

CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS: CONFLICT VS. DIALOGUE

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Course Description

Christians and Muslims have been living together—and actively engaged with each other—for over 1400 years. Despite sharing common beliefs such as faith in one Creator, Jesus as the Messiah, and the Day of Judgment, relations between these two communities have often (though not always) been marked by conflict and confrontation. The course examines this often-troubled history of Christian-Muslim dialogue to illuminate the two communities' current relationship, which is marked by anxiety, rage, and hostility that wounds everyone.

¹ In consultation with the author, this syllabus has been edited for length, removing details particular to the author's context such as office hours and location, absence policies, honor codes, and other instructor-specific (or institution-specific) details.

Course Objectives

As a result of this course, students will be able to:

- ▶ Explain the history, basic beliefs, rituals, scriptures and communal dynamics of Christianity and of Islam, and to clearly articulate their major similarities and differences,
- ▶ Have knowledge about the dynamics, opportunities, risks, and prospects of interfaith/interreligious dialogue in general in the past and present as well as prospects for the future,
- ▶ Describe past and present conflicts and tensions, the causes and results of those conflicts, and the on-going prospects of those conflicts by and for Christians and Muslims,
- ▶ Detail past and present attempts among Christians and Muslims to achieve mutual understandings through education, their respective spiritualities, contact and interfaith dialogue both on international, national and local levels, and
- ▶ Formulate his/her own views on the positive and negative prospects for the relationships among Christians and Muslims as well as for the Christian and Muslim World.

Required Texts

- ▶ Hussain, Amir. *Oil and Water: Two Faiths One God*. Canada: Wood Lake Publishing, 2006, ISBN 9781896836829.
- ▶ Ayoub, Mahmoud /ed. by Irfan A. Omar. *A Muslim View of Christianity: Essays on Dialogue*. New York: Orbis Books, 2007, ISBN: 9781570756900.
- ▶ Michel, Thomas S.J. /ed. by Irfan A. Omar. *A Christian View of Islam: Essays on Dialogue*. New York: Orbis Books, 2010, ISBN: 9781570758607.

Additional Readings Available On the Internet

- ▶ Vatican II document, [Nostra Aetate](#).
- ▶ [A Common Word Between Us and You](#).
- ▶ Imam A. Rashied Omar, "[Islam and Violence](#)," accessed from the World Council of Churches (WCC) website.

Notable Course Policies

Religious Holidays: If you will be observing any religious holiday this semester which may prevent you from attending a regularly scheduled class or interfere with fulfilling any course requirement, your instructor will offer you an opportunity to make up the class or course requirement, if, of course, you make arrangements in advance by informing your instructor.

Controversial Subject Matter: In this class, we will be discussing subject matter that some students may consider controversial. Some students may find some of the readings and/or comments in class very challenging. Our purpose in this class is to explore this subject matter deeply and consider multiple perspectives and arguments. Students are expected to listen to the instructor and to one another respectfully, but of course are free to disagree, respectfully, with views expressed in class or readings.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

1. Group Presentation

Students will facilitate class participation and discussion with a presentation comparing Christian and Islamic perspectives on a particular topic (for example, sacrifice, martyrdom, salvation, and so on). Each group will consist of 2-3 students. The group members will have the same grade. The groups and the presentation topics will be determined in the second week of class. (The group may choose another relevant topic in consultation with the instructor) Presentations will be about 25-30 minutes long including a Q/A session. The presentations must have a bibliography of at least 3 books and 3 academic articles, and must end with at least 3 discussion questions for the class. The purpose of the presentation is to share the students' research for the benefit of the other students. Students are more than welcome to incorporate media such as pictures, short clips, or movies in their presentation.

The presentations will be graded by the following criteria:

- ▶ The accuracy and variety of the sources,
- ▶ The level of comprehension and analysis of the topic,
- ▶ The level of connection with the audience, and
- ▶ The relevancy of discussion questions and the quality of the presentation.

2. Response Paper

Students will write a response paper to the weekly questions to facilitate class participation and discussion. The papers must be submitted to eLearning (the course website) 24 hours before the next class meeting.

