

Abilene Christian University
Graduate School of Theology
BIBD 661.W1 Theological Explorations: Contested Monotheisms
Spring 2021

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Virtual Office Hours: TWR 9:00-11:00 am (US Central time) and by appointment

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The mission of Abilene Christian University is to educate students for Christian service and leadership throughout the world.

The GST aims to equip men and women for effective missional leadership for ministry in all its forms, and to provide strong academic foundations for theological inquiry. By equipping students with the requisite skills, knowledge, and experience, the GST aspires to produce graduates with trained minds and transformed hearts.

Course Description

BIBD 661 is an in-depth study of one of the major Christian doctrines in light of insights from other fields of knowledge. This particular seminar focuses on Muslim and Christian interreligious contact between the emergence of Islam and the beginning of the Crusades (7th-11th centuries), centering on debates over monotheism and Christology.

Required Texts

Accad, Martin. *Sacred Misinterpretation: Reaching Across the Christian-Muslim Divide*. Eerdmans, 2019. ISBN 978-0-8028-7414-6.

Donner, Fred M. *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2010. ISBN-13: 978-0674064140.

Siddiqui, Mona. *Christians, Muslims, and Jesus*. Yale University Press, 2013. ISBN 978-0-300-16970-6.
~~Theodore Abu Qurrah. Translated by John C. Lamoreaux. Library of the Christian East 1. Provo, UT: BYU Press, 2005. ISBN 13: 978-0934893008.⁺~~

⁺ Since Abu Qurrah is on the official book list for this course, I have left it on the syllabus. However, the book has recently been discontinued by the publisher, and we will not be using it.

Course Objectives

Student Learning Outcomes	Competencies	Evaluation
Graduates will have knowledge of the major theological content, structures, and procedures of the Christian tradition. (Prog. 2)	To analyze and evaluate theological claims, formulations, and expressions used historically in dialogue and debate between Christians and Muslims in terms of their biblical, historical, and philosophical dimensions.	Weekly discussion and reflection, critical book review, final paper/project
Graduates will have facility in critical thinking, analysis, and in oral and written communication. (Prog. 5)	To gather relevant information, to construct coherent arguments, and to convey those arguments clearly in oral and written form.	Weekly discussion and reflection, critical book review, current event, final paper/project
Graduates will have critical facility with the most important primary sources and issues of scholarly discussion in biblical studies, theology, or church history. (MA 1)	To examine different approaches to various topics in the historical Muslim-Christian interface.	Weekly discussion and reflection, critical book review, final paper/project
Graduates will have the ability to integrate theology in contemporary cultural contexts. (MDIV 1)	To interpret critically the role of historical and cultural contexts in the formation of Christian and Muslim theological perspectives, and to formulate and practice a coherent Christian engagement with contemporary Islam.	Weekly discussion and reflection, critical book review, current event, final paper/projects
Awareness of the historical and contemporary beliefs and practices of the worldwide church. (MDIV 2)	To analyze critically contemporary situations in light of historical knowledge and to apply that knowledge in ministerial practice.	Weekly discussion and reflection, critical book review, current event, final paper/project

Grading Scale:

92-100	= A	Excellent
83-91	= B	Good
74-82	= C	Decent
70-73	= D	Ouch
0-69	= F	Nooooo!

COURSE POLICIES

Participation: The cumulative nature of an online, graduate-level course makes regular participation a must. Students are expected to login to the course site multiple times each week (early in the week, mid-week, and at the end of the week) to check on assignments and participate in group discussion. Students whose participation is limited due to severe illness or other unforeseen circumstances should notify the instructor as soon as possible to make appropriate arrangements to make up work.

Late Work: Please submit all work on time. For each day that an assignment is late, there will be a grade reduction of 5 percentage points, unless special arrangements have been made with the professor. Discussion boards will close 24 hours after the deadline because of the time-sensitive

nature of class discussion. If you miss the window for the weekly discussion because of illness or other circumstances, please contact the professor as soon as possible to discuss options.

