece of writing, film, or piece of music.

A presentation paper is associated with a class presentation. Different professors have different expectations about presentation papers, so read the assignment carefully.

A reflection paper asks students to reflect on a piece of work or a single topic and then summarize their thoughts about it. Journal entries and some other assignments may be considered reflection papers. Although these papers require personal thoughts and ideas without much research, they are also formal writing and should follow all the conventions of formal writing, including proper spelling and punctuation. The major exception is that the frequent use of *I* or *we* is generally acceptable in this kind of paper.

An essay is a short piece of writing that addresses a particular topic. Essays may be written in class or outside of class. Regardless of the topic or the assignment, essays written for class are also formal writing and therefore should follow the guidelines for formal writing.

THE RESEARCH PAPER

The research paper is typically the longest type of writing assigned in a religion and theology course. Working on a research paper provides an opportunity for you to learn a lot about a subject and communicate that knowledge to others clearly and concisely. It is also an opportunity for you to formulate a position or claim about a subject and present information gleaned through research that supports your claim.

Before you begin any research project, clarify the assignment. Be sure you know any parameters set by the professor such as the minimum number of sources you are required to use, the length of the paper in pages or words, and whether the paper will be presented orally in class as well as submitted to the professor in writing. Also find out what method of citation is expected and any other formatting guidelines that your teacher expects you to follow.

Beginning a Research Paper

Work on most research papers begins with the exploration of a general topic. The way to begin a research paper is not simply to jump in and begin writing. Before you can write, you need to do some research to gain the knowledge necessary to determine your paper's purpose and organization. Begin by doing general reading and thinking about the aspects of the topic that raise interesting questions. It is helpful to know what other people have written on the topic and to get some sense of what materials will be available for you to draw on as you write your paper.

After you have done some reading, narrow your topic to something that will be manageable within the limits of a research paper. Some initial ideas are too broad and general to write about in the ten

to fifteen pages of a typical research paper. Narrowing your focus will give you a more manageable topic so that you are not overwhelmed and are able to learn about a specific area and easily communicate what you have learned.

For example, suppose that you are taking a course on religion and film. This course requires a research paper of ten to twelve pages on any aspect of religion as it relates to film. You decide that you would like to write about Catholics in the movies. This is an interesting topic with many possible avenues of inquiry. Entire books and numerous articles have been written about this topic. After reading some of this material, you realize that ten pages is not sufficient to cover the entire topic that you had in mind when you began. A narrower focus that appeals to you relates to the roles that the actor Bing Crosby played in movies that were specifically about Catholics, including *Going My Way* and *The Bells of St. Mary's*. This narrower focus will allow you to continue your research without being overwhelmed by the number of sources available for your research.

Formulating a Thesis Statement

A thesis statement articulates the main point or claim that results from research. It is a concise summary of the position that your paper will develop and support. The body of your paper will present information that supports your thesis and will attempt, through sound argument, to persuade the reader that your position is valid or that your interpretation of the information presented is correct.

Students usually form a thesis after evaluating their research when they are able to identify a significant question and make a claim that answers the question. Questions such as who's right?, which side of this issue is more correct?, is this interpretation valid?, is this the best way to analyze this situation?, and what is the relationship between these two areas?, are good starting points for formulating a thesis. The answer to one or more of these questions can become the basis for your paper's thesis.

A clearly articulated thesis statement can provide something of a map for your paper. It lets the reader know what you intend to demonstrate or argue within your paper. The thesis statement should appear early in a paper, usually in the first paragraph or two.

For an example of how to formulate a thesis, let's return to the topic stated above, Bing Crosby's roles in movies about Catholics. From your research, you learn that Bing Crosby was a popular actor who played Catholic characters in several of his movies. You see that your sources suggest that this was important to Catholics in the United States. An initial draft thesis statement might read: Bing Crosby was important to Catholics in the United States. Although it makes a claim, it does not seem to answer a compelling question, so you expand your thinking to consider why Bing Crosby was important to Catholics in the United States. This gives you a new fertile area for research, and you discover that it was the nature of his movie roles that made him an appealing figure. Recognizing this, you modify your original thesis: Bing Crosby was important to Catholics in the United States because of the roles he played in his movies. This has a sharper focus than the first, but you realize that specifying the nature of his roles adds important information about the reasons for his popularity: Bing Crosby was important to Catholics in the United States because his movie roles demonstrated that Catholics were an important part of American society. You decide that this thesis statement articulates a position with significance for your audience that can be developed and supported with evidence gathered through research.

