

KHATIB PROGRAM IN RELIGION & DIALOGUE

University of Mary Washington

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dr. Mehdi Aminrazavi

I am honored to announce the establishment of **The Khatib Program in Religion & Dialogue (KPRD)** at the University of Mary Washington in 2019.

Who are the Khatibs and why have they given us a gift which makes the establishment of this program possible? It was over a decade ago, when through a mutual friend, I met Dr. Reza Khatib and his wife, Georgianna Khatib in New York for the first time. Dr. Khatib, who had practiced neurosurgery in New York and Florida, graduated from Tehran University's Medical School in 1956 after which he came to the US to specialize in neurosurgery.

Dr. Khatib and his wife are well known for their philanthropic work in science, medicine, and brain-related diseases, but the tragedy of 9/11 opened up an area of concern. As Dr. Khatib mentioned to me when we met, on 9/11 they were in New York and witnessed the horrors and destruction caused by hate and religious fanaticism. The husband and wife looked at each other and said, "We need to do something about it!" The Khatibs then set aside one million dollars; the proceeds of which were

dedicated to promoting inter-religious dialogue. The Khatibs observed that it is only through mutual understanding and respect for each other's religions that tolerance and peaceful coexistence is possible, and since sacred scriptures can be used or abused, they can become a source for good or evil. The Khatibs then decided to support endeavors to expose and introduce the scholarly and academic



Dr. Reza Khatib and Mrs. Georgianna Clifford Khatib

versions of religions taught by well-respected academics to offset the hateful agendas of those

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who commit violence in the name of world religions.

For some time, other institutions of higher education were the beneficiary of their generous gift; now the University of Mary Washington has become what we hope to be the permanent home of **The Khatib Program in Religion & Dialogue**.

Throughout the last year, following numerous meetings at UMW and in New York, the administrative and legal documents were drawn up, and the work began. As the Interim Director of the Khatib Program, I went to work and put together an ambitious program which unfortunately, due to the Covid-19, was only partially implemented. The program we had designed was to sponsor a number of events which included the following:

1. The Bible & the Qur'an:

We sponsored the teaching of a course for credit titled "Religion 231: The Bible & the Qur'an," in the Spring of 2020. Professor Benjamin Maton who specializes in inter-religious dialogue and is affiliated with the University of Virginia taught the course.

2. Thomas Jefferson's Statute of Religious Freedom:

On the occasion of Thomas Jefferson's Statue of Religious Freedom, Professor Mary Beth Mathews of the Religious Studies Program, offered a lecture on the "Religions of Enslaved People" with emphasis on the predominance of Islam among early African Americans. (February 18, 2020.)

It was following the above event that the Corona virus changed the very fabric of our society and the University decided to close. While we were not able to complete the rest of our plans, we are however, keeping them as future plans and as soon as it is safe to resume our activities, we shall proceed with

them. The events which we had planned are as follows:

3. Inter-religious conference.

Representatives of six religions were to present their views in an all-day symposium. This event was scheduled for Friday April 3, 2020 and the following individuals were scheduled to speak:

- Judaism: Rabbi Elizabeth Goldstein
- Christianity: Pastor Benjamin Maton
- Islam: Chaplain Munira Abdalla
- Baha'ism: Bret Breneman, Northern Virginia Baha'i Center
- Buddhism: Rev. Hayashi- Resident Minister of Ekoji Buddhist Temple
- Sikhism: Randhir Chhatwal, Sikh Foundation of Virginia

Sessions were to be moderated by Dr. Daniel Hirshberg, Dr. Steve Rabson and Dr. Mehdi Aminrazavi.