Academic Integrity: Violations of academic integrity and other forms of cheating, as defined in ACU's Academic Integrity Policy, involve the intention to deceive or mislead or misrepresent, and therefore are a form of lying and represent actions contrary to the behavioral norms that flow from the nature of God. Violations will be addressed as described in the Policy. While the university enforces the Policy, the most powerful motive for integrity and truthfulness comes from ones' desire to imitate God's nature in our lives. Every member of the faculty, staff, and student body is responsible for protecting the integrity of learning, scholarship, and research. The full Policy is available for review at the Provost's office web site (<http://www.acu.edu/campusoffices/provost>) and the following offices: provost, college deans, dean of campus life, director of student judicial affairs, director of residential life education and academic departments.

The first violation of academic integrity will result in a warning and a zero on the assignment in question. On the second violation, the offender will be dropped from the class with an F, and the professor will initiate the university procedure as outlined in the policy linked above.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) protects individuals with disabilities from discrimination. If a student requests accommodations under ADA, please notify the professor one week prior to the course. If needs arise during the course, please notify the professor as soon as possible. The professor will work with the College of Biblical Studies to accommodate the student's needs.

Course Materials: Course materials prepared by the instructor (including PowerPoint presentations, study guides, and handouts), together with the content of all lectures and review sessions presented by the instructor, are the property of the instructor. Video and audio recording of lectures and review sessions without the consent of the instructor is prohibited. Unless explicit permission is obtained from the instructor, recordings of lectures and review sessions may not be modified and must not be transferred or transmitted to any other person.

Subject to Change. The professor reserves the right to change this syllabus if needed, and students will be given ample notice of any changes.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS AND REQUIREMENTS²

Weekly Assignments

Weekly Discussion. Each student will compose a short post with a question for class discussion (fewer than 200 words) based on the week's assigned readings. The initial post is due by Wednesday at 11:59 pm Central time. The student will post a substantive response to at least two other students' posts and facilitate further discussion by responding to other students' comments on his/her own post until Saturday at 11:59 pm. (15%)

Weekly Essay. The student will compose a 600- to 750-word essay on the week's readings. The essay should be formal in structure, focused on one particular issue, and demonstrate integration of

² Full instructions for each assignment can be found on the Canvas assignment page.

primary sources (if assigned) and application to contemporary contexts. It should demonstrate full engagement with the assigned course material for the week. The weekly essay is due by 11:59 pm on Saturday. (30%)

Major Assignments

Current Event Project. For this assignment, the student will select a recent/current event involving contact between Islam and Christianity (or Islam and the West), and interpret this event in light of the history of Muslim-Christian relations. Due March 27 at 11:59 pm Central. (10%)

Critical Book Review: In this 1,000- to 1,250-word essay, the student will bring Mona Siddiqui's *Christians, Muslims, and Jesus* into conversation with Martin Accad's *Sacred Misinterpretation*. Due April 10 at 11:59 pm Central. (15%)

Term Paper. The student will write a paper on a perennial topic of theological discourse between Muslims and Christians. Using appropriate primary and secondary sources, the paper will briefly survey the historical development of this theological topic in Muslim-Christian discourse. The paper will then explain why this issue is still of interest today and develop a proposal for modern Muslim-Christian discussion about the issue. Use of relevant secondary sources on historical and contemporary Muslim-Christian relations is expected. A good paper will use economy of language, engage fairly with sources, and make a clear and cogent contemporary proposal. The term paper should be approximately 3,000–3,750 words/12–15 pages in length, double-spaced, 1-inch margins, 12-pt font. The final paper is due on the last day of class.

The term paper is worth a total of **30% of your final grade**. This breaks down into three parts:

1. A one-paragraph topic proposal due by March 6. (Credit/no credit)
2. Participation in the Paper/Project Précis Discussion during week 13. (5/30)
3. Participation in the peer-review process during week 13. (5/30)
4. The paper itself, due on the final day of the semester, **April 23**. (20/30)

See the provided bibliography for starting places.

* Students with areas of interest related to Muslim-Christian dialogue that do not fit the terms of the above assignment may present an *alternative* paper proposal to the professor. Students should only proceed with the a paper topic after the professor gives express approval to the proposal.

Pathways Project. In place of the term paper, students may do a Pathways project, also due on the last day of class. The Pathways project will be a series of no fewer than 4 lessons on Islam for a Christian audience, and it should be designed in such a way that it is ready for implementation. (Implementation does not have to be completed at the time of submission, but it is encouraged if possible.) The project is expected to be as robust and demanding as researching a term paper would be. Any student wishing to do a Pathways project must first discuss this with the professor. Students who elect to do a Pathways project will still be expected to participate in the peer-review process and to submit a summary of their project to the précis discussion board in week 13.

COURSE SCHEDULE³

Unit	Dates	Topic	Reading	Assignments ⁴
1: Islam – Early History and Theology	1/11-16	Late Antiquity and Nascent Islam	F. M. Donner, <i>Muhammad and the Believers</i> , pp. 1-89, Appendix A: The <i>umma</i> Document (pp. 227-32)	“Hi, my name is...” Discussion Discussion 1 Essay 1
	1/17-23	Expansion & Struggle in Early Islam	Donner, <i>Muhammad and the Believers</i> , pp. 90-193	Discussion 2 Essay 2
	1/24-30	Islamic Theology: Historical Perspectives and Themes	Donner, <i>Muhammad and the Believers</i> , pp. 194-224; Appendix B: Inscriptions in the Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem (pp. 233-35) T. Winter (ed.), <i>The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology</i> , pp. 33-54, 121-40 (PDF) Catharina Raudvere, <i>Islam: An Introduction</i> , pp. 59-82 (ACU)	Discussion 3 Essay 3
	1/31-2/6	Islam: Basics of Faith and Practice	Catharina Raudvere, <i>Islam: An Introduction</i> , pp. 83-166 (ACU)	Discussion 4 Essay 4
2: Major Themes in Muslim-Christian Dialogue in Historical Perspective	2/7-13	Hermeneutics and Dialogue	M. Accad, <i>Sacred Misinterpretation: Reaching Across the Christian-Muslim Divide</i> , pp. xxiii-74 S. H. Griffith, <i>The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque</i> , pp. 6-22 (ACU)	Discussion 5 Essay 5
	2/14-20	God	Accad, <i>Sacred Misinterpretation</i> , pp. 75-106 Griffith, <i>The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque</i> , pp. 75-105 (ACU) S. Noble and A. Treiger (eds), <i>The Orthodox Church in the Arab World 700-1700: An Anthology of Sources</i> , pp. 40-59 and 216-35 (ACU)	Discussion 6 Essay 6

³ For readings outside of your required texts, I will either provide PDFs or links to the ACU library catalogue where electronic versions are available. Note that you must be signed into the ACU library’s distance portal to access e-books from home.

⁴ Weekly assignments are in regular font; major assignments are in bold.

	2/21-27	Jesus	Accad, <i>Sacred Misinterpretation</i> , pp. 107-87 Abu Ra'itah al-Takriti, <i>Risalah on the Incarnation</i> ; (tr. Sandra Toenies Keating), pp. TBD (ACU)	Discussion 7 Essay 7
	2/28-3/6	Scripture	Accad, <i>Sacred Misinterpretation</i> , pp. 188-262 ‘Ammar al-Basri, <i>Kitab al-Burhan (The Book of Proof)</i> , 368-372 (PDF) Timothy I, <i>Dialogue with Caliph Mabdi</i> , pp. TBD (PDF)	Discussion 8 Essay 8 Paper topic proposal due
	3/7-13	SPRING BREAK		
	3/14-20	Muhammad	Accad, <i>Sacred Misinterpretation</i> , pp. 263-346	Discussion 9 Essay 9
	3/21-27	Current Event Project	n/a	Current Event Project Due
3: Muslim and Christian Perspectives in Dialogue	3/28-4/3	Interfaith Dialogue on Jesus from a Muslim Perspective	Mona Siddiqui, <i>Christians, Muslim, and Jesus</i> , pp. 1-148	Discussion 10 (No essay due this week)
	4/4-10	Dialogue on Jesus, Cont.	Mona Siddiqui, <i>Christians, Muslims, and Jesus</i> , pp. 149-248	Critical Book Review
4: Papers/projects	4/11-17	Writing Workshop	n/a	Paper Précis Discussion Rough Draft Peer Review
	4/18-23	Finals Week: Research paper/Pathways projects due	n/a	Final Paper/Project Submit papers/projects and any later work by Friday, April 23 rd at 11:59 pm.

