

Religious Studies 104
Seminar: Problems in the Study of Religion

OUTLINE OF COURSE: SUBJECT AREAS PROBED

I. The Grand Design

1. Historical Considerations: The Enlightenment Paradigm
 - (a) how shall religion be conceived?
 - (b) what is that without which religion would not be what it is?
2. The Religious Temperament
 - (a) to what range of human experience does religion refer, and/or from what human impulse or faculty does it derive?
 - (b) relation of religious sensitivity to thinking, acting, and feeling
 - (c) relation of religious studies to philosophy, ethics and aesthetics
3. Viewpoints of Eminent Theoreticians
 - (a) Immanuel Kant: approaching religion as an extension and refinement of ethical responsibility
 - (b) Friedrich Schleiermacher: approaching religion as a "matter of feeling"
 - (c) Rudolf Otto: religion as "the power of the holy"
 - (d) Anders Nygren: the religious apriori and religious studies as comparative motif research

II. The Dynamics of Religious Studies

1. The Development of Religious Studies within the State University
2. The Origins of the program in Religious Studies on the campus of the University of California
 - (a) origins in political science
 - (b) historical and cultural foci: approaching religion as a component of culture within a cross-cultural and interdisciplinary framework

(c) the range of present faculty interests [Alexander]

(d) ongoing challenges [Alexander]

3. The future of the academic study of religion

(a) its present status in American higher education: successes and disappointments (highs and lows)

(b) new opportunities: teaching about values in the public schools (primarily in secondary education)

III. The Nature of Religious Experience and the Religious Vocation [guest presentation by Fr. Paschal Phillips, a Trappist monk]

1. Primary considerations

(a) The role of environmental factors

1. the importance of the monastic setting

2. the pilgrimage: departure, initiation, and return(?)

3. stark contrasts between "the religious habitat" and the everyday world

(b) Cultivating the religious perspective

1. Is religion primarily a worldview, a set of beliefs (as in creed), or a perspective that can be learned and practiced?

2. Does religion appear as answers to questions or as recognition of mystery?

(c) The nature of personal religious commitment and individual religious devotion

1. Being serious, but not somber (the disposition)

2. Relationships between religious devotion and romantic love

3. In what does all of it eventuate?

V. Parables and Analogies reflecting Relationships between the Practice and Study of Religion

1. Soren Kierkegaard's Tale of the man who wished to have his pants pressed

2. John Wisdom's allegory "Gods" about relationships between flowers and weeds and the nature of religious affirmation
3. Citations from Lilly Endowment Project on responses of majors in religious studies to their courses in the subject
 - (a) students with strong religious commitments often find religious studies courses difficult, and sometimes do not perform well academically. Why?
 - (b) courses in which "religious transactions" take place; consequences of coursework in the Bible, and, particularly, courses in the New Testament
 - (c) coursework in religious studies and the frequent onset of the feeling of alienation from society (the impact of the awareness of illusion and deception)

V. Religion and Religious Studies: Interdependencies

1. Studying religion does indeed influence religious perspectives and attitudes
2. Religious perspectives and attitudes do indeed influence the academic study of religion
3. Primary example: from "Christianity and Non-Christian Religions" to cross-cultural sensitivities in religious studies to cross-cultural sensitivities within the religious life
4. The relation of thinking about religion to practicing it: a fruitful and mutually beneficial partnership