4. Inter-Religious Dialogue at the Smithsonian Institute's "The National Museum of Asian Art."

The Khatib Program for Religion & Dialogue in collaboration with the First Millennial Network of scholars and the Smithsonian Institute's "The National Museum of Asian Art" in Washington, DC jointly organized a roundtable conversation on interreligious dialogue. Participants were to propose new ways to study the complex dynamic between shared, and competing, religious investments in first millennium artifacts and contemporary religious conflicts. This event was scheduled for April 16, 2020. Among the participants were:

Peter Bang, U. of Copenhagen

Richard Hodges, President of The American Academy of Rome

Muriel Debie, Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes

Matthew Canepa, U. of Chicago

Susanna Elm, UC Berkeley

Michael McCormick, Harvard University

Stephanie Mulder, U. of Texas, Austin

D. Ali, UPenn

Valerie Hansen, Yale

Annette Yoshiko Reed, NYU

5. Summer program in Inter-religious dialogue:

Professor Daniel Hirshberg of the Religious Studies Program was going to take a group of our students to Japan to study Japanese religions, such as Zen Buddhism, and Shintoism. Through the Khatib program, modest financial assistance was to be offered to students in order to enable them to complete the program.

The above are among the events which the generous gift of the Khatibs has made possible. We look forward to offering another Khatib sponsored class next year and to implement the events which had to be postponed.

-Mehdi Aminrazavi

Professor of Philosophy & Religious Studies



Dr. Mehdi Aminrazavi

*Interim Director of the Khatib Program in Religion
and Dialogue*

RELG 234: THE BIBLE AND THE QUR'AN

Course Description and Reflections from Rev. Benjamin Maton:

Scriptural Reasoning (SR) is a now worldwide practice of shared scriptural study among Jews, Muslims, and Christians. During the Spring 2020 semester at UMW, I was privileged to offer students an introduction to SR through the course entitled *The Bible and the Qur'an*. While we spent some of our time introducing the sacred scriptures of the three Abrahamic communities and how they are read and used within them, the main goal of the class was to teach students to read and engage with the texts and with one another in weekly in-class scriptural reasoning sessions. In those sessions, we strove to read those scriptures as scriptures and see how we together might grow deeply into our own religious traditions while at the same time being drawn closer—often surprisingly so—to the ones those traditions in various ways have marked as outsiders. In contrast to modes of thought and life that extol quick work and value product, “scriptural reasoning” offers an apprenticeship in slow, careful, even loving reading of scripture that instead of insisting on agreement teaches participants how to disagree better and more peaceably. In a world too full of anger and tribalism (has it ever been otherwise?), the class aimed to equip students—at once members of singular religious traditions and of a diverse global community—with a tool for imagining religion without violence and for fostering alternatives to interreligious strife.

So how did it go? Well, as one might imagine, a course like this one is not the easiest thing to pull off in classroom of undergraduates at a state university. SR asks of participants a level of personal investment, even vulnerability, probably atypical of most other courses students had experienced and not everyone was ready for it at first. As the weeks went on, however, I noticed a growing intensity in discussions and depth of thought in the required weekly journal reflections. Before coronavirus and campus closing made it impossible, we had hoped as a class to visit local places of worship and hear from faith leaders about how about the scriptures are used in worship and daily life to form the faithful. Still, we were able to make use of online resources and Zoom meetings to finish off the semester strong. I'm confident students left the class with not only a better understanding of the sacred scriptures of Jews, Christians, and Muslims, but better equipped to engage with others honestly, fruitfully, and peacefully across religious boundaries.

Benjamin Maton is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Virginia's Religious Studies program in Scripture, Interpretation and Practice where he was first introduced to the philosophy and practice of Scriptural Reasoning and had opportunity to organize and facilitate SR workshops and seminars throughout the Virginia commonwealth. Before coming to Virginia, Ben studied at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis (MDiv, STM) and currently serves as pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church in Charlottesville. Questions about the course can be directed to him at bom6y@virginia.edu or 434-806-0021



JEFFERSON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM LECTURE: "THE RELIGIOUS WORLDS OF ENSLAVED AFRICAN AMERICANS"

Description and Reflections by Professor Mary Beth Matthews:

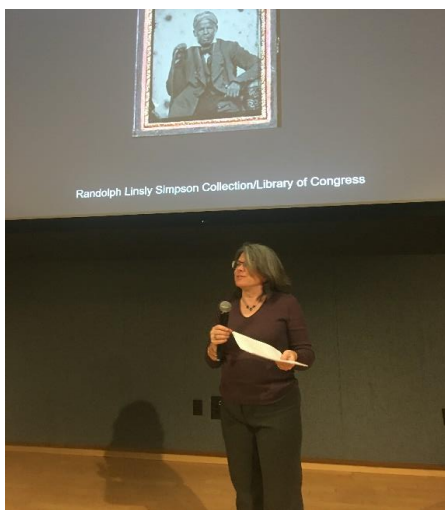
"I was honored to deliver the Jefferson Statute for Religious Freedom Lecture this semester, supported by generous support from the Khatib Program. In the lecture, I explained that despite the lack of freedom and religious freedom offered to enslaved African Americans, they created their own religious worlds and wrested religious freedom for themselves.

