

## Major Themes in the Qur'an (Rel. 115): Fall 2012

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**Office Hours:** Tuesday 11am-12pm, Wednesday 4pm-5pm and by appointment.

**Lectures:** MW 8:55am- 10:05am, Main St. Campus, Comenius Hall, 114.

### **Course Description:**

- The course outlines three major themes related to the Qur'an:

(i) *The basic structure of Qur'anic worldview:* In the first part of the course, the main question is as follows: What are the major themes of the Qur'an? To address this question, we discuss Qur'anic views of God, Human being, the Muslim Community, the Structure of the World as human beings' home, and Etico-Religious concepts. We particularly emphasis on three types of relations between God and human being as conceived in the Qur'an: Ontological relation, Communicative relation, and Ethical relation.

(ii) *Interpreting the Qur'an:* In the second part of the course, the main question is as follows: How should one understand and interpret the Qur'an? To address this question, we discuss three major approaches in the tradition of Qur'anic exegesis: Textualism, Semi-textualism, and Contextualism.

(iii) *Contemporary Challenges:* The Qur'an has been facing some serious challenges in the modern era. In this course, we briefly address two of those major challenges: (i) The Feminist Challenges, i.e., the status of women in the Qur'an, and the whole issues regarding women's rights in Islam; (ii) the issue of violence and more specifically, the whole debates on the concept of *Jihad* in the Qur'an.

For each theme, we closely examine the Qur'an itself to have a first hand experience of the language and content of the Text.

### **Course Objectives:**

- To develop a substantial understanding of the text of the Qur'an, including its form, style, and content.
- To develop skills of textual analysis through close reading and the comparison of texts.
- To exercise scholarly fairness, sympathy, and tolerance toward different cultures and world views, and expand our intellectual horizon.
- To develop expository writing skills.
- In a class of this nature, class members will naturally come with or develop a wide variety of opinions about the topics covered. But the goal of this course is not to agree and to adopt a single opinion concerning the interpretation of a particular text; rather, the goal is to back up or criticize the opinions put forward in a rational manner, and to reveal the complexity of cultural phenomena, particularly, in the realm of religion.
- To have a better understanding of the impact of the Qur'an on Muslims' contemporary lives.

### **Required Texts:**

- *God and Man in the Qur'an (Semantics of the Qur'anic Wltanschauung)*, Toshihiko Izutsu. Islamic Book Trust, Kuala Lumpur, 2002. ISBN: 983-9154-38-9
- *The Qur'an (An Introduction)*, Abdullah Saeed, Routledge, 2008. ISBN: 978-0-42125-6.
- *The Qur'an, A New Translation* by M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, Oxford University Press, 2008. ISBN: 978-0-19-953595-8.

These books are available at Moravian College Book Store.

- Some additional articles would also be available during the course on the Blackboard. (Please make sure you have access to Blackboard and the shell designed for this course.)
- To search the content of the Qur'an, you may use the search engine provided by the following websites:  
([www.tanzil.info](http://www.tanzil.info)) or (<http://www.islamicity.com/mosque/quran/>)

For further reading on the Qur'an, the following book is recommended:

**Note:** You will find that you get the most out of the course if you read each assignment before lecture and then re-read the assignment after the lecture.

### **Lecture attendance:**

It is not possible to perform well in the course without attending lecture regularly. We will cover substantial amounts of material in lecture not included anywhere in the readings. It is highly unlikely that you will learn this material adequately by, e.g., borrowing your friend's lecture notes. You have two class sessions you can miss with no questions asked. Beyond those two class sessions, any further missed classes without a really good excuse (involving a note from your doctor, psychiatrist, parole officer, etc.) will cost you 2% of your final grade.

### **Academic honesty:**

Students are required to honor academic integrity. The course imposes the application of Moravian College's Academic Honesty Policy. The policy is to be found at Moravian College's *Student Handbook*.

### **Course requirements:**

- A regular final exam, scheduled for **Monday, December 10, 2012 at 1:30pm**, plus a midterm (tentatively scheduled for **Wednesday, October 3, 2012**). You will receive a Study Guide for the Midterm and Final Exams prior to the exams to know what kind of questions you should expect on the Midterm and Final Exams. Make up final exam will be administered only under the most extraordinary of circumstances, and only in light of appropriate supporting documents.
- One paper (700-1500 words). On **October 24**, the paper topic will be posted on Blackboard. The paper due is **November 7**. Paper should be typed, double spaced, and spell-checked. You are responsible to submit a hard copy of your paper. In some exceptional cases, you may be allowed to submit your paper through email. If so, you must receive a confirmation email from me, otherwise, you must assume that I have not received your paper. If the paper is turned in late without prior permission, the grade will be adjusted downwards by a third of a grade for each day the paper is late (e.g., A to A-, A- to B+, B+ to B, etc.). It is always helpful to discuss the draft of your paper with your friends, roommates, or classmates so as to solicit feedback.

