

Religious Studies 50
Religious Classics of the Western World

Mid-term Exam

I. Answer the following question:

What sorts of changes or transformations are reflected in the "conversion experience" of St. Augustine, as recorded in the Confessions? To what was he converted? From what was he converted? What role is played by the Bible? How did his understanding of things become altered? What sense do you make of the text ("not in rioting and drunkenness...") of the conversion? Again, explain.

II. Answer one of the following:

- A. What is the purpose of monasticism, as conceived by the Christian fathers, and how is this purpose reflected in The Rule of St. Benedict? How would you portray the motivation that leads persons to commit themselves to the monastic way of life?
- B. Identify some of the key themes in the attitude of St. Bernard of Clairvaux. Do you understand Bernard to be a mystic? Why or why not? Explain.

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F I N A L E X A M

Part I

In no more than 250-300 words each, answer three of the following questions:

1. Throughout his writings, John Calvin stresses that the knowledge of God that has been "naturally implanted in the minds of men" has also been "smothered or corrupted, partly by ignorance, partly by malice." What does he mean by this? What remedies or recourse does he offer? In short, how do human beings acquire knowledge of God?
2. There are some major shifts -- cultural, intellectual, temperamental, et al. -- following the Reformation, prior and into the dawning of the modern era. Identify one of these, for example, the tendency to compartmentalize religion instead of equating it with the whole of life, the tendency toward laicization in 16th and 17th century France (and elsewhere), the rise of a more critical rationalist approach, the rise of "pietism." Develop the tendency, describing some of its ramifications. And, illustrate it, if you can, by relating it to the work of one or another figure discussed or cited in the course.
3. The Danish philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard, believed it useful to distinguish between an "existential dialectic" and an "intellectual dialectic." What are the bases of the distinction? What are the primary differences between the two dialectics? And, most importantly, what did Kierkegaard hope to demonstrate or achieve by proposing the distinction? Finally, how successful is the distinction, as you perceive it?

OR

There is large basis in Kierkegaard's THE PRESENT AGE for distinguishing personal or individual religion from state or "organized religion". Kierkegaard refers to the latter as "this whole machinery of the state church and the thousand royal officials who, under the pretense of being spiritual guides, trick the people out of the highest thing in life, which is solicitude about one's self and the need which would surely of itself find a teacher or minister~~s~~ after its own mind...were it not forestalled by being satisfied long before it can arise." What is Kierkegaard driving at? Why does he find cultural religion to be deceptive? What, by contrast, does he believe to be authentic? Discuss this issue.

4. Mircea Eliade presents a view of religion in his book, The Sacred and the Profane, which is based upon an understanding of the power of space and time. He writes that "religious man (homo religiosus) has always sought to fix his abode at the 'center of the world.'" And, in the next chapter, he adds that "for religious man time too, like space, is neither homogeneous nor continuous." What are some of the basic elements of religion in this portrayal? How is religion made known in human experience? What are fundamental religious aspirations? Explain and discuss.

OR

Mircea Eliade, author of The Sacred and the Profane, believes that there are two modes of relating to the world, the sacred and the profane. He also tends to associate the sacred modality with the viewpoint of a previous time or era in the history of human awareness; consequently, there are close associations between profane existence and some of the attitudes of the modern world.

Against this background, how does Eliade portray the character and/or quality of "the modern world?" Is modern man devoid of religious sensitivity? Is the modern world necessarily profane? Is contemporary human experience anti-religious or a-religious? Explain and discuss.

5. The course "Religious Classics of the Western World" has covered a broad sweep of human history, from the time of St. Augustine's Confessions to the mid twentieth century. As you survey the entire sweep, what issues or themes seem to you to be most prominent, compelling, interesting, or puzzling? Take this question as an invitation to develop an attitude toward a particular issue (as, for example, the concern for the relationship between faith and reason, or religious appreciation for the nature of man, the relation between God and world, etc.), illustrate its occurrence over the centuries, show how it was portrayed, and indicate whether or not you believe it was resolved.