

AMSS 37th ANNUAL CONFERENCE

“Crossing Boundaries: Mobilizing Faith, Diversity and Dialogue”

Hosted By:
The Harvard Divinity School
Harvard University, Cambridge, MA
October 24 – 25. 2008

ABSTRACT

“Cultural Worlds/Culture Wars:
Islam, Christianity, and Culture in the 21st Century”

By: Marcia Hermansen, Ph.D
(Loyola University Chicago, IL)

A shared dimension of interfaith dialogue is a concern about the relationship of *religion* to *culture*. The cultural worlds inhabited by Christians and Muslims have often confronted people of faith with similar challenges. While the Bible and the Qur’an do not address *culture* directly, a broader concept of the *world* represents a potential distraction from faith, yet also a realm to be potentially transformed by it. In his mid-20th century classic, *Christ and Culture*, the American Protestant theologian H. R. Niebuhr delineated five distinctive ways in which Christianity has engaged its contemporary contexts throughout history, among them: Christ against culture, Christ in (assimilated to) culture, and three mediating positions. This proposed paper illustrates and analyzes corresponding debates and positions among Muslims, both in classical works and in contemporary America. This analysis constitutes an initiative towards inter-religious dialogue in demonstrating both commonalities and distinctive elements of Muslim positions on these issues. A concluding reflection will consider how Islam itself has become a polarizing element in American *culture wars* in the 21st century.