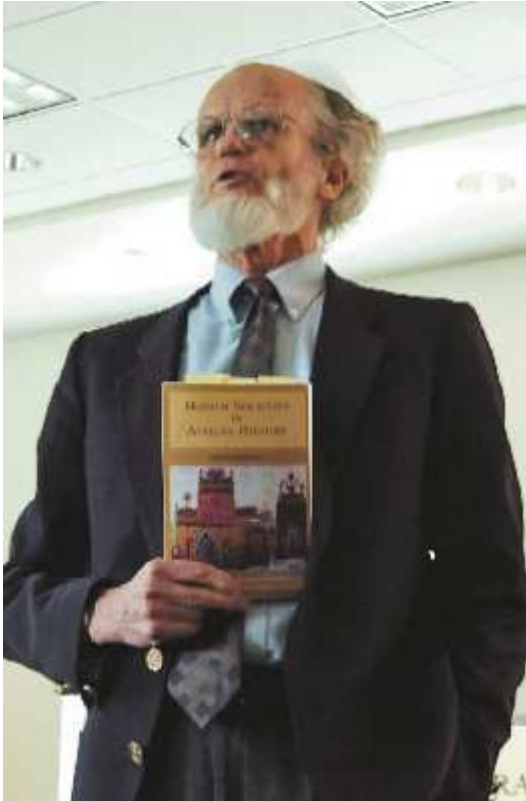


Grand Valley Lanthorn

Islam expert discusses African Muslims



GVL / Kaitlyn Irwin

Local scholar: Michigan State professor, Dr. David Robinson comes to Grand Valley to discuss with students “The Islamization of Africa and the Africanization of Islam.” The event was held in the Pere Marquette room Monday afternoon.

Amy Sawade
GVL Staff Writer
News
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Michigan State University professor David Robinson told a small group of Grand Valley State University students and faculty Monday that many people have misconceptions of the Islamic people of Africa.

“Most don’t associate Africa with Islam, or they see Africans as inferior Muslims in faith and practice,” Robinson said, addressing about 20 students in the Pere Marquette Room of the Kirkhof Center.

“The Islamization of Africa and the Africanization of Islam” was the final installment of four-part Mandela-Parks Lecture Series highlighting African and African-American culture, religion and identity.

The Muslim religion is influenced by Christianity and Judaism, Robinson said. The Quran's scriptures tell the stories of Moses, the angel Gabriel, Noah and Abraham, he added.

"If this was known, many may come to think of Islam differently and find the commonalities between them," Robinson said.

Sophia Reichert, a Jenison Public Schools teacher taking French courses at GVSU, said the lecture was very important to combat the lack of diversity in West Michigan.

"It's important for every Christian who thinks they are the bearers of the only truth to learn the diversity of Islam," Reichert said. "Generally, this area is narrow-minded."

More than half of Africa is Muslim and after the events of Sept. 11, there is more need to understand the religion outside of the Middle East, Robinson said.

The terrorist attacks changed the perceptions of Islamic identity and societies all over the world, and Muslims in Africa are no longer invisible, he added.

The Muslim world was very sympathetic and supportive of the U.S. in the months following Sept. 11, however that support dwindled after the invasion of Iraq, Robinson said.

"It was surprising to hear the Muslims were supportive of the United States after 9/11," said junior Rachel Tanner. "But it's decreasing and getting pretty negative."

GVSU philosophy professor Coeli Fitzpatrick, who also teaches an Islamic Middle East course said the lecture was useful in her work.

"I don't know that much about Muslim Africa," Fitzpatrick said. "And it's helpful to know that Islam is influenced by indigenous cultures."

Robinson gained much of his knowledge of Islam in Africa by studying in Senegal. He had to learn Arabic to read the ancient texts of Senegalese history and the local language to study the people of the west African nation.

In 2004 he wrote "Muslim Societies in African History," a text he uses for his courses at MSU. He is also the author of 12 additional books and has a doctorate from Columbia University.

Jacques Mangala, professor of African and African-American studies, invited Robinson to GVSU. The African/African American Studies Program sponsored the speech.

"David Robinson is the leading expert on Islam in Africa," Mangala said. "It's great that he's just a town away from Grand Valley."

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