Sources for Research

The best place to begin a research project is with your college or university library. In addition to books, libraries house electronic databases and journals (many of which are not available to the general public), printed journal and folio collections, sophisticated searching software and subject-area databases, and, in some cases, special collections of materials that may help your project. Librarians are knowledgeable about the library collections and how to search them. They can direct you to materials that you might not find on your own.

Books are the most frequently consulted source for research on religious and theological topics. A good place to start is with a specialized religious encyclopedia or dictionary. These sources can provide you with a broad overview of your topic and bibliographical information that can help you identify sources for your research.

As you begin your research, try not to limit your search to religion and theology texts. For example, if you are researching Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Zen Buddhist monk blocked from returning to Vietnam in the 1970s, you might consider exploring the political history of Vietnam during the twentieth century to see if it enhances your understanding of him as a religious figure.

Academic journals are also helpful sources for research. Most journals are catalogued in electronic databases, such as ATLA Religion Database and ATLASerials. These databases can be searched by author, title, keyword, or subject. When using a database to search journals, be as specific as possible, because some databases will cite articles only slightly related to your topic if you use imprecise or broad terms. For example, searching for the term *Thich Nhat Hanh* is likely to generate a list of more articles than you can possibly review. Your search of electronic databases will be more fruitful if you can narrow the topic. In the case of Thich Nhat Hanh, if you are interested in the Buddhist meditation center he established in France, you might add the name of the center, *Plum Village*, as a search term. Librarians work with these databases every day, so don't be afraid to ask for help if you are not getting the types of articles you need.

Scholarly books and academic journals contribute greatly to research in religion and theology, but many other materials may be useful, such as prayer books, ritual texts, scriptures, videos, documents from churches or other religious groups, and interviews with religious leaders. In addition, the Internet can provide some useful information. Many churches and religious communities have reliable websites that also provide links to useful related sites. These are fine to use for research, especially if they are combined with other materials, such as books and articles.

Evaluating Sources for Research: General Principles

Learning to evaluate the sources available to you for research is a valuable skill that can translate to areas beyond religious and theological studies. (The same is true of many of the skills, tips, and conventions outlined in this book.) Not all sources of information are reliable, and not all sources that you find will be helpful to your research. Your best guides for assessing sources are professors and

librarians, but you can learn to ask and answer the sorts of questions that will help you make determinations on your own. Here are a number of questions to consider when selecting your sources:

- Does the author have the qualifications to write on the topic at hand?
- Does the author's name appear in notes and bibliographies in other works?
- When was the source published? If it is not current, is it still relevant?
- Is the source free from obvious errors and bias?
- Does the author support his or her claims with sufficient evidence?
- If the author offers a unique interpretation or perspective, is the work free of faulty logic?
- If the source is a book, do the book's reviewers affirm the quality of the author's scholarship?
- Does the source address your topic closely enough to be worth the time it will take you to find it and read it?
- Does the source provide enough depth to meet your research needs?

The more of these questions that you can answer in the affirmative, the more you can trust the reliability and usefulness of a source.

As you learn more about your topic, the better you will be at assessing the quality of sources. After you have a sense of what your thesis will be, be careful not to use your thesis as a basis for eliminating sources. If your research yields information that conflicts with your position, pay attention to it. Consider whether the new information challenges you to revise your thesis. Even if it doesn't, this information can be important for your paper. You can describe objections to your thesis and show how these objections do not negate the evidence for your position.

Evaluating Websites

Evaluating information provided via websites requires some special consideration, because the standards for Internet publications are lower than those for print publications. Though Internet sources can provide a vast amount of information, they can also mislead. This is particularly true in the study of religion and theology, subject areas that can generate strong emotion, widely varying interpretations, and positions rooted solely in anecdotal evidence and personal experience.

One way to assess the reliability of websites is to identify their owners or sponsors and then assess both their qualifications and the credentials of the authors who wrote the material that you are considering using for your research. Another assessment strategy is to analyze the nature of a website's material, largely just as you would do for a print source. Are facts substantiated with evidence? Is the information provided accurate? Is the writing free from propaganda and clearly not functioning as an advertisement? Is the material current and does it have a date? Is your view of a web document unrestricted, not a partial view due to limitations in software or a lack of permission to gain full access?

