

The Faiths as Formal Realities: Describing and Portraying God (TH-513)

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Mondays, 5:00-7:00

Synchronous (in person and remote)

TH-513 MAIRS Core Course description:

Explores how faith communities move from the text to practices with the use of structured beliefs and traditions, approaches and doctrines. This course is taught in a multi-faith classroom, with faculty of different faith traditions, and it builds knowledge and skills for study within a multifaith setting.

Spring 2025 Theme: Describing and Portraying God

Through a literary reading of scriptures, this course will examine how God is described and portrayed in the Hebrew Bible, New Testament, and Qur'an. Students engage in the questions about naming, describing, defining, or portraying God in the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim scriptures, and how those portrayals lead to communal identity and embodied activities. The goal of the course is to assist students examine their own views of God in concert with viewpoints from other students, the instructors, and multiple authors from different theological perspectives.

Course Objectives:

1. Students will be able to describe the various literary and narrative perspectives of God in the Hebrew Bible, New Testament, and Qur'an.
2. Students will be able to identify and utilize diverse religious, ethnic, racial, gender, economic, theological voices, and intersectional resources to engage in theological questions about God.
3. Students will be able to synthesize material to articulate their own theological ideas about God and write at an advanced graduate level.

MAIRS Program Learning Outcomes: This course will fulfill the following program outcomes

1. Articulate your own worldview or religious belief system while empathically and respectfully engaging people whose worldviews, religious practices, and religious beliefs differ from your own.
2. Demonstrate fluency in the foundational concepts, insights and methods of Interreligious Studies and the application of those methods within contemporary multifaith settings.
 - b. Provide clear and empathic restatements of the beliefs and perspectives of several religious traditions.
6. Express your ideas and perspectives clearly in oral and written communication.
 - a. Write sustained, coherent arguments or explanations in clear academic English, with well-formed sentences and paragraphs.

Hartford Values for Collaborative Teaching and Learning:

- Showing mutual appreciation and respect for others—modeling the privilege to learn from and partner with each other.
- Engaging in cross-disciplinary content and teaching
- Paying attention to the whole personhood of another – history, race, religion, knowledge, gender, and rank
- Demonstrating how to disagree respectfully and well
- Embodying mutuality – Learning to construct ideas and skills and experiences together

Teaching and Learning Strategies:

This course will be a hybrid Synchronous. At least one instructor will be located at HIU with students present in the classroom, and distance students joining remotely.

- 1) The first two-hour session of each class will address the topic from the assigned reading. The final hour of class will be asynchronous online discussion forums.
- 2) There are three modules to the course. Each module will have an essay assignment.
- 3) Students will be required to undertake research to produce diverse cultural, ethnic, and religious resources for their essays.
- 4) Please note, during Ramadan, the evening class schedule will be altered to provide opportunities for students to participate in *iftar*.

Required Reading:

Miles, Jack. *God: A biography*. New York: Vintage Books, 1995.

Miles, Jack. *Christ: A Crisis in the Life of God*. New York: Vintage Books, 2001.

Miles, Jack. *God in the Qur'an*. New York: Vintage Books, 2018.

Students should also have access to the TaNaKh, Christian Bible (preferably NRSV translation), and Qur'an (preferably *The Study Qur'an*, or MAS Abdel Haleem translation).

In addition, there will be several several shorter readings posted on the canvas sites.

Finally, students will be required to utilize other sources that reflect diverse religious, ethnic, racial, gender, economic, religious, and intersectional perspectives (such as Feminist, Womanist, African American, Asian, Indigenous, Queer, or Liberationist, etc.). See the bibliography of alternative voices at the end of the syllabus.

Assignments:

1. **Participation:** Weekly seminar discussion questions will be posed based on the assigned reading. Students will be required to have read and actively contribute to the discussion sections. (20% of the grade. Learning Outcome #1.)

