

UNDERSTANDING RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE AND EXPRESSION

RELIGION 161 - [Dr. Rennie](#)

Course Description	Course Objectives and Requirements	Grading Information	SCHEDULE
Some Suggested Definitions of Religion	Major Hindu Scriptures and Varnashramadharma	Chinese Classics and the Precepts of Confucianism	The Contents of the Jewish Scriptures
Dimensional Models of Religion	The Development of the Study of Religion	Internet Links of Interest	Some notes on the essay

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Religion can be studied in many ways, by many methods, and from many points of view. For the purposes of this course it will be assumed that religious narratives are, among other things, metaphorical expressions of important truths. They operate both as models *of* human experience and as models *for* human life; as metaphorical descriptions and as exemplary ideals. Human experience provides the source of these narratives.

This is a phenomenological approach to the study of religion and religious experience. (So one of the first things students will have to do is to find out what "phenomenology" means.) Most importantly, we will attempt to withhold judgment of the issues until *after* we have inspected and analyzed religion *as it appears in the world*. What exactly *is* religion and religious experience? What forms does it take? How would it be apprehended by someone who made it their business to travel around the world researching it? Does religious experience possess any consistent recognizable characteristics? What types of people have religious experiences?

In order to consider these and similar questions I will first introduce the class to actual manifestations of religion and then discuss relevant elements of the basic history of religions. This will introduce students to the major religious traditions and faiths of the world, presenting these as the genuine beliefs and actual practices of living persons and attempting to answer the above questions, and also considering how it is that some people can seriously believe things which are not at all credible to others.

Familiarity with the concepts and the terminology of alternative religious traditions is

essential to the understanding of other people's religious experiences and expressions. To that end students will be expected to acquire the knowledge and the vocabulary presented in the textbooks. Huston Smith's *The Illustrated World's Religions* will provide us with the basic material knowledge of the various faiths of our world, and selections from Philip Novak's *The World's Wisdom* will provide an introduction to the texts of those faiths.

Classes will involve *discussion* of the material presented, so it is essential that students do the required reading *before* each class and that resulting questions are raised in the class. Evident failure to do the required reading will result in loss of attendance/participation points. Individual inquiries and responses are strongly encouraged.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The aims of this course are firstly to acquire a knowledge of those experiences and expressions which have been identified as religious along with some critical understanding of what "religion" is taken to be. Various theories and definitions of religion will be considered as tools for the construction of relevant and durable opinions about material which is often confusing and uncertain. Thirdly, the skills required to communicate those opinions clearly and persuasively will be practiced.

So-the acquisition, the analysis, and the articulation of information all will be assessed.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Preparation

To prepare for each class you must read the given section of the textbook or handbook. Try and formulate any questions that arise from these readings and have them ready to ask in class. You must write out your questions as this will help you to put them clearly before the class. If it is possible discuss the issues raised in the readings with your classmates (or anyone else who's interested) outside of the classroom.

Attendance

Attendance to class is mandatory. Absences will result in an *automatic lowering of your grade*. This will be done on an exponential scale so that the first absences will have little effect, but after three classes are missed the cumulative effect will be significant (1st absence -1, 2nd -2, 3rd-4 etc.). Reading alone will not give you the skills or the information needed to pass this course satisfactorily. The class discussions and explanations are the most important component of the course.

Participation

The classes will generally follow a question-and-answer pattern. I will ask students to raise

questions or to outline and explain what they understand from their readings and classroom materials and the class as a whole will discuss the topic. During that discussion I will attempt to answer students' questions as thoroughly and clearly as I can. All students will be expected to participate in discussions. The ability to express yourself clearly before a small audience like this is *absolutely necessary* to your advancement in almost all areas of life. Extra credit will be given for effectively encouraging class discussion.

Integrity

Westminster College as an institution and I as an individual both pursue a strict policy of academic honesty. Plagiarism: **leading your reader or listener to believe that what you have written or said is your own work, when, in fact, it is not** will be treated severely. But always remember that while using someone else's work *without* declaring your source is dishonest, doing the same thing and *citing the source* is good scholarship! Books must be cited in the correct bibliographic style ([see below](#)) and personal sources can also be cited.

