

THE FORMATION OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES
Religious Studies 180

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COURSE DESCRIPTION AND READING LIST

Preamble

The UCSB Catalog states that the general purpose of courses in Religious Studies is "to provide students with the intellectual tools and scholarly background required for a critical understanding of the forms and traditions of religion that have appeared in human culture." Within that context this course, "The Formation of Religious Studies," is described as "cross-disciplinary treatment of the origin and composition of religious studies as a distinct subject-field, from Müller, Tylor, Frazer, Durkheim and Weber to the present." Clearly, the emphasis of the course lies more in the direction of "intellectual tools and scholarly background required for a critical understanding" than it does in the direction of "the forms and traditions of religion that have appeared in human culture." In other words the course is committed to treating problems in methodology in an historical perspective. It seeks to make the "critical understanding of the forms and traditions of religion that have appeared in human culture" self-conscious.

Taken on its own terms, the purpose of the course is to develop an understanding of the origin and composition of religious studies as a distinct subject-field of scholarly inquiry. An attempt will be made to reach into the nineteenth century to gather the various strands of interests--from anthropology, sociology, philosophy, comparative law, archaeology, theology, history of art, and theology--from which religious studies has been (and is being) formed. In other words, the course is designed to cultivate a sense of a "second-order tradition" in religious studies and to place some prominent interests and problems in the field within that fundamental context.

That such a course of study does not appear often in undergraduate and graduate curricula simply calls attention to the fact that religious studies is still in a very embryonic state of development. To take some contrasting examples, when one studies philosophy he is introduced not only to long-standing philosophical issues but to philosophers and to philosophical schools. To study philosophy is to engage in philosophical reflection and to learn to find one's way into the reflections

of Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Russell, Wittgenstein, and the others. The same is true in psychology. In studying psychology, one is introduced to problems and issues that belong to the field, and he is also obliged to become acquainted with the history and theory of psychology. This in turn implies knowing one's way into Freud, Jung, Adler, Rank, Erikson, Sullivan, Maslow, and the others. To study philosophy and/or psychology is to engage the problems, issues, and interests which characterize these respective fields of study, but via a disciplined engagement that is informed by and resonates with the field's ongoing history, self-consciousness, and representative scholarly traditions.

Until lately it has been difficult to do the same in religious studies. The prime difficulty is due to the fact that instructors and students in the field are not yet generally aware of a clear, direct, conscious, self-sustaining second-order tradition in religious studies. But this in turn is partially due to the fact that religious studies is a multi-disciplinary undertaking: its subject is multiple and the scholarly means of access are numerous. As a result one cannot draw upon the pioneers in the field--Sir James Frazer, E. B. Tylor, Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Sigmund Freud, Rudolf Otto and the others--under the presumption that all of them participate in the constitution of one and the same subject. For, as is obvious, such personages come from a variety of fields, represent a variety of disciplines, and hardly ever enter the field of religious studies from the same standpoint or on the same grounds. Before very long one discovers that the principal contributions and the prime discoveries within the field have ordinarily been made by persons who are self-conscious practitioners of methods and disciplines of other fields: anthropologists, sociologists, philosophers, historians, psychologists, and sometimes historians of art. Much of the time, the formative contributions have not come from within the field, but, as it were, from the outside. Thus, if a sense of a second-order tradition is to be recovered, one cannot expect to look for a chain of communication and delivery that bears any resemblance to apostolic succession. Instead, it is disparate, disjointed, flexible, and accumulated (or even created) rather than discovered. Its sources lie here and there, and its ingredients are always arbitrarily assembled. But no matter how difficult it is to recover, the field cannot get along without a sense of second-order tradition. It cannot hope to be instrumentally self-conscious without knowing how to arrange its second-order literature. It cannot pretend to find its way until it can relate to its past in narrative form. Thus, insight into the composition of this tradition is the chief objective of this course.

