

UNIVERSITÉ SAINT-PAUL

FACULTÉ DE PHILOSOPHIE



SAINT PAUL UNIVERSITY

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Muslim Perspectives on Justice, Peace, Diversity, and Good Government

Spring 2012
Tues and Thurs, 17:30–20:30
Room XXX

Professor: Matthew A. MacDonald
mmacdonald@ustpaul.ca
613-236-1393; Extension: XXX

Instructor reserves the right to modify course outline up to an including first scheduled class

Course Description

At a time of great upheaval in the Middle East, when tensions between Muslims and non-Muslims in many countries are on the rise, when people are beginning to question the claim that religion would eventually die out and become politically meaningless, when people continue to worry about religious fanaticism and violence, and when people continue to wrestle with increasingly serious questions about how to understand and live with human diversity, this course introduces students to a variety of Muslim perspectives on justice, peace, diversity, and good government. There are more than 1.5 billion professed Muslims throughout the world. Islam clearly represents a significant, living tradition of knowledge of the transcendent that speaks to many people in many different ways. Informed by the Qur'an, said to be an accurate record of the verbatim revealed word of God, and the teachings and practices of the Prophet Muhammad (c. 570–632 CE), Muslims throughout history have developed a wide range of ideas about what justice is, how peace and justice should and can best be achieved, how to understand and live with human diversity, and what good government consists of. In Muslim-majority countries, even people who do not consider themselves particularly religious cannot escape the profound cultural, and consequently moral and political, influence of Islam, often taking for granted different Muslim assumptions about justice, peace, diversity, and politics. Whether in Canada, France, Saudi Arabia, or Senegal, Islam represents a major tradition that no serious student of politics, conflict, philosophy, and human relations can reasonably ignore. In this course, students will study and discuss the historical, philosophical, and theological development of different conceptions of justice in Islam, the challenges confronting Muslims and Muslim political thinkers today, and various contemporary Muslim perspectives on justice, peace, diversity, and good government that attempt to respond to these challenges.

Objectives

1) For students who are relatively unfamiliar with Islam, to learn enough about Islam to facilitate a serious engagement with contemporary texts in political theory written from a Muslim perspective and to better understand the role of Islam as a cultural force and tradition of knowledge of the transcendent.

- 2) For students to better understand the relationship between Islam and politics, especially in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, in a variety of social, political, and historical contexts.
- 3) To become familiar with and better understand the ideas of various classical and contemporary Muslim political thinkers on questions related to justice, peace, diversity, and good government.
- 4) To consider what non-Muslims may learn from different Muslim conceptions of justice, peace, diversity, and good government, and what Muslims may learn from considering alternative perspectives from a variety of Muslim thinkers.

Instructor Biography

Matthew A. MacDonald holds a PhD in Political Science, specializing in Political Theory and International Relations, from Carleton University, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. He has taught courses on religion and politics in the College of the Humanities at Carleton and political thought in the modern Muslim Middle East in the Department of Political Science at Carleton. His doctoral thesis, *Truth, Politics, and Diversity: A Muslim Response to Modern Liberalism*, offers a comprehensive synthesis of the political theology of Tariq Ramadan, one of the most prominent contemporary Muslim political thinkers, with a view to articulating a possible Muslim alternative to the modern liberal paradigm of diversity. His work focuses on cultural, religious, moral, and ethical diversity; truth and politics; freedom of religion; and Muslim political thought. He has presented papers at conferences in Canada and the United States and his work has been published in the *American Journal of Islamic Social Science* and the *Journal of Islamic Philosophy* (forthcoming).

Required Texts

BOOKS:

Nimat H. Barazangi, M. Raquibuz Zaman, and Omar Afzal (eds.), *Islamic Identity and the Struggle for Justice* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996).

Majid Khaddhur, *The Islamic Conception of Justice* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

Other readings available in custom-made course-pack and/or online.

Grading

In-class presentation:	20%
Essay based on presentation:	20%
Attendance and Participation:	20%
Major Essay:	40%

Instructions for presentations and essays will be given in class.

NB: Failure to follow essay documentary guidelines entails a penalty of 10%.