

## Conference Report: Howard University School of Divinity's International Conference on the Qur'ān

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For the religiously diverse group of students at Howard University's School of Divinity, the Islamic Studies concentration in the Masters of Arts in Religious Studies and the Doctor of Ministry is an opportunity for an in-depth study of the Qur'ān and the Prophetic Tradition. It is a study of the Qur'ān and the Prophetic Tradition at a university steeped in a history and tradition of social justice - a university established to fight the oppression Black people faced at the end of slavery.

The Islamic Studies program at Howard University's School of Divinity is the first graduate theological program in the mid-Atlantic region to establish Islam as a permanent course of study. Its extensive course work and authentic hands-on methodologies foster critical thinking and place students at the forefront of current events and intriguing conversation within the Christian-Muslim community. The Islamic Studies Program at HUSD is under the direction of its founder, Associate Professor Dr. Zainab Alwani whose specialty is jurisprudence, Qur'ānic Studies, gender equity, women's religious scholarship, and Islamic family law. She is an advocate for the role of Muslim women as religious scholars. Dr. Alwani holds the distinction of being the first female jurist to serve on the board of the Fiqh Council of North America, an association of Muslims who interpret Islamic law in North America. She has authored and co-authored a wide variety of publications ranging from textbooks, book chapters, to scholarly articles. She is currently working on a book about Muslim female scholars and their critical role in socioeconomic, cultural, and political reform.

Highlights of the Islamic Studies program include a two-day international conference on the Qur'ān in 2013 and 2015 that brought together academics, community leaders, and students. It focused on contemporary Qur'ānic scholarship and was a collaboration between the Howard University Divinity School, George Mason University, Georgetown University, and the International Institute of Islamic Thought. Papers were presented from students and researchers from a range of universities including Duke University and Harvard Divinity School. The conference focused on the Qur'ān in dialogue with Jews and Christians, between faith and critical thinking, Qur'ānic ethics, gender in the Qur'ān, intertextual readings, and a thematic and stylistic analysis of the Qur'ān.

The Islamic Studies program also hosts a yearly Christian-Muslim Dialogue that brings students and the community together to talk about religious and social issues of the day. The 2017 Dialogues was centered around the following questions: How does your devotion to God impact your everyday life? What is the value of another faith? How do we create a beloved community between Muslims and Christians?

On September 29 and 30, 2017, the School of Divinity partnered with the Office of the Dean of the Chapel, under the direction of Dr. Bernard Richardson, for the debut conference, "Islam and the BlackAmerican: From African Roots to American Fruit." The conference was a university wide project which featured collaborations between the School of Divinity and the Office of the Dean of the Chapel, the Center for Excellence in Teaching, Learning and Assessment, the Department of African Studies, the School of Education, and the College of Arts and Sciences.

The conference featured an opening plenary session led by Imam Zaid Shakir, co-founder of Zaytuna College. Imam Zaid, along with Dr. Hakim Rashid of Howard University's School of

Education and Dr. Bahiyyah Muhammad of Howard University's Department of Sociology served as respondents for the papers presented on the first day of the conference. Dr. Sherman Jackson, King Faisal Chair in Islamic Thought and Culture and Professor of Religion and American Studies and Ethnicity at the University of Southern California, delivered the luncheon keynote address on the second day of the conference. Dr. Jackson and Imam Zaid Shakir served as the second day's respondents.

A review board selected 13 proposals from students and researchers from universities including Howard, Duke, Ohio State, Harvard Divinity School, the Graduate Theological Foundation, and Northeastern Law School. Paper titles included: "Re-Visioning the Afro Arab" by Nubia Kai, Ph.D., Howard University; "Egyptian Musk and Bean Pies: A History of Black Muslim Political Economies in New York City," Rasul Miller, Ph.D. candidate, University of Pennsylvania; "Embodied Ideology: The Nation of Islam and Constructed Womanhood," Parmida Mostafavi, Duke University; Northeastern Law student Hakeem Muhammad, Northeastern Law School, "The Islam of Black Revolutionaries: Confronting the Prison Industrial System."; "Islam and the Black American Woman: Invisibility from the Root to the Fruit," Maryam Sharrieff, Harvard Divinity School; and "The Making of American Islam and the Emergence of Western Islamic Intellectual Thought to Prevent Violent Extremism: A Case Study of American Muslim Revivalist, Imam W. D. Mohammed (1933-2008)," Muhammad Fraser-Rahim, Howard University, Ph.D. candidate.

Plans are currently underway for next year's conference, scheduled for September 28-29, 2018.