GRADING

Attendance and participation will constitute 20% of your grade, but note well that repeated absences will not only lose these 20 percentage points but will finally result in a subtraction of points earned elsewhere.

Quizzes (x4) will be held to ensure that the required reading is being properly done. These will constitute a combined total of 40% of the grade.

Examinations. There will be a final worth 20% ([Sample Questions](#)) Note that there is no midterm exam).

Essay. All students will submit a typewritten critical essay of 8-10 pages (double spaced, that is 2,000 to 2,500 words) due in on Friday December 4th. The topic of this paper will be selected by each student and approved by me *no later than week five*. (I will provide a list of sample essay topics but I much prefer that students use their own imagination in the selection of their topic.) Students will have the whole of the semester to work on this paper and it will be their major opportunity to display their personal potential. It will constitute 20% of the grade. Rough drafts of this paper can be submitted to me for comments and corrections up to Friday, 27th November.

Extra Credit will occasionally be awarded for specific tasks, for effective class participation, and for participation in visits to sites of interest.

Please remember that high grades reflect very well on my teaching record. I *want* to give you good grades! But I am examined also and you must give me *cause* to give you a good grade. Like most other skills academic ability improves with practice. If you feel weak in public speaking or critical analysis now is the time to practice and improve.

The Problem of the Definition of Religion.

Firstly, it must be borne in mind that "what we call 'religion' is of much wider prevalence and of much longer standing than is the use of this term, or indeed of any other term, to designate it" (W. C. Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 18). The human activities which we identify as religious are unquestionably factual, the experiences which prompt people to behave religiously are as real as any other experiences, and the expressions of those experiences have historically constituted the most significant products of human culture.

So what is 'religion'?

"Recognition on the part of man of some higher unseen power as having control of his destiny, and as being entitled to obedience, and worship." (*Oxford English Dictionary* 1971)

"The relationship which humanity establishes with the divinity through worship; a specific group of beliefs, moral laws and cultic practices whereby humanity establishes a relationship with the divine." (*Grand Larousse de la langue française*, 1971)

"The essence of religion consists in a feeling of absolute dependence. . ." (Frederick Schleiermacher, (1768-1834) *The Doctrine of Faith*)

E. B. Tylor, thought that "it seems simplest . . . simply to claim, as a minimum definition of religion, the belief in Spiritual Beings." (*Primitive Culture*, 1871)

"By religion, then, I understand a propitiation or conciliation of powers superior to man which are believed to direct and control the course of Nature and human life." (Sir James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 1890)

"the first ideas of religion arose not from a contemplation of the works of nature, but from a concern with regard to the events of life, and from the incessant hopes and fears, which actuate the human mind." (David Hume, (1711-1776) "The Natural History of Religions")

"All ideas and feelings are religious which refer to ideal existence, an existence that corresponds to the wishes and requirements of the human mind." (W. Wundt, *Ethics*)

"A man's religion is that set of objects, habits, and convictions . . . which he would die for rather than abandon, or at least he would feel excommunicated from humanity if he did abandon." (H. Bosanquet, "Philosophy of Religion", in Baldwin's Dictionary)

Religion is "an hypothesis which is supposed to render the Universe comprehensible. . . . Now every theory tacitly asserts two things: first that there is something to be explained;

secondly that such and such is the explanation . . . that the existence of the world with all it contains is a mystery ever pressing for interpretation . . . [and] that it is not a mystery passing human comprehension." (Herbert Spencer, (1820-1903) *First Principles*)

Religion is "a pathological manifestation of the protective function, a sort of deviation of the normal function . . . caused by ignorance of natural causes and of their effects." (G. Sergi, *Les Emotions*, 404)

"Religious life consists of the belief that there is an unseen order and that our supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting ourselves thereto." (William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 53, 1902)

"A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden - beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a church, all who adhere to them." (Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*)

"The psychic origin of all religious thought, is the recognition, or, if you please, the assumption, *that conscious volition is the ultimate source of all Force*. It is the belief that behind the sensuous, phenomenal world, distinct from it, giving it form, existence, and activity, lies the ultimate, invisible, immeasurable power of Mind, of conscious Will, of Intelligence, analogous in some way to our own; and,--mark this essential corollary--*that man is in communication with it*." (Daniel G. Brinton, "Religions of Primitive Peoples")

[The claim] "that there is a Beyond or an Unborn, and that this is somehow accessible to the religious experience of the human race, and is not just a philosophical speculation or a theory about the world." (Ninian Smart, *Beyond Ideology*)

"On the theoretical side [religion] is characterized by a world-view which denies the adequacy of the world of the senses and affirms the existence of a transcendental world, conceived both as highest existence and highest value. On the practical side, it consists in the passage from things of this world to a conception and experience of the reality of the transcendent world, and thus to salvation from the world." (Hermann Siebeck, *Lehrbuch der Religionsphilosophie*)

"Religion is a human response to mystery. . . . not as a deadly emptiness, but somehow as a reality in which lies the meaning of human existence. . . . The response to the mystery as fullness is religion. In general, religion is a way of relating to mystery as a sacred or divine reality rather than as useless or meaningless." Michael H. Barnes, *In the Presence of Mystery*, 1f.

"To be, or to become, human means to be religious." (Mircea Eliade, *The Quest*)

"One's religion . . . is one's way of valuing most intensively and comprehensively."

(Frederick Ferré, "The Definition of Religion." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 38, no.1 (1970): 11.)

"A religion is: (1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic." (Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System")

"Religion is a cultural system and a social institution that governs and promotes ideal interpretations of existence and ideal praxis with reference to transempirical powers or beings." Armin Geertz, "Theory, Definition, and Typology," *Temenos* 33 (1997), 39. (Note that by "ideal" Geertz seems to mean perfect or ultimately desirable rather than mental or non-material--from a reading of this paper at the World Congress of Philosophy, Boston, August 11th, 1998.)

Finally perhaps "the sustained inability to clarify what the word 'religion' signifies, in itself suggests that the term ought to be dropped; that it is a distorted concept not really corresponding to anything definite or distinctive in the objective world. The phenomena we call religious undoubtedly exist. Yet perhaps the notion that they constitute in themselves some distinctive entity is an unwarranted analysis" (Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 17). But he goes on to say that this is too extreme a conclusion, "an alternative suggestion could be that a failure to agree on definitions of religion may well stem from the quality of the material. For what a man thinks about religion is central to what he thinks about life and the universe as a whole. The meaning that one ascribes to the term is a key to the meaning that one finds in existence" (18).

Three Dimensional Models of Religion:

[Ninian Smart](#) | [Frank Whaling](#) | [Bryan Rennie](#)

Ninian Smart's Six Dimensions of Religion.

(from *The Religious Experience of Mankind*, 6-12, 1969, reprinted in *The Religious Experience*, 1996, 3-8.)

The Ritual Dimension

"Religion tends to express itself through worship, prayers, offerings, and the like. We may call this the ritual dimension of religion. . . . Some form of outer behavior . . . coordinated with an inner intention to make contact with, or to participate in, the invisible world."

The Mythical Dimension

"Stories about God . . ., about the gods . . ., but also [stories relating to] significant historical events in a tradition. . . . We can count both *historical* myths (that is to say, stories about the invisible world which have an anchorage in history) and *non-historical* myths (those that have no such anchorage) as aspects of the mythological dimension." (15)

The Doctrinal Dimension

"Doctrines are attempts to give system, clarity, and intellectual power to what is revealed through the mythic and symbolic language of religious faith and ritual. . . The dividing line between the mythological and what I shall call the *doctrinal*" is not easy to draw."

"The world religions owe some of their living power to their success in presenting a total picture of reality through a coherent system of doctrines."

The Ethical Dimension

"The code of ethics of the dominant religion controls the community." However, since people usually "fail to come anywhere near this ideal . . . we must distinguish between the ethical teachings of a faith . . . and the actual sociological effects and circumstances of a religion."

The Social Dimension

"The mode in which the religion in question is institutionalized, whereby through its institutions and teachings, it affects the community in which it finds itself. The doctrinal, mythological, and ethical dimensions express a religion's claim about the nature of the invisible world and its aim's about how people's lives ought to be shaped: the social dimension indicates the way in which people's lives are, in fact, shaped by these claims and the way in which religious institutions operate."

The Experiential Dimension

Religious people "may hope to have contact with, and participate in, the invisible world through ritual, [but] personal religion normally involves the hope of, or realization of, experience of that world."

Frank Whaling's Eight Dimensions

(from *Christian Theology and World Religions*, 37-48, 1986)

"all the major religious traditions of the world contain eight inter-linked elements. The major religions are dynamic organisms within which there are eight inter-acting dimensions; they are historical chains within which there are eight connecting links. . . . these elements are present in separate traditions with different weights and different

emphases. Because all religions have these elements this does not mean that they are all the same" (38).

Religious Community

Ritual and Worship

Ethics

Social and Political Involvement

Scripture/Myth

Concept

Aesthetics

Spirituality

"Lying behind them is something that is even more important, namely transcendent reality. For a Christian this would be God, for a Muslim Allah, for a Jew Yahweh, for a Hindu Brahman, and for a Buddhist Nirvana. Insofar as it is transcendent this reality is less clear than the eight elements . . . they are directly observable, transcendence is not.

"However, transcendent reality is made more clear by means of a Mediating Focus that lies at the heart of each religious tradition. This mediating focus--Christ for a Christian, the Koran for a Muslim, the Torah for a Jew, a personal deity or the Atman for a Hindu, and the Buddha or the Dharma for a Buddhist--brings transcendent reality closer and makes it more meaningful. God is therefore mediated through Christ, Allah through the Koran, Yahweh through the Torah, Brahman through a Hindu Lord or the Atman within, and Nirvana through the Buddha or the Dharma. It is this combination of a transcendent reality and a mediating focus that lies behind and gives meaning to the eight elements of each religious tradition.

". . . some person, and indeed some group of persons, has to respond to mediated reality. Persons have dynamically to use the eight elements that form a tradition otherwise those elements are lifeless forms" (46-47).

Bryan Rennie: Six Dimensions of Religion (1992)

The dimensions of religion are certainly not independent one of another but interpenetrate like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, each one completes and is completed by the others, and the whole is a dynamic unity.

The Dimension of Revelation (through human experience)

Religion represents an assurance that an unseen order authoritatively reveals itself to humanity in some way. In the major world religions the main vehicle of revelation is often thought to be scripture, the written sacred word. Closer inspection suggests that, in fact, the vehicle of revelation is always human experience. The Christian Bible is not so much the revelation as was the life of Jesus in history; the Koran (the sacred book of Islam) is not so much the revelation of Allah as were the visions of Muhammad; the Tripitaka (the sacred texts of Buddhism) are not so much the revelation as was the enlightenment of the Buddha. Of course, in pre-literate religions the experience of the shaman or spiritual specialist is the main vehicle of revelation and only thereafter sacred lore, mythology. Of course, a large part of our experience is the experience of our human community.

The Dimension of Epistemology

What is revealed is characteristically regarded as sacred *knowledge*. That experience apprehended as an authoritative source of knowledge (i.e. revelation) is conducive to specific activities in response. This activity is justified by knowledge of cosmology, of theology, and of anthropology. For example, that all action (i.e. *karma*) will be justly repaid; that Allah is merciful; or that the meek will inherit the earth.

The Dimension of Faith

This can be divided into faith as *assurance* and faith as *belief*. The former is the emotional state of final optimism about the unseen order, the latter is the adherence to certain specific doctrinal claims about that order. Although separable as descriptions of inner or intentional states, they can be seen to converge in specific behavior. One *acts* out of one's optimism and adherence to specific propositional truths. The human creative response to our environment as both that which is *inspired* or breathed into us (by the gods etc.) and that which is *imitative* (of the divine acts of creation and of revelation) thus becomes itself a medium of revelation.

The Dimension of Ethics

This represents the specific claim that there is a particular correct and beneficial pattern of human behavior. This pattern of behavior is harmonious with the unseen order: externally it harmonizes community with cosmos, internally it harmonizes personal behavior with personal experience of the world (mediated through knowledge).

The Dimension of the Community

Those who share the same "sacred genealogy," that is to say, whose ethics are known through the same faith in the same revelations, have a recognizable identity and are united into a coherent and recognizable social group.

The Dimension of Witness (through human expression)

The expressions of the religious group, both intentionally and unintentionally, support and strengthen the worldview from which they are made. Deliberately in the form of mission and unconsciously in the application of religious knowledge *as* knowledge--in the living of the life of the community--the religious community bears witness to and to persuades others of its truth and thus propagates and spreads as a faith. The arts are particularly effective in this dimension of religion. Iconography, drama, architecture, oral tradition, and written scriptures express the whole matrix of religious dimensions. As these expressions become part of the experience of others the circle of the religious dynamic tends to close; human expression displaces natural experience as the primary stimulus of our response to our environment.

The Development of the Study of Religious Experience

The German Friedrich Schleiermacher published *On Religion: Speeches to the Cultured among its Despisers* in 1799. It is generally agreed that, as W. C. Smith has said, *On Religion* "would seem to be the first book ever written on religion as such--not on a particular kind or instance and not incidentally but explicitly on religion itself as a generic something." (*The Meaning and End of Religion*, 45. Although one should note also *Natural History of Religion* by David Hume and other such works.) Following the lead of Schleiermacher many later scholars (egs. Wm. James, Rudolph Otto, Jonathan Edwards, Joachim Wach, Ernst Troeltsch) agreed that the religious experience is "*a sense or feeling that is not to be identified with either belief or practice.*" (It was Schleiermacher who defined religion as "the feeling of absolute dependence upon God.")

It has been pointed out that "*with this idea of religion as an experiential moment irreducible to either science or morality, belief or conduct, Schleiermacher sought to free religious belief and practice from the requirement that they be justified by reference to non-religious thought and action and to preclude the possibility of conflict between religious doctrine and any new knowledge that might emerge in the course of secular inquiry.*" (Wayne Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*, xiii) The idea of religious experience as a class of human subjective experiences different in kind from all other, "non-religious" experiences thus had its origin in a deliberate attempt to defend Christian institutional religion against the "threat" of alternative conceptions of the real. This defensiveness is neither surprising nor unfounded. This was a period of intense positivism, empiricism, and materialism. Darwin's *Origin of the Species* appeared in 1859 and Herbert Spencer's *First Principles* in 1862. The advances of science continued with increasing vigor with the development of Einstein's theory of relativity and Max Planck's quantum theory in the early years of the twentieth century.

In 1856 with the publication of the *Essays in Comparative Mythology* of Max Muller the

"science of religion" or the "comparative study of religion" began in earnest. Müller was primarily a linguist who studied, among other texts, the Rg Veda, which he held to represent a "primordial phase" of Indo-European religion. He saw religion as a "disease of language" through which the *nomen* ("name") became the *numen* ("holy"). One example would be the development of the idea of the human soul from the word for breath. The process of *reification*, ascribing a real and independent existence to abstract entities or assuming that a merely *named* concept must have material existence, was thus proposed as an explanation of the origins of religion.

In 1871 Edward B. Tylor published *Primitive Culture* (see Eliade, 177-185 for a sample of Tylor's work). He argued for an evolutionary development in religion. Monotheism, he claimed, had developed from polytheism which in turn had grown out of *animism*. Animism, the religious belief that *everything* has some kind of a soul, was proposed as the universal human condition out of which all religious beliefs developed.

In his books *Custom and Myth* (1883) and *Modern Mythology* (1897) Andrew Lang attacked the theories of Max Müller pointing out that the processes of reification could not be traced through all known forms of religion. In *The Making of Religion* in 1898 Lang attacked Tylor's arguments. Since the Australian Aborigines and the Andaman Islanders both had a developed belief in a High God but exhibited no traces of Animism then animism could not have universally preceded and thus be the origin of other forms of religion.

Despite the difficulties set against such attempts at a universal account of the origins of religion the theory of *Mana* dominated the study from 1900 - 1920. This theory, proposed by R. R. Marrett, differed from Tylor's theory only in that belief in mana was seen as even more archaic than animism and mana was impersonal where the *anima* was a personal force.

Wilhelm Schmidt between 1912 - 1955 published a multi-volume work on *The Origins of the Idea of God* in which he argued that, in fact, *primal monotheism* was the universal human belief from which all religions had developed. This was not well received.

Partially in a reaction to the extremities of logical positivism and materialism the early twentieth century saw the development of various *irrationalist* theories. Freud's psychoanalysis of the unconscious mind, Lucien Lévy-Bruhl's "prelogical mentality," Rudolph Otto's *Idea of the Holy*, and even Wm. James's adaptation of the unconscious as the "hither" side of the religious experience were all such theories. They had in common the proposal that, despite its evident utility, pure *reason* did *not* govern all processes of human development.

It must be noted that all these attempts to explain religion had a common preoccupation with the *origins* of religion. Like religions themselves, these attempted explanations sought

to base themselves on a *genesis* of religion, a sort of theoretical cosmogony. While Müller's "disease of language" and Tylor's animism sought an explanation in the early stages of religion, Marrett's mana, and Schmidt's primal monotheism sought to replace them with theories promising a revelation of the very beginnings of religion.

Emile Durkheim in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1912) and Sigmund Freud in 1913 with his *Totem and Taboo* sought once again to explain the very beginnings of religion--the personification of society in the first case and the primal murder of the tribal father in the second. These, however, were the last attempts to explain religious origins and they were followed by the quest for complete knowledge and global familiarity. The attempt to study the *origins and development* of religion gave way to the attempt to study the *context and history* of religion. In a precursor of the new development James George Fraser published his enormous *The Golden Bough* in 1890. Other massive works of compilation began to appear; Hastings' *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, was published between 1908 and 1921. Pritchard published his *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Bible* in 1950.

Following hard on the heels of the attempt to catalogue the data of world religions rather than the elaboration of overconfident theories of religious origins came studies in *perspective and method*. Gerardus van der Leeuw published his *Phenomenology of Religion* in 1933. Here it was suggested that by a the method of "bracketing" (called *epoché*) one's own personal beliefs one could achieve an intuition of the essence of religion, an "eidetic vision." As well as the phenomenology of religion a smaller but possible more important classification of the study, the *morphology* of religion, sought to classify religious phenomena into connected groups or categories. Mircea Eliade's book *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (1954) is one of the clearest examples of this type of approach but Ninian Smart's attempt to clarify the "dimensions" of religion can be seen as a type of morphology (*The Religious Experience of Mankind*, 1969).

In 1959 Wilfred Cantwell Smith made a number of observations and suggestions regarding the academic study of religion in an important paper entitled "Comparative Religion: Whither and Why?" One of his earliest published writings on comparative religion, and one which is in many ways a seminal piece from which much of his later work develops, "Comparative Religion: Whither and Why?" traces the chronological development of the study of religion. I can do no better than to let Smith speak for himself at this point.

The argument may be summarized briefly, in pronominal terms. The traditional form of Western scholarship in the study of other men's religion was that of an impersonal presentation of an "it". The first great innovation in recent times has been the personalization of the faiths observed, so that one finds a discussion of a "they". Presently the observer becomes personally involved, so that the discussion is one of a "we" talking about a "they". The next step is a dialogue, where "we" talk to "you". If there is listening

and mutuality, this may become that "we" talk with "you". The culmination of this process is when "we all" are talking with each other about "us". (34)

Not only does Smith trace the process by which this is coming about - at least to the "we" and "you" stage - but he also "urges desiderata" (ibid.) to encourage the progression to the "we all" stage. Throughout this analysis and exhortation, the central motifs of Smith's thought are apparent. His stress on (i) *persons as the locus of religion*, which cannot otherwise be reified (ibid.), along with the warning the "personal explanations must be checked against or co-ordinated with texts and other overt data" (40 n.18). His stress on (ii) *faith as a quality of men's lives* and his