

"Religion as Illusion:  
pejorative or positive?"

WALTER CAPPS

U. of California at Santa Barbara

Wed., Dec. 3

4:00 p.m.

Gulick  
Lounge

Jobard + William Smith Colleges

RELIGION AS ILLUSION -- POSITIVE OR PEJORATIVE?

Dec. 3, 1975

(illusion = an unreal, or misleading image presented to vision...  
deceptive)

Begin with a quote from Whitehead:

- ① Native America -  
Relig - -
- ② Erik Erikson -

- ③ Relig - +  
dialectics -

utilizing this primarily as a stage setter -- atmospheric --  
to give a bit of supporting background:

The theme, Religion is Illusion --

Has a curious history --

-- used primarily as a disclaimer --

Feuerbach -- projection

Freud -- illusion

Ernst Bloch -- illusions as illusions are real

Ernest Becker --

Neo-Thomistic School -- Bernard Lonergan

Michael Novak --

treat religion as horizon ---

Hint:: perhaps illusion is like perspective --

visual dynamics --

Great turnabout: not religion is illusion -- but world is illusion --

in illusion --

Tillich: religion = depth dimension

Otto:

in Thomas Merton's writings --

Max Müller -- religion = "the perception of something  
beyond the grasp of our senses"

...beyond, behind, beneath, and within the finite, the infinite is always present to our senses. It presses upon us, it grows upon us from every side. What we call finite in space and time, in form and word, is nothing but a veil or a net which we ourselves have thrown over the infinite. The finite by itself, without the infinite, is simply inconceivable, as inconceivable as the infinite without the finite.

Additional Dimensions:

Neo-Thomistic School -- Bernard Lonergan

Michael Novak --

treat religion as horizon ---

Great turnabout: not religion is illusion -- but world is illusion --

in Buddhism --

in monastic revival --

in Thomas Merton's writings --

Illusion:

*Kinetic model*

Double Duty -- to sort out questions about (1) the nature of religion  
and (2) what is involved in the study of religion...

*The Study of Religion is a disciplines way of coming to terms with religion.*  
Begin by imagining a conversation:  
*By asking the right questions...*

What would happen next...?  
Questions are really fundamental:  
Someone will point to something....

Someone will give a definition: religion has to do with belief in divine beings...

Or, they'll ask someone ---

The possible references that could occur --

one could talk about religion, by trying to define its nature

-- its cultural forms... institution, tradition, cultural presence...

*Beliefs* -- patterns of belief (Hindus regard cows as being sacred... Jews regard Saturday as the Sabbath Day... The Amish don't use gas-powered machines... capacity)

-- religious influences -- like, in culture " " society  
*Muslims regard Mecca as the Holy City*

(quarrel between Jews and Arabs today ... over meaning of Zionism ...)

(northern Ireland -- Protestants vs Catholics)  
(Syria -- Muslims vs Christians) Lebanon

-- like, religious influences, in development of personality....

In other words, if the inquirer doesn't know...  
he won't know if the subject is belief ..  
culture ..  
metaphysics...

*The place of Rel. Studies*

Religious Studies -- initially, an enterprise in sorting out the uses of the term....

-- an analytical undertaking -- making sense of things...  
-- an interpretative undertaking --

Cf. Michael Novak and Harvey Cox' roles in last week's film --

religious studies -- seeks to make sense of religious phenomena

The goal of the study of religion: to make sense of religion...  
-- to come to terms with religion in a reliable scholarly way.

How does religious studies make sense of religion...?

By asking the right questions...

Questions are really fundamental:

What is religion ... ?

(elaborate)

How did it come into being.... ?

How does one describe it.... ?

How is it described?

What are its fundamental materials.....?

Give some examples:

What is religion ... ?

(usually associated with a natural human capacity)

religion is our awareness of being dependent (Schleiermacher)

religion is our sense of moral obligation (Kant)

religion has to do with openness to transcendence

Or, the fundamental core element in religion is holiness ... R. Otto

" " " " " " " is ultimacy -- Tillich

Another way of going about it: how did religion come into being...?

~~It's not about the history of the word but about the experience of the sacred~~

E. B. Tylor -- dreams about spiritual beings

or in mythological awareness --

or, as Freud would say, in wishful thinking (illusion)

or, in longings for a better state --

or in the innate drive for transcendence --

or, religion was prompted by exposure to things we can't explain...

↳ the source of ul - lies in our  
our psyches - in unconscious



Perspective is necessary to insure objectivity --

- 4) Such perspectives possess their own history ... *Coming to terms with*  
 Scholarly traditions on what is religion...? *4*  
 " " " how did religion begin...? *history*

The student is not doing this work for the first time...

- 5) The mysterious element: the study of religion is not mechanical...  
 analogy: to study philosophy -- two things: learning how to reason...  
 (2) becoming familiar with the work of the philosophers...or of philosophical tradition...

same thing true in religious studies:

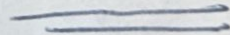
- (1) immersion in scholarly traditions...  
 -- including gaining familiarity with the theorists...  
 -- including coming to terms with histories of commentary...analysis ... and interpretation...

But, at some point -- in a mysterious way -- several things come together ..

the study of religion and the personal story of the one studying religion...

Final point: Religion-Study = an instrument in self-knowledge...

Religion-Study = an exercise in coming to terms with oneself...





The Release of History

through myth.

The Carpenter  
 1) consumers / folk

only that is real & what  
 the folk attend.

but are equated with  
 reality

perceptual world &

practical utility

Michael

intelligible

not unrepeatable  
 see infinitely

John Deere

Historic reality is  
 see reducible to folk

being in the world imply reality.  
 a part - historical  
 consciousness

Mr. De. Thompson  
 2572  
 57  
 22

mathematics  
 351  
 14  
 22

Leidinger  
 351  
 14  
 22

historical - poetic

new  
 rel  
 yr

maintaining the substance