GST Classroom Virtues

The GST invites students to participate in a process of theological and spiritual formation. Knowing how to think theologically comes by habit and by imitation, not simply by acquiring isolated facts. The assumption here is that books alone are insufficient for addressing difficulties of life and forming people into the image and likeness of God. Ultimately, we strive to form communities of inquiry, inviting you to inhabit a shared world of learning. Within such an environment, the goal is to cultivate critical skills of reflection, spiritual disciplines, interact authentically with one another, and learn to function as a community of inquiry. A large part of this involves connecting areas of life rather than pitting them against one another. Prayer, study, and other dimensions of life are all integral to the process of formation. Consequently, we invite you to participate in a set of practices; nurtured within this context, you pursue “intellectual, moral, spiritual excellence” the result of which is the formation of the whole person.

- a. **Desire for truth in the context of love**—the aptitude to discern whether belief-forming processes, practices, and people yield true beliefs over false ones. People motivated by this desire will be more likely to conduct thorough inquiries, scrutinize evidence carefully, investigate numerous fields of study, and consider alternative explanations while respecting and caring for others.
- b. **Humility**—the capacity to recognize reliable sources of informed judgment while recognizing the limits of our knowledge and the fallibility of our judgments. This is not created in isolation but takes into account feedback and correction from other sources of informed judgment.
- c. **Honesty**—the capacity to tackle difficult questions without seeking simple answers. Ignoring complex and difficult questions only solidifies vices such as intellectual dishonesty, close-mindedness, and rash judgments. These vices preclude the possibility of refining our thinking and of participating in conversations with others.
- d. **Openness**—the desire to engage in an open-ended search for knowledge of God, including receptivity to different ideas, experiences, and people. Listening becomes a discipline that acknowledges the other and respects diversity. The art of being a student and a teacher is an ongoing process that necessitates hospitality, patience, and love.
- e. **Courage**—the ability to articulate one’s position while considering other perspectives. The aptitude to express convictions involves risk yet fosters opportunities for meaningful dialog. Responding to objections entails tenacity but should not be confused with close-mindedness.
- f. **Wisdom**—the capacity to offer a synthetic discernment of knowledge on behalf of the community. The aim is not merely the dissemination of information but a pastoral implementation of faith for the building up of the community. It solidifies various pieces of data, practices, and experiences and aptly applies knowledge and faith to particular situations.
- g. **Stewardship**—the commitment to one’s accountability to the gifts and responsibilities that one brings to the classroom. Classroom engagement includes proactively participating in the course goals, seeking mastery of course competencies, and collaborating with faculty and fellow students in the development of a learning environment. Committing oneself to spiritual and intellectual well-being and growth is a faithful response to the opportunities graduate education affords.
- h. **Hopefulness**—the receptivity to the future possibilities of God. The cultivation of thankfulness for our heritages and expectation for our future ministries engenders a guard against cynicism and a spirit of perseverance during times of stress and disorientation.
- i. **Prayerfulness**—the making of space to commune with God. The task of learning and teaching so that we are formed into the image of Christ through the Spirit involves our consistent reliance on God’s sanctifying work.