

LITERATURES OF FAITH: CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM

Dr. Marion H. Larson, Bethel University (St. Paul, MN)
mlarson@bethel.edu

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Course Description

This course compares important literary works from both the Christian and Islamic worlds from the Middle Ages to the present, and emphasizes literary and historical study, as well as vigorous dialogue and inquiry, as vital tools for understanding present-day Christian and Muslim cultures. A significant cross-cultural experience, involving interaction with Muslim communities, is required.

Students experience an off-campus person-to-person intercultural engagement of at least 25 hours with a specific cultural group that supports the development of awareness of the student's own culture and the culture with which the student is interacting. Students develop an increased understanding of the complexity and tension cultural difference has on interaction with others. This experience places students in an experiential learning environment (domestic or abroad) that included faculty guided pre-experience preparation and post-experience processing.

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 Goals

- ▶ Gain knowledge of selected literary works from the Islamic world,
- ▶ Consider points of connection and contrast between Christian and Muslim faith and practice,
- ▶ Gain appreciative knowledge of Islam through assigned readings, class discussions, and out-of-class interfaith engagement,
- ▶ Develop skills and attitudes conducive to constructive interfaith engagement, and
- ▶ Articulate a personal theology of interfaith engagement.

Required Texts

- ▶ Barks, Coleman, translator. *The Essential Rumi*. HarperOne: 2004.
- ▶ Birkel, Michael. *Qur'an in Conversation*. Baylor: 2014.
- ▶ Sells, Michael, translator. *Approaching the Qur'an: The Early Revelations, 2nd ed.* White Cloud: 2007.
- ▶ Volf, Miroslav. *Allah: A Christian Response*. HarperOne: 2011.
- ▶ Wilson, G. Willow. *The Butterfly Mosque*. Grove: 2010.
- ▶ Excerpts from other short readings will be made available throughout the semester in class.

Course Assignments

Experiential learning

- ▶ At least 25 hours, excluding travel time. I'll make several options available so you can plan accordingly.
- ▶ Intercultural interaction log: Fill out the form I'll provide that indicates your intercultural interaction hours and activities.
- ▶ For each interaction session: Reflect briefly (about one page) on the session so that you'll remember your initial thoughts, questions, reactions. This will be a journal of sorts that helps to show me that you're thinking about your experience—and it will also provide you with some initial material to draw upon for your final course synthesis paper.

Prepared Participation

This grade category includes the sort of things you'd expect: attendance, respectful and attentive interaction with others in class, and respectful and attentive interaction with assigned readings. Also get into the habit of coming to class prepared to draw our attention to particular parts of that day's reading that you liked, that seemed important, or that you had questions about.

Reading Reflections

Each day that reading is assigned, come to class with a written reading reflection (about 250-300 words) that touches on one or both of the following:

- ▶ **Connecting:** What did you learn about Islam or about Muslims that you found admirable? Where did you find similarity and feel a sense of connection with Islam or with particular Muslims? What positive things could people of other faith traditions learn from Muslims?
- ▶ **Questioning:** What did you learn about Islam or about Muslims that you found troubling or confusing? Where did you feel a sense of distance between your own beliefs and Islam? What are you still unsure about?

Synthesis Paper

This is the place to pull together your thinking and learning this semester. To do so, draw upon your experiential learning, your own thinking, your reading reflections, and at least five academically-appropriate sources (two of which can come from course material). *I'd estimate that strong papers will be at least 1500 words total.*

Your paper will have three parts. Please use each heading to label that section of your paper.

- ▶ **Connecting:** What did you learn about Islam or about Muslims that you found admirable? Where did you find similarity and feel a sense of connection with Islam or with particular Muslims? What positive things could people of other faith traditions learn from Muslims? (at least 500 words)
- ▶ **Questioning:** What did you learn about Islam or about Muslims that you found troubling or confusing? Where did you feel a sense of distance between your own beliefs and Islam? What are you still unsure about? (at least 500 words)
- ▶ **Moving forward:** How would you articulate your own "theology of interfaith engagement"? What from your beliefs helps to explain why and how you interact with people from other faiths? (Use your interaction with Islam and with Muslims, both over the course of this semester and possibly looking ahead to the future, to help illustrate the general principles that you articulate.) (at least 500 words)

COURSE SCHEDULE

Class meets twice per week. Notice that I've scheduled in five "Reflection and Response Days." These are days when we can step back and reflect together on readings, experiential learning interactions, course-related news items, or questions that have accumulated since the previous Reflection and Response Day. We will be doing important and sometimes challenging thinking together this semester; these days will help give us additional space for that.