Religious freedom is different than religious tolerance. Religious freedom is the notion that the right to believe or not believe, to worship however one pleases resides within the individual as part of being a human being. The Founding Fathers enumerated it as an "unalienable" right—humans couldn't, in theory, be stripped of this right because it was part of their nature. But the history of the United States has been marked with plenty of times that groups weren't allowed to worship or believe what they wanted to. Enslaved Africans and their enslaved descendants were among those groups. For enslaved Africans, slavery meant a break with a land that was integral to their religious traditions. For their enslaved descendants, it meant living in a society that attempted to control their religious

options.

Enslaved Africans brought a variety of religions with them to the New World, among them indigenous religions and Islam. The Middle Passage and the cultural annihilation inherent in slavery largely eradicated all but vestiges of those religions, but enslaved African Americans managed to adapt and interpret Christianity through their own lens, rather than the lens offered by their enslavers.

I often tell my students that they should always ask the "so what?" question--why is this information important? In this case, there are three answers to that question. First enslaved African American used a belief in the interconnectedness of this world and the supernatural and a belief that they would be God's chosen people. Second, religious freedom is taken, not given. While the Founding Fathers could talk a good game about religious liberty being a natural right, they denied it to those people they held in bondage. But ironically, enslaved African Americans proved that religious freedom was a human right--they exercised it without permission of white authorities and made it their own. Third and finally, these religious dialogues have echoes in today's world. African American religious worlds still combine the long history of Christianity and the echoes of oppression. There is no singular version of Christianity, nor is there a singular black Christianity. Instead, it's incredibly complex."



Dr. Mary Beth Matthews



Audience at the Jefferson Religious Freedom Lecture

KHATIB AWARD IN RELIGION AND DIALOGUE

Another promising opportunity made possible by the Khatib's generous donation comes in the form of an award available for upperclassmen who are Religious Studies majors. This award would be used for an educational experience outside of the UMW Fredericksburg campus community to introduce students to different religions and cultures.

To qualify for the award, students need to discuss the potential course or program with Dr. Aminrazavi; complete an application; submit a final reflection (2-4 pages) on the program upon completion; and have a minimum GPA of 3.0. The application can be found below, or by request. Formal inquiries and applications may be sent to Dr. Mehdi Aminrazavi at maminraz@umw.edu.

KHATIB AWARD IN RELIGION AND DIALOGUE APPLICATION

The Religion Program has received a generous gift from Dr. & Mrs. Khatib to promote interreligious dialogue at UMW. From this fund, several awards will be distributed to declared religion majors entering their junior or senior year who want to take courses for credit -or university acknowledgement- in the US or overseas that provide a deeper insight into religious traditions outside of their own. Upon completion of the program or courses, the student will write a brief 2-4-page reflection on the experience which may potentially be published in the annual *Khatib Program in Religion & Dialogue Newsletter*.

In addition to the information listed below, please attach:

- Proof of financial need in the form of a copy of your Student Aid Report (found on the FAFSA website)
- Information on the program in which you intend to enroll

All applications and inquiries should be sent to Dr. Medhi Aminrazavi at: maminraz@umw.edu

APPLICANT INFORMATION

Full Name: _____ Date: _____
Last First M.I.

Phone: _____ Email _____

Anticipated
Graduation Year and
Major(s): _____

GPA: _____

ESSAY

In 1-2 pages, describe the program you intend to attend and the benefits of this course or program to you and UMW in the context of interreligious studies. Explain your qualifications for the Khatib Award and ways in which you will benefit from it.