INTRODUCTION

This master’s level seminar for theology students uses issues of sustainability to fill critical gaps in contemporary work on Christian-Muslim relations. It was designed as a small, discussion-based course for students at Candler School of Theology, a Methodist institution of theological education at Emory University. Although the syllabus raises theological questions, the course materials and bibliography could be adapted for courses in Islamic studies, women’s studies, or religion. This syllabus originated as a project to make sustainability in dialogue a more prominent theme in my course entitled “History and Practice of Christian-Muslim Relations.” I intended to expand my treatment of women in historical Christian-Muslim encounters through the use of Beth Baron’s book, *The Orphan Scandal*, and to add a unit on environmentalism as a common concern for Christian and Muslim communities. I soon realized that an entirely new course was needed to fully engage both themes – gender justice and ecological sustainability – and explore their relevance for Christian-Muslim relations. Rich scholarship has emerged in the past few decades on women in Islam and on religio and the environment, yet few publications exist on women in Christian-Muslim dialogue or on Muslim women and environmentalism. I therefore decided to use the available materials on these subjects while also emphasizing sustainability as a fruitful lens for Christian reflection on engagement with Islam and Muslims.

In examining women and gender in Christian-Muslim relations, this course concentrates on two types of sustainability: social (liberation, social justice, community empowerment, human diversity, inclusion, and equality) and ecological (environmental restoration, food justice, and protection of water, air, soil, forests, and biodiversity). Social sustainability includes work by and on behalf of individuals who have been excluded from rights and resources due to gender or sexual orientation, and I made this form of sustainability the focus of the first three units of the course of for a couple of reasons. First, I found far less literature on Muslim women and ecological sustainability, so I used this literature only in the final unit and supplemented it with general readings on Islam and ecology and site visits to an urban farm and halal restaurant. Second, historical Western Christian discourses on women in Islam have impeded Christian-Muslim relations substantially. Characterizations of Muslim women as passive victims of oppression have fed Islamophobic sentiments in America today, causing a rise in hate crimes and harassment against Muslim women who wear headscarves. This course provides students with tools to counteract such trends by putting scholarship on women and gender in Islam into conversation with Christian feminist, womanist, and queer theology and by considering the relevance of such theological conversations for social and ecological sustainability.
SYLLABUS
Women & Gender in Christian-Muslim Relations
Deanna Ferree Womack
Candler School of Theology at Emory University
Tuesday/Thursday 1:00-2:20 PM

COURSE DESCRIPTION
Christian discourses on women, gender, and sexuality in Islam have often created barriers for Christian-Muslim understanding. As a means of building more positive relations between Muslim and Christian communities, this course raises questions of social sustainability (social justice, liberation, community empowerment, human diversity, inclusion, and equality) and ecological sustainability (environmental restoration, food justice, and protection of water, air, soil, forests, and biodiversity). The first unit of the course provides a foundation for studying women, gender, and Islam in a Christian theological context. By engaging themes of social sustainability, unit two examines how gender was employed in historical Christian-Muslim encounters and unit three addresses the theological interpretations and activist work of Muslim feminists and LGBTQ Muslim leaders. The final unit explores intersections between Islam, gender, and environmental sustainability. This reading-intensive, discussion-based seminar is recommended for students who have done prior academic study or community work in one of the following areas: Christian-Muslim relations, Islam, women and gender, liberation theology, or environmental sustainability. Enrollment will be capped at 15 students.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES
Through this course students will...
• Demonstrate basic knowledge of the Islamic tradition and the history of Christian-Muslim relations and a proficient understanding of contemporary scholarship on women, gender, and sexuality in Islam
• Employ questions of sociological and environmental sustainability to critically interpret texts by Christian and Muslim authors on gender and sexuality
• Reflect theologically and practically on Christian-Muslim relations and practices of peace, reconciliation, and dialogue in relation to gender, sexuality, and sustainability
• Articulate a contextual approach to Christian-Muslim relations and sustainability that may be applied in the student’s own congregation, community, or workplace
• Contribute to classroom learning through presentations and by engaging in discussion

