

## Major Themes in the Qur'an (Rel. 115): Fall 2014

**Instructor:** Dr. Arash Naraghi

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**Office Hours:** Tuesday 2:30-3:30pm, Wednesday 2:30-3:30pm, and by appointment.

**Lectures:** MW 10:20am-11:30am, Main Street Campus, Reeves Library, 212

### **Course Description:**

In this course we study the major themes of the Qur'an. The Qur'an is a theocentric book, i.e., God is the main character of the book, and the book is mainly concerned with salvation and spiritual well-being of humans. In this course we study the following topics in the Qur'an:

(1) God, and His relations to men. (2) Man as individual, i.e., the Qur'anic image of human's condition in this world as an individual. (3) Man in society, i.e., the social aspects of human life. (4) Nature, i.e., the Qur'anic image of the nature and its relation to God. (5) Prophethood and revelation. God reveals His message to me through an elected group of humans, i.e., prophets. We study the phenomenon of revelation, which is God's verbal and non-verbal communication with men, and the concept of prophethood and the story of prophets in the Qur'an. (6) Eschatology, i.e., the Qur'anic image of life after bodily death. (7) Satan and evil. (8) Different exegetic approaches to the Qur'an, and finally (8) Some modern challenges to the content of the Qur'an, such as feminist challenges.

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:

- *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, by Fazlur Rahman, University Of Chicago Press; 2 edition (June 15, 2009). ISBN: 978-0226702865.
- *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/>)

**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 8, 2014, at 8:30am**, plus a midterm (tentatively scheduled for **Wednesday, October 8, 2014**). 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 November 5**, the paper topic will be posted on Blackboard. The paper due is **November 12**. 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.
- **Important note:** *By the end of the semester, all four above-mentioned requirements must be completed in order to pass the course. In order 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:

August 25, 27.

- (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).

September 1, 3

- (1) Historical and Cultural Context
- (2) Qur’anic cosmology

Readings:

- “The historical Context”, by Fred M. Donner, from *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur’an*, pp. 23-39. (Will be available on Blackboard).
- “*God and Man in the Qur’an*, Chs. 3 & 4: “The Basic Structure of Qur’anic Weltanschauung”, pp. 74-99 (Will be posted on Blackboard)
- The Movie

September 8, 10, 15

- (1) God in the Qur’an.

Readings:

- *Major themes of the Qur’an*. Ch. One: God
- "God", by Andrew Rippin, in *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur’an*, Ch. 14, pp.223-233 (will be available on Blackboard).
- *The Qur’an* (The chapters will be assigned during the classes)

September 17, 22, 24

- (1) Man as individual

Reading:

- *Major themes of the Qur’an*. Ch. Two
- *God and Man in the Qur’an*, Ch. 5 (pp.127-141, Ch. 6&7 (pp.142-215), and Ch.9 (pp. 254- 269). (Will be posted on Blackboard)
- *The Qur’an* (The chapters will be assigned during the classes)

September 30, October 1, 6

- (1) Man in Society

Reading:

- *Major themes of the Qur'an*. Ch. Three
- *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).
- *The Qur'an* (The chapters will be assigned during the classes)

### **October 8: Midterm exam**

October 15, 20, 22

(1) Nature

#### Reading:

- *Major themes of the Qur'an*. Ch. Four
- *The Qur'an* (The chapters will be assigned during the classes)

October 27, 29, November 3

(1) Prophethood and Revelation

#### Reading:

- *Major themes of the Qur'an*. Ch. Five
- *The Qur'an* (The chapters will be assigned during the classes)

November 5, 10, 12

(1) Eschatology and Life after death

#### Reading:

- *Major themes of the Qur'an*. Ch. Six
- "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).
- *The Qur'an* (The chapters will be assigned during the classes)

November 17, 19

(1) Satan and Evil

#### Reading:

- *Major themes of the Qur'an*. Ch. Seven
- *The Qur'an* (The chapters will be assigned during the classes)

November 24

(1) Interpreting the Qur'an

#### Reading:

- *The Qur'an (An Introduction)*, Chs. 10, 11, 12. (Will be posted on Blackboard)
- "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).

December 1, 3

(1) Contemporary Challenges (Women's Status in the Qur'an)

#### Reading:

- *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).

**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 8, at 8:30am, 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 in the lower level of Monocacy Hall, or by calling 610-861-1401. 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.