- You will be required to write weekly short paragraphs (not more than two pages) consist of your critical evaluation of the material to be discussed in the class. In the paragraphs, you should concentrate on a specific concept, theme or question. You are required to complete 10 assignments of this sort by the end of the semester, that is, you have the option of choosing 10 out of roughly 12 assignments I am to assign throughout the semester. Every week, by the end of our Wednesday class, the assignments should be submitted. (There would be no assignment due on Wednesday August 29.)

**Important note:** *By the end of the semester, all four above-mentioned requirements must be completed in order to pass the course. In other words, if you miss at least one of the above requirements, we will fail the course automatically.*

**Grading:**

Final Exam: 30% - Midterm Exam: 30%, Paper: 20% -Weekly reflecting papers: 20%.

The grading scale is as follows:

Points	Grade	4-point conversion
95-100	A	4
90-95	A-	3.7
87-90	B+	3.3
84-87	B	3
80-84	B-	2.7
77-80	C+	2.3
74-77	C	2
70-74	C-	1.7
67-70	D+	1.3
64-67	D	1
60-64	D-	0.7
0-60	F	0

## **Tentative Lecture Schedule:**

### **I. Preliminary Remarks:**

August 27, 29.

**(1) What is “Scripture”? The Qur’an as a Scripture**

**(2) Phenomenology as a method.**

#### **Readings:**

- “The True Meaning of Scripture: The Qur’an as an Example”, From: *What is Scripture?*, by Wilfred Cantwell Smith, (will be available on Blackboard).
- “Odysseus’ Scar”, Erich Auerbach, (will be posted on Blackboard).
- “Phenomenology of Religion”, by Douglas Allen, from *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*, Ch. 10, pp. 182-207 (will be available on Blackboard).

### **II. The Context of the Qur’anic Revelation:**

September 5, 10

**(1) Historical and Cultural Context**

**(2) The Concept of Revelation in Pre- and Islamic Period**

#### **Readings:**

- *The Qur’an (An Introduction)*, Chs. 1&2: “The Qur’an in its Context”, and “Revelation and the Qur’an”, pp. 1-20& 21-36.
- “The historical Context”, by Fred M. Donner, from *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur’an*, pp. 23-39. (Will be available on Blackboard).
- The Movie

### **III. The External Structure of the Qur’an:**

September 12, 17, 19.

**(1) The Structure of the Qur’an as a message**

**(2) The External Structure of the Qur’an as a text: (i) Order and Divisions of the Text; (ii) The composition of the Qur’an as a book; (iii) The Doctrine of inimitability of the Qur’an. (iv) The Importance of the Idea of “illiteracy” of the Prophet Muhammad.**

#### **Readings:**

- *The Qur’an (An Introduction)*, Ch. 3, “The Qur’an as scripture”, pp.37-59.
- “Introducing”, by Tamara Sonn, From *The Blackwell Companion to The Qur’an*, Ch. 1, pp.3-17 (will be available on Blackboard).
- “The Creation of a fixed text”, by Claude Gilliot, from *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur’an*, Ch. 2, pp.41-58.
- “Alternative accounts of the Qur’an formation”, by Harald Motzki, from *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur’an*, Ch. 3, pp. 59-75.

### **IV. The Internal Structure of the Qur’an (1):**

September 24, 26, October 1.

**The Basic Structure of the Qur’anic Worldview: (i) God and Man, (ii) The Muslim Community, (iii) The Unseen and the Visible, (iv) The Present World and the Hereafter, (v) Eschatological Concepts.**

**(1) Allah: The Religio-Historical Background of the Concept Allah.**

#### **Readings:**

- *God and Man in the Qur'an*, Chs. 3 & 4: "The Basic Structure of Qur'anic Weltanschauung", pp. 74-99, and "Allah", pp. 100-126.
- "God", by Andrew Rippin, in *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'an*, Ch. 14, pp.223-233 (will be available on Blackboard).
- *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, By Fazlur Rahman, Ch. 4 pp.65-79, and Ch.6, pp.106-120 (will be available on Blackboard).
- "The Qur'an on the End of This World and Life in the Hereafter", By Walter Wagner, in *Opening the Qur'an*, Ch. 9, pp.231-254 (will be available on Blackboard).

