

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

David D. Grafton (dgrafton@hartfordinternational.edu)

Hossein Kamaly (hkamaly@hartfordinternational.edu)

Wednesdays, 7:00-10:00

Hybrid Synchronous

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 2023 Theme: Describing and Portraying God

Through a literary reading of scriptures, this course will examine how God is revealed 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 traditions, 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. For the final hour the class will be broken into discussion sections.
- 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.

Tentative Required Reading:

Amit, Yairah. *Reading Biblical Narratives: Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, Press, 2001.

Heschel, Abraham Joshua. *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1983 reprint.

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

In addition, students will be required to bring research and 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).

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.
2. **Discussion leader:** Each student will be responsible for drafting questions and guiding one discussion session in the class.
3. **Three Essays:** Students will write a 1,500-2,000 word essay in response to 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. See ["Guidelines for Writing a Research Paper."](#)
 - a. *God in Search of Humanity:*
 - b. *Christ: A Crisis in the Life of God:*
 - c. *God in the Qur'an:*

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.

The class will develop a bibliography of diverse perspectives on God in each of the religious traditions.

Tentative Outline of the course:

Week 1: Overview of the course, descriptions of the Hebrew Bible, New Testament, and Qur'an, and a "literary reading" of the scriptures

Reading: Amit, 1-22; Miles, *God in Christ*, 247-87

Week 2: Questions about God: Heschel, 1-23

Week 3-5 – God in the Hebrew Bible

Reading: Amit, 23-149

Week 6-9 – God in the New Testament

Reading: Miles, *God in Christ*, 15-245

Week 10-13 – God in the Qur'an

Reading: Miles, *God in the Qur'an*, 3-215

Week 14 Final reflections on a "literary reading" of the diverse voices and perspectives of God.

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: <http://www.hartsem.edu/current-students/student-writing-resources/>.

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

Wikipedia and other non-documented websites: Please do not cite *Wikipedia* or other non-documented websites. While these sites might direct one to documented sources (in the **Bibliography**) their authorship is unknown and cannot be considered authoritative as academic sources. Students will be marked down for referencing these public sites if they are used as primary sources.

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” at <http://www.hartsem.edu/current-students/policies/>.

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

Late Assignments/Papers: As per the Student Handbook, late assignments or papers will be marked down 1/3 of a grade for every two days.

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: <http://www.hartsem.edu/current-students/student-handbook/>.

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