

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
TH 553 - Introduction to Islamic Theology
Hartford International University
Fall 2026
Hybrid Synchronous
Preliminary Syllabus

Instructor: Dr. Jawad A. Qureshi
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Session Meetings: **Wednesdays, 5:00-6:50pm** (Eastern Time)
Office Hours: **TBD**

Course Description

This course provides an introduction to the breadth and depth of Islamic theology, through a close reading of primary texts, supplemented by secondary literature for historical context and further analysis. The foundational Islamic beliefs and concepts (God, Prophets, Life after Death, the nature of faith, theodicy) are discussed with reference to the role of reason and scriptural texts (Qur'an and Hadith), as well as the competing methodologies of different Islamic theological schools. We also examine theology's interaction with and impact on Sufism, philosophy, law, and society, including the concept of orthodoxy, and theological developments in the modern world.

This is a hybrid course, and students must register for either Face-to-Face (Section 1), or Online (Section 2) attendance. Since the weekly lecture time is only 1h50min, there is an expectation of an additional weekly hour of work outside lecture, potentially including online discussion forums, and posting video presentations.

Course Objectives

Course fulfills the following curricular requirements:

MAIRS - Interreligious Studies Elective
MAIRS - Islamic Studies Elective
MAIRS - Islamic Studies: Beliefs and Practices
MAIRS - Islamic Studies: Foundational Fields
MAC - Islamic Chaplaincy Elective

Rationale & Method

The purpose of this class is to introduce students to a variety of modes of theological inquiry among Muslims. These modes of theology include theologies that are **creedal, natural, revealed, practical, and mystical**. By **creedal theology**, we mean those statements of faith that outline the core teachings of Islam, emerging from within the tradition itself, extending revelation (Qur'ān and *sunna*) and reflecting the experiences of the earliest Muslims. **Natural theology** on other hand is an attempt to make a rational case for Islamic notions of God, prophethood, and revelation that does not rest revelation. Drawing on reasoned argumentation, natural theologies end point is revelation. **Revealed theology** by contrast does

not seek to make the case for revelation, rather it takes revelation as a starting point to explore the nature of God and faith. **Practical theology** builds on revealed theology to consider the religious practices that are authorized by a religious tradition to embody and internalize the teachings of scripture, shaping the religious life. **Mystical theology** finally expresses the experience of God, what can and cannot be said of that experience and the attentive discussions of epistemology. In exploring these modes of theology, we will study the main topics that each mode covers, paying attention to the reasoning available to each.

While one could undertake this exercise by exploring a series of authors from across the spectrum of Islamic schools of thought, in this course we will focus on the writings of one author, the work of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111). To be sure, this exercise could also be carried out studying the works of other major theologians, such as Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037), Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210), Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 638/1240), Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274), al-‘Allām al-Ḥillī (d. 726/1258), Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 661/1263), and numerous others. Yet, Ghazālī is particularly well-suited for our purposes for several reasons.

First, Ghazālī has written extensively in each of these modes of theology and his contributions have shaped not only Sunni-Ash‘arī thought but the broader discussions in Islamic civilization on these questions. Additionally, to our great fortune, much of the Ghazālīan corpus exists in scholarly translation allowing us to access his works without recourse to an in-depth knowledge of Arabic. Finally, and perhaps more importantly, in taking one author and reading their corpus closely, we gain a depth that a broad survey of secondary or even primary literature does not often allow. Rather than dig numerous small holes, we will dig deep in one place to strike water.

It should be noted that this class is not a *history* of theology. Rather, the purpose of this class is to sharpen our theological reasoning by thinking with one of the most brilliant minds for the course of a semester. Indeed, history will not be ignored, but it will not be the primary lens with which we explore theology. Our primary concern will be the different modes of *doing* theology. To assist us to this end, each primary source reading will be paired with relevant material from the secondary literature to provide scholarly context and background.

Each session will thus entail: (1) a short lecture by the instructor, (2) a discussion of the primary text, and (3) student presentations and discussions on the secondary literature. Students will be assessed by their presentation, three writings, and a term paper.

A final word on our approach to the texts. We will be undertaking a *close reading* of the primary texts. Students are required to bring their primary texts for each session and be ready to read, gloss, and discuss passages.

