INTRODUCTION TO ISLAMIC THEOLOGY (TH-553)

This course explores the content and structure of Islamic belief, as elaborated by Muslim classical thinkers (7th-15th centuries), in relation to a selection of representative texts. The Introduction questions the nature and modalities of theology in Islam. The History studies the origins and growth of the science of Kalâm in its interaction with the other major religious disciplines of Sunnism -- exegesis, Prophetic tradition, jurisprudence, sects, philosophy (falsafa) and Sufism. The Creed is then analyzed more theoretically in its major components: the lordship and divinity of God, the mediation of the Messenger, the servitude and ethics of the believers. Society offers a last avenue for enquiry, in so far as it was shaped by particular theological doctrines. The Way/Law (shari‘a), power, love, innovation, and alterity -- religious or other -- are among the topics envisaged. No knowledge of Arabic is required for this course.

Class will meet: Wednesdays 7-9:30 p.m., September 15 - December 15.

Course Objectives

1) Students should be able to find their way around in the major reference works on Islamic theology.
2) They are expected to gain an acquaintance with the most important classical definitions of the Islamic Creed (‘aqīda): divinity and prophethood, divine attributes and justice, Sunnism versus Shi‘ism, Ash‘arism versus Mu‘tazilism and Hanbalism, sects and other religions…
3) They should have some general accurate knowledge of the ways classical kalâm developed, the historical and ideological contexts in which it evolved, its key figures and the main doctrines, schools or movements it crystallized into.
4) In reference to the classical period, they should also be able to take an informed view of the modern theological developments and debates in the Muslim world, as well as of contemporary positions of Islam towards other world religions.

Course Requirements

1) It is strongly recommended that the student arrive at the first class already having a general knowledge about the religion of Islam, as well as about the history and geography of Muslim peoples.
2) 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. Some knowledge of the general references and detailed knowledge of the assigned readings are essential.
3) A mid-term essay, a final research paper and a viva voce, as described below.
The final grade will be based upon the following:

1) Class participation (25%).
2) A mid-term essay (7 pages)* on a topic relating to the history of classical Islamic theology. The topic should be chosen by the end of class V in consultation with the Professor (20%).
3) A final research paper of a least ten pages* on a doctrinal debate or societal aspect of classical Islamic theology. The topic should be chosen by the end of class VIII in consultation with the Professor. This paper will be due by the end of the week of class XII (30%).
4) A final viva voce exam discussing the course, with an emphasis on the mid-term essay and the final research paper submitted (25%).

* All written work is to conform to the seminary writing guidelines, which can be found online at: http://www.hartsem.edu/student/forms/researchpaperguide.pdf. The Hartford Seminary Grading Guidelines will be the standard of evaluation for work in the course.

Class Schedule

I. September 15. Introduction: Kalâm and Islamic theology
   General reference:
   Reading Assignments:
   (can be read on: www.muslimphilosophy.com/it/index.html)

II. September 22. History: the early debates and the establishment of the religion
   General reference:
   Reading Assignment:

III. September 29. History: the construction of orthodoxy
   General reference:
   Reading Assignment:
IV. October 6. History: philosophical challenges

General reference:
IBN ṬUFAYL (d. 1185), *Hayy ibn Yaqzân*: a philosophical tale translated with introd. and notes, by Lenn Evan GOODMAN (New York: Twayne Publishers [1972]).

Reading Assignment:
(can be read on: www.muslimphilosophy.com/it/index.html.)

V. October 13. History: mystical alternatives

General reference:

Reading Assignment:

VI. October 27. History: failure and reformism

General reference:

Reading Assignment:

VII. November 3. Creed: Tawhîd or the oneness, lordship and divinity of God

General references:


Reading Assignment:

VIII. November 10. Creed: Nubuwwât or Prophethood

General reference:

Reading Assignment:
IX. November 17. **Creed:** ‘Ubûdiyya or servanthood and praxis mystica

**General reference:**


**Reading Assignment:**


(Nov. 22-26: Reading week)

X. December 1. **Society:** Sharî’a or a way/law of loving obedience

**General reference:**


**Reading Assignments:**


**Reading Assignment:**


XI. December 8. **Society:** God’s multiple paths and ways

**General reference:**


**Reading Assignment:**


XII. December 15. **Society:** ‘Adl or justice among humans

**General reference:**


**Reading Assignment:**