

PRECONDITIONS FOR PREACHING THE UNKNOWN GOD:
The Need For Religious Studies Programs At Bible Colleges And Christian Universities

I. Intro:

- A. Johnson University mission statement
- B. Curriculum should equip students to fulfill this goal
- C. Functionally, the latter half of 1 Peter 3:15 has not been consistently applied in attempts to “extend the Kingdom of God among all nations.” φόβου requires an acknowledgement of the other.
- D. We see φόβου done particularly well by Paul in Athens.
- E. Thesis Statement: Knowing the structures and roles of religions in the cultures in which we as Christians are sent (not merely their content) is essential in order to fulfill the Great Commission, and therefore Religious Studies ought to be taught at institutions which function with that goal in mind.

II. Body¹:

- A. History of evangelical education/evangelization
 - 1. Done well
 - a) Acts 17
 - (1) “Religious people” is not a pejorative
 - b) Stone and Campbell quotes on evangelism
 - 2. Done poorly - An ecumenical issue. The good news is not good if you have to force or deceive someone into accepting it or you reject them when they reject it.
 - a) The Crusades
 - b) Oliver Cromwell
 - c) Godless in Dixie
 - d) Renee Bach
 - 3. Much of modern evangelistic efforts fail/create resentment because they center the voices and experiences of the evangel, disrespecting the significance of the life lived outside of Christ
- B. Why Religious Studies?
 - 1. What is it?
 - a) A “secular” enterprise
 - b) A way of categorizing information about religion
 - (1) Which involves multiple disciplines (historical, anthropological, sociological, etc)

¹ A note on method/the author: as the daughter of a preacher in the Christian Church, formally educated at a Christian university in the Restoration Movement, I ground myself (and this paper) first in scripture, which then must be contextualized through history. Scripture guides and the history of RM schools guides this paper.

- (a) Which offers a more holistic picture
- 2. JZ Smith
 - a) Essential courses
 - (1) Basic Problems in the Study of Religion
 - (a) Intro to Method
 - (i) Teaches students there are many methods for understanding religion, none of which are perfect
 - (2) Basic Structures in the Interpretation of Religion
 - (a) Utilizing a specific method
 - (i) Teaches students the rigor and self-criticism necessary for learning religion well
 - (3) Basic Structures in the Self-Interpretation of Religion
 - (a) Differentiates between internal and external communication in religious communities
 - (i) Teaches students that the language by which they interpret religions and religious people is often skewed
 - (4) Religious Literature and Expression
 - (a) Focuses on specific religious texts
 - (i) Teaches students that exegesis varies across time and culture
- 3. Why we ought to consider a “secular” correction to our evangelizing efforts
 - a) Ashley S. Johnson
 - b) Psalm 139
 - c) 1 Cor 9:22

III. Conclusion:

- A. One of the most pervasive errors in evangelism is a lack of respect for those being evangelized - centering the perspective of the missionary over the individuals they are trying to reach.
- B. To counteract this, our institutions much intentionally teach respect for people and perspectives we do not share as we have always intended, Paul did, and Religious Studies does.
- C. The Great Commission