Required Texts:

- *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology* (Cambridge Companions to Religion). Edited by Tim Winter. Cambridge, CUP: 2008.
<https://thedtl.on.worldcat.org/oclc/235948503>
- *Principles of the Creed*. Translated by Khalid Williams. FonsVitae.
- *A Return to Purity in Creed*. Translated by Abdullah Bin Hamid Ali. Lamp Post Publications, 2023
- R.J. McCarthy, *Deliverance from Error*. FonsVitae.
- *The Jewels of the Qur'an: Al-Ghazālī's Theory*. Translated by Muhammad Abul Quasem. KL: Islamic Book Trust.
- *Al-Ghazali on the Ninety-nine Beautiful Names of God*. Translated by David Burrell. Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1999
- *Al-Ghazali Letter to a Disciple*, translated by Tobias Meyer. Islamic Texts Society, 2005
- *The Beginning of Guidance: The Imam and proof of Islam*. Translated by Mashhad Allaf. Whitethread Press, 2009.
- *Al-Ghazali's Forty Principles of the Religion (Al- Arba'in Fi Usul ad-Din)*. Translated by Nasir Abdussalam. Turath Publishing, 2016
- *The Niche of Lights*. Translated by David Buchman. Brigham Young University Press, 1998.

Reference Materials

- Watt, William M. *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*. Oxford: OneWorld Publications, 1998.
- *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*. Edited by Sabine Schmitdke. Oxford, OUP, 2018.
- *Islamic Theological Themes: A Primary Source Reader*. Edited by John Renard. Berkeley, UC Press: 2014. <https://thedtl.on.worldcat.org/oclc/880579540>

Reference Website

- www.ghazali.org

Assessment and Grading:

1) Participation (Formative Assessment)

10% of grade

Students must be alert, present, and willing to participate in classroom discussions by offering their insights from the lectures, readings, and personal experiences. During the lectures, the instructor will ask the class specific questions about readings or previous lectures as a method of weekly formative assessment. Attendance will be taken on a regular basis. Please see the attendance policy below.

2) In-Class Presentations (Formative Assessment)

20% of grade

Starting from week 2, students will present on the secondary literature assigned for that week. This will entail (1) a presentation of **no more than 8 minutes** in length, (2) followed by leading

the class discussion related to the reading and your presentation. Presenters must submit either their write-up or slides to the instructor as part of their grade.

For your *presentation*, you are expected to:

- (1) accurately summarize the main argument of the reading,
- (2) connect it to the passages in the primary text that we are reading or other readings that we have done in the semester,
- (3) (when applicable) weigh the arguments presented in the reading, considering counter-arguments and possible responses,
- (4) and provide at least **two** open ended questions for class discussion related to the issues brought up in the reading.

3) Response Papers (Formative Assessment)

20% of grade

For each assignment, you will be given a prompt to guide your writing. These essays are to be **no less than 800 words** (size 12 font, Times New Roman, double spaced), which comes out to 3 pages. Assignments are to be uploaded to our populi course site by **5pm** on the following dates (also listed on our weekly lecture schedule):

- Week 6
- Week 11
- Week 14

4) Final Paper (Summative Assessment II)

50% of grade

Students will be required to submit a final paper for the course. This paper will examine a theological problem covered in the *Iqtisād*. By **Week 6** students need to provide a topic and beginning bibliography to be approved by the instructor. By **Week 10**, must provide a tentative thesis statement and a working outline of their paper. Final papers will be due at the end of finals week. These will be submitted online via Populi. A detailed rubric will be handed out later in the semester. The dates are listed here, as well as in the weekly schedule below.

- Week 6 Paper topic and beginning bibliography due
- Week 11 Thesis statement
- Week 15 Final paper due

Nota bene. This is a writing intensive course, meaning that the central part of your assessment will be a series of regular, low stakes writing assignments (formative assessments) that will contribute to the development of your theological knowledge, in addition to a larger summative assignment. Those low-stakes writing assignments entail recall and response to discussions and readings in the form of reflections, short papers, and glossing passages from our readings. The purpose of these low-stakes assignments is not only to ensure that students are keeping up with the material and grasping the concepts clearly, but also to cultivate a writing habit. The larger summative assignment is meant to let you explore a theological question, problem, challenge, or concern and reflect upon it at some length.

Late Papers and Assignments Policy

A student is to turn in all assignments, papers, and exams on time. Arrangements should be made with the instructor prior to the due date if the student is unable to meet a deadline. Any and all verbal communications MUST be sent to the instructor via email to document any accommodations. The instructor has full discretion whether to accept any late assignments, papers or exams. Unless stated otherwise by the instructor, late assignments will not receive full credit.