2. **Presentation on a theme of the week:** During weeks 3 - 13, students will sign up to provide a written or video presentation for the asynchronous hour of each week. (20% of grade. Learning Outcome #2.)
 - a. Based on the assigned readings for the week, students should select one of the themes listed in the syllabus for that class session.
 - b. In addition to the required reading, presenters will need to select at least one (1) source from the “Bibliography for alternative, diverse voices,” or another source in consultation with the instructors. Normally, the authors would NOT be from the student’s own tradition.
 - c. Presenters are responsible to post a written or oral presentation on the chosen theme (of at least 500 words or 4 minutes), examining how God as portrayed by the chosen author(s). The presentation, questions, and any presentation material (such as outlines, or links to videos) must be posted to the class canvas site prior to class.
 - d. Presenters should also come up with at least 2 questions for the rest of the class to engage with on that theme.
 - e. Students not presenting will be responsible to respond to the presenter’s questions by posting before the next class session.

3. **Three Essays:** Students will write a 1,500-2,000 word essay in response to a theme in each of the assigned texts, at the conclusion of each section. The essays should be written according to the appropriate academic conventions, following HIU’s expectations of academic writing. (Each essay is worth 20% of the grade. Learning Outcome #3.) See [“Guidelines for Writing a Research Paper.”](#)

	<u>Due Date</u>
a. <i>God: A Biography</i>	Monday, 3 March
b. <i>Christ: A Crisis in the Life of God</i>	Monday, 31 March
c. <i>God in the Qur’an</i>	Monday, 5 May

In preparing each essay, students **must also utilize at least two other sources** that reflect diverse religious, ethnic, racial, gender, economic, religious, and intersectional perspectives.

Outline of the course:

27 January: Overview of the course and expectations; an introduction to a “literary reading” of the scriptures; Overview of the TaNaKh, Christian Bible, and the Qur’an.

Required Reading: Miles, *God*, 1-24; *Christ*, 247-87; *God in the Qur’an*, 3-22

3 February: Scripture and prayer in faith communities

Required Reading: Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Psalms: Prayerbook of the Bible*; selections of Qur’anic prayers (all posted on Canvas site).

Week 3-5 – God in the Book of Genesis

10 February: God the Creator

Required Reading: Miles, *God: a biography*, 25-46

Discussion section themes: 1) God, free will and determinism OR
2) God, humans, and the environment

17 February: God, Abraham’s family

Required reading: Miles, *God: a biography*, 47-84

Discussion section themes: 1) God and gender rights OR
2) Who is God’s chosen?

24 February: God and the Exodus

Required reading: Miles, *God: a biography*, 85-126

Discussion section themes: 1) God and ethics OR
2) Is God the Liberator?

3 March: Essay #1 Due

Week 6-9 – God in the New Testament

3 March: The Messiah

Required reading: Miles, *Christ*, 15-75 (part one)

Discussion section themes: 1) Can God have a Son? OR 2) Is Jesus Jewish?

10 March: The Prophet

Required reading: Miles, *Christ*, 76-144 (part two)

Discussion section themes: 1) God and a “preferential option for the poor,” OR
2) God and Empire

17 March: The Lord of Blasphemy

Required reading: Miles, *Christ*, 145-198 (part three)

Discussion section themes: 1) God and Religious Law OR
2) What is “incarnation”?

24 March: The Lamb of God

Required reading: Miles, *Christ*, 199-246 (part four)

Discussion section themes: 1) Supercessionism, OR
2) Can God suffer?

31 March: Essay #2 Due

Week 10-13 – God in the Qur’an

31 March: The creation of humanity

Required reading: Miles, *God in the Qur’an*, 23-80 (chapters 1-3)

Discussion section themes: 1) Does God cause evil? OR
2) Does God punish?

7 April: Abraham

Required reading: Miles, *God in the Qur’an*, 81-119 (chapters 4-5)

Discussion section themes: 1) What is idolatry? OR
2) Family or Ummah?

14 April: NO Class (Reading Week / Eastern and Western Holy Week)

21 April: Joseph and Moses

Required reading: Miles, *God in the Qur'an*, 120-170 (chapters 6-7_

Discussion section themes: 1) God and suffering (theodicy) OR

2) Who's scripture is correct?

28 April: Mary

Required reading: Miles, *God in the Qur'an*, 171-195 (chapter 8)

Discussion section themes: 1) The virgin birth of Christ OR

2) Is Mary a prophet?

5 May: Essay #3 Due

Policies and Miscellany:

Attendance: Active attendance in all classes is expected. However, if you must miss a class due to illness, family conflict or other emergency, please contact the instructor right away.