### **Midterm Exam: October 3.**

#### **V. The Internal Structure of the Qur'an (2):**

October 10, 15, 17, 22, 24, 29.

- **The Relation between God and Man: (i) The Ontological Relation, (ii) The Communicative Relation, (iii) The Ethical Relation.**
- **The Day of Judgment**

#### **Readings:**

- *God and Man in the Qur'an*, Ch. 5 (pp.127-141, Ch. 6&7 (pp.142-215), and Ch.9 (pp. 254- 269).

#### **VI. Ethical Teachings:**

October 31, November 5, 7, 12.

- (1) **From tribal code to Islamic ethics: (i) The Pessimistic Conception of the Early Life, (ii) The Spirit of Tribal Solidarity, (iii) The Islamization of Old Arab Virtues, i.e., Generosity, Courage, Loyalty, Veracity, and Patience.**
- (2) **The Basic Moral Dichotomy: (i) The Companions of Paradise, (ii) The Companions of Hell.**
- (3) **Good and Bad**

#### **Readings:**

- *The Qur'an (An Introduction)*, Ch.9, "Ethico- legal teachings", pp. 161-176.
- *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an*, by Toshihiko Izutsu, Ch. 3, pp.45-54; Ch. 4, pp.55-73; Ch.5, pp.74-104; Ch. 6, pp.105-118, Ch. 11, pp. 203-249 (will be available on Blackboard).

#### **VII. Interpreting the Qur'an**

November 14, 19.

- (1) **Tradition-based Interpretation**
- (2) **Reason-based Interpretation**
- (3) **The Principles in Qur'anic exegesis**
- (4) **Modern interpretation of the Qur'an**

#### **Readings:**

- *The Qur'an (An Introduction)*, Chs. 10, 11, 12.
- "The tasks and traditions of interpretation", by Jane Dammen McAuliffe, from *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'an*, Ch.9, pp. 181- 209 (will be available on Blackboard).

- “Western Scholarship and the Qur’an”, by Andrew Rippin, from *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur’an*, Ch.11, pp.235-251 (will be available on Blackboard).

### **VIII. Contemporary Challenges:**

Nov.26, 28, Dec.3.

#### **(1) Feminist Challenges**

#### **(2) Political Challenges: The issue of *Jihad* and Violence**

#### Readings:

- *Women and Gender in Islam*, Leila Ahmed, Ch.3, “Women and the Rise of Islam”, pp. 41-63; Ch. 4, “The Traditional Age”, pp. 64-78 (will be available on Blackboard).
- *The Veil and the Male Elite (A Feminist Interpretation of Women’s Rights in Islam)*, Fatima Mernissi, Ch. 3, “A Tradition of Misogyny (1)”, pp.49-61; Ch.4, “A Tradition of Misogyny”, pp. 62-81; Ch.5, “The *Hijab*, the *Veil*”, pp. 85-101; Ch. 10, “The *Hijab* Descends on Medina”, pp. 180-188 (will be available on Blackboard).
- “Jihad”, by Reuven Firestone, from *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur’an*, Ch.20, pp.308-320 (will be available on Blackboard)
- “The Place of Tolerance in Islam”, by Khalid Abou al-Fadl, from *The Place of Tolerance in Islam*, Aboul al-Fadl and others, Ch.1, pp.3-23 (will be available on Blackboard).

**Review Session:** Nov. 5 (The last day of classes.)

**Note:** For all the sections, every week I will also assign some passages from the Qur’an. You are required to read the assigned passages carefully. We will discuss those passages in the class.

**The Final Exam will be held on Monday, December 10 at 1:30pm, Main St. Comenius Hall, 114.**

#### **Important Notes:**

- Students who wish to request accommodations in this class for a disability should contact Elaine Mara, Assistant Director of Learning Services for Academic and Disability Support, 1307 Main Street, or by calling 610-861-1510. Accommodations cannot be provided until authorization is received from the Academic Support Center..
- The Writing Center is located in a building that is not accessible to persons with mobility impairments. If you need the services of the Writing Center, please call 610-861-1392. The Writing Center tutors will make arrangements with the student who needs tutoring services to meet in an accessible location, such as the library or a study/conference room in PPHAC.