

## **THEOLOGY OF RELIGIONS IN THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT**

Prof. S. Wesley Ariarajah  
 Drew University School of Theology  
 E-Mail: [WARIARAJ@drew.edu](mailto:WARIARAJ@drew.edu)

Christianity was born in the Jewish environment and soon it came into touch with the religious traditions of the Greco-Roman world. Therefore, Christian attitude and approach to other religious traditions has occupied the church and its theology from the very beginning. The question became even more crucial when Christian missions expanded into Asia, Africa, Latin America and other parts of the world. Preaching of the Gospel had to be based on some theological assumptions about the faith of those to whom it was brought.

What has been the history of Christian approach to other religions? What advances have been made on this question within the ecumenical movement? What are some of the contemporary thinking on this issue? This course seeks to study this history and attempts to lift up some of the main issues that Christians need to face in relation to religious plurality. These include the doctrines of God, Christ, Holy Spirit, and the churches' approaches to Mission and Evangelism. We would also look at the writings of the main personalities associated with this discussion.

### **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

The course will include lectures by the professor as well as class presentation by the students.

The final grading will be based on the following:

Class attendance and quality of participation in the discussions: 20%

Student presentation to the class: 30%

A final paper of 15-18 pages on a topic related to the seminar: 50%

The student must select the topic of the paper and get the approval of the instructor in advance.

### **COURSE OUTLINE:**

**Sep. 6** General introduction to the course, its aims, and expectations.  
 Assignments.

**13** Theology of religions: A historical background with special emphasis on the history of the discussions in the ecumenical movement (Lecture)

**20** An Evangelical Perspective on the Theology of Religions  
 Read: Pinnock, *Wideness in God's Mercy*

**27** Roman Catholic Approaches  
 Read: Jacques Dupuis, *Towards a Theology of Religious Pluralism*

**Oct 4** Roman Catholic Approaches (Continued)  
 Documents of the Second Vatican Council. (distributed in previous class)

**11** Reading Week (No classes)

**18** A Liberal Protestant approach.

Read: John Hick, *A Christian Theology of Religions*

**25** Postmodern approach.

Read: Mark Heim, *Salvations*.

**Nov. 1** Problems and issues in Theology of Religions

Read: Paul Knitter, *Introduction to Theologies of Religions*

**8** Christian Theology for a Theology of Religions.

(Please indicate in advance the doctrine on which you wish to lead the discussion.)

Re-visiting the doctrines of God, Christ, and Salvation in the context of religious plurality.

**15** Christian Theology for a Theology of Religions (Cont.)

Re-visiting the doctrines of the Holy Spirit, the Church and Christian Missions in the context of religious plurality

**22** Thanksgiving Recess (No classes)

**29** Interfaith Dialogue: A Historical Survey; theology of dialogue; principles of dialogue; kinds of

dialogue and how to initiate and sustain dialogue.

Significant documents.

**Dec 7** Issues in Interfaith relations

Read: *Not without My Neighbour: Issues in Interfaith Relations*

Issues raised in each of the chapters of the book will be introduced for discussion by a student.

(Please indicate the chapter you like to introduce)

#### REQUIRED BOOKS:

1. Clark Pinnock, *Wideness in God's Mercy*.
2. Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Theology of Religious Pluralism*.
3. John Hick, *A Christian Theology of Religions*.
4. Mark Heim, *Salvations*.
5. Paul Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*.

6. S. Wesley Ariarajah, *Not without My Neighbour - Issues in Interreligious Relations*.