All written assignments should follow the normal conventions as in *Turabian: A Manual for Writers 8th ed* (or later). Please include a title page on all papers more than one page, and make sure that your name is included below your name on the cover page. Number all pages. *The instructor reserves the right to have students re-submit an assignment for reasons of poor grammar, mistakes, or poorly written work.* For those who would like assistance in how to write a proper research paper, there are a number of good guides at: [“Student Writing Resources.”](#)

Email Policy: The instructor will use the official HIU student email addresses for all communications. Please check your HIU email account regularly.

Plagiarism and Academic Integrity: Academic honesty and integrity are expected of all students. Plagiarism exists when: a) the work submitted was done, in whole or in part, by anyone other than the one submitting the work, b) parts of the work, whether direct quotations, ideas, or data, are taken from another source without acknowledgement, or c) the whole work is copied from another source [especially a web based source]. See [“Plagiarism”](#).

Extensions: Extensions for papers will be given for illnesses or family emergencies only in consultation with the instructors.

The following evaluation process will be utilized as a guideline: (based on a 4-point system)

- A (4-3.8 / 100-96) Demonstrates excellent mastery of the subject matter, a superior ability to articulate this, and provides helpful connections to daily life or contemporary issues. Exceeds expectations of the course.
- A- (3.7-3.5 / 95-90) Demonstrates mastery of the subject matter, ability to articulate this well, and makes connections to daily life or contemporary issues. Exceeds expectations of the course.
- B+ (3.4-3.1 / 89-86) Demonstrates a very good understanding of the subject matter, able to articulate lessons learned in the assignment well. Meets expectations of the course.
- B (3.0-2.8 / 85-83) Demonstrates an understanding of the subject matter and the ability to articulate lessons learned. Meets expectations of the course.
- B- (2.7-2.4 / 82-80) Demonstrates an understanding of the material at hand, has some difficulty articulating this, and basic connection of the material to daily life or contemporary issues/life. Meets basic expectations for the course.
- C+ (2.3-2.1 / 79-77) Demonstrates a basic comprehension of the subject matter, weak articulation and connections. Does not meet expectations for the course.
- C (2.0-1.8 / 76-73) Demonstrates a minimal comprehension of the subject matter and has difficulty making connections. Does not meet expectations of the course.
- F (1.7-0.0 / 72 >) Unable to meet the basic requirements of the course.

Student Handbook: For all other questions you might have regarding policies or procedures, please see: <https://www.hartfordinternational.edu/current-students/student-resources/student-handbook>.

Other Academic policies are listed at: <https://www.hartfordinternational.edu/current-students/academics/academic-policies>.

A Bibliography for alternative, diverse voices on the theological interpretation of God for student essays and discussions:

(While this bibliography is a starting point, it is not exhaustive. We anticipate the class will add to this list throughout the semester. If you have a resource that you would like to use for your discussion section, and it is not here, please check with your instructors.)

Feminist, Gender, and Womanist perspectives

- Ali, Kecia. *Sexual Ethics & Islam: Feminist Reflection on Quran, Hadith and Jurisprudence*. Oxford: Oneworld Publishing, 2006.
- Brenner, Athalya. *A feminist companion to the Hebrew Bible in the New Testament*. Sheffield, England : Sheffield Academic Press, 1996.
- Brettschneider, Marla. *Jewish Feminism and Intersectionality*. New York: State University of New York Press, 2017.
- Donaldson, Laura E, and Pui-lan Kwok. *Postcolonialism, Feminism, and Religious Discourse*. New York: Routledge, 2015.
- Fiorenza, Elisabeth Schüssler. *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet: Critical Issues in Feminist Christology*. London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015.
- Goldstein, Elyse. *New Jewish Feminism: Probing the Past, Forging the Future*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2008.
- Hammer, Juliane, Dina El Omari and Mouhanad Khorchide, eds. *Muslim Women and Gender Justice: Concepts, Sources, and Histories*. London: Routledge, 2019.
- Hidayatullah, Aysha A. *Feminist Edges of the Qur'an*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014.
- Hooks, Bell. *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism 2nd ed.* New York: Routledge, 2014.
- Ibrahim Celene. *Women and Gender in the Qur'an*. Oxford University Press 2020.
- Johnson, Elizabeth A. *She Who Is: The mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*. New York: Crossroad, 1993.
- Junior, Nyasha. *An Introduction to Womanist Biblical Interpretation*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015.
- Kvam, Kristen E, Linda S. Schearing, and Valarie H. Ziegler. *Eve and Adam: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Readings on Genesis and Gender*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999
- Kwok Pui-lan. *Hope Abundant: Third World and Indigenous Women's Theology*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books 2010.
- Kwok Pui-lan. *Introducing Asian Feminist Theology*. London: Sheffield Academic 2000.
- Lightsey, Pamela R. *Our lives matter: a womanist queer theology*. Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2015.

