“Our Muslim Neighbors”

“...I was profoundly conscious of the fact that [the missionaries] did not understand Muslims because they were not properly trained for the work. As far as Islam was concerned, they were horribly ignorant.” These words, from a scholar in Cairo, describe a besetting problem in North American theological education. Because they are over a century old, they underscore the truth that understanding Islam is not a new challenge. The “enigma of Islam,” as Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) termed it, now confronts us in a rapidly changing world. When Reformed Theological Seminary was founded in 1966, there were few mosques in America. A generation later, a flourishing Islamic community is found in every major city in the United States.

Then, September 11, 2001 happened. According to Michael Novak, the terrorist attacks on that date marked the abrupt end of the “unshakeable” confidence that the world was “going automatically secular.” As Islam has awakened from a half-millennium of isolation, Christians are confronted with their profound ignorance of Islamic teachings and practices. Our world keeps changing, as more recently stunning events in the Islamic world have been dubbed the “Arab Spring.” Will this yield more problems or more promise or both?

What has not changed is the mission of Reformed Theological Seminary, which is “to serve the Church by preparing its leaders, through a program of graduate theological education, based upon the authority of the inerrant Word of God, and committed to the Reformed Faith.” In fidelity to this calling, RTS includes a missional commitment among its core values:

RTS equips leaders to take the Gospel of Jesus Christ into the whole world in the power of the Holy Spirit in order to proclaim that salvation is only by God’s grace through faith alone in Christ alone, and in order to disciple the nations into maturity in Christ. Our goal is that the world may worship the true God, serving him everywhere in His creation, and that the nations may enjoy His presence and restoration.

Flowing from this mission, the RTS QEP Steering Committee has developed a systematic plan to integrate the study of the diversity of Islamic faith and practice in the seminary’s Master of Divinity (MDiv) curriculum. At its heart, the QEP has three basic components:

1. A new class in the MDiv curriculum: “Christian Encounter with Islam”;
2. The expansion of coverage of Islam in five other MDiv courses;
3. The addition of three new artifacts for assessment purposes.

With careful attention by the faculty and stable support from the administration, we believe the QEP will play a vital role in improving the preparation for ministry at Reformed Theological Seminary, enabling our graduates better to understand, love, and witness to their Muslim neighbors.