

Religious Studies 30  
Introduction to Religion  
Winter Quarter, 1972  
Walter H. Capps, Instructor

### COURSE INFORMATION

Catalog Description of Course: "A survey of the historical development and cultural role of selected religious traditions" (p. 315).

#### Course Strategy this Quarter:

This quarter, "Introduction to Religion" will focus on selected religious traditions, as usual, but will approach them with particular interests in mind. In the first place, stress will be given to the forms of expression that accompany or occur in religion and religious traditions. Instead of concentrating rather exclusively on patterns of thought (belief systems, ideological schemes, etc.), the course will also pay attention to the art and the art forms of the world's religions. This is the strategy implicit in the use of two books simultaneously, first, Ninian Smart's textbook, THE RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE OF MANKIND, and, second, E. H. Gombrich's textbook in art history, THE STORY OF ART. The student will notice that the two books follow a similar chronological pattern, although the treatment of the history of non-western art is weak in contrast with that given western art. Thus, when the class is reading Ninian Smart on "primitive religions" it will also be reading E. H. Gombrich on "the art of primitive peoples." The instructor's goal is to fill out the picture that must be painted when religion is considered as a cultural occurrence.

The second "strategy" has to do with the chronological direction of the class lectures, readings, and discussions. Instead of starting at the beginning of history, as is usual, the class will begin with the contemporary religious scene. Thus, the first readings are the final chapters of Smart's and Gombrich's books; and the first lectures in the course will deal with current religious issues. This move is calculated not only to magnify the common starting point that students share with instructors, but also to identify those prime areas of class interest that can be projected backwards over man's religious history.

Thirdly, the content of the course will be created by the interaction between topics of current religious interest and their prime historical precedents. The contemporary scene will be referred back, chronologically, to times at which some of those issues were addressed in rudimentary form. For example, the current interest in questions of personal identity, self-consciousness, and transcendence will be referred to the classical discussions of "the nature of the self" that occur in both Hindu and Buddhist religious traditions. In every instance, the student will be required to know the relevant historical materials well, which materials will form the basis of the conversations that belong to the discussion sections.

The Examinations, a mid-term, February 7, and a final, will be devoted to the materials covered in the textbooks and lectures as designated by the instructors. A short paper (5-8 pages) will also be required.

COURSE OUTLINE

First Section. Mode: Present. Subject: The Current Situation

Topic: Protean Man, Experimental World, Uncertain Apocalyptic

- A. Current Religious Trends
- B. Questions of Definition

Commentary:

"The yes and the no, joyfulness and despair, are terribly close together."

-- Robert Bellah

"This whole issue of a working theory of culture in the absence of dogma or genuinely felt metaphoric imperative of progress and perfectibility seems to me one of the most difficult now facing us."

-- George Steiner

Minimal Reading Assignment

- (1) Smart, 499-517, "Contemporary Religious Experience;" Gombrich, chap. 27, 419-446 (passim.); additional material distributed in class.
- (2) Smart, 3-23, "Religion and Human Experience," (special stress on "dimensions").

Second Section. Mode: Past (mostly). Subject: Religions of India

Topic: The Self, and the Prospect of Transcendental Liberation

Commentary:

"The hero, therefore, is the man or woman who has been able to battle past his personal and local historical limitations to the generally valid, normally human forms. Such a one's visions, ideas, and inspirations come pristine from the primary springs of human life and thought."

-- Joseph Campbell

"Lead me from the unreal to the real;  
Lead me from darkness into life;  
Lead me from the mortal to the immortal."

-- The Upanishads

Minimal Reading Assignment

(3-4) Smart, 57-138; Gombrich, 99-108 (passim.); duplicated materials distributed in class.

Third Section. Mode: Past (partly)      Subject: Primitive Religions

Topic: The Quest for a Sanctionable Orientation to the World

Commentary:

"...the experience of sacred space makes possible the 'founding of the world': where the sacred manifests itself in space, the real unveils itself, the world comes into existence....Hence the manifestation of the sacred in space has a cosmological valence; every spatial hierophany or consecration of a space is equivalent to a cosmogony. The first conclusion we might draw would be: the world becomes apprehensible as world, as cosmos, in the measure in which it reveals itself as a sacred world."

-- Mircea Eliade

"The major characteristic of religious beliefs as opposed to other sorts of beliefs, ideological, philosophical, scientific, or commonsensical, is that they are regarded as being not conclusions from experience--from deepened social awareness, from reflective speculation and logical analysis, from empirical observation and hypothesis testing, or from matriculation in the school of hard knocks--but as being prior to it. For those who hold them, religious beliefs are not inductive they are paradigmatic; the world, to paraphrase a formulation of Alisdair MacIntyre's, provides not evidences for their truth but illustrations of it. They are a light cast upon human life from somewhere outside it."

-- Clifford Geertz

Minimal Reading Assignment

(4-5) Smart, 27-54; Gombrich, 19-48; materials distributed in class.

Fourth Section. Mode: Past (mostly).

Subject: Judaism and Christianity

Topic: What About the Body?

Commentary:

"For though a man delight in the law of God after the inward man, what shall he do with the other law in his members which warreth against the laws of his mind, and bringeth him into captivity to the law of sin, which is in his members? ...What shall wretched man do? Who shall deliver him from the body...?"

-- Augustine

"This is my body, broken for you."

-- New Testament

"The quarrel is over the paternal inheritance. But the paternal inheritance is the paternal body itself."

-- Norman O. Brown

Minimal Reading Assignment

Smart, 266-371, 424-495; Gombrich, 79-90, 109-148. (Note: this reading assignment may be modified. Watch for announcement in class.)

Fifth Section. Mode: Future (hopefully). Subject: The Future in Religion

Topic: The Future (hopefully)

Commentary:

"We put forward the hypothesis that a scientific, comparative study of religious development can help the religions to take their next great forward step..."

-- Wilfred Cantwell Smith

"Keep faith with the beginning, whose genesis is still to come."

-- Ernst Bloch

Minimal Reading Assignment

Smart, 518-537.