

R 315: INTERPRETING RELIGIOUS PHENOMENA

SPRING 1998 SYLLABUS (CRN 9617) MWF 1 PM (MOD 103) FOR PROFESSOR DALE CANNON Email: cannodw@wou.edu Office Hours: MWF 11-12, TTh 2-3, and by appointment.

OBJECTIVES

- R315 is designed to be a practical introduction to the discipline of acquiring an understanding of, and communicating to others, the meaning of specific expressions of religious life in a manner that does them justice, a manner that is empathetically sensitive to the viewpoints of participants as well as appropriately objective.
 - Each student will be involved in efforts to bring to light and make intelligible to others the inner meaning of particular religious phenomena, both alien and familiar, in an empathetically objective manner.
 - The neutral, non-judgmental orientation it trains the student to take is not meant to be a permanent posture or stance, but is wholly for the sake of developing understandings of religious phenomena on their own terms from within. This assumes that the person who acquires such understandings will be able to discriminate and judge more soundly and justly than without them.
- Along with this, R315 aims to educate student sympathies to welcome diversity: to discover what is like yourself in the stranger, so that the alien seems less strange, and to discover the stranger in yourself, so that you will come to seem more strange to yourself (i.e., come to see yourself and the things you take for granted in the way that others see them).
- Students will encounter and come to understand religious beliefs, practices, and experiences that are representative of the variety one may find throughout the history of human religiousness.
- Different approaches to the interpretation, understanding, and explanation of religious phenomena will be explored, as well as criteria of better and worse interpretations, with particular attention given to learning what resources are available that are likely to be helpful in carrying out interpretations for yourself.
- As this course is directly relevant to preparing persons to handle and teach about religion in a public school context, some attention will be given to familiarizing the student with the legal and academic responsibilities of public school personnel in this area of study. (Students specially interested in public education religion studies should plan to discuss their interests and concerns with me outside of class. There is an option of an extra credit or an additional independent course of study for credit to be earned in connection with designing a learning unit that might be used in public education.)

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 effort to practice and master the discipline of empathetic objectivity in interpreting religious phenomena.**
- 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. It is suggested that you keep a journal for the course for this purpose, although a journal will not be required.
- 3. Regular attendance, attentive taking in of what is conveyed in lectures, and active participation in classroom activities and discussion.** (2 to 3 absences in any three weeks of the course will reduce your grade by 1/3 of a grade point. 3 to 4 absences, a reduction of 2/3 of a grade point. More than 5, a reduction of 1 grade point. Any absence may be made up by carefully outlining the reading assignment for the day and writing a thoughtful response to it -- e.g., questions it raised, thoughts it occasioned, and/or things you did not understand, plus going out of your way to learn what transpired in the class session and verifying that with me. These outlines are due as soon as possible after your absence but in any case within one week of your return to class.)

You will find that your understanding of class lectures, intelligent participation in class discussions, success on examinations and other assignments -- i.e., achievement of the course objectives -- depends directly on meeting these first three requirements. When you find yourself not understanding what seem to be major points after class sessions, you are requested to speak with me outside of class. Please realize that I am available for individual consultation whenever you seem to be having difficulties.

- 4. One to two page, empathetically objective brief interpretations of five religious phenomena**, not later than the following dates: 1st by April 10, 2nd by April 17, 3rd by May 8, 4th by May 15, 5th by May 29. Each of these interpretations are to focus on an example from a distinct tradition of a different one of the six ways of being religious we will be exploring in this course. It should make clear how it is an example of that way of drawing near to (and coming into appropriate relationship to) what the tradition in question takes to be ultimate reality. (Note, your choice of phenomena should be coordinated with your topic for the Field Research topic, for the latter must be an example of the remaining 6th way of being religious which is not covered by your 5 short papers. Also note that a religious phenomenon may happen to involve simultaneously more than one way of being religious. While you should explain whatever ways of being religious are involved, the phenomenon chosen for the paper should at least clearly exemplify the way in question and your paper should make that evident and not just say so.) Each interpretation should be concisely summarized for the most part in your own words and, so far as possible, should empathetically but neutrally capture the central core of meaning involved for participants. Endeavor to choose example religious phenomena that are as specific as possible (do your best to avoid generalizations), have your interpretation be wholly focused on the phenomenon you have chosen, and imagine your way into what it is like to be an insider participant. Obtain sources that will enable you to fulfill these objectives.

