

R460 : COMPARATIVE RELIGION

SPRING 1999 SYLLABUS MWF 1 PM (HSS 335) FOR PROFESSOR DALE CANNON

Email: cannodw@wou.edu Office Hours: MWF 11-12, TTh 2-3, and by appointment.

OBJECTIVES

- **Overall, the aim of the course is to introduce students to the study of "the way of devotion" as a generic way of being religious, one among others, to be found in many religious traditions.**
 - **We will proceed by way of examining the nature and role of this pattern of religious life in a variety of religious traditions, taking special note of differences as well as similarities, focusing particularly on Bhakti spirituality in the Hindu Vaishnava tradition of Krishna worship, Pure Land Buddhist spirituality as found in the Japanese Jodo Shin tradition, and Christian Evangelical Holiness spirituality as found in early Methodism under John Wesley.**
- **The course takes for granted that students will be learning and practicing a specific methodological approach to the comparative study of religion (utilized in other religious studies courses at Western and explained in Cannon's Six Ways of Being Religious) for the purpose of achieving understandings which are both empathetic and objective.**
 - **Although indirectly the course may be useful to the development of students' personal faith and opinions, these matters will be strictly secondary to the principal aims of the course.**
 - **The course also takes for granted that students already have, or will make the effort on their own to build up, an elementary acquaintance with the larger Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian traditions in which the religious expressions we will be studying are found. (If you need guidance as to how this can readily be done, please see me. Helpful background can be found in my R201 Lectures (1999) and my R204 Lectures (1998) on reserve.)**

FOR ORIENTATION

- **"The way of devotion" is to be conceived as one way of being religious among others.**
- - **A "way of being religious" is defined as one generic way, among other ways, of drawing near, and coming into right relationship, to whatever is conceived to be ultimate reality -- namely, what is conceived to be the ground of life's meaning and purpose, the ultimate truth about life, and therefore the ultimate orienting basis for how life ought to be lived.**

- (Note: This phrasing leaves open or undefined what specifically is to be taken to be ultimate reality. You should not assume in advance that the phrase "ultimate reality" refers to the same thing in any two religious traditions. Not only will the characterization of ultimate reality be different, but that of which the characterization is made may be quite distinct.)
- "The way of devotion" will be defined as that way of approaching ultimate reality (however conceived) which consists of cultivating a personal relationship to it of wholehearted adoration, devotional surrender to its transforming grace, and trust in its providential care, anticipating in return an influx of sustaining energy, hope, and a sense of affirming presence or at-onement. It typically involves a conversion experience and emotional purgation. (Note: These definitions are taken from Cannon, Six Ways of Being Religious.)

EMPATHETIC OBJECTIVITY: the discipline of making real to yourself the inward life, the subjective reality, of the lives lived within traditions other than your own as they truly are (thereby discovering what is like yourself in the stranger) and coming to recognize and understand your own tradition objectively as one among others (thereby discovering what is strange about yourself).

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. A persistent determination to understand the unfamiliar empathetically and the familiar objectively--and, more generally, to cultivate the discipline of empathetic objectivity in understanding and interpreting the religious phenomena we will be studying.

(For an understanding of what is meant by the discipline of empathetic objectivity, see Cannon, Six Ways of Being Religious, ch. 2; and Cannon, Essays in Religious Studies, essay II: "Empathetic Objectivity . . .")

(2) Thoughtful preparation for and active participation in class discussion on the basis of scheduled readings and other assignments.

Write down and bring to class, questions of clarification, critical reflections, and/or attempts to put key points in your own words on which you would like feedback.

(3) Regular attendance and active participation in class.

(When you must be absent, it will be expected that you make up the absence by viewing one of the videotapes on reserve for the course in the ITC Media Lab -- particularly one identified as representing some expression of the Way of Devotion -- and writing up (typed double-space) a description of its content. All such make ups must be completed by the final week of classes. More than 1 absence for any three week period of the course which is not made up will have a negative effect on your grade. 2 to 3 absences, -1/3 grade point; 4 to 5 absences, -2/3 of a grade point. More than 6, by 1 grade point.)

(4) Two take-home examinations that relate to readings and class session content.

These will be given out at least one week in advance before their due dates, Friday April 16 and

Wednesday, June 9 at Noon (the scheduled final examination). (Each counts 25% of grade.)

(5) Each student is to be placed in one of three groups whose responsibility is to become (as far as the class is concerned) experts on one of the three sub-traditions we will be studying.

Possibly also subgroups will be formed to focus on a specific expression of the sub-tradition. (In most cases, the tradition you choose will be one of the two traditions dealt with in your final paper.)

In connection with this responsibility, each group of students is to work together to get to know well the book the class is expected to read on that sub-tradition, but also fill out their background knowledge by investigating and learning from other available sources on the topic.

