INTRODUCTION TO ISLAMIC THEOLOGY (TH-553)

This course explores the content and structure of Islamic belief, as elaborated by Muslim classical thinkers (7th-15th centuries), in relation to a selection of representative texts. The Introduction questions the nature and modalities of theology in Islam. The History studies the origins and growth of the science of Kalâm in its interaction with the other major religious disciplines of Sunnism -- exegesis, Prophetic tradition, jurisprudence, sects, philosophy (falsafa) and Sufism. The Creed is then analyzed more theoretically in its major components: the lordship and divinity of God, the mediation of the Messenger, the servitude and ethics of the believers. Society offers a last avenue for enquiry, in so far as it was shaped by particular theological doctrines. The Way/Law (shari‘a), power, love, innovation, and alterity -- religious or other -- are among the topics envisaged. No knowledge of Arabic is required for this course.

Class will meet once a week for 12 weeks on Thursdays, 6–9:30 p.m. Each of these twelve classes will be divided in two parts: A) Lecture; B) Discussion of the required readings.

Course Objectives

1) Students should be able to find their way around in the major reference works on Islamic theology.
2) They are expected to gain an acquaintance with the most important classical definitions of the Islamic Creed (‘aqīda): divinity and prophethood, divine attributes and justice, Sunnism versus Shī‘ism, Ash‘arism versus Mu‘tazilism and Hanbalism, sects and other religions…
3) They should have some general accurate knowledge of the ways classical Kalâm developed, the historical and ideological contexts in which it evolved, its key figures and the main doctrines, schools or movements it crystallized into.
4) In reference to the classical period, they should also be able to take an informed view of the modern theological developments and debates in the Muslim world, as well as of contemporary positions of Islam towards other world religions.

Course Requirements

1) It is strongly recommended that the student arrive at the first class already having a general knowledge about the religion of Islam, as well as about the history and geography of Muslim peoples.
They should also be able to find their way around in the major reference tools for Islamic Studies (Encyclopaedia of Islam, Index Islamicus…).

2) Attendance in class is required. If you know that you will be unable to attend a session please inform the professor in advance. Missing two classes will result in an automatic lowering of your final grade by 20%. Missing three or more classes will result in automatic failure of the course.

3) For each class of weeks 2-12, students shall submit a summary of one and/or two of the reading assignments and be ready to speak about it in class. Each student can skip any one week during that time for a total of 10 submissions. Here are the guidelines for these summaries:
   - Approximately 2 pages (3 pages maximum)
   - One modern study must be used in each summary
   - Students must make copies of their summaries for all students in the class

4) A final written examination, as described below.

The final grade will be based upon the following:

1) Weekly summaries (25%) and class participation (25%).

2) During the week following the last class, a final two hour long written examination consisting of ten multiple choice questions (20%) and a short essay on a question (to be chosen among three) relating to the content of the course (30%).

* All written work is to conform to the seminary writing guidelines, which can be found online at: http://www.hartsem.edu/student/forms/researchpaperguide.pdf. It must use the transliteration system given in class I. It must be run through a grammar and spell-check program or read by the writing tutor if necessary before submission. The Hartford Seminary Grading Guidelines will be the standard of evaluation for work in the course.

IMPORTANT: Plagiarism, the failure to give proper credit for the words and ideas of another person, whether published or unpublished, is strictly prohibited. All written material submitted by students must be their own original work; where the words and ideas of others are used they must be acknowledged. Credit will not be given for work containing plagiarism, and plagiarism can lead to failure of a course. Please see the Hartford Seminary Catalogue for the full plagiarism policy.

General references

Encyclopaedia of Islam, Index Islamicus…
Caspar, R., A Historical Introduction to Islamic Theology. Muhammad and the Classical Period. Translated by P. Johnstone (Roma, Pontificio Istituto di Studi Arabi e d’Islamistica - P.I.S.A.I., 1998), 278 p. (OCoLC)42577199
—, Islamic Theology II: Doctrines. Translated by P. Johnstone (Roma, Pontificio Istituto di Studi Arabi e d’Islamistica - P.I.S.A.I., 2007), viii & 229 p., 8885907210.
CLASS SCHEDULE

Class I. Sept. 4: *Introduction: Kalām and Islamic Theology*

General references:


Reading Assignments:


Class II. Sept. 11: *History: The Early Debates and the Establishment of the Religion*

General reference:


Reading Assignments:


Class III. Sept. 18: *History: the Construction of Orthodoxy I*

General references:


Reading Assignments:


Class IV. Oct. 2: *History: the Construction of Orthodoxy II*

General references:


Reading Assignments:


Class V. Oct. 9: *History: Alternatives & Challenges*

General references:


IBN TUFAYL (d. 1185), *Hayy ibn Yaqzân*: a philosophical tale translated with introd. and notes, by Lenn Evan GOODMAN (New York: Twayne Publishers, [1972]).


Reading Assignments:


Class VI. Oct. 16: *History: Mysticism, Failure, & Reformism*

General references:


Reading Assignments:


Class VII. Oct. 23: *Creed: Tawhîd or the Oneness, Lordship and Divinity of God*

General references:


Reading Assignments:


Class VIII. Oct. 30: Creed: Nubuwwât or Prophethood

General references:


Reading Assignments:


Class IX. Nov. 6: Creed: ‘Ubûdiyya or Servanthood and Praxis Mystica

General references:


Reading Assignments:


Class X. Nov. 13: Society: Sharî’a or a Way/Law of Loving Obedience

General references:


Reading Assignments:


Class XI. Nov. 20: Society: God’s Multiple Paths and Ways

General reference:


Reading Assignments:


(No. 24–28: Reading week)

Class XII. Dec. 4: Society: ‘Adl or Justice among God’s Creatures

General references:


Reading Assignments:


WRITTEN EXAMINATION: Thursday December 11, 6–8pm.