▶ Why not just go to Wikipedia? Wikipedia and other open-source websites like it are not authoritative or reliable sources, although much of the information they present is accurate. Be cautious about these sites, because the entries are the work of numerous people whose motives and authority to write on the subjects at hand are difficult to establish. Because anyone can edit or delete information, the reliability of an entry cannot be counted on from day to day. One person may edit an entry only to find his or her edits reversed the next day or replaced with unsubstantiated claims. Although Wikipedia pages and other websites may provide some inspiration for research and links to some useful sources, they should not be viewed as authoritative sources for research. ◂

SPECIAL TOPICS

This final section of chapter 1 addresses three additional topics worth reviewing before undertaking a writing assignment for a religion or theology course: avoiding plagiarism, writing with respect for people, and employing sound word usage.

Avoiding Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the use of a person's words or ideas in a paper without giving him or her proper credit. Essentially, it is the theft of another person's work. This is a serious offense, and it can lead to significant consequences, such as failing grades, academic probation, suspension, or expulsion.

Plagiarism takes many forms. Copying the words of others into a paper, purchasing an already-written paper, and paying someone else to write a paper for you are all forms of plagiarism. Failing to note quoted material and failing to provide a citation when you use other people's words or ideas is also plagiarism. The proliferation of information in electronic form, through the Internet, online databases, and e-books, has made plagiarism easier. It can be simple to cut and paste information from one electronic source to another. At the same time, the Internet also makes it easier for readers to detect plagiarized material.

Plagiarism can also occur when writers pass off the work of others as their own because of sloppiness or ignorance of citation rules. Sometimes students use quotations or concepts from other people's writing without giving credit because they have taken poor notes and cannot remember where they came across a certain idea. Other times students omit necessary notes thinking that using quotations and footnotes will weaken their papers by making it seem as though they have no original ideas. Sometimes students are unaware that what they are doing is plagiarism, especially if they are paraphrasing an argument from someone else. *Even if it is unintentional, plagiarism is still plagiarism and is still very serious.* This cannot be overemphasized.

To be clear, all of the situations listed above are plagiarism—cutting and pasting, purchasing a paper, not giving credit for a quotation or idea, and even paraphrasing another person's ideas without giving credit for them. It is essential to avoid plagiarism in your papers. The following guidelines will help:

- Leave yourself enough time to write your paper. A lot of dishonesty is the result of desperation when facing a critical due date. If you did not leave yourself enough time to write the paper properly, don't give in to the temptation to purchase or copy a paper. As noted above, plagiarism has serious consequences. Talk

to your professor instead. Taking a lower grade is better than being expelled from school.

- Make sure the assignment is clear to you. If you don't understand what you are supposed to do or what kind of paper you are supposed to write, talk to your professor or teaching assistant.
- Don't assume that no one will know that you have purchased a paper or paid someone else to write it or that your professor will not be able to find the source you have cut and pasted into your paper. There will be telltale signs that you did not write the material you are claiming. Professors are experts in their fields and are knowledgeable about the things that are circulating on the Internet about their primary subjects. There are also programs available to professors to assist in finding sources if they suspect plagiarism in a paper. Assuming that no one will know what you have done will only lead to sad consequences.
- Take good notes as you do your research. If you note the sources of your information and quotations as you are preparing to write, citing sources will be easier when you write the paper.
- Understand that footnotes make your papers stronger, not weaker.
- Each time you rely on someone else's work, include a citation. Don't skip any instances, even if they seem redundant.
- Remember that a citation is necessary when you paraphrase another person's idea, not just when you quote the person directly.
- Pay attention to the distinction between someone's original work and common knowledge, which does not require a citation. A fact can be considered common knowledge if it is known by many people or found in many sources. For example, if you write "Brussels, Belgium, is the host city for the 2014 Parliament of Religions," you do not need to provide a citation.
- If you don't understand whether you need to cite something or how to do it, talk to your professor or teaching assistant.
- Make use of writing centers and other writing help offered on your campus.
- Remember that *you* are responsible for all work that you hand in for class. No one else will suffer any consequences for your dishonest or sloppy work. Be sure to review your work to make certain you give the proper credit to others.

Writing with Respect for People

When writing about any religious tradition it is important to maintain respect for people and their beliefs. Learning about religion is likely to expose you to new ideas, some of which may seem odd or strange to you. Religious beliefs can be strongly held and are often deeply integrated into societies. When writing about religion, avoid suggesting that certain ideas or practices are strange. This includes writing about groups that are outside the mainstream of religious practices or beliefs. Respect people by treating their ideas and beliefs with respect. Use words that convey this respect, and avoid labels and stereotypes. Refer to people the way they refer to themselves, and refer to religious groups in a similarly respectful manner, even if you do not agree with their beliefs or understandings.

