

Christian Encounter with Islam (02ST5550)
Reformed Theological Seminary – Orlando
Dr. Keith Johnson
Keith.Johnson@cru.org
Spring 2026
Monday, 3:00-5:00pm

Course Description

There are 1.8 billion Muslims in the world (24% of the world's population). As a global religion, Islam is rapidly growing. In a little over four decades, there will be as many Muslims in the world as Christians and more Muslims than Jews in the U.S. Unfortunately, many Americans (including evangelical Christians) are ignorant about Islam. In the twenty-first century, it is important for Christian leaders to be growing in their understanding of Islam so they can help their communities to love their Muslims as neighbors and bear witness to Christ. This course will help you better understand the history, culture, traditions, beliefs, and practices of Islam. We will reflect on the ways in which Islamic faith and practice have been shaped by historical/cultural circumstances. You will discover that, like global Christianity, Islam exists a rich variety of forms (both in its past and present). For Christians, the presence of Islam raises many important questions: How, from a biblical/theological perspective, should we think about Islam? How do we address Muslim objections to Christian teaching? What are the most effective ways to bear witness to Christ as the way, the truth and the life? Where/how might we partner with Muslims (e.g. addressing social issues)? We will explore Christian engagement with Islam from historical, biblical/theological, missiological and ethical perspectives. As a result of this class, you will be better equipped for cross-cultural ministry in a religiously pluralistic world.

Learning Outcomes

Affective (attitudes, motivation, character)

1. Grow in your desire to understand Muslims and represent their faith accurately.
2. Cultivate a greater desire to live out the Great Commandment toward your Muslim neighbors and winsomely bear witness to Christ as the way, the truth and life.

Cognitive (knowledge, and thinking skills)

1. Grow in your understanding of Islamic history, culture, traditions, beliefs, and practices.
2. Become more aware of diversity within Islam, both historically and in its contemporary expressions.
3. Better understand how Christians (both past and present) have reflected on Islam and engaged Muslims (politically, missiologically, evangelistically, apologetically, theologically).

Behavioral (personal and ministry skills)

1. Grow in your capacity to critically evaluate Christian responses to Islam.
2. Grow in your ability to articulate the distinctiveness of the Christian gospel to Muslims and address their questions.
3. Grow in your capacity to cross cultures with the gospel in your future ministry.

Learning Resources (Required)

- The Qur'an*, translated by M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, Oxford World's Classics (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). ISBN-13: 978-0199535958
- Colin Chapman, *Cross and Crescent: Responding to the Challenge of Islam*, 2d ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2007). ISBN-13: 978-0830834853
- Nabeel Qureshi, *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus: A Devout Muslim Encounters Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016). ISBN-13: 978-0310092643

Recommended Resources

- Daniel W. Brown, *A New Introduction to Islam*, 3d ed. (Hodoken, N.J.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017).
- Nabeel Jabbour, *The Crescent through the Eyes of the Cross: Insights from an Arab Christian* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2008).
- Kambiz Ghanea Bassiri, *A History of Islam in America* (New York: Cambridge, 2010).
- Thomas S. Kidd, *American Christians and Islam: Evangelical Culture and Muslims from the Colonial Period to the Age of Terrorism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).
- Peter G. Riddell and Peter Cotterell, *Islam in Context: Past, Present, and Future* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003).
- James R. White, *What Every Christian Needs to Know About the Qur'an* (Grand Rapids: Bethany House, 2013).