The grading will be determined on the basis of 1) timely submission; 2) analytical depth of the response to the question; and 3) evidence of engagement with the readings. Your response papers need to:

- ▶ Answer the question based on the readings (if applicable),
- ▶ Clearly refer to the text(s) (if applicable),
- ▶ Include your original, substantive commentary. This could be a question, analogy, example, or criticism. be comprehensive yet concise (your response should be at least 500 words), and
- ▶ Be well written and free of grammatical and typographical errors.

3. Interview/Social Experiment

Each student has to conduct 2 sets of interviews: with *minimum of 3 Christians AND minimum of 3 Muslims outside of this class*. Interviewees may be a friend, family member, co-worker, and so on. The questionnaire will be provided by the professor. After receiving all the answers, the student needs to write a 3-4 page reflection paper, answering the following questions: As a student taking this comparative course, what did you think about the answers?, How do you compare Muslims and Christian answers?, What additional questions can be asked?, and so on. The typed – verbatim – answers along with your reflection must be submitted to eLearning on the due date indicated below.

Centers That Might Host Visitors for Interviews:

American Albanian Islamic Center Of Wisconsin
6001 88th Ave
Kenosha, WI 53142
Tel: (262) 654-0575
Fax: (262) 313-0144
Web: www.aaicw.org
Email: global32@aol.com

Niagara Foundation Milwaukee Office
6011 S 27th Street
Greenfield, WI 53221
Phone: (414) 325-1355
Email: onur@niagarafoundation.org

4. Book Review

In addition to the textbooks and other assigned readings each student will read an additional book (from a pre-selected list chosen by the instructor) and submit a 5-7 page book review. Only one student will be permitted to review any one book. Written book reviews must be submitted to eLearning on the due date indicated below.

Guidelines for Book Review and Paper

- ▶ **Book Review Objectives:** An analytic review of a book is more than a summary; it should evaluate the work in terms of its theoretical strengths and weaknesses, methodology, style and readability, and accuracy. A useful review is also one that places the text in the context of the available literature and provides the reader with references to other significant texts relevant to the issue. You have a responsibility to be candid and honest, but neither a blanket dismissal nor an uncritical acceptance should be the goal. Criticism should be elaborated with specific reasons given, so both the author and readers can evaluate the basis of the criticism. You should make no assumptions about the beliefs or commitments of any reader, should contain nothing that might imply that one individual is superior to another on the grounds of race, sex, ethnicity, language, culture or any other characteristic, and should use inclusive language throughout the review.
- ▶ **Book Review Process:** As you read the text, you should answer and consider the relevance of the following general questions:
 - What is the specific topic of the book, and its chapters? Citing the author's own description is a good way to orient the reader. What are the major issues, time period(s) covered, discipline of the author, and theoretical orientation of the narrative?
 - Who is the primary audience of the book? How effective is the communication of the information to a general reader? How might the book be useful as a textbook?
 - How effective is the author in fulfilling the stated goals throughout the text?

- What does the text contribute to the existing literature on the subject? Is it likely to be a standard reference in the future? Are there sources that the author could have usefully consulted?
- How are the materials used to demonstrate and argue the thesis of the text? Here it would be useful to quote specific passages to indicate the author's writing style and tone.
- Are there alternative ways of arguing from the same material? Does the author show awareness of these?
- What theoretical or methodological issues and topics for further discussion does the work raise?
- What are your own reactions and considered opinions regarding the work and how did you come to these?

COURSE SCHEDULE

Class meets once per week. This schedule will be subject to modification as necessary. I reserve the right to make changes in the course outline, syllabus, examinations and assignments which are compatible with the aims of this course.

Week 1

Topics:

- ▶ Introduction, Syllabus, and Things to Know
- ▶ What is Islam & Who are the Muslims?

