

COURSE SYLLABUS

The Missionary Encounter with World Religions

Course Lecturer: Harvie M. Conn, LittD

Former Professor of Missions and Director of the Urban Missions Program at Westminster Theological Seminary

Course Description

Nothing demonstrates the pluralism of our world better than religion. Christians must be able to respond to the myriad of religious systems that permeate society. This course develops a biblical theology of religions by studying current models and approaches. Using major religious systems as examples, the lectures sketch five characteristics of all religions. Students will learn the major concepts in religious encounter, including the concept of elenctics, various definitions of “religion,” and the five magnetic points of religions. The course culminates with practical suggestions for approaching world religions evangelistically.

Course Objectives

Upon completion of the course, you should be able to:

- Appreciate the need for skill in encountering world religions.
- Understand major concepts in religious encounter, including:
 - › The concept of elenctics.
 - › The qualities of a biblical missionary encounter.
 - › Various definitions of “religion.”
 - › The background of contemporary models of encounter.
 - › Contemporary models of encounter.
 - › A basic biblical theology of religions.
 - › The five magnetic points of religions.
- Evaluate contemporary models of religious encounter.
- Develop a biblical theology of religions.
- Associate significant persons with their models of religious encounter.
- Analyze religions according to their five magnetic points.

Course Lecturer



Harvie M. Conn, LittD (1933-1999)

Education:

- Geneva College, LittD
- Westminster Theological Seminary, BD and ThM
- Calvin College, BA

Teaching Career:

- Professor of Missions and Director of the Urban Missions Program, Westminster Theological Seminary (1972-1998)
- Taught New Testament at the General Assembly Theological Seminary in Seoul, Korea (1962-1972)
- While at Westminster, Dr. Conn focused on interdisciplinary teaching methods, believing that effective ministry work must connect and meet people where they are at in their lives

Other Career Highlights:

- Greatest contribution was to the field of urban missiology where he combined statistical data with Scriptural principles
- Skilled at interpreting popular culture and building bridges to the truths of Scripture and was highly influential in advocating for the important role urban missions must play in spreading the gospel
- Instrumental in the formation of the Center for Theological Studies
- Speaker/lecturer at numerous venues throughout the world
- Ordained as an orthodox Presbyterian minister
- He and his wife spent nearly 13 years as missionaries in Korea (1960-1972), where he worked as an itinerant preacher and ministered to the indigent including special ministries to prostitutes, pimps, and the underprivileged. Physically beaten on numerous occasions for his ministry work, Dr. Conn was a tangible example of turning the other cheek and loving those who are persecuting you.
- Leader of several student mission trips to India and Uganda
- Instrumental in the Center for Urban Theological Studies, a training center for future African American pastors
- Editor of *Urban Mission* (1989-1999)
- Regular reviewer of movies/films in a column for *Eternity Magazine*
- Active in the American Society of Missiology and the Evangelical Theological Society

Publications:

- Numerous publications including the books *Evangelism: Doing Justice and Preaching Grace, A Clarified Vision for Urban Mission*, and *Theological Perspectives for Church Growth*
- *Eternal Word in a Changing World* is considered one of his most influential works
- His works have been translated into Chinese, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, Spanish, and Portuguese, among other languages

Recommended Reading

Though not required, you may choose to read the textbooks shown below to supplement your learning.

Alexander, P. organizing ed. *Eerdmans' Handbook to the World's Religions*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994.

Bavinck, J.H. *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publ. Co., 1992.

Knitter, Paul. *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985.

Textbooks can be ordered through your local bookstore, various online bookstores, or through your preferred eReader when available.

Course Methods

The lecture content for each lesson is provided in two easy-to-use formats: audio and PDF text (if available). Students can choose the medium (or combination of media) that most closely aligns with their individual learning styles.

Course Assessment and Requirements

To earn a Certificate of Completion, you must complete the course requirements. Course requirements include:

1. Listening to all 24 audio lectures.
2. Completing a final self-assessment form in which you will reflect on the content in the course and evaluate your life in light of what you have learned. The specifics of this assessment are provided in the course materials.

Course requirements noted in this syllabus will be validated before a Certificate of Completion is awarded to any student.