Teaching about Islam for RE in secondary schools: resources and approaches

Time 11 November 2017
Venue ISMC, 210 Euston Road, London, NW1 2DA (2nd floor, room 2.3)

9.30-10.00 Registration

10.00-11.15 The academic scholarship on early Islam
Critical scholarship on Muhammad, the Quran and the first two centuries of Islam has produced fascinating, but contradictory results in the past four decades. In this session, we examine the different revisionist approaches of John Wansborough, Patricia Crone, Fred Donner and the Early Islamic Studies Seminar (EISS). The intention is not to endorse any of these positions, but to see how they emerge from privileging different sources, from among the Quran, the Sira [the biography of Muhammad], the hadith [sayings attributed to Muhammad] and non-Muslim sources. These different approaches also differ from traditional Muslim narratives of the events of the seventh century by invoking different sets of comparative material. We also examine how this has led scholars to their conclusions.

11.15-11.30 Coffee

11.30-12.45 Manuscript sources
Detailed study of Quranic manuscripts has meant that some of the ultra-revisionist approaches of the 1970s have been revised. In particular, palaeographic (hand-writing) studies of the earliest manuscripts and discoveries of very early Qurans in Sana’a in Yemen have confirmed some (but not all) of the chronology of the traditional Muslim accounts of Muhammad’s life. In this session, we examine a small selection of the manuscripts held at the library of ISMC/IIS and compare some twentieth-century translations of the Quran.

12.45-13.30 Lunch

13.30-14.45 Resources available on the internet: what are children actually exposed to?
The academic discussions referred to above have had very little impact on the material that is available online, which will be the first port of call for many with interests in Islamic history or theology. This session surveys the kind of materials that are available online so that secondary teachers can have a clear picture of the different agendas that have formed these websites. In particular, we examine the use of the internet for cultural apologetics; to reinforce intra-Muslim boundaries between Sunni Shia or to recapitulate medieval narratives for a modern audience.

14.45-15.00 Coffee

15.00-16.15 Textbook resources: how can we teach using what is available
This last session examines the treatment of Islam in curricula recommended for Key Stage 3 and GCSE. Here, we highlight the areas where factual errors are likely to occur and the agendas that produce these. We also aim to discuss how RE textbooks are designed more generally and how this encourages certain visions of religion over others. However, we also recognise that this is the kind of material that is readily available, and we conclude by asking how one might teach good lessons using problematic textbook materials, by encouraging students to pose critical questions.

16.15-17.00 Q&A

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