CONNECTION TO CANDLER’S CURRICULAR VALUES
This course is designed to enable students to demonstrate critical engagement with multiethnic, intercultural, ecumenical, and religious diversity, with a particular emphasis on local and global Muslim communities; demonstrate skills for cross-cultural and cross-racial ministry and interreligious dialogue; articulate some of the basic beliefs of Christianity and one other religious tradition; reflect theologically on conflict, violence, and conflict transformation in the context of Christian-Muslim relations; and demonstrate skills in critical and imaginative thinking, responsible interpretation, and effective communication.
TEXTBOOKS


REQUIREMENTS

1. **Attendance and active participation** are required for your successful completion of this seminar-style course. Unexcused absences will result in a grade deduction and more than six absences will result in a failing grade for the course.

2. **Reading Response Papers (40%)**: Between weeks 2-13, complete 20 short response papers focusing on the required readings for each class session (300-500 words). Out of the 24 class sessions during this period, you may skip two sessions of your choice along with the date of your topical presentation and the date of our off-campus visit (week 13, session 2). Responses are due before class and should engage with each of the assigned texts and offer a succinct assessment of the value of the author’s work for our discussion of Christian-Muslim relations, sustainability, and/or women/gender/sexuality in Islam. You may use the response papers to begin brainstorming questions for investigation in your research project.

3. **Topical Presentation (15%)**: Between weeks 3-13, give one 15-minute presentation on an article or book chapter related to the course readings for that day. You may select a presentation text from the supplementary readings listed in the syllabus schedule or choose another publication in consultation with the instructor. See the recommended bibliography and periodicals listed at the end of the syllabus for additional resources. The presentation should 1) offer a brief biography of the author, 2) summarize the author’s aims and arguments, 3) identify the significance of the text in relation to our discussions of women/gender/sexuality and sustainability, 4) pose 3-5 substantive questions for further investigation in conversation with the required course readings for that day. These questions will be used to open our class discussion of the readings and are due by noon on the day before your presentation.

4. **Research Project (45%)**: During the second half of the semester, you should plan and implement a major project that uses questions of women/gender/sexuality and sustainability to investigate, analyze, and respond to challenges and opportunities for Christian-Muslim relations. In order to contribute unique insight beyond the limited body of scholarship that we have discussed in class, the project **must involve significant community**
engagement (such as ethnographic interviews, focus group studies, participant observation at interfaith dialogue sessions or sustainability events, or site visits to advocacy organizations). You should submit a 1-page project proposal by week 12, including your central questions for investigation, an outline of your process for answering these questions, and a bibliography of at least two published sources outside of our course readings. You may work with a partner if your project involves extensive audio/visual or multiple interviews. If you work alone and would like to interview more than two people, consider doing a focus-group conversation with all the interviewees at once. Projects should be the equivalent of a 15-page paper or 30-minute audio/video broadcast but may take on other formats with the instructor’s approval.

COURSE SCHEDULE

PART I: FOUNDATIONS

Week 1: Introduction to Islam & Christian-Muslim Relations
Tuesday Session:
Thursday Session:
- Interview with Rev. Dr. Charles Amjad-Ali on Christian-Muslim Relations (September 2016; 19 minutes): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xcpho34sGyY

Recommended:
- Charles Amjad-Ali, “Room for All at the Convocation: World Christianity and Islam” (September 27, 2017; 1 hour 20 min): https://www.westernsem.edu/stoutemire-lecture

Week 2: Islamic understandings of God, human life, and nature
Tuesday Session:
Thursday Session:
Week 3: – Approaches to the study of women and gender in Theology and Religion

Tuesday Session:
- DOA: Alice L. Laffey, “The Influence of Feminism on Christianity,” 50-64. *Pay particular attention to the section on ecofeminism.