Course Outline

Instead of being arranged chronologically, and rather than having its materials classified according to the various fields and disciplines (anthropology, sociology, psychology,

theology, philosophy, etc.) from which they come, the course calls attention to certain prominent methodological interests in religious studies which cut across several fields simultaneously. For example, philosophers, psychologists, theologians, and others alike have registered an interest in identifying the fundamental core element of religion; and scholarship in each of these fields has been motivated by that specific controlling objective. Similarly, another prominent methodological interest has been regulated by an attempt to recover religion's origin or earliest manifestations. Scholarship in a variety of fields has invested in that interest. The lectures, discussions, and materials of the course are arranged in constellations around these prominent signal points.

The outline of the course has been designed to promote comprehensive general knowledge, first of all, and then to provide a frame of reference for more detailed subsequent work. Accordingly, all members of the class will read the same material on a given topic (from Capps, Ways of Understanding Religion), and, in addition, each person will be required to know some specific formulations of the issue in reasonable detail. For example, everyone in the class will be asked to read each selection in the anthology on "The Sine Qua Non of Religion"; this is the general class requirement. And, in addition, each person will be held responsible for a more specific topic within that spectrum. Six times during the quarter each student must submit a paper on one of these more specific topics (2000 word maximum for each). The grade for the course will be based on a final examination (for which questions will be distributed in advance) and the six essays. It should be emphasized that the course is designed to promote a resourceful acquaintance with the broad sweep of interests, paradigms, and figures which constitute religious studies' second-order traditions. The range is broad and the number of items that will come to be included is both large and expansive. Accordingly, the instructor does not expect the members of the class to gain comprehensive, detailed knowledge of each entry in the course outline. But the class will work together to promote an understanding of the dynamics of each of the prominent problems listed in the outline, as well as a general familiarity with the personages who are associated directly with those issues of longstanding. The strategy which is being employed to make such goals accessible depends upon a cooperative group effort, where insights and information covering a wide range of materials are shared and conjoined via group discussion of the specific problem area. If the organizing scheme is accurate, essays by several persons, sometimes in diverse fields and out of varying disciplines, when combined, should contribute to a general and more specific understanding of a specific problem area.

In more detail, the sequence of topics of the course runs as follows:

- I. Introduction
 - a. On placing religion and denotating religious studies

- b. Religious Studies as a subject-field
- c. Toward recognizing a second-order tradition within the subject-field
- d. The logic of religi methodology

II. Reduction to First Principles: The Attempt to Isolate a Sine Qua Non of Religion

Read materials from Otto, Schmidt, Pattazzoni, Suzuki, Goodenough, and Tillich in WAYS OF UNDERSTANDING RELIGION, pp. 13-53, together with materials on Kant, Descartes, and isolative methodology on reserve in library.

III. Origin and Development: The Attempt to Recover Religion's Primordium and to Trace its Evolution

Read materials from Bachofen, Müller, Frazer, Levy-Bruhl, Durkheim, Bergson, Nilsson, Widengren, and Evans-Pritchard in WAYS, pp. 55-133, plus additional chapters of E. E. Evans-Pritchard, THEORIES OF PRIMITIVE RELIGION (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), on reserve.

IV. Structural Depictions: The Perceptible Aspects of Religion

Read materials from Merleau-Ponty, Widengren, Bleeker, Dumézil, Eliade, Levi-Strauss, and Geertz in WAYS, pp. 135-185, plus essays by Clifford Geertz and Melford E. Spiro, in Michael Banton, ed., ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF RELIGION (London: Tavistock, 1966), on reserve.

V. Distinguishing Organic Coordinates: On Religions, Religious Traditions, and Religious Institutions

Read materials from W. C. Smith, Smart, Weber, O'Dea, and Bellah in WAYS, pp. 187-247; supplementary materials on Wach, Troeltsch, Parsons, Radcliffe-Brown, and Zaehner, and Ninian Smart, THE RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE OF MANKIND (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), chapter one (pp. 3-23), all on reserve.

