

TH-513 The Faiths as Formal Realities: *God and the Nation*

PRELIMINARY SYLLABUS

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Mondays, 5:00-7:00

Hybrid Synchronous

Spring 2026 Theme: *God and the Nation*

This class will explore the tension between the ideal of a social religious community and the ideology of religious nationalism. Religious traditions are imbedded in a community of believers that share beliefs, rituals, or identities. These identities provide vision and hope for believers, but can also become dangerously exclusive. How do religious traditions walk the line of being an “imagined community” with a vision without creating ethnically or nationally exclusive ideologies? We will examine these issues within the current context of the rise of populism around the world in general and Christian Nationalism in the U.S., specifically.

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.

Course Objectives:

1. Students will be able to articulate how religions (and religious communities) publicly interact with various nationalisms.
2. Students will be able to identify the various historical origins and manifestations of religious nationalisms.
3. Students will be able to synthesize material and articulate their own theological ideas about God and religious communities in society.

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.
- 2) Following the plenary, students will engage in an asynchronous activity that is due on the Wednesday following the Monday class.
- 3) Please note, during Ramadan, the evening class schedule will be altered to provide opportunities for students to participate in *iftar*.

Required Reading:

Anderson, Benedict R. O'G. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Revised edition. London: Verso, 2016.

Soper, J. Christopher, and Joel S. Fetzer. *Religion and Nationalism in Global Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

Ward, Keith. *Religion and Community*. Oxford, New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press, 2000.

Recommended:

Beinart, Peter, *Being Jewish After the Destruction of Gaza*. New York: Alfred K. Knopf, 2025.

Hallaq, Wael B. *The Impossible State: Islam, Politics, and Modernity's Moral Predicament*. Paperback edition. New York: Columbia University Press, 2013.

Malji, Andrea. *Religious Nationalism in Contemporary South Asia*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2022.

Omer, Atalia, and Jason A. Springs. *Religious Nationalism: A Reference Handbook*. Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 2013.

Whitehead, Andrew L., and Samuel L. Perry. *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2020.

Assignments:

1. **Participation:** Students are required to have read all of the required reading and actively engage in the class. Students who are going to be absent should inform the instructors prior to the class. Participation will be assessed at the first half of the course and again at the second half of the course. (30% of the grade)
 - **A-synchronous activity:** Each week a discussion prompt will be posted on the course canvas site based on the assigned reading and the class discussion from class . Students will be required to respond to the prompt by Wednesday after the Monday class by 7:00 pm. This is part of the expected participation in the course.
 - *In the case of an absence, the professors reserve the right to ask the student for a written assignment on the required reading for that session.*
2. **Essay on religious communal identity and “the nation”:** Each student will write a 1,500-2,000 word essay on an example of how a particular religious community articulates its own unique role within a specific social-political context (i.e., Catholics in Northern Ireland, or Mormons in the U.S.). The essay must include theological reflection. (30% of the grade)
3. **Presentation on Religious Nationalism:** Each student will sign up to present and lead a class discussion on one case study of Religious Nationalism which they will pick in consultation with the professors. (40% of the grade)

- a. Students are responsible to present on one case study of Religious Nationalism, examining the views of God and the religious community or “the nation” for 20 minutes,
- b. come up with at least 3 questions for the rest of the class for class to engage the theme, and
- c. post all presentation material (such as outlines, or handouts, and questions) to the class canvas site prior to class.

Proposals for these presentations should be emailed to both professors by **6 April**. Students may select either a case study from Soper, or another that is approved by the professors.

Tentative Outline of the course:

19 January: MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. HOLIDAY

26 January: overview of the course and expectations; introduction to “Imagined Communities”

Required Reading: Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, chaps. 1-8

2 February: “Imagined Communities” and Religious Nationalism

Required Reading: Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, chaps. 5-8

9 February: Judaism and “the Nation of Israel”

Required Reading: Ward, *Religion & Community*, chap. 1

Suggested Reading:

16 February: Islam and the *Ummah*

Required Reading: Ward, *Religion & Community*, chap. 2

Suggested Reading:

23 February: Buddhism and the *Sangha*

Required Reading: Ward, *Religion & Community*, chap. 3

Suggested Reading:

RAMADAN BEGINS

2 March: Hinduism and the *Sampradaya*

Required Reading: Ward, *Religion & Community*, chap. 4

Suggested Reading:

9 March: Christianity and the “Catholic Church”

Required Reading: Ward, *Religion & Community*, chap. 13 & 14

Suggested Reading:

16 March: READING WEEK: NO CLASS

23 March: Contemporary Religious Nationalism

Essay on “religious communal identity and the nation” due

Required Reading: Soper, *Religion and Nationalism*, chaps. 1 & 8

30 March: Civil-religious nationalism –

Required Reading: Soper, *Religion and Nationalism*, chaps. 2 & 3; [Baylor Religious Survey 2021](#); [“8 in 10 Americans Say Religion Is Losing Influence in Public Life,” Pew Research Center](#) (specifically chapter 3, “Christianity’s place in politics, and ‘Christian nationalism’”

6 April: America – a Judeo-Christian Nation?

Presentation proposals are due

Required Reading: Stahl, Ronit Y. "A Jewish America and a Protestant Civil Religion: Will Herberg, Robert Bellah, and Mid-Twentieth Century American Religion." *Religions* 6, no. 2 (2015): 434-50. And, Ahmed, Akbar S. ‘Defining American Identity.’ *Journey into America: The Challenge of Islam*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2010. 39-98.

Suggested Reading:

13 April: Contemporary American Christian Nationalism

Required Reading: Hawley, Josh. “Our Christian Nation.” *First Things* 340 (December 2024): 33–39; AND Grafton, David D. “Making Room at the Table: Lutheran Ministry in a Religiously Plural America.” *Dialog* 56, no. 3 (2017): 310–20.

Suggested Reading:

FINAL STUDENT PRESENTATIONS ON RELIGIOUS NATIONALISM

20 April: Student presentations

27 April: Student presentations

4 May: Student presentations