It is expected that each group will make contact with a contemporary expression in Oregon of the sub-tradition being studied, and at least conduct intensive interviewing and, where feasible, on-site observation. (For guidance in such fieldwork, consult Miller and Seltser, *Writing and Research in Religious Studies*, section three.)

The members of each group will be given at least one class session (to be assigned later) to make a presentation on the sub-tradition for which they are responsible.

(Class participation including the in-class presentation counts 20% of grade.)

(6) A final paper/research project in which you interpret, compare, and contrast in an empathetically objective but comprehensive manner an instance of the way of devotion from each of two different religious traditions.

(In most cases these will be from the three sub-traditions covered in class. Special permission may be given to allow an expression outside of the three studied in class to be part of the research project.)

You are encouraged, where possible, to have your research incorporate fieldwork as well as library work. If you do incorporate fieldwork and it is done well, you will be given extra credit for your work. (A background reading or review of Miller and Seltser, *Writing and Research in Religious Studies*, chs. 1, 3, Section Two, and Section Three are very relevant to this project. However, do not follow Miller and Seltser's guidance regarding documentation format.)

Be especially encouraged to use *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (see the topic headings listed on p. 80 for the Way of Devotion in *Six Ways of Being Religious*).

The project is to culminate in a written form (7 - 12 pages approximately) that juxtaposes and makes intelligible to others the inner meaning (for participants) of the two religious movements in question in an empathetically objective way.

You are asked to carry out your project in close consultation with me. An approximate outline and bibliography should be ready to be discussed with and reviewed by me not later than the week of May 17-21.

You are encouraged to pair up with at least one other class member to help give you feedback on your developing understanding and interpretation.

The final paper will be due Friday, June 4. (It will count 30% of grade.)

Examples of papers of the sort here expected are on library reserve.

If you wish an opportunity for a re-write of your paper, it must be handed in by Friday, May 28; it will be available from me on Tuesday, June 1.

PLEASE TAKE NOTE: All written work for the course, including the in-class examination must be done so far as possible according to the principles of empathetic objectivity and follow the explicit directions of the assignment. Work that does not meet these two requirements will not be given credit. In addition, all written work done outside of class (including the final take-home exam) is expected to be (a) coherent, (b) the result of your own thinking through to an understanding of the issues being covered, (c) neatly typed with double spacing, (d) free of minor spelling and grammatical errors (proof-read and corrected before you hand in your final draft), (e) characterized by full and accurate references to all sources on which you have directly relied (even when not quoted directly), and (f) following the MLA format. (For those of you unfamiliar with the current MLA format for giving references, consult my [webpage on MLA format](#) and/or chapters 4 and 5 of the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, 4th ed., by Joseph Gibaldi, on reserve in the library for this course; or Writing with Sources: A Guide for Students, by Gordon Harvey, available for purchase and on reserve (which contains excellent guidance on all sorts of questions you might have, including what is plagiarism, when a source should be quoted, etc.). Failure to meet these minimum expectations will result in a substantially lower grade than you otherwise might deserve. It is strongly suggested that you find another student in the class who would be willing to review next-to-last drafts of your papers to provide you with honest, constructive, critical feedback in exchange for your doing the same in return. Special note: encyclopedia articles are referenced by the author of the article [found usually at the end] and the article title. In addition, the paper should be written so as to be intelligible to someone unfamiliar with the course and unfamiliar with the sub-traditions being covered; thus it should be self-explanatory. You will not need a table of contents in your papers.

COURSE TEXTS

Dale Cannon. Six Ways of Being Religious: A Framework to Guide Comparative Study of Religion. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1996. (As only some of this is required reading, purchase is optional and two copies are on library reserve.)

David L. Haberman. Journey Through the Twelve Forests: An Encounter with Krishna. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.

Taitesu Unno. River of Fire, River of Water: An Introduction to the Pure Land Tradition of Shin Buddhism. New York: Doubleday, 1998.

Albert C. Outler, ed. John Wesley. New York: Oxford University Press, 1981.

Gordon Harvey, Writing with Sources: A Guide for Students. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1998. (This is optional; a copy is on reserve.)

TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE

(Some of the items are available on library reserve; others are in the reference collection or in the stacks. A few--marked with an asterix *-- are not available in this library, but are particularly recommended and should be available in area libraries--e.g., Willamette University--and available on interlibrary loan.)

Mar 31 Introduction to the Course and to Each Other

Apr 2 - Apr 9 An Empathetically Objective Approach to Religious Studies

and Different Ways of Being Religious

Read: Cannon, Six Ways of Being Religious, chs. 1, 2, & 3

Recommended: Cannon, Six Ways of Being Religious, chs. 4, 5, & 6.

Apr 12 - 16 The Way of Devotion as One Way Among Others

Read: Cannon, Six Ways of Being Religious, chs. 7 and 8 for background and 12 for content.

