

# Sunni and Shi'ite Islam

REL 276 (Fall 2011)  
MWF 11:30 – 12:20 (Chambers 1006)

Prof. Syed Rizwan Zamir

Office: Preyer 201A

Off. Tel. (704) 894-2950

Email (Mon – Fri): [rizamir@davidson.edu](mailto:rizamir@davidson.edu) (On weekends I will have limited access to email)

Office Hours: Mon & Wed 12:30- 2:00; Tue 3:00 – 4:00

## Course Description:

This course is an overview of the doctrines, thought, spirituality and history of Shi'ite Islam and complements RELI 272 (Introduction to Islam) that presented Islam from the mainstream Sunni point of view. Although primarily an introduction to Shi'ite Islam, throughout the semester we will touch upon the commonalities and differences between Sunni and Shi'ite Islam. Beginning with the origins of the Sunni-Shi'ite split in history our study will discuss Shi'ite theology, view of history and political and religious history, legal tradition, popular piety and spirituality. We will also examine major themes within the Sunni-Shi'ite polemical literature, and close with reflections on recent political developments and ecumenical efforts from both sides.

## Required Readings (available at the Bookstore):

1. al-Tabatabai, Muhammad Husayn. *Shi'ite Islam*. (Albany, State University of New York Press, 1975).
2. Amir-Moezzi, Mohammad Ali, and Institute of Ismaili Studies. *The Spirituality of Shi'i Islam: Beliefs and Practices*. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011).
3. Ayoub, Mahmoud. *The Crisis of Muslim History: Religion and Politics in Early Islam*. (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003).
4. Halm, Heinz. *Shi'ism*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).
5. Inayat, Hamid. *Modern Islamic Political Thought: The Response of the Shi'i and Sunni Muslims to the Twentieth Century*. (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2005).

## Course Requirements:

|                                                                                                           |                      |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|
| Midterm Examination                                                                                       | 30%                  |
| Final Examination                                                                                         | 35% (self-scheduled) |
| 2 Response Papers (3-4 pages)<br><b>OR</b> Book Report (7-8 pages)<br><b>OR</b> Research Paper (8-10page) | 20%                  |
| Attendance & Participation*                                                                               | 15%                  |

*\*Note:* Classes vary in format from lecturing to in-class discussions of the readings. Once a week (or in two weeks) we will be reviewing the readings together in the class. You will be required to bring in questions from the readings for discussion and clarification. Your participation grade is based therefore on the overall quality of your in-class participation throughout the semester. This includes proper class etiquette, attentiveness, preparing for the discussion sessions, asking engaging questions and responding to those asked by the instructor. Do ask the instructor if you have any questions regarding how to make your participation more effective.

### **A Note on the Response Papers:**

Instead of merely a summary of the reading itself, these assignments give you a chance to reflect on aspects of the reading that you find interesting, contentious, or simply unclear/confusing. In the larger picture, these “response papers” are designed to help you “think through” the major themes in the readings and provide some insight to allow you to better participate in the class discussions. The response papers should indicate that you have critically engaged the readings; large quotes from the readings are as unacceptable as a rambling current of thoughts unrelated to the subject at hand.

**Attendance Policy:** Attendance is compulsory in this course and more than 2 absences without valid excuse such as sickness or family emergency etc. will result in lowering of grade. It is student’s responsibility to obtain notes and ‘catch-up’ in the case of absence. *Absence will not be a good excuse for not knowing what happened in the class.*

**Grading Scale:** To avoid any misunderstandings, I will share with you what is expected in order to obtain good marks in this course:

A: Excellent Work: a firm grasp of the material in lectures and readings and an ability to offer sound and insightful analysis.

B: Solid Work: a good grasp of the material in lectures and readings and significant effort to interpret the material in an analytical fashion.

C: Decent work: a fair grasp of the material in lectures and readings, but analysis and effort are lacking.