Depending on its quality, you may be directed to re-write any of these interpretations. (Rewrites are

normally expected to be completed by one week from receiving them back, accompanied by the original, and done in accordance with my suggestions. Your grade for each will be based on the final product.)

At the end of these brief papers you should cite any sources used in proper, MLA format. (For those of you unfamiliar with the current MLA format for giving references, see my webpage on [MLA format](#) and/or consult 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. Do not follow Miller and Seltser's [[Writing and Research in Religious Studies](#)] guidance regarding documentation format.) As background for doing library research for this assignment, read Miller and Seltser, chs. 1, 3, and "Section Two: Library Research" (pp. 1-3, 13-19, and 20-37) and be sure to attend our library orientation class session April 6. Religious Studies Videos available in the ITC Lab (some of which are excellent) may also be used as sources for these papers. (The five papers and general class participation will together count for 20% of grade.)

In researching and composing your papers, keep in mind their purpose: they and all other writing assignments in the class are meant to serve as bridges of mutual understanding and rapport between insiders of the tradition(s) in question and outsiders.

5. An empathetically objective report of a religious phenomenon or practice based directly on your own fieldwork -- e.g., observing a religious ritual or intensive interviews -- supplemented as needed by reading and library research. The phenomenon must exemplify the one of the six ways of being religious that you are not covering in your five brief papers. While this report is not intended to be a comprehensive interpretation, it must provide sufficient (and accurate) background for your reader (and of course for you as well) to understand the phenomenon within its context and tradition and also provide for your reader enough of the concrete detail and feel of the phenomenon to convey something of the participants' perspective and experience. Thus it will involve both library research and fieldwork. To prepare for the fieldwork for this report, you must read Miller and Seltser, chs. 1 & 3 (if you haven't already) and "Section Three: Field Research in Religious Studies," pp. 38-89; your fieldwork should reflect the basic guidelines given by Miller and Seltser. Before carrying out your fieldwork but once you have done initial planning for the fieldwork itself, you must consult with me to help you focus your fieldwork and receive some suggestions for what to look for and what to ask. You are encouraged to consult with me in relation to any other aspect of the assignment including possible places to visit and contacts.

The resulting report, about 3-5 pages in length, is due Friday April 24 (unless special dispensation is granted -- e.g., for a report on the observance of some ritual which occurs the previous Wednesday or that weekend). In addition to the usual MLA format for sources, you should give full citation of whatever interviews, visitations, etc., on which it is based. Depending on its quality, you may be directed to re-write the report. (Rewrites are normally expected to be completed by one week from receiving them back, accompanied by the original, and done in accordance with my suggestions.)

You will be expected to make a brief 10-15 minute presentation in class concerning the subject of your fieldwork during the weeks of May 11 through 22. (The report plus your presentation will count for 20% of your grade.)

6. One in-class examination drawn from short essay questions given out ahead of time that relate to readings and lectures. This will be held Friday May 1. You will be given the option of gaining up to one half of any points missed on the exam by rewriting any of the answers from scratch outside of class upon consulting anew appropriate sources.. Such rewrites are due one week after receiving the exam back and accompanied with the original exam. (This will count 20% of grade.)

7. An essay comparing the examples from Buddhism and Christianity of any one of the ways of being religious covered in chs. 9 through 14 of Six Ways of Being Religious, based on an attempt to answer with care each of the study questions at the end of the chapter in question and having read both chapters 7 and 8 which survey Buddhism and Christianity in their entirety (which will help you situate the examples you will be comparing). The resulting essay, which is due Friday, May 22, should be between 3 and 6 pages and

should be a coherent, empathetically objective comparison of the two religious phenomena that more or less stands on its own, and should use MLA format for any references on which it relies, including the class text. The essay should not simply be the set of answers you come up with to each of the study questions, but should rather be a coherent essay drawing upon your answers to them. The sources from which each of the excerpts are taken will be placed on library reserve, so that you may consult the larger work and context from which they have been taken if you so wish. You are encouraged (but not required) to consult the other references given at the end of the chapter as well. It may draw upon as much external research as you like, but it will not be graded down if no external research beyond the text is conducted. You are encouraged to consult with me in relation to any aspect of the assignment. This essay also may be rewritten for an improved grade, following the same guidelines given above. (This essay will count for 20% of grade.)

8. One take-home final essay exam due Monday, June 8 at Noon at the latest. This will be in answer to a set of optional questions given out well in advance which will involve a critical discussion of competing approaches to the interpretation religion found in Paden's Interpreting the Sacred and Cannon's Six Ways of Being Religious. You are encouraged to consult with me in relation to any aspect of the assignment. (This exam will count for 20% of grade.)

9. Extra Credit: Find, describe, and evaluate in written form (2 to 3 pages) an Internet website that appears to offer valuable information on some religious tradition or phenomenon as to its value and usefulness as a reliable source for empathetically objective interpretations of the religious tradition or phenomenon that it represents. This must be done in accordance with the principles and criteria otherwise used in the course. It can be turned in at any time, but not later than the final week of classes. Depending on its quality, it can raise your grade up to 1/3 grade point. This can be done not more than twice for credit.

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. Do not use Miller and Seltser's guidance for documentation in chs. 13 & 14. Generally, however, their advice on writing papers is very helpful. You will not need a table of contents in any of your papers.) 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.

COURSE TEXTS

Cannon, Dale. Six Ways of Being Religious: A Framework for Comparative Studies of Religion. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1996.

Miller, Donald E. and Barry Jay Seltser, Writing and Research in Religious Studies. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1992.

Paden, William E. Interpreting the Sacred: Ways of Viewing Religion. Boston, MA:
Beacon Press, 1992.
A few handouts.

TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE

(All items except the required texts are available on library reserve or reference.)

Mar 30 Introduction to the Course and Introductory Video

Apr 1 Introduction to Each Other and to Public Education Religion Studies

Read: Cannon, "Public Education Religion Studies," and Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, "Religion in the Curriculum."

Recommended: Paul J. Will, ed., Public Education Religion Studies: An Overview; Jacob Neusner, "To Weep With Achilles," Chronicle of Higher Education (January 29, 1979), p.40; Jacob Neusner, "Stranger at Home: The Task of Religious Studies;" see also other references on reserve list, "REFERENCES ON PUBLIC EDUCATION RELIGION STUDIES."

Apr 3 Empathetic Objectivity

Read: Cannon, Six Ways, preface, ch. 1, and pp. 17-21; Cannon, "Empathetic Objectivity . . .,"

Recommended: Dale Cannon, "Having Faith, Being Neutral, and Doing Justice: Toward a Paradigm of Responsibility in the Comparative Study of Religion;" Clifford Geertz, "From the Native's Point of View," in his Local Knowledge, ch. 3.

Apr 6 Library Research in Religious Studies

Read: Miller & Seltser, "Section Two: Library Research," pp. 20-37.

Recommended: Familiarize yourself with the list of books on reserve for R 315, and do some browsing in both the books listed there that are in the Reference Room and the BL through BR section of the Library Stacks, so you will know where your main library resources can be found. Being aware of other ways of attempting to carry out an objective study of religion (e.g., anthropological, sociological, historical) than the primary approach we are taking in this course will help you find other sources in our library. (Also, be aware that I may have books on specific subjects in my private library that are not in the College library which I would be willing to loan to you. You should also know that the libraries at Willamette University, Oregon State, and the University of Oregon have larger holdings in religious studies than we do, and that the library at Mount Angel Abbey is perhaps the best research facility in religious studies in the Northwest. We can access their catalogues via computer in our library and obtain books via interlibrary loan.)

Apr 8 Ways of Studying Religion and Phenomenology of Religion

Read: TBA.

Recommended: Frederick J. Streng, Understanding Religious Life, 3rd ed., chs. 11, 12, & 13; Roger Schmidt, Exploring Religion, 2nd ed., ch. 1; James C. Livingston, Anatomy of the Sacred, chs. 1 and 2; Lawrence Cunningham, et al., The Sacred Quest, chs. 1, 2, and 9; Walter Capps, Religious Studies: The Making of a Discipline, chs. 1, 3, 4, and 6; Walter Capps, Ways of Understanding Religion; Sumner B. Twiss and Walter H. Conser, Jr., eds. Experience of the Sacred: Readings in the Phenomenology of Religion; Dale Cannon, "Having Faith, Being Neutral, and Doing Justice: Toward a Paradigm of Responsibility in the Comparative Study of Religion;" and Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description," in his

The Interpretation of Cultures, ch. 1. Also see bibliography at the end of ch. 2 of Six Ways, including the articles listed from The Encyclopedia of Religion.

Apr 10 First short paper due.

Apr 10 Defining Religion

Read: Cannon, "The Multifacetedness of Religion;" Cannon, Six Ways, ch. 2; and Miller and Seltser, ch. 2 (pp. 4-12).

Recommended: T. William Hall, ed., Introduction to the Study of Religion, ch. 1; Frederick J. Streng, Understanding Religious Life, 3rd ed., ch. 1; Roger Schmidt, Exploring Religion, 2nd ed., ch. 1; James C. Livingston, Anatomy of the Sacred, chs. 1 and 2; Lawrence Cunningham, et al., The Sacred Quest, chs. 1, 2; Walter Capps, Religious Studies: The Making of a Discipline, ch. 1; Walter Capps, Ways of Understanding Religion; William Tremmel, Religion: What Is It?; Dale Cannon, "Having Faith, Being Neutral, and Doing Justice: Toward a Paradigm of Responsibility in the Comparative Study of Religion;" Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," in his The Interpretation of Cultures, ch. 4; and Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description," in his The Interpretation of Cultures, ch. 1. Also see bibliography at the end of ch. 2 of Six Ways, including the articles listed from The Encyclopedia of Religion.

Apr 13 Religion as a Cultural System

Read: Cannon, Six Ways, ch. 2.

Recommended: TBA

Apr 15 The Problem of Meaning and the General Idea of Ways of Being Religious

Read: Cannon, Six Ways, chs. 2 and 3.

Recommended: TBA

Apr 17 Second short paper due.

Apr 17 The Way of Sacred Rite

Read: Cannon, Six Ways, chs. 3 and 4.

Recommended: the brief introduction to ch. II of Frederick J. Streng, et al., Ways of Being Religious; and Frederick J. Streng, Understanding Religious Life, 3rd ed., chs. 3 and 9. Also see bibliography at the end of ch. 3 of Six Ways, including the articles listed from The Encyclopedia of Religion.

Apr 20 The Way of Right Action

Read: Cannon, Six Ways, chs. 3 and 4.

Recommended: the brief introduction to ch. III of Frederick J. Streng, et al., Ways of Being Religious; and Frederick J. Streng, Understanding Religious Life, 3rd ed., chs. 4, 7, and 10. Also see bibliography at the end of ch. 3 of Six Ways, including the articles listed from The Encyclopedia of Religion.

Apr 22 The Way of Devotion

Read: Cannon, Six Ways, chs. 3 and 4.

Recommended: the brief introduction to ch. I of Frederick J. Streng, et al., Ways of Being Religious;

and Frederick J. Streng, Understanding Religious Life, 3rd ed., chs. 2 and 6. Also see bibliography at the end of ch. 3 of Six Ways, including the articles listed from The Encyclopedia of Religion.

Apr 24 Fieldwork Report Due.

Apr 24 The Way of Shamanic Mediation

Read: Cannon, Six Ways, chs. 3 and 4.

Recommended: See bibliography at the end of ch. 3 of Six Ways, including the articles listed from The Encyclopedia of Religion.

Apr 27 The Way of Mystical Quest

Read: Cannon, Six Ways, chs. 3 and 4.

Recommended: the brief introduction to ch. IV of Frederick J. Streng, et al., Ways of Being Religious; and Frederick J. Streng, Understanding Religious Life, 3rd ed., ch. 5. Also see bibliography at the end of ch. 3 of Six Ways, including the articles listed from The Encyclopedia of Religion.

Apr 29 The Way of Reasoned Inquiry

Read: Cannon, Six Ways, chs. 3 and 4.

Recommended: Frederick J. Streng, Understanding Religious Life, 3rd ed., chs. 8 and 10. Also see bibliography at the end of ch. 3 of Six Ways, including the articles listed from The Encyclopedia of Religion.

May 1 Mid-Term Examination.

May 4 Ways of Being Religious, Examples, Combinations, Permutations

Read: Cannon, Six Ways, ch. 4.

Recommended: Ninian Smart, The Phenomenon of Religion; Huston Smith, "Accents of the World's Religions" in T. William Hall, ed., Introduction to the Study of Religion, ch. 8. Also see bibliography at the end of ch. 4 of Six Ways, including the articles listed from The Encyclopedia of Religion.

May 6 Religious Common Sense and Evaluative Considerations

Read: Cannon, Six Ways, ch. 5.

Recommended: See bibliography at the end of ch. 5 of Six Ways.

May 8 Third short paper due.

May 8 Critical Reflections on the Framework of Ways of Being Religious

Read: Cannon, Six Ways, ch. 6.

Recommended: See bibliography and notes at the end of ch. 6 of Six Ways.

May 11 - 22 Oral Presentations of Fieldwork Reports.

May 11 Applying the Framework of Ways of Being Religious

Read: Cannon, Six Ways, chs. 7 and 8.

May 13 TBA

May 15 Fourth short paper due.

May 15 TBA

May 18 TBA

May 20 TBA

May 22 Comparative essay due.

May 22 TBA

May 25 Interpretive Frames; Critical Interpretations of Religion

Read: Paden, Interpreting the Sacred, chs. 1 and 2.

Recommended: Walter Capps, Religious Studies: The Making of a Discipline, chs. 1 and 2; William Tremmel, Religion: What Is It?.

May 27 Social Interpretations of Religion

Read: Paden, Interpreting the Sacred, ch. 3.

Recommended: Walter Capps, Religious Studies: The Making of a Discipline, ch. 4; William Tremmel, Religion: What Is It?.

May 29 Fifth short paper due.

May 29 Psychological Interpretations of Religion

Read: Paden, Interpreting the Sacred, ch. 4.

Recommended: Walter Capps, Religious Studies: The Making of a Discipline, ch. 4; William Tremmel, Religion: What Is It?.

June 1 Comparative Perspective and Views from the Inside

Read: Paden, Interpreting the Sacred, chs. 5 and 6.

Recommended: Walter Capps, Religious Studies: The Making of a Discipline, ch. 6.

June 3 Contextuality of Interpretations

Read: Paden, Interpreting the Sacred, ch. 7.

Recommended: Walter Capps, Religious Studies: The Making of a Discipline, ch. 7.

June 5 Plurality of Interpretations

Read: Paden, Interpreting the Sacred, ch. 8.

Recommended: Walter Capps, Religious Studies: The Making of a Discipline, ch. 7.

June 11 Take-home examination due by Noon.

June 13 Last class session.

(Wednesday at Noon)

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