This section of chapter 1 provides guidance about four aspects of respecting people when writing about religion and theology: using inclusive language, referring to race and ethnicity, using people-first language, and referring to economic classes.

Inclusive Language

Inclusive, gender-neutral language is essential in most settings today. This means avoiding the use of gender-specific nouns to mean all people, as in the phrase, "God's relationship with man." (Try, "God's relationship with humanity" or "God's relationship with people" instead). It is true that the terms *man* and *men* have historically been used as generic nouns that mean all people. This has changed, however, as societies have shifted to different forms of usage to reflect different social norms and changing social understandings. Language has also evolved to reflect these social changes. As a sign of this evolution of language, many publications, both academic and popular, no longer accept exclusive language. Using inclusive language shows respect for human beings in general and for your readers.

In general, avoid gender-specific terms whenever possible. This doesn't just mean avoiding masculine-oriented nouns and pronouns. For example, substituting *she* for *he* and *her* for *his* is just as exclusive as the alternative. Referring to gender is often not necessary, unless a paper is specifically about gender roles or gender exclusion. The best strategy is to rewrite your sentences to eliminate gender references where they are not needed. One easy way to avoid gendered language

is to recast your sentences so that the nouns are plural. Pronouns like *they* and *them*, which are inclusive, can then be used in subsequent sentences. Another strategy is to look for neutral alternatives, such as referring to roles instead of people.

▶ Be careful not to mix singulars and plurals in the same sentence; keep subject/object agreement when changing a sentence to incorporate plurals. For example, suppose you use this sentence: "A priest is someone who has dedicated his life to serving God." If you are writing about a church or religion that has both male and female priests, this is not an inclusive sentence. To incorporate inclusive language, you change your sentence to read: "A priest is someone who has dedicated their life to serving God." This sentence, while more inclusive than the first, is incorrect because it mixes a singular subject and verb with a plural pronoun. To be correct, you would have to change all of the elements of the sentence to plurals: "Priests are people who have dedicated their lives to serving God." ◂

Constructions like *he/she*, *him/her*, and the very awkward (and incorrect) *s/he* are unacceptable. This is poor writing. Rewrite your sentences to avoid this. When you do need to indicate *he or she*, spell it out instead of using the slashes.

▶ If you are writing *he or she* in every sentence, consider rewriting several of these sentences in the plural to make writing and reading easier. ◂

Using inclusive language does not require making up words or creating situations where no word is appropriate. It is not necessary to completely eradicate the words *man* and *men* and their compounds. For example, several female members of Congress are "chairmen" of congressional committees. So, be as inclusive as possible but avoid extremes and use common sense in your writing.

Avoid these terms:	**Use these instead:**
man, men	person, people, humanity
mankind	humankind, humanity, human beings
man-made	manufactured, synthetic
the common man	the average person, ordinary people
any man	anyone
he, him	he or she, her or him, they, them
his	his or her, their

Avoiding stereotyping about gender roles is also a part of inclusive language. Avoid any language that adds gender where it doesn't belong.

Avoid terms like these:	**Use these instead:**
woman rabbi	rabbi
female doctor	doctor
male aid worker	aid worker, humanitarian aid worker
woman soldier	soldier
male nurse	nurse
woman pastor	pastor

Another aspect of inclusive language is getting rid of diminutives like *–ess* and *–ette* added to the ends of some words to indicate that the person is a woman. Many women find these terms denigrating because they imply that a woman performing the same task as a man is doing something unusual or that her work has less value. Although several of these words in common usage are inoffensive (actress, princess), avoid these types of words except in direct quotations.

Avoid words like these:	**Use these instead:**
authoress	author
Jewess	Jew
benefactress	benefactor
mayoress	mayor

Race and Ethnicity

Avoid references to race and ethnicity that communicate bias or judgment. For example, avoid using the term *primitive* in reference to an ethnic group's religious beliefs; though some religions have much more complex theologies than others, the word *primitive* suggests that the less complex theology is underdeveloped and implies some sort of evolutionary hierarchy of religious beliefs. It also suggests that the people who hold such beliefs are themselves primitive—that is to say, inferior.

Some theological and religious issues are related to race and ethnicity; in such cases, it is appropriate to make explicit reference to

race and ethnicity in your writing. For example, it is appropriate to mention race or ethnicity when writing about the founding of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Some who write about religion and theology incorporate their experiences of race or ethnicity into their writings. It is appropriate to quote them and to use the same terms that they use in referring to racial or ethnic categories.