Week 1

Thursday: Getting Started, Anticipations and Anxieties

Week 2

Tuesday: Sells and Volf

- ▶ Read: *Approaching* (Sells 1-31, 35-40); *Allah* (Volf 1-39)
- ▶ Write: Reading Reflection
- ▶ In class: Listen to *Approaching* (161-171)

Thursday: Sells, Birkel, Rumi

- ▶ Read before class: *Approaching* (Sells 42-63); *Conversation* (Birkel 5-13; 34-40)
- ▶ Write: Reading Reflection
- ▶ In class: Listen to *Approaching* (172-179)

Week 3

Tuesday: Volf

- ▶ Read before class: *Allah* (Volf 40-76)
- ▶ Write: Reading Reflection
- ▶ In class: Guest speaker, Dr. Amy Poppinga

Thursday: Reflection and Response Day

Week 4

Tuesday: Sells and Birkel

- ▶ Read before class: *Approaching* (Sells 64-91); *Conversation* (Birkel 198-206)
- ▶ Write: Reading Reflection
- ▶ In class: Listen to *Approaching* (180-4)

Thursday: Sells and Birkel

- ▶ Read before class: *Approaching* (Sells 92-113); *Conversation* (Birkel 216-230)
- ▶ Write: Reading Reflection
- ▶ In class: Listen to *Approaching* (186-195)

Week 5

Tuesday: Sells

- ▶ Read before class: *Approaching* (Sells 114-141)
- ▶ Write: Reading Reflection
- ▶ In class: Watch *Koran by Heart*

Thursday: Reflection and Response Day

Week 6

Tuesday: Sells and Birkel

- ▶ Read before class: *Approaching* (Sells 145-157); *Conversation* (Birkel 148-161; 181-198)
- ▶ Write: Reading Reflection

Thursday: No Class, Spring Break

Week 7

Tuesday: No Class, Spring Break

Thursday: No Class, Spring Break

Week 8

Tuesday: Rumi

- ▶ In class: Watch *Inside Mecca*

Thursday: Wilson

- ▶ *Butterfly Mosque* (Wilson 1-59)
- ▶ Write: Reading Reflection

Week 9

Tuesday: Wilson and Rumi

- ▶ *Butterfly Mosque* (Wilson 60-141)
- ▶ Write: Reading Reflection

Thursday: Wilson

- ▶ *Butterfly Mosque* (Wilson 142-212)
- ▶ Write: Reading Reflection
- ▶ In class: Watch *30 Days*

Week 10

Tuesday: Wilson and Rumi

- ▶ *Butterfly Mosque* (Wilson 213-304)
- ▶ Write: Reading Reflection

Thursday: Reflection and Response Day

Week 11

Tuesday: Birkel and Sells

- ▶ Read before class: *Conversation* (Birkel 14-32, 40-48); *Approaching* (Sells 145-157)
- ▶ Write: Reading Reflection

Thursday: No Class

Week 12

Tuesday: In class, Watch *Between Allah and Me (and Everyone Else)*

Thursday: Volf and Rumi

- ▶ Read before class: *Allah* (Volf 127-218)
- ▶ Write: Reading Reflection

Week 13

Tuesday: Birkel

- ▶ Read before class: *Conversation* (Birkel 48-75; 161-180)
- ▶ Write: Reading Reflection

Thursday: Reflection and Response Day

Week 14

Tuesday: Birkel and Volf

- ▶ Read before class: *Conversation* (Birkel 115-145); *Allah* (Volf 219-262)
- ▶ Write: Reading Reflection

Thursday: Volf and Rumi

- ▶ Read before class: *Allah* (Volf 79-124)
- ▶ Write: Reading Reflection

Week 15

Tuesday:

- ▶ Read before class: *Conversation* (Birkel 77-114)
- ▶ Write: Reading Reflection

Thursday: Reflection and Response Day

Week 16

Tuesday: No class. Paper Conferences

Thursday: Sharing insights

Week 17

Tuesday: Final Exam

Thursday:

- ▶ Synthesizing paper due
- ▶ Watch *Timbuktu*