- Mernissi, Fatima. *Women and Islam: An Historical and Theological Enquiry*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1991.
- Pauw, Amy Plantinga and Serene Jones. *Feminist and Womanist Essays in Reformed Dogmatics*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006.
- Trible, Phyllis and Letty M. Russell, *Hagar, Sarah, and Their Children: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006.
- Rhodes, Jerusha T. *Divine Words, Female Voices: Muslima Explorations in Comparative Feminist Theology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018,
- Ruether, Rosemary R. *Women Healing Earth: Third World Women on Ecology, Feminism, and Religion*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2002.
- Russell, Letty M. *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2004.
- Smith, Mitzi J. *Womanist sass and talk back: social (in)justice, intersectionality, and biblical interpretation*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018.
- Stowasser, Barbara Feyer. *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions, and Interpretation*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Tirosh-Samuelson, Hava, Aaron W. Hughes, Judith Plaskow, and Richard Fish. *Judith Plaskow: Feminism, Theology, and Justice*. Brill: Leiden, 2014.
- Tonstad, Linn Marie. *God and difference: the Trinity, sexuality, and the transformation of finitude*. New York: Routledge, 2016.
- Wadud, Amina. *Qur'an and Women: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Williams, Delores S. *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*. Maryknoll, NT: Orbis, 2013.
- Winter, MT. *The chronicles of Noah and her sisters: Genesis and Exodus according to women*. New York: Crossroad, 1995.
- Winter, M.T., *In the Spirit of Jesus*. Authorhouse, 2020.

Eco-Justice Perspectives

- Abdul-Matin, Ibrahim. *Green Deen: What Islam Teaches About Protecting the Planet*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2010.
- Bohannon, Richard. *Religions and Environments: A Reader in Religion, Nature and Ecology*, London, New Delhi, New York, Sydney: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014.
- De la Torre, Miguel, ed. *Gonna Trouble the Water: Ecojustice, Water, and Environmental Racism*. Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2021.
- Deloria, Vine. *God Is Red: A Native View of Religion*. 30th Anniversary Edition. Los Angeles: Fulcrum Press, 2003.

- Gade, Anna M. *Muslim Environmentalisms: Religious and Social Foundations*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2019.
- Gottlieb, Roger S. ed. *Liberating Faith: Religious Voices for Justice, Peace, and Ecological Wisdom*. Lanham: MD: Rowan & Littlefield, 2003
- by Hanh, Thich Nhat. *Zen and the Art of Saving the Planet*, ed. Sister True Dedication. New York: HarperOne, 2021.
- Harris, Melanie. *Ecowomanism: African American Women and Earth-Honoring Faiths*. Ecology and Justice Series. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2017.
- Johnston, David. *Earth, Empire and Sacred Text: Muslims and Christians as Trustees of Creation*. London: Equinox, 2010.
- Khalid, Fazlun M., ed. *Islam and ecology*. London: Cassell, 1992.
- Mattson, Ingrid, Murad W. Hofmann, Martin Arneth, and Dietmar Mieth. *Islam, Christianity & the Environment*. Amman, Jordan: Royal Aal Al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, 2011.
- Montgomery, Michelle, ed. *Re-Indigenizing Ecological Consciousness and the Interconnectedness to Indigenous identities*. Lexington Books 2022.
- Sherman, Rita D., and Purushottama Bilimoria, eds., *Religion and Sustainability: Interreligious Resources, Interdisciplinary Responses*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer Nature, 2022.