Office Hours and Contact with Instructor

Office hours for this semester are: **Wednesday 11:30am-12:30pm; Thursday 1-2pm**; or by appointment. You can sign up for office hours here

<https://calendar.app.google/46BGVx8xrymABxvh6>

Weekly Readings

Subject to modification by the instructor as the semester progresses

CCCIT = *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*

Week	Primary Source Readings	Secondary Source Readings
1	Introduction and Setting the Tone	Qureshi, Jawad Anwar. "Being Bilingual: Thoughts on the Insider/Outsider Problem in Teaching Islam." Qureshi, Jawad Anwar. "Thinking about Constructive Muslim Theology."
2	Creedal Theology & Natural Theology: The Case for Reason ('<i>ʿaql</i>) and Contemplation (<i>nazar</i>) - <i>Principles of the Creed</i> . Book 2 of <i>Iḥyāʾ</i> . Section 1 and 2. Translated by Khalid Williams. FonsVitae. - <i>Moderation in Belief</i> , (7-22).	CCCIT, ch. 2 "The Early Creed."
3	Natural Theology I: Reasoning the Creed - <i>Principles of the Creed</i> . Book 2 of <i>Iḥyāʾ</i> . Section 3.	CCCIT, ch. 4 "The Developed Kalam Tradition." CCCIT, ch. 10 "The Existence of God."
4	Natural Theology II: Reasoning the Creed (continued) - <i>Principles of the Creed</i> . Book 2 of <i>Iḥyāʾ</i> . Section 3.	CCCIT, ch. 6 "God: Essence and attributes." CCCIT, ch. 7 "Creation."
5	Natural Theology III: Understanding Revealed Attributes - <i>A Return to Purity in Creed</i> . Translated by Abdullah Bin Hamid Ali. Lamp Post Publications, 2023.	TBD
6	Natural Theology IV: Attributes and the Nature of Faith - R.J. McCarthy, <i>Deliverance from Error</i> , "Appendix 1: <i>Fayṣal al-tafriqa bayn al-islām wa al-zandaqa</i> .")	TBD
	- Paper Topic Due - Response Paper 1 Due	
7	Revealed Theology: Contemplating Revelation	CCCIT, ch. 1 "Qur'an and Hadith."

	- <i>The Jewels of the Qur'an: Al-Ghazālī's Theory</i> . Translated by Muhammad Abul Quasem. KL: Islamic Book Trust.	CCCIT, ch. 9 "Revelation."
8	Revealed Theology and the Ethical Turn: Divine Attributes and Human Perfection - <i>Al-Ghazali on the Ninety-nine Beautiful Names of God</i> . Translated by David Burrell. Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1999	Casewit, Y. "Al-Ghazālī's Virtue Ethical Theory of the Divine Names: The Theological Underpinnings of the Doctrine of <i>Takhalluq</i> in <i>al-Maqṣad al-Asnā</i> ." <i>Journal of Islamic Ethics</i> , 4(1-2), 155-200
9	Practical Theology I: The Way of the Hereafter TBD	CCCIT, ch. 8 "Ethics."
10	Practical Theology II: Embodiment - <i>Al-Ghazali Letter to a Disciple</i> , translated by Tobias Meyer. Islamic Texts Society, 2005. - <i>The Beginning of Guidance: The Imam and proof of Islam</i> . Translated by Mashhad Allaf. Whitethread Press, 2009.	CCCIT, ch. 11 "Worship."
11	Practical Theology III: Spiritual Virtues and Vices - <i>Al-Ghazali's Forty Principles of the Religion (Al- Arba'in Fi Usul ad-Din)</i> . Translated by Nasir Abdussalam. Turath Publishing, 2016.	Taneli Kukkonen, "Al-Ghazālī on the Origins of Ethics." <i>Numen</i> 63 (2016) 271 – 298
	- Tentative Thesis Statement and Bibliography Due - Response Paper 2 Due	
12	Mystical Theology I: Beyond Reason - "On the True Meaning of Esoteric Knowledge: Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī's (d. 505/1111) <i>Al-Risālat al-Ladunī</i> ." In <i>Esoteric Traditions in Islamic Thought: An Anthology of Texts on Esoteric Knowledge and Gnosis in Islam</i> , Leonard Lewisohn. Oxford: OneWorld Academic, 2024. - <i>Principles of the Creed</i> . Book 2 of <i>Iḥyā'</i> . Section 4 & 5.	CCCIT, ch. 13 "Theology and Sufism."
13	Mystical Theology II: Beyond Reason - <i>The Niche of Lights</i> . Translated by David Buchman. Brigham Young University Press, 1998.	CCCIT, ch. 14 "Epistemology and Divine Discourse."

14	Catch up & Wrap up: Political Theology? - <i>The Deliverance from Error</i> . Translated by R.J. McCarthy.	Ulrich Rudolph. "Post-Ghazālian Theology What were the Lessons to be Learned from al-Ghazālī?"
	- Response Paper 3 Due	
15	- FINAL PAPER DUE	