If a person's race or ethnicity has no bearing on your work, there is usually no reason to refer to it. When it is necessary to refer to a person's race or ethnicity, use generally accepted terms. If at all possible, determine how people refer to themselves and use those terms in your paper. For example, some people prefer the designation "African-American" while others prefer to be called "black." The same applies to other terms, such as "Native American" versus "American Indian." Remember that your writing should never be offensive.

▶ If you are unsure whether you should use a reference to ethnicity or not, try writing the sentence without that reference. Does your sentence still make sense and convey the same point? If so, you do not need the ethnic reference. ◂

Some religious organizations focus on specific areas of religious faith or practice, such as the Institute for Black Catholic Studies, the Hispanic Evangelism Conference, or the Korean Presbyterian Church in the United States. Be sure to refer to these organizations exactly as they refer to themselves, avoiding shortcuts and slang.

Another aspect of race and ethnicity is seen in the stereotypes that are often associated with particular racial or religious groups. For example, many people use the terms "Arab" and "Muslim" interchangeably. Actually, not all Arabs are Muslims, and not all Muslims are Arabs. Arabic peoples existed before the introduction of Islam, and there are Arabs who are Christian, Jewish, or Muslim, along with others who belong to non-Abrahamic faiths or to no faith at all. Muslims are the followers of the religion of Islam. Muslims can come from any ethnic, racial, or national group and can be found in most countries in the world. The equating of Arabs and Muslims is a stereotype generated by television and the movies. Be aware of such racial and religious stereotyping and avoid it whenever possible.

People-First Language

Some writing about religion and theology requires references to people who face physical challenges. Strive to use people-first language. This is language that emphasizes the person and not his or her disability. For example, use *people with disabilities* not *disabled people*; *people with autism* not *autistic people* or *autistics*. This approach ensures that people are not identified by their disabilities. Using this type of language shows respect for persons and their abilities. (See appendix B, "Helpful Resources," for more resources on people-first language.)

Economic Classes

Many questions within theology and religion address economic issues, such as those that arise in the study of social ethics. Categorizing people by economic class, even when the intention is to write about how these classes can work together, can lead to unintentionally offensive statements or stereotypes. As with other easily misused terms, avoid categorizing people unless the topic of your paper demands it. When you use terms like *the poor*, be clear about what you mean. Use specific numbers and income levels if possible. Avoid any kind of stereotypical implications about people of differing economic classes, for example, that the poor are lazy or that the wealthy have worked harder.

When writing about economic classes around the world, you should also be careful about the implications of your words. Many people object to the classification of countries into "first world" and "third world." Find better and more specific terms to describe the situations of the countries you are writing about. For example, instead of describing the United States as a "first world" country, you might describe it as a wealthy country or an economically developed country. As always, be consistent with the terms you use throughout your paper.

Employing Sound Word Usage

Writing about religion involves a vocabulary of its own, and many of the words used in the study of religion can be easily confused with other words. Some of the most frequently misused words are listed

below. Always check a dictionary or your sources if you are unsure about usage.

altar, alter An altar is a table used for worship; to alter something is to change it.

Arab, Muslim These are not interchangeable terms. Not all Arabs are Muslims, and not all Muslims are Arabs.

canon, cannon A canon is a rule or standard; a cannon is a weapon.

censer, sensor, censor A censer is used for incense; a sensor detects something, such as light; to censor something is to examine it and edit out objectionable portions.

cite, site To cite something is to give credit to an original source; a site is a place, either physical or virtual.

girl Use of this term in reference to adults is offensive and indicates a lack of respect for them as people. Use the term *girl* only to refer to children, up until about the age of 14. Adults are women. Teenagers may be "young women" or simply "women."

imam, ayatollah These are terms applied to some leaders in the Muslim faith. Not all Muslims accept these as legitimate terms, so use them carefully.

Israelite, Israeli An Israelite is one of the ancient people of God referred to in the Old Testament; an Israeli is a citizen of the modern nation of Israel. The two terms are not interchangeable.

priest, minister These terms are not interchangeable, and their usage depends on the religious tradition being referenced.

Mass, service, worship Different Christian groups refer to their religious rites and ceremonies in different ways. These terms are not all equivalent. Not all religious rites are Mass, even in the Catholic or Orthodox traditions.

rite, right A rite is a religious ceremony; a right is something that people have a claim to.

satanic, evil Something that is satanic is related to Satan; not all evil is satanic.

tenet, tenant A tenet is a principle or idea; a tenant is someone who rents space from a landlord.