Ethnic and Racial Perspectives

- Bashir Kamran. *The Qur'an in South Asia: Hermeneutics Qur'an Projects and Imaginings of Islamic Tradition in British India*. 1st ed. Routledge 2021.
- Callahan Allen Dwight. *The Talking Book: African Americans and the Bible*. Yale University Press 2006.
- Curtis IV, Edward E. *Islam in Black America: Identity, Liberation and Difference in African-American Islamic Thought*. Albany, New York: State University of New York, 2002.
- Jackson, Sherman. *Islam and the Blackamerican: Looking toward the Third Resurrection*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Jackson, Sherman A. *Islam and the Problem of Black Suffering*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Kwok Pui-lan. *Hope Abundant: Third World and Indigenous Women's Theology*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books 2010.
- Kwok Pui-lan. *Introducing Asian Feminist Theology*. London: Sheffield Academic 2000.
- Lightsey, Pamela R. *Our lives matter: a womanist queer theology*. Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2015.

McCaulley Esau. *Reading While Black : African American Biblical Interpretation As an Exercise in Hope*. Downers Grove, ILL: IVP Academic an Imprint of InterVarsity Press 2020.

Sugirtharajah, R.S. *Asian Faces of Jesus*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015.

_____. *Voices from the Margins: interpreting the bible from the Third World*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2016.

Segovia. Fernando F. *Reading from this Place, Vol. 1: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United States*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995.

_____. *Reading from this Place, Vol. 2: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in Global Perspective*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995.

Smith Mitzi J. *Insights from African American Interpretation*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press 2017.

Society of Biblical Literature et al. *Re-Presenting Texts: Jewish and Black Biblical Interpretation*. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press 2013.

Ware, Frederick L. *African American Theology*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016.

Wildman, Terry M. *When the Great Spirit Walked Among Us*. Mericopa, AZ: Great Thunder Publishing, 2014.

Wimbush Vincent L and Rosamond C Rodman. *African Americans and the Bible: Sacred Texts and Social Textures*. New York: Continuum 2000.

Liberationist Perspectives

Ateek Naim Stifan. *A Palestinian Theology of Liberation: The Bible Justice and the Palestine-Israel Conflict*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2017.

Boff, Leonardo, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2012

Cone, James. *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013.

_____. *God of the Oppressed*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997.

Ellis Marc H et al. *Towards a Jewish Theology of Liberation: The Challenge of the 21st Century*. 3rd expanded ed. Waco: TX: Baylor University Press, 2011.

Esack, Farid. *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective Of Interreligious Solidarity Against Oppression*. London: OneWorld, 1997.

Gonzalez, Justo. *Mañana: Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective*. Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 2010.

Gutierrez, Gustavo. *A Theology of Liberation*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988.

Raheb Mitri. *The Cross in Contexts: Suffering and Redemption in Palestine*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books 2017.

Rahemtulla Shadaab. *Qur'an of the Oppressed: Liberation Theology and Gender Justice in Islam*. First ed. New York: Oxford University Press 2017.

Ramon, Harvey. *The Qur'an and the Just Society*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2018.

Sobrino, Jon. *Jesus the Liberator*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993.

Postcolonial Perspectives

Abbas, Sadia. *At Freedom's Limit: Islam and the Postcolonial Predicament*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2014.

Donaldson, Laura E, and Pui-lan Kwok. *Postcolonialism, Feminism, and Religious Discourse*. New York: Routledge, 2015.

Gossai Hemchand. *Postcolonial Commentary and the Old Testament*. New York: Bloomsbury T & T Clark Publishing, 2019.

Kim Uriah Y. *Identity and Loyalty in the David Story: A Postcolonial Reading*. London: Sheffield Phoenix Press 2008.

Majeed, Javed. *Muhammad Iqbal: Islam, Aesthetics, and Postcolonialism*. New Delhi: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2009.

Nash, Geoffrey, Kathleen Kerr-Koch, Sarah E. Hackett, eds. *Postcolonialism and Islam, Theory, Culture, Society and Film*. London: Routledge, 2014.

Niang Aliou Cissé. *A Poetics of Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: God Human-Nature Relationship and Negritude*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books 2019.

Santesso Esra Mirze and James E McClung. *Islam and Postcolonial Discourse*. New York: Routledge, 2017.

Sugirtharajah, R.S. and Fernando Segovia, *A Postcolonial Commentary on the New Testament Writings*. New York: Bloomsbury T & T Clark Publishing, 2013.