

Religious Studies 177
The Religious Personality
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COURSE DESCRIPTION AND READING LIST

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 this context, RS 177, "The Religious Personality," is described as a "study of the cultural influence and personal characteristics of religious men as reflected in their diaries, journals, and autobiographical writings." The course qualifies for four units of upper-division credit. It meets three times per week for fifty-minute periods; then, in addition, each student is required to attend a discussion section which meets once a week with approximately six to ten persons in attendance.

It is the desire of the instructors of the course that the direction and format of the lectures and discussions be determined in part by the discoveries that occur because of the class. Instead of pre-arranging the entire course, the instructors are willing to allow it to take form as it develops and progresses. Also, instead of looking upon those who are enrolled in the course as persons before whose presence the course will take place, the instructors covet an opportunity to co-participate with students in setting the agenda and establishing priorities. This method of approach seems to be appropriate to the nature of the subject on which the class--both instructors and students--will train its attention.

This does not mean, however, that the course has no boundaries and is in a complete state of flux. On the contrary, the assignments should be treated as definite ground rules. The assigned readings should be looked to to supply definite foci. And the combination of readings and written assignments should be understood to yield a definite though flexible course structure.

In addition, there are certain topics on which a course such as this must focus. For example, to prevent it from lapsing into all manner of speculative thought, the course must deal with actual historical lives as these are discussed and interpreted by actual living or historical persons. The course will deal with actual "personal documents" (journals, memoirs, diaries, autobiographies, et al.), and will relate these to pertinent background material. On the other hand, to aid our interpretation of the "personal documents," a certain amount of tested interpretive suggestions--such as those rendered by Erik Erikson, Joseph Campbell, Robert Jay Lifton, Norman O. Brown, and others--will be offered within the course. The assumption is that these interpretive studies are useful in bringing light to the more biographical material which is recorded in the "personal documents". Also, to acknowledge the fact that a course of this kind stimulates self-reflection and (perhaps) intensifies self-consciousness, the opportunity is also present for preparing one's own "personal documents" in an autobiographical statement.

Apart from this, the instructors intend to give attention to some of the following issues, and not necessarily in this order of appearance:

Ways in which "being religious" differentiates some men from other men

Characteristics of "religious" models of personality formation as distinguished (if one can) from other sorts of models of personality formation

Certain useful models, such as Lifton's "protean man," for understanding dominant personality traits in contemporary man

Differences between Freudian and Jungian interpretations of "the religious personality"

Self-concepts which seem to predominate in selected "personal documents" (cf. the Introduction and Table of Contents to Capps and Capps, The Religious Personality)

Interpretations of certain gifted men as "cultural workers" (in Erikson's words), and relationships between religious aspirations and cultural stances

Psychological interpretations of human history (cf. Norman O. Brown, Life Against Death)

Ways in which "models of religious formation" both differ and coalesce in eastern and western religious traditions

Correlations between life-styles and thought-systems in given, historical instances

The foregoing list of course interests gives but a hint of the topics that will be addressed. Additional detail will be given as the course progresses. But even this brief introduction ought to demonstrate that the course is designed to provide maximum freedom and impetus for exploring the intriguing and many-sided worlds of "the religious personality." A certain lack of structural rigor is inserted into the course to allow participants to pursue those matters and subjects which they find compelling. At the same time there is sufficient structural rigor that the intended freedom of the participants will not go undisciplined.

The first item on the agenda, by acknowledged prearrangement, is the orientation to the course. Your instructors recommend that you read Lifton's Boundaries in its entirety as well as the brothers Capps' "Introduction" to The Religious Personality.

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READING ASSIGNMENTS

1. Donald Capps and Walter H. Capps, editors, The Religious Personality (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1970). (Readings as assigned)
2. Joseph Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces (Princeton University Press, Bollingen Series, 1968). (Chapters as assigned)
3. Robert Jay Lifton, Boundaries: Psychological Man in Revolution (New York: Vintage Books, 1967).
4. Norman O. Brown, Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1959). (Portions strongly recommended)
5. Erik H. Erikson, selections from Young Man Luther, Gandhi's Truth, Identity and the Life Cycle, and other autobiographical essays.

ASSIGNMENTS ON WHICH THE GRADE FOR THE COURSE WILL BE BASED:

1. Final Examination (scheduled for Friday, June 9, 7-10 AM)
Note: Portions of the final examination will consist of questions distributed to the class in advance
2. "Term paper" not to exceed ten (10) pages in length, due no later than Monday, May 8.
3. Personal autobiography, an assigned option, due by the last regular day of class.

Note: For clarification of assignments 2 and 3, consult announcements in class and in discussion sections.

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"Man makes notes, gathers experiences, reflects on the past, and seeks to express the meaning of life. He tries to hold fast whatever is of significance in the course of his life, so that by it he may interpret that life. He wishes that his life might become, as it were, transparent, that he might take possession of himself and it. The historian finds an immeasurably rich literature of diaries, letters, autobiographies, and essays in which this striving for self-interpretation finds ever new expressions."

-- Bernard Groethuysen