D: Poor work: a simplistic understanding of the material with little or no effort towards analysis.

F: Little grasp of the subject matter and no attempt to engage the material or respect the parameters of the course and assignments.

**Disabilities:** A student who requires accommodation for a documented disability of any type should see me *immediately* to discuss modifications to course requirements.

**Academic Honesty:** Students are expected to fully abide by the Honor Code as set out by the College and should pledge all their assignments and exams.

**NOTE:** The instructor reserves the right to change/alter the syllabus as he deems fit.

## **COURSE OUTLINE**

### **WEEK 1 (Aug 22-26): Introduction to the Course/Islam**

*Readings:* Tabatabai 3-35

*Note:* Start reading an introductory book on Islam (especially those with no background in Islam)

- Framework for the study of Sunni and Shi'ite Islam
- Demographic Distribution of Sunnis and Shiites
- Scholarly Study of Shi'ism: History, Methods and Approaches
- Major sources and Scholars of Shi'ism

### **WEEK 2 (Aug 29-Sep 2): Introduction to Islam**

*Readings:* You should complete your reading of the introductory book on Islam by this weekend

- The Qur'an,
- The Prophet
- Religious Doctrines and Practices

### **WEEK 3 (Sep 5-Sep 9): Early Islamic History**

*Readings:* Ayoub: Introduction - p.80

- Origins of Islam
- The Prophet's Life (Meccan and Medinan Period)
- The Muslim Community during the Prophet's times
- The Prophet's Companions (*sahaba*) and the Family (*ahl al-bayt*)

### **WEEK 4 (Sep 12-Sep 16): The Question of Succession**

*Readings:* Ayoub: 81- 167 & Tabatabai 39-55

- Political and Spiritual Authority in Islam
- The Question of Succession to the Prophet
- Caliphate vs. Imamate
- Sunni and Shi'ite view of Islamic History
- Majority-Minority: Causes of Separation
- Sunni Perception of Political Authority: The Caliphate

### **WEEK 5 (Sep 19-Sep 23): Shi'ite Beliefs**

*Readings:* Tabatabai 123-190

- Understanding of God
- Prophetology
- Eschatology
- Imamology

## WEEK 6 (Sep 26-Sep 30): Imamology Contd. and the Lives of the Twelver Shi'ite Imams

Readings: Tabatabai 190-214 and Amir-Moezzi 103-131, 231-275

- The Household of the Prophet (ahl al-bayt)
- Significance of Imam 'Ali
- Shi'ite Approach to the Concept of Authority: The Imam and His Functions
- Lives of the Twelve Imams

1. 'Ali ibn Abi@ T}a>lib
2. Ima>m H}asan
3. Ima>m H}usayn
4. Ima>m Sajja>d
5. Ima>m Ba>qir
6. Ja'far al-S}a>diq
7. Ima>m Musa> al-Ka>z}im
8. Ima>m Rid}a>
9. Muhammad Taqi@
10. 'Ali al-Naqi@,
11. H}asan al-'Askari@
12. Ima>m Mahdi>: Occultation and Re-Appearance

## WEEK 7 (Oct 3-7): Imamology and Esoteric Shi'ism

Readings: Tabatabai 215-217 and Amir-Moezzi 133-190, 277-304, 403-429

- Imam as the Divine Guide
- Shi'ism as Initiatic Path
- Nubuwwa/Wilaya and exoteric/esoteric religion
- Shi'ite Mystical anthropology
- Shi'ite Messianism

## OCT 7: MIDTERM EXAM

FALL BREAK: Fri, Oct 7 (4:30 p.m.) - Wed, Oct 12 (8:30 a.m.)

## WEEK 8 (Oct 12-14): Shi'ite Religious and Spiritual Life

Readings: Tabatabai 231-233, Amir-Moezzi 339-400.