Learning Tasks

1. **Class Engagement:** Class engagement includes attending all class sessions and actively participating in the course discussion. If you need to miss a class session, please send me an email prior to class letting me know you will be absent.
2. **Readings (Due: Monday, May 4):** If you are wanting to work ahead, read all of Chapman. You will submit the percentage of the reading you completed on the last day of class.
3. **Islam in the News (Due: prior to each class session):** Each week we will start class by discussing examples of Islam in the news. You will find an article and post a link to it. In 100-150 words share your observations about the article. What was the article about? What stood out to you? What did you learn about Muslims/Islam? After you post, you will be able to see the stories your classmates posted.
4. **Weekly Journal Entry (most be posted within 48 hrs. to count):** Following each class session, you will write a short journal entry (150-200 words) reflecting on how you felt about something you read, heard or discovered. It could be something that surprised you, something you found helpful or something that upset you. Consider the following questions: What was the most important thing you heard or read in today's session? Why was it important? What there anything you found challenging in the week's class or readings? Why? Was there anything that made you feel uncomfortable or with which you disagreed? In your final journal entry, describe how your understanding of Islam has changed.

5. **Report on Mosque Visit (Due one week after the Mosque visit):** We will visit a local mosque together, observing, but not participating in, a Muslim service of worship. (Be sure to read pp. 26-28 of Chapman before the visit.) Following the service, we will talk with one of the leaders at the mosque. The visit will take place on a Friday afternoon and the date of the visit will be announced early in the semester so you can plan accordingly. Following the visit, you will write a report (3-4pp, single-spaced, 12-point font) reflecting on your experience. In your report, you should not merely describe what you experienced but also reflect critically on how this experience affected your understanding of Islam. Your report should be structured around the following questions:
- Have you ever attended a service at a Mosque before? If so, when and where?
 - What fears or concerns did you have before you went?
 - What did you observe about the worship service? How would you describe it to one of your friends?
 - What stood out to you from your experience? (Consider what you heard, what you saw, what you smelled, what you tasted, what you felt at this service.)
 - What values did you perceive were being communicated at the service?
 - What was confusing and/or surprising to you during your experience of the service?
 - What were your preconceptions before the visit? How were your preconceptions confirmed or challenged?
 - What similarities and differences exist between Muslim worship and Christian worship?
 - How did your visit change your attitude towards either Islam or Muslims?
 - After reflecting on your experience, what questions do you have?
 - What did you learn from this experience that might help you build bridges to Muslims in the future?
6. **Research Paper (Due Friday, May 8):** You will compose a 10-12pp essay (double-spaced, 12 pt font, 1" margins) on some aspect of Islam (or Christian engagement with Islam). This is an opportunity for you to learn more about Islam. Your paper should present a clear thesis and offer critical analysis. If you compare Islam and Christianity on some topic, your paper represents the Muslim perspective as robustly as you do the Christian perspective. Your topic must be submitted to the instructor for approval by no later than April 21. Possible topics could include the following:
- Explore the role(s) of women in Muslim teaching and practice
 - Explore the doctrine of "abrogation" in Islam
 - Examine the Holy Spirit in the Qur'an and Islam
 - Explore modesty among Muslim women (motivations, practices, diversity)
 - Discuss the question, "Do Muslims and Christians worship the same God?"
 - Compare/contrast Muslim and Reformed approaches to religious law
 - Explain and respond to Muslims criticisms of some aspect of Christian teaching (e.g., doctrine of the Trinity, divinity of Christ, Christian worship).
 - Examine a major figure from Christian history who has reached out cross-culturally to Muslims (e.g., Raymond Lull, Francis of Assisi, Samuel Zwerner, etc.).
 - Discuss and address missiological challenges in evangelizing Muslims
 - Explore how might Christians partner with Muslims on social issues (abortion, religious freedom, injustice, etc.) in a way that is faithful to Christian commitments.

Course Grade

Journal Entries	10%
Islam in the News	10%
Reading	20%
Mosque Report	15%
Research Paper	<u>45%</u>
	100%

A	97 - 100	C	80 - 82
A-	94 - 96	C-	78 - 79
B+	91 - 93	D+	75 - 77
B	88 - 90	D	72 - 74
B-	86 - 87	D-	70 - 71
C+	83 - 85		

Course Overview

This course will be divided into two sections. First, we will focus on understanding Islamic history, culture, traditions, beliefs, and practices. Our approach will largely be descriptive. This will occupy two-thirds of the course. Then we will consider how Christians have encountered and engaged Islam from several perspectives.

1. Introduction: Why study Islam?
2. Understanding Islam
 - a. Muslim faith and practice
 - b. Early history and expansion of Islam
 - c. Islamic sources: Qur'an and Hadith
 - d. Islamic law (*fiqh*)
 - e. Islamic theology (*kalam*)
 - f. Islamic responses to modernity and the West
 - g. Islamic responses to other religions (including Christianity)
3. Christian engagement with Islam
 - a. Historical perspective: The good, the bad and the ugly - What can we learn from the history of Christian encounter with Islam?
 - b. Apologetic perspective: How might we address Islamic objections of Christian teaching and practices?
 - c. Theological perspective: How should we think biblically and theologically about Islamic culture, institutions, beliefs and practices in light of God's self-revelation in Holy Scripture?
 - d. Missiological perspective: How can we winsomely and effectively bear witness to Jesus Christ?

Course Objectives Related to MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes

Course: Christian Encounter with Islam

Professor: Johnson

Campus: Orlando

Date: Spring 2026

MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes <i>In order to measure the success of the MDiv curriculum, RTS has defined the following as the intended outcomes of the student learning process. Each course contributes to these overall outcomes. This rubric shows the contribution of this course to the MDiv outcomes.</i> <i>*As the MDiv is the core degree at RTS, the MDiv rubric will be used in this syllabus.</i>		Rubric ➤ Strong ➤ Moderate ➤ Minimal ➤ None	Mini-Justification
Articulation (oral & written)	Broadly understands and articulates knowledge, both oral and written, of essential biblical, theological, historical, and cultural/global information, including details, concepts, and frameworks.	Strong	Research paper tests student ability to articulate understanding of Islamic history, culture, and theology. Class discussion tests understanding and application.
Scripture	Significant knowledge of the original meaning of Scripture. Also, the concepts for and skill to research further into the original meaning of Scripture and to apply Scripture to a variety of modern circumstances. (Includes appropriate use of original languages and hermeneutics; and integrates theological, historical, and cultural/global perspectives.)	Moderate	Course will reflect biblically and theologically on Islamic beliefs and practices as well as biblical teaching shaping Christian engagement with Islam.
Reformed Theology	Significant knowledge of Reformed theology and practice, with emphasis on the Westminster Standards.	Minimal	Will explore how Reformed theologians have engaged with Islam. Reformed teaching will be compared/contrasted with Islam.
Sanctification	Demonstrates a love for the Triune God that aids the student's sanctification.	Strong	Cultivate a greater desire to live out the Great Commandment toward Muslim neighbors and winsomely bear witness to Christ as the way, the truth and life.
Desire for Worldview	Burning desire to conform all of life to the Word of God.	Moderate	Better understand an Islamic worldview(s) in relation to (and contrast with) Christian worldview
Winsomely Reformed	Embraces a winsomely Reformed ethos. (Includes an appropriate ecumenical spirit with other Christians, especially Evangelicals; a concern to present the Gospel in a God-honoring manner to non-Christians; and a truth-in-love attitude in disagreements.)	Strong	Encourages a critical yet charitable approach to Muslims
Preach	Ability to preach and teach the meaning of Scripture to both heart and mind with clarity and enthusiasm.	None	
Worship	Knowledgeable of historic and modern Christian-worship forms; and ability to construct and skill to lead a worship service.	None	
Shepherd	Ability to shepherd the local congregation: aiding in spiritual maturity; promoting use of gifts and callings; and encouraging a concern for non-Christians, both in America and worldwide.	Minimal	Encourages concern for Muslims and helps those they lead engage their Muslim neighbors
Church/World	Ability to interact within a denominational context, within the broader worldwide church, and with significant public issues.	Strong	Course will reflect on Christian engagement with Muslims/Islam from historical, biblical, apologetic, missiological and pastoral perspectives.