355-01 Introduction to Islam

Waleed El-Ansary

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THEO 355: Introduction to Islam

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Spring 2014
TR 2:30-3:45
Building-room no. Logan 100
Office hours: TR 1:00-2:00

Course Description:

This course examines the emergence and development of Islam as both a religion and a tradition. It discusses the basic Islamic beliefs and practices and introduces the essential sources of the Islamic faith, the Qur’an, the hadith, and the traditions (sunnah) of the Prophet Muhammad, as well as the relation of Islam to other religions, particularly Judaism and Christianity. It will analyze the development of the Islamic intellectual tradition including Islamic law (Sharī’ah), Sufism, theology (kalām), philosophy, arts and sciences, and shall introduce and study the most important representatives of these sciences from the founders of the four Sunni schools as well as the Shi’ī school of law, and from Sufis to Muslim philosophers, theologians, and scientists.

The course also reviews the early history of Islam as it relates to the establishment and consolidation of Sunni Islam and the rise of early theological currents and political factions including the Shi’ītes and the Kharijites. It discusses the historical background of major Muslim dynasties from the Umayyads and the Abbasids to the Safavids and the Ottomans with particular emphasis on theological, legal, and intellectual developments. Finally, to understand the current situation in the Muslim world, the course examines Islam in modern times. It introduces modern movements such as Pan-Islamism, Islamic modernism, and fundamentalism, with special attention to the role of European colonization and ascendance as well as the challenges of nationalism and modernism.

Learning Objectives:

Students who successfully complete this course should be able to:

- Intelligently discuss basic Islamic beliefs and practices
- Cogently demonstrate understanding of the essential sources of Islamic faith
- Clearly discuss the key areas of Islamic intellectual tradition in the context of their historical development
- Demonstrate a thoughtful contextualized understanding of modern Islamic movements
Course Requirements:
Midterm 30%
Final 40%
Paper 30%

The mid-term and final exams will consist of essay questions in which there is a range of choice, e.g. choose three of four questions.

Undergraduate students are expected to write a term paper of ten pages on a subject of their choice which must be approved by the instructor in advance of its completion. Graduate students must write a research paper of some twenty five pages on a subject of their choice which they must treat in depth.

Required Reading:

1. *Islam and the Destiny of Man* by Gai Eaton (Albany, The State University of New York Press, 1977), for the relationship of European and Christian civilization to the Islamic world, as well as a good reader for early Islamic history and for the larger social questions in the religion.
2. *Islam: The Straight Path* by John Esposito (Oxford University Press, 1997), for an overall presentation of Islamic history more weighted to political history.
4. *Ideals and Realities of Islam* by Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Chicago, Kazi Publications, 1989), which deals effectively with the spiritual and temporal significance of the Qurʾān, hadīth, and Sufism. Also valuable for its discussion of Shiʿism.

Recommended Reading:

1. *Approaching the Qurʾān* by Michael Sells (Ashland, White Cloud Press, 2006), for a poetical translation of the early Meccan chapters capturing some of their power in Arabic with commentaries drawn from traditional sources and a CD with leading Qurʾānic reciters.
2. *Islamic Life and Thought* by Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Chicago, Kazi Publications, 2001), for its discussion of the intellectual life of Islam, particularly sciences and philosophy.
Course Outline:

1. Introduction - methods and approaches to the study of Islam - the Islamic world, historic and present geography

2. The Islamic religion and its principles
   READINGS: Nasr, *Heart of Islam*, pp. 1-54, 57-112, and 159-199;
   Murata & Chittick, pp. 3-27 and 37-131.

3. Early history of Islam and its expansion

4. The twin sources of Islam: the Qur’ān and hadīth

5. Islamic Law: the Sharī‘ah, its injunctions, and schools of law
   READINGS: Nasr, *Ideals and Realities*, pp. 85-113 and 163-180; *Heart of Islam*,
   pp. 115-156; *Islamic Life and Thought*, pp. 24-30.

6. The Spiritual Path: Sufism (tasawwuf)
   READINGS: Nasr, *Ideals and Realities*, pp. 115-140; *Islamic Life and Thought*,

7. Islamic Theology (kalām)
   READINGS: Murata & Chittick, pp. 236-246; Nasr, *Islamic Life and Thought*,
   pp. 55-79.

8. Islamic Philosophy
   READINGS: Murata & Chittick, pp. 247-250; Nasr, *Islamic Life and Thought*,
   pp. 145-186.

9. The sense of beauty: principles and applications of Islamic Art
   READINGS: Nasr, *Heart of Islam*, pp. 203-236; Eaton, pp. 203-222; Murata &
   Chittick, pp. 298-303.

10. Study of the book of nature: Islamic Science and its historical achievements

11. Islamic Political Thought
    READINGS: Eaton, pp. 115-157; Esposito, pp. 144-160; Nasr, *Heart of Islam*,
            pp. 239-272.

12. Shi‘ism: its doctrines, history, and branches
13. Islam and the West

14. The dawn of a new era: Islam in the modern world - 18th century to the present -
   The present situation: contemporary schools of thought in the Islamic world

15. Conclusion