Assignments:

- ▶ Read: Hussain, p. 19-48
- ▶ Watch: Documentary, *Reel Bad Arabs*

Week 2

Topics:

- ▶ Christianity and the Church
- ▶ Surrender to God: Muslim Faith and Life

Assignments:

- ▶ Read: (Bible) The Letter to the Philippians and the Letter of James
- ▶ Read: Hussain, p. 87-112

Week 3

Topics:

- ▶ Jesus
- ▶ Muhammad: the Beloved Prophet

Assignments:

- ▶ Read: (Bible) The Gospel of Mark and the Gospel of John
- ▶ Read: Hussain, p. 49-67

Week 4

Topics:

- ▶ The Bible
- ▶ The Qur'an: The Ultimate Revelation

Assignments:

- ▶ Read: *Bible and Quran in Dialogue*, PDF Document
- ▶ Read: Hussain, p. 69-86
- ▶ Question #1: What is the core of Islam? What makes someone a Muslim and how is it similar to and/or different with the practice of Christianity?

Week 5

Topics:

- ▶ Roots of Christian-Muslim Conflict
- ▶ Social and Religious Factors Affecting Christian-Muslim Relations

Assignments:

- ▶ Read: Ayoub, p. 42-61
- ▶ Read: Michel, p. 53-68
- ▶ Presentation # 1: Signs, Symbols and Sacred Numbers
- ▶ Question #2: How are Christianity and Islam being presented today in books and media? Are there critical issues especially pertaining to Islam and Muslims today?

Week 6

Topics:

- ▶ From Tolerance to Dialogue
- ▶ Interfaith Dialogue

Assignments:

- ▶ Read: Hussain, p. 177-198
- ▶ Read: Michel, Forward & p. 1-6
- ▶ Presentation #2: Art, Architecture and Music
- ▶ Question #3: How do you define mission? How are you to think on the subjects of mission, proselytism and apostasy? How fundamental is the concept of mission to Christianity and Islam? Explain.

Week 7

Topics:

- ▶ Approaches to Dialogue
- ▶ The Necessity for Interreligious Dialogue

Assignments:

- ▶ Read: Michel, p. 29-49
- ▶ Read: Ayoub, p. 1-16 and 64-69
- ▶ Presentation #3: Religious Holidays and Festivals
- ▶ Interview Assignment Due

Week 8

Topics:

- ▶ Christian and Islamic Perspectives on Dialogue
- ▶ Christian-Muslim Relations in the Modern World

Assignments:

- ▶ Read: Michel, p. 9-28
- ▶ Read: Ayoub, p. 17-41 and p. 187-231
- ▶ Read: *Nostra Aetate* and *A Common Word Between Us And You* (both online)
- ▶ Question #4: What are some of the central texts in Christianity and Islam that seem to require interreligious dialogue? Give specific examples.
- ▶ Presentation # 4: Effects of Refugee Crises on Christian-Muslim Relations

Week 9

Topic: Fundamentalism and Violence

Assignments:

- ▶ Read: Michel, p. 90-107 and 149-155
- ▶ Read: Hussain, p. 115-140
- ▶ Question #5: Does a secular state guarantee human rights more so than a state with religious basis? Explain.
- ▶ Presentation #5: The Place of Politics

Week 10

Topic: Redemption, Forgiveness, and Martyrdom

Assignments:

- ▶ Read: Michel, p. 108-119
- ▶ Read: Ayoub, p. 80-97
- ▶ Question #6: What are the major differences and similarities between Christianity and Islam discussed in today's readings?
- ▶ Presentation #6: Sin, Crime and Punishment

Week 11

Topic: Jesus and Crucifixion

Assignments:

- ▶ Read: Ayoub, p. 111-175
- ▶ Presentation #7: The End of the World and Afterlife
- ▶ Presentation #8: The Concept of Sacrifice

Week 12

No Class, Fall Recess

Week 13

Topic: Spirituality and Holiness

Assignments:

- ▶ Read: Michel, p. 174-192
- ▶ Read: Ayoub, p. 73-79
- ▶ Read: Hussain, p. 161-176
- ▶ Question #7: Our understanding of our place in nature influences our behavior. What is the role of religion in creating the necessary consciousness of harmony between humanity and nature?
- ▶ Presentation 9: Family, Marriage and Divorce

Week 14

Topic: Paths of Coexistence in a Shared Future

Assignments:

- ▶ Read: Hussain, p. 199-216
- ▶ Presentation #10: A presentation of the Biblical and Quranic versions of Abraham
- ▶ Book Review Assignment Due