Supplementary Reading:

Thursday Session:

Supplementary Reading:

PART II: HISTORICAL ENCOUNTERS

Week 4 – Western Christian Representations of Muslim Women

Tuesday Session:
- Beth Baron, The Orphan Scandal (BB), Preface & 1-41
Thursday Session:
- **BB**: 42-77

*Read and compare the following missionary publications. What do these primary sources tell us about American missionary thought on women & Islam in the 19th and 20th century?*

*Supplementary Reading:*

**Week 5 – Women & Christian-Muslim Encounters in Twentieth-Century Egypt**

Tuesday Session:
- **BB**: 78-96

Thursday Session:
- **BB**: 117-166

*Supplementary Reading:*

**Week 6: Western & Middle Eastern views of Muslim Women, Mid-20th Century to Present**

Tuesday Session:
- **BB**: 167-201

*Supplementary Reading:*

Thursday Session:
Supplementary Reading:

Part III: GENDER JUSTICE

Week 7 – Women in Islamic Tradition & Feminist Interpretations

Tuesday Session:

Supplementary Reading on Islamic interpretations of scripture:

Thursday Session:
- **DOA**: Amira El-Azhary Sonbol, “Rethinking Women and Islam,” 108-146.

Supplementary Reading:

Week 8 – Women’s Activism and LGBTQ Muslim Voices

Tuesday Session:

Supplementary Reading:

Thursday Session:
- Scott Kugle, *Living Out Islam (SK)*, Preface & 1-54
Week 9 – LGBTQ Activism (1)

Tuesday Session:
- **SK**: 55-80

*Supplementary Reading:*

Thursday Session:
- **SK**: 81-192. *Read and respond to two of the three chapters*

Week 10 – LGBTQ Activism (2)

Tuesday Session:
- **SK**: 193-218

Thursday Session:
- **SK**: 219-229
- Panel discussion on gender, sexuality, & Christian-Muslim relations

*Weekend visit to Sufi Atlanta*

Part IV: (EN)GENDERING SUSTAINABILITY

Week 11 – Women, Ecology, & Islam

Tuesday Session:

Thursday Session:
Week 12 – Women & the Environment in the Islamic World

Tuesday Session:

Supplementary Reading:

Thursday Session:
- Patricia H. Karimi-Taleghani, “‘Women’s Spirit’ and ‘Spiritual Matter(s)’: Gender, Activism, and Scholarship in an Ethiopian Eco-Spiritual System.” In Women and Islam, ed. Zayn R. Kassam. Praeger, 2010, 231-244.

Week 13 – Food & Farming

Tuesday Session:
- Carolyn Rouse, “Soul Food.” In Engaged Surrender, 105-126

Supplementary Reading:

Thursday Session: Visit to Truly Living Well Center in Atlanta

*Friday Visit to Marie’s @ Ummat Café and Friday Prayer at Atlanta Masjid of al-Islam

Week 14 – Sustaining Dialogue: Women & Christian-Muslim Relations

Tuesday Session:
this article from 2000 are still relevant? How might we expand, adapt, or critique Taji-Farouki’s argument?

- Revisit our readings on women, Islam, and ecology. What are the challenges and possibilities for Christian-Muslim dialogue?

Thursday Session:


- Revisit our readings on women, gender, and sexuality in Islam. What are the challenges, possibilities, and needs for Christian-Muslim dialogue on these subjects? What have you learned from readings, guest speakers, and class that will guide your personal, pastoral, or scholarly approach to Christian-Muslim engagement?
RECOMMENDED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Christian-Muslim Relations


**Women & Interfaith Dialogue**


**Women, Gender, & Sexuality in Islam**


Ecology & Religion/Ecology & Christianity


Ecology & Islam


Ecology & Feminism/Women & the Environment


RECOMMENDED PERIODICALS

Azizah Magazine: www.azizahmagazine.com
Contemporary Islam
Earth Ethics
EcoTheo Review: www.ecotheo.org
Environmental Ethics
Evangelical Interfaith Dialogue Journal
Feminist Review
Feminist Studies
Feminist Studies in Religion
Feminist Theology
Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies
Gender and Society
Gender, Place & Culture
Hawwa: Journal of Women of the Middle East and the Islamic World
International Journal of Gender and Women’s Studies
Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations
Journal of Ecumenical Studies
Journal of International Women’s Studies
Journal of Inter-Religious Dialogue
Journal of Interreligious Studies: www.irstudies.org
Journal of Islamic Studies
Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies
Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs
Journal of Women’s History
Philosophy Activism Nature (PAN)
Religion and Gender: www.religionandgender.org
Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society
Studies in Interreligious Dialogue
The Muslim World
Theology & Sexuality
Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology