Christian-Muslim Dialogues in Early Christian Theology

(June 6-10, 2016)
9:00 am - 5:30 pm

Instructor: Najib George Awad
Associate Professor of Christian Theology
Hartford Theological Seminary
nawad@hartsem.edu
(Phone: 860-987 8048)

- Course Description:
This course aims at visiting some of the earliest Christian-Muslim theological debates and then looking specifically at some of the apologetic theological texts of the *mutakallim*, Theodore Abū Qurrah, one of the earliest original theological writers in Arabic, who belonged to the Melkites community during the Abbasid kingdom in the Ninth century. The course aims at taking the students through some of the major theological texts which Abu Qurrah and some others wrote in Arabic to defend Christian faith and to respond to critical questions against Christian theology from the Muslims. This will be analyzed within a Christian-Muslim Relations framework to glean some lessons of the nature of these relations at their early historical stage.

-Course’s Objectives:
by the end of the course, students would:

1- acquire sufficient knowledge on Theodore Abū Qurrah’s and some other Christian authors’ theological discourses in their apologetic texts.
2- examine if Theodore these apologists’ theological claims remain within the Christian main-line doctrinal stream of thought, or they diverge from it, or even compromise it, sometimes for the sake of making Christian theology acceptable to Islam.
3. learn to analyze and interpret the theological content, and reconstruct the dialogical and apologetic strategies, of some exemplary Christian conversing voices with early Islam and explore their relevance to the Christian-Muslim Relations today.

- Text Book:


This text is going to be used during the whole course. So, the students are expected to purchase their own copy of the book.

- Course’s Schedule:

  (the Historical and Contextual) Setting

- Monday, June 6, 2016:

I- Session .1 (9:00 am-10:30 am): Introducing the Syllabus and the subject of the course

  (short pause- 10:30 am -10:45 am)

II- Session .2 (10:45 am- 12:30 pm): the Arab Christians and Islam


  (Lunch Break- 12:30pm -2:00 pm)

III- Session .3 (2:00 pm- 3:30 pm): Christians in the Shadow of Islam


  (short pause- 3:30 pm - 3:45 pm)

IV- Session .4 (3:45 pm- 5:30 pm): the Beginning of Christian-Muslim Kalam

[R.R: Sidney Griffith, The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque, Ch. III, p. 45-74]
- **Tuesday, June 7, 2016:**

  **I- Session .5 (9:00 am- 10:30 am):** Dialogue of Patriarch John I and 'Amr b. al-'Āṣ (1)  
  *(task in Library)*

  *(short pause- 10:30 am- 10:45 am)*

  **II- Session .6 (10:45 am-12:30 pm):** Dialogue of Patriarch John I and 'Amr b. al-'Āṣ (2)  

  *(Lunch Break- 12:30 pm- 2:00 pm)*

  **III- Session .7 (2:00 pm- 3:30 pm):** John of Damascus (1)  
  *(task in Library)*

  *(short pause- 3:30 pm-3:45 pm)*

  **IV- Session .8 (3:45 pm-5:30 pm):** John of Damascus (2)  
  *(R.R: John Damascene, “the Chapter 100/101 of the De Haeresibus,” in John of Damascus on Islam, pp. 133-141)*

- **Wednesday, June 8, 2016:**

  **I- Session .9 (9:00 am-10:30 am):** Dialogue between Patriarch Timothy I and the Caliph al-Mahdī (1)  
  *(task in library)*

  *(short pause- 10:30 am-10:45 am)*

  **II- Session .10 (10:45 am- 12:30 pm):** Dialogue between Patriarch Timothy I and the Caliph al-Mahdī (2)  

  *(Lunch Break- 12:30 pm-2:00 pm)*

  **III- Session .11 (2:00 pm- 3:30 pm):** The Apology of al-Kindī and al-Hāshimī (1)  
IV- Session .12 (4:35 pm-5:30 pm): the Melkite text of *On the Triunity of the One God*

**Christian-Muslim Controversies in**
**Abū Qurrah’s Texts**

- Thursday, June 9, 2016:

I- Session .13 (9:00 am- 10:30 am): On Theodore Abū Qurrah (1) *(task in library)*

   *(short pause- 10:30 am-10:45 am)*

II- Session .14 (10:45 am- 12:30 pm): On Theodore Abū Qurrah (2)

   *(Lunch Break- 12:30 pm- 2:00 pm)*

III- Session .15 (2:00 pm- 3:30 pm): Abū Qurrah’s Maymar, *On the Existence of God and the True Religion* (1)

   *(short pause- 3:30 pm- 3:45 pm)*


- Friday, June 10, 2016:

I- Session .17 (9:00 am- 10:30 am): Abū Qurrah’s Maymar, *On the Death of the Messiah*
II- Session 18 (1:45 am- 12:30 pm): Abū Qurrah’s Maymar, On Our Salvation

(Lunch Break- 12:30 pm- 2:00 pm)

III- Session 19 (2:00 pm- 3:30 pm): Abū Qurrah’s Maymar, On the Trinity (1)

(Short pause- 3:30 pm- 3:45 pm)

IV- Session 20 (3:45 pm- 5:30 pm): Early Christian-Muslim Relations: Continuity or Antagonism?
[R.R: M. Penn, Envisioning Islam: Syrian Christians and the Early Muslim World, pp. 142-182]

-Course Requirements-

1) Assigned readings’ preparation and active class participation: Students are required to read the required texts as thoroughly and perceptively as they can and then to demonstrate an active class participation by coming to the sessions with questions or comments on them and the taught materials therein.

2) Tasks in the Library: students are going to be asked to work in the library on writing 600-1000 words-long entries on specific figures related to the course’s subject. They will be asked to collect the content of these entries from the resources and books available in the library and come back with their written texts to the instructor.

3) Final Essays: students will be required to write a short essay of 3000-5000 words-long on the following question: “What are the lessons on Christian-Muslim dialogues one can learn from early Christian dialogues with Muslims, and how are these lessons useful in and relevant to today’s interreligious relationships? Try to engage with this question by picking up a specific subject, idea, or doctrine, from Christian faith and then reflecting on how one/some of the authors we read in the course tried to speak about it in a plausible and dialogical way before Muslims. Make this selection the example case-study of your paper, and then try to suggest some intelligent lessons we can learn from it to pursue a fruitful and meaningful interreligious dialogue with Muslims today. The essay must be submitted to the instructor via email no later than, June 30, 2016, 10:00 pm.
- **Grading Division:**

1- reading’s preparation and class participation (30%)
2- Tasks in Library: (30%)
3- Final Essay: (40%)

- **Grading Criterion**

Students are graded using the A, B, C, or F system, with “+” and “−” markings allowed. For purposes of this course, these grades mean:

- **A** Exceptional in several or most ways; completes all tasks, is creative and even original in content, and displays mastery of expression.
- **B** Adequate in all basic ways; parts of the task are slighted, the content has minor weakness, and expression is competent yet not compelling.
- **C** Inadequate in some ways; does not address significant tasks, shows weak or erroneous content, and expression sometimes obstructs understanding.

- **Additional Policies:**

1) **Forbidden in the Classroom:**

- mobile phones, unless shut down completely, are disallowed in the classroom.
- while bringing laptops or electronic Tablets is allowed for the purpose of recording or writing lecture notes, surfing the net or using any other program on the internet during the session is strictly forbidden.

2) **Attendance:** Attendance in class is required. If you know you will be unable to attend a class session please inform the professor in advance. Missing two sessions will result in an automatic lowering of your final grade by 10%. Missing three or more sessions will result in automatic failure of the course.

3) **Plagiarism:** Plagiarism is the failure to give proper credit for the words or ideas of another person, whether published or unpublished, and is strictly prohibited. Credit will not be given for written work in this course containing plagiarism, and plagiarism may result in a failing grade for the entire course. Please consult the Plagiarism Policy on pp. 56-57 of the Hartford Seminary Catalogue 2011-2012, and/or contact the instructor with questions in this regard.

- **Selected Bibliography:**

The books enlisted here are by no means exhaustive of all the literature on christology that is available in the field. Students are encouraged to look for other primary and
secondary literature and to use every theological book they believe is helpful for their study of the course’s subject.