Recommended: Frederick J. Streng, Understanding Religious Life, 3rd ed., chs. 2 & 6; Frederick J. Streng, et al., Ways of Being Religious, parts 1 & 5; Denise Carmody and John T. Carmody, Prayer in World Religions; Lala. Bhakti in Religions of the World; relevant articles in The Encyclopedia of Religion, e.g., *Devotion* (especially this article), *Bhakti*, *Popular Religion*, *Grace*, *Faith*, *Pietism*, *Evangelical and Fundamental Christianity*, *Vaishnavism*, *Krsnaism*, *Saivism*, *Jodoshu*, *Jodo Shinshu*, *Hasidism*, and articles on specific religious traditions exemplifying the way of right action.

April 16 First Examination due.

Apr 19 - 30 Krishna and Vaishnava Bhakti Spirituality

Read: Haberman. Journey Through the Twelve Forests

Recommended: B. V. Tripurari, Aesthetic Vedanta: The Sacred Path of Passionate Love; Klostermaier. A Survey of Hinduism, 2nd ed.; Subramuniya, Dancing with Siva: Hinduism's Contemporary Catechism, 4th ed; .W. G. Archer, The Loves of Krishna In Indian Painting and Poetry; John Carman, Majesty and Meekness: A Comparative Study of Contrast and Harmony in the Concept of God (see especially chs. 3, 4, 5, 6, & 10); John Braisted Carman, The Theology of Ramanuja: An Essay in Interreligious Understanding; Diana Eck, Darshan: Seeing the Divine in India, 2nd ed.; B. G. Narasimha, Evolution of Theism; B. V. Tripurari, Joy of Self; C. J. Fuller, The Camphor Flame: Popular Hinduism and Society in India; John Stratton Hawley, At Play with Krishna: Pilgrimage Dramas from Brindavan; John Stratton Hawley and Donna Marie Wulff, eds., Devi: Goddesses of India; relevant articles in The Encyclopedia of Religion, e.g., *Bhakti* (especially this article), *Vaishnavism*, *Sri Vaishnavas*, *Caitanya*, *Krsna*, *Krsnaism*, *Radha*, *Hinduism: Classical Bhakti Hinduism*; *Saivism*, *Devotion*, *Popular Religion*.

May 3-14 Shinran, Amida, and the Spirituality of Jodo Shinshu

Read: Unno. River of Fire, River of Water.

Recommended: James C. Dobbins, Jodo Shinshu: Shin Buddhism in Medieval Japan; Lloyd Arthur, The Creed of Half Japan; Paul Ingram; The Dharma of Faith; Alfred Bloom, Shinran's Gospel of Pure Grace; Alfred Bloom, Tannisho: Resource for Modern Living; Taitesu Unno, "The Nature of Religious Experience in Shin Buddhism," in The Other Side of God: A Polarity in World Religions, ed. Peter Berger; John Carman, Majesty and Meekness: A Comparative Study of Contrast and Harmony in the Concept of God (see especially ch. 7); relevant articles in The Encyclopedia of Religion, e.g., *Jodo Shinshu*, *Shinran*, *Amitabha*, *Rennyō*, *Jodoshu*, *Honen*, *Devotion*, *Pure and Impure Lands*, *Mappo*, *Nien-fo*, *Avalokitesvara*, *Buddhism: Schools of China*, *Buddhism: Schools of Japan*, *Buddhism: Buddhism in China*, *Buddhism: Buddhism in Japan*.

May 21 Final date for my review of your final paper outline and bibliography.

May 17 - 28 Wesley and Early Methodist Spirituality

Read: Outler, ed. John Wesley

Recommended: Louis Dupé and Don E. Saliers, eds. Christianity Spirituality: Post-Reformation and

Modern (see especially, Albert C. Outler, “Pietism and Enlightenment: Alternatives to Tradition,” pp. 240-257; and David Trickett, “Spritual Vision and Discipline in the Early Wesleyan Movement,” pp. 354-371); Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, and Edward Yarnold, eds. The Study of Sprituality (see “VIII.C: Later Protestant Sprituality,” especially A. Raymond George, “6. John Wesley and the Methodist Movement,” pp. 455-459); Frank C.Senn, ed. Protestant Spritual Traditions (see especially David Lowes Watson, “Methodist Sprituality,” pp. 217-273; and John Webork, “Pietism: ‘The Fire of God which . . . Flames in the Heart of Germany,’” pp. 183-216); Frank Whaling, ed. John and Charles Wesley: Selected Prayers, Hymns, Journal Notes, Sermons, Letters and Treatises; Richard P. Heitzenrater, Wesley and the People Called Methodists; George Marsden, Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism; relevant articles in The Encyclopedia of Religon, e.g., *Wesley Brothers, Methodist Churches, Devotion, Popular Religion, Grace, Faith, Pietism, Evangelical and Fundamental Christianity*.

May 31 Memorial Day – no school

Jun 2 - 4 Comparative Review of the Three Traditions

June 9 Final Examination due Wednesday at Noon

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[RELIGIOUS STUDIES ESSAYS II: Empathetic Objectivity . . .](#)

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