- Shi'ite Law and Jurisprudence (see below for details covered)
- Prayer Life
- Encounters with the Imam
- Visitations

### *Shi'i Law and Jurisprudence*

Sources of Shi'i Law

Development of Shi'ite Jurisprudence and Legal Methodology (*usul al-fiqh*)

The Rise of the Notion of *ijtihad* and the Office of *Mujtahid* as the Supreme Jurisprudent

The Emergence of Juristic Hierarchy (*Marja'iyah*) and its Effects on the Structure of Political Authority of Time

On *Jihad*

### **WEEK 9 (Oct 17-21): Divisions within Shi'ism**

*Readings:* Tabatabai 75-83 and Halm 160-206

- - Twelver Imamism (*Ithna'ashari*)
  - Isma'ilism & its branches
  - Zaydism & its branches
  - Other branches

**OCT 21: 1<sup>st</sup> RESPONSE PAPER IS DUE TODAY**

### **WEEK 10 (Oct 24-28): Twelver Shi'ite History till the Mongol Invasion**

*Readings:* Tabatabai 55-65 and Halm 1-60 and 137-141

From Imam Hasan to the Martyrdom of Husayn  
Muawwiya  
Yazid: Persecution of the Shi'ites  
The Tragedy of *Karbala*  
Martyrdom of Husayn in Shi'ite Thought  
Other Umayyad Caliphs  
The End of the Umayyad Dynasty  
Shi'ism under the Abbasid Caliphate

### **WEEK 11 (Oct 31-Nov 4): Twelver Shi'ite History from Mongol Invasion to the Present**

*Readings:* Tabatabai pp. 65-67, 89-120, Halm 60-98, 124-135

- - Shi'ite Intellectual History (An Outline)
    - Shi'ite Theology
    - Philosophical Developments within the Shi'ite World
    - Mysticism within the Shi'ite Tradition
    - Usuli-Akhbari Divide
  - Rise of the Safavids in Iran and Religio-political developments in its aftermath
  - Historical Expansion of Shi'ism and Present Geography
    - Persia
    - Iraq
    - Lebanon and Syria
    - Anatolia
    - India
    - Gulf and other regions

### **WEEK 12 (Nov 7 -Nov 11): Religion and Politics in Shi'ite Iran & Shi'i Responses to Modernism**

*Readings:* Halm pp. 98-124, Enayat 160-194.

Issues in contemporary Shi'ite thought  
Iranian Revolution  
Major Contemporary Iranian Intellectuals and Religious Scholars  
State and government in Shi'ite thought and history  
Shi'ite clerical structures and institutions  
The Role of Shi'ite Clergy in Politics

**WEEK 13 (Nov 14-18): Sunni-Shi'ite Differences and Polemics**

*Readings:* Hamid Enayat pp. 1-50; other readings to be announced and provided

Review of the differences between Sunni and Shi'ite Islam  
Recurring Themes in the Polemical Literature

**NOV 16: 2<sup>nd</sup> RESPONSE PAPER/BOOK REPORT/RESEARCH PAPER IS DUE**

**NOV 18:** *There will be no class today* – You will watch a movie this weekend

**WEEK 14 (Nov 22):** *There will be no class today*

*THANKSGIVING BREAK: Tue, Nov 22 (4:30 p.m.)-Mon, Nov. 28 (8:30 a.m.)*

**WEEK 15 (Nov 28-Dec 2): Sunni and Shi'ite Islam (Convergences and Divergences)**

*Readings:* Nasr "Sufism and Shi'ism"; other readings to be announced and provided

-

Reviewing the Commonalities and Differences between Sunni and Shi'i Islam  
Sufism as the Meeting ground between Shi'ism and Sunnism  
Islamic Esoterism  
Ecumenical efforts, intra-faith dialogue and recent developments  
Hurdles – religious and geopolitical

*Fall Semester Classes End Dec. 7*  
*December 5-7 Optional Class Days*  
*December 8 Reading Day*