Introduction to Christian-Muslim Relations in Early Islam

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Office Hours: Monday & Tuesday: 10:00 am – 1:00 pm
Meetings: upon appointment to be agreed upon with the instructor via email message.

- Course’s Structure:
  this course is structured to be a semester-long enterprise. Its sessions are divided into fourteen weeks. Since it is an introductory course, students are not required to know Arabic language fluently to be able to read and study the required primary texts of the relevant literature. The instructor will provide the students with English translations of all the primary, originally Arabic texts, which the instructor and the students will look at together during the semester. The instructor will, nonetheless, keep the Arabic texts available in his teaching whenever he deems it necessary to draw the class’s attention to some theological, philological and philosophical nuances that originate from the translation of the Arabic texts into English.

- Course’s Description:
  This course aims at visiting some of the earliest Christian-Muslim theological debates and then looking specifically at the Arabic apologetic theological texts of some of the earliest original theological writers in Arabic, who belonged to the Christians communities of Greater Syria during the Umayyad and Abbasid ears. The course aims at
taking the students through some of the major theological texts which these Christians wrote in Arabic to defend Christian faith and to respond to critical questions against Christian theology from the Muslims they lived with in the shadow of the Muslim Caliphate. It endeavors to introduce them to the contextual, intellectual and religious *sitz im leben* these Christians lived in and participated in developing with their Muslim neighbors and how such setting influenced their theological interpretation and representation of their religious faith during that early era of Christian-Muslim history.

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

  1. acquire basic knowledge on some Christian authors’ theological discourses in the extant Arabic apologetic texts for early Islamic period.
  2. examine if the theological claims of these Christian theologians remain within the orthodox 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 Arabic Christian conversing voices with early Islam.

- **Course’s Object in Relation to the Study Program (MA #1):**
  At the end of the course the students would have the chance to

  1. To acquire foundational and critical knowledge of Christian religion.
  2. To accumulate knowledge of the practices of Christian religious tradition
  3. To acquire knowledge and skills for dialogical and constructive engagement with diversity.

### Course’s Outlines and Sessions’ Reading Assignments

*(the Historical and Contextual)*

**Setting**

I- **Week One:**

- **Session 1:** Introducing the Syllabus and the subject of the course

- **Session 2:** The Middle East in the Seventh Century

[ **R.R:** J. Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis*, pp. 436-460]
II- Week Two:

- **Session 3:** Religiosity in the Pre-Muslim Arab Peninsula  

- **Session 4:** the Arab Christians and Islam  

III- Week Three:

- **Session 5:** Christians in the Shadow of Islam  

- **Session 6:** Some Textual Attitudes on Islam in Early Christian Literatures  

IV- Week Four:

- **Session 7:** Philosophy and Greek Heritage in Early Islam  

- **Session 8** the Beginning of Christian-Muslim *Kalām*  

(Part of Week Five:

V- Week Five:

- **Session 9:** Dialogue between Patriarch John Sedra and a Muslim *Amīr*  

- **Session 10:** Dialogue of Umar II and Leo III  
VI- Week Six:

- **Session. 11:** John of Damascus on Islam (1)

- **Session. 12:** John of Damascus on Islam (2)
  [R.R: John Damascene, “the Chapter 100/101 of the *De Haeresibus*,” in *John of Damascus on Islam*, D. Sahas, pp. 133-141]

VII- Week Seven:

- **Session. 13:** Dialogue between Patriarch Timothy I and The Caliph al-Mahdī (1)

- **Session. 14:** Dialogue between Patriarch Timothy I and the Caliph al-Mahdī (2)

VIII- Week Eight:

- **Session. 15:** The Apology of al-Kindī and al-Hāshimī (1)

- **Session. 16:** The Apology of al-Kindī and al-Hāshimī (2)

IX- Week Nine:

- **Session. 17:** the Melkite text of *On the Triunity of the One God*

- **Session. 18:** The Disputation between a Muslim and a Monk of Bēt Ḥālēj
X- Week Ten:

- **Session. 19:** Theodore Abū Qurrah on Islam

- **Session. 20:** Abū Qurrah as Philosopher and Translator: His Contribution to the Translation movement

XI- Week Eleven:

- **Session. 21:** Abū Qurrah’s Maymar, *On the Existence of God and the True Religion*
[**R.R:** Theodore Abū Qurrah, *On the True Religion*, in *Theodore Abū Qurrah*, J. Lamoreaux, Ch.1, Ch. 3-5, pp. 1-25, 41-57]

- **Session. 22:** between Abū Qurrah’s Maymar, *On the Existence of God and the True Religion* and ’Alī b. Rabbān at-Ṭabarī’s text, *On Religion and State*

- **Week Twelve:**

- **Session. 23:** Abū Qurrah’s Maymar, *On the Trinity*

- **Session. 24:** Abū Qurrah’s Maymar, *On Our Salvation*

- **Week Thirteen:**

- **Session. 25:** Abū Rāʾiṭah at-Takrīṭī on Islam
[**R.R:** Sandra T. Keating, *Defending the ‘People of Truth’ in the Early Islamic Period*, pp. 32-56]

- **Session. 26:** Abū Rāʾiṭah at-Takrīṭī Letter, *First Letter on the Holy Trinity*
[**R.R:** Sandra T. Keating, *Defending the ‘People of Truth’ in the Early Islamic Period*, pp. 164-215]
- Week Fourteen:

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<th>- Session 27: Early Christian-Muslim Relations: Continuity or Antagonism?</th>
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- Session 28: Final Remarks and Evaluation.

- Course’s Requirements

1) **Assigned readings’ preparation and active class participation (30%)**: 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) **Short Weekly Written Tasks (30%)**: The students will be asked to submit short summary of the main points of discussion that are found in the assigned texts from the literature of Christian Kalam with Islam that we will look at every week.

3) **Term Papers (40%)**: Students will be required to write a term paper of 8000 words-long (approx. 18-20 pages-long, 1.5 space, 12 Time Romans font size and style) on a subject related to the topic of the course and the issues we talked in the sessions and discussed in the studies texts.

- Grading Division:

| 1- reading’s preparation and class participation | (30%) |
| 2- Short Tasks: | (30%) |
| 3- Term paper: | (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 (95-100) 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- (90-94) 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+(87-89) Demonstrates a very good understanding of the subject matter, able to articulate lessons learned in the assignment well. Meets expectations of the course.
B (83-86) Demonstrates an understanding of the subject matter and the ability to articulate lessons learned. Meets expectations of the course.
B-(80-82) 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+(77-79) Demonstrates a basic comprehension of the subject matter, weak articulation and connections. Does not meet expectations for the course.
C (70-76) Demonstrates a minimal comprehension of the subject matter and has difficulty making connections. Does not meet expectations of the course.
F (below 70) Unable to meet the basic requirements of the course.

Auditors are welcome to participate in discussion and assignments to the degree they wish and should clarify their intent with the instructor, but their work will not be graded. The students can find their course’s grade posted in SONISWEB starting from January 10th, 2019.

- Additional Policies:

1) Attendance: Active 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 - 4 or more absences --- without a serious reason should be an automatic failure.

2) Plagiarism: 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, c) the whole work is copied from another source [especially a web based source], or d) significant portions of one’s own previous work used in another course. See “Plagiarism” at http://www.hartsem.edu/current-students/policies/

3) Appropriate Classroom Etiquette and Use of Technology: In order to respect the community within the classroom: 1) Mute all cell phones during class; 2) Utilize laptops for the sole purpose of taking class notes. Please do not surf the web, email, or other programs during class time. Such use of the computer during class is disrespectful of the class and professor, and may result in lowering your participation grade.

4) Inclusive Language: Hartford Seminary is committed to a policy of inclusion in its academic life and mission. All members of the community are expected to communicate in language that reflects the equality of genders, openness to diverse cultural and theological perspectives, and sensitivity to one another’s images of God.
5) **Extensions:** Extensions for papers will be given for illnesses or family emergencies only in consultation with the instructor.

- **Selected Bibliography:**
The books enlisted here are by no means exhaustive of all the literature on the subject of the course 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.


Noble, Samuel and Alexander Treiger (eds.), *The Orthodox Church in the Arab World, 700-1700, An Anthology of Sources*, DeKalb, IL: NIU, 2014.