VI. Sanctionative Criticism: Theological Approaches to Religion

Read materials from Kraemer, Wach, Radhakrishnan, Danielou, and Goodenough in WAYS, pp. 249-279, and essays by Raimundo Panikkar, Karl Rahner, and Jonathan Z. Smith on reserve.

VII. Modal Parsing: The Language of Religion

Read materials on Symbolic Forms from Cassirer, Langer, and Ricoeur, and on Discourse from Ryle, Braithwaite, Holmer, and Winch, in WAYS, pp. 287-351, and take note

of supplementary materials (Whorf, Sapir, Hall, Nakamura, Kuhn, Popper, Toulmin, Steiner, and Gombrich) on reserve.

VIII. Behavioral and Motivational Referents: Religion as Personality Quotient

Read materials from James, Jung, Erikson, and Maslow in WAYS, pp. 353-392, and consult additional bibliography on psychological interpretations of religion (Leuba, Lifton, Brown, Bakan, Bettelheim, to name but a few of the more prominent entries) which will be distributed in class.

Final Reflections

The chief difficulty of the course pertains to the level of instruction at which it is offered. Because the course really serves as the equivalent, say, of the history of philosophy course in the philosophy department, or the history of psychology course in the psychology department, it carries a certain almost necessary orientational function. For that reason, it ought to be required of all undergraduate majors in religious studies, and probably should be placed somewhat early in the sequence of courses they take. At the same time, the course is of sufficient breadth and difficulty that it is unrealistic to expect untrained undergraduate students to comprehend its subject. I think the course fits best as an upper-division course, which is taken ordinarily during the junior year. I am still trying to find a way to make this orientational subject an interesting introduction to religious studies so that it might also be offered to freshmen and sophomores.

The prime strength of the course is that it provides a reliable frame of reference within the field of religious studies. I know of nothing that serves as well for map-work purposes nor from which the returns are as evident and impressive. The course is useful in helping students become aware of the ranges of schools, issues, methods, and interests which comprise the academic study of religion. It also lends rigor to the discipline.

It is the best way I know of of "introducing" religious studies, when the goal is internal orientation. I know of better ways of providing exposure to religion, but such is not the purpose of RS 180.

TEACHING RELIGION TO UNDERGRADUATES
SOME APPROACHES AND IDEAS FROM TEACHERS TO TEACHERS

Published by the Society for Religion in Higher Education
under a grant from the Eli Lilly Endowment

Edited by Luke T. Johnson

1973

FOREWORD

The current interest in religious experience among college students and increased enrollments in religious studies in many institutions have focused new attention upon the undergraduate teaching of religion. In response to changing expectations, many teachers have revised their courses, developed new programs and ways to teaching, and sought opportunities to learn how others are teaching, either through journal articles or discussions.

As one of the by-products of the recent Study of Graduate Education in Religion sponsored by the American Council of Learned Societies, Claude Welch was commissioned by the Association of American Colleges' Commission on Religion in Higher Education to survey, analyze, and interpret the current practices and experimental efforts in teaching religion to undergraduates. Part III of the resulting publication, Religion in the Undergraduate Curriculum (Washington, D.C., AAC, 1972), titled "Innovation and Experiment: Samplings," prompted some persons concerned about religion in higher education to ask how this discussion of teaching models and styles might be expanded. The result was a four stage Project on the Undergraduate Teaching of Religion sponsored by the Society for Religion in Higher Education and funded by the Lilly Endowment.

During the first stage in the Spring of 1972, an effort was made through campus visitation and extensive correspondence to identify undergraduate teachers of religion sensitive to the changing religious contexts and committed to both effective teaching and scholarly competence. Twenty-five of these teachers were invited by the Steering Committee to meet at Wingspread in Racine, Wisconsin, in September 1972 for a weekend consultation jointly sponsored with the AAC's Commission on Religion in Higher Education and hosted by the Johnson Foundation. In this second phase of the project, participants presented descriptions of particular courses they were teaching and constituted themselves into teams for making presentations to other undergraduate teachers.

In the third stage of the project, these teams presented course descriptions and sparked discussions about various teaching styles and courses at sixteen regional conferences of the American Academy of Religion, Society of Biblical Literature, and College Theology Society during the 1972-73 academic year. Reports from those conferences indicate widespread interest in improving undergraduate teaching of religion and enthusiastic response to opportunities to learn what other teachers are doing.

This notebook represents the fourth stage of the project--an effort to make available to other teachers descriptions of courses the contributors have recently taught, along with critical reflections and in some instances plans to revise the course offerings. The form of this publication, therefore, is intentionally impermanent to reflect the incomplete, "teaching in process" nature of these course descriptions. The contributors do not pretend to be "master teachers" publishing finished products, but artisans working to improve their course offerings and willing to share the process with others. In addition to the materials from the twenty-five teachers participating in the project, courses are included which were submitted by other teachers during the year. Where important, the location and departmental context of the courses are described, since geographical location, the nature of the student body, the shape of the curriculum, and an institution's history and affiliation affect the way religion is taught there.

This collection opens with articles by William May, Albert Rabil, and Jeremy Zwelling, addressing general questions about undergraduate teaching of religion. These are followed by descriptions of four introductory courses. The remainder of the material is organized around the four approaches to teaching religion utilized at the Wingspread consultation. Although no status is claimed for these categories and placement within them is somewhat arbitrary, they may provide a fresh way to view the offerings in religious studies. It is also hoped that such a format will encourage browsing outside the traditional fields of specialization and prompt the kind of cross-fertilization of materials and methods which will enhance the teaching of others.

Implicit in the planning of this project and this workbook are four assumptions about current undergraduate teaching of religion.

- 1) In spite of growing concern for more effective teaching, too little attention has been paid to the preparation of good teachers. This seems especially true in the area of religious studies, where sensitive teachers feel ill-prepared to respond to the kinds of demands made upon them by students and colleagues.

- 2) There seems to be a reticence among college teachers to share course outlines or to describe and defend a particular style of teaching. Whether because of modesty, insecurity, or fear of appearing preoccupied with teaching methods and therefore unscholarly, many teachers seem reluctant to tell their colleagues what they are doing or to risk the criticisms and suggestions of other teachers.

- 3) Although there is an understandable antipathy to courses or teaching styles which can be copied or packaged and marketed, and an aversion to so-called "master teachers," a description of how one teaches a specific course can provide insight and provoke responses which are beneficial to others in assessing their own teaching style.

4) How a teacher organizes, conducts, evaluates, and reflects upon a specific course often provides more immediate access to his self-image and understanding of his role as teacher than extended theoretical discussion about undergraduate teaching.

It is hoped that this notebook will contribute to the process begun at Wingspread, enlarged at the regional meetings, and now spreading to a growing number of undergraduate teachers who are concerned about the quality of their teaching.

Special thanks are due the members of the Project Steering Committee: Samuel H. Magill, Executive Associate, Association of American Colleges; Robert A. Spivey, Florida State University; Claude Welch, President, Graduate Theological Union; James T. Burtchaell, Provost, University of Notre Dame; John F. Wilson, Princeton University; William F. May, Chairman, Religious Studies, Indiana University; and Walter Harrelson, Dean, Vanderbilt Divinity School. We are also grateful to Kevin Gordon, now at Lone Mountain College, who was responsible for the initial campus visitation, and to Luke Johnson, a graduate student in Religious Studies at Yale, who edited these materials. The teachers who participated in the project are in our special debt. Their efforts will be rewarded as other teachers begin to share in writing, conversation, and professional conferences their own critical reflection upon how they are teaching and what they have learned about teaching from their students and colleagues. Finally, our appreciation is due the Johnson Foundation, who so graciously hosted the Wingspread Consultation, and the Lilly Endowment, whose generosity made possible this project and publication.

Harry E. Smith
Executive Director
The Society for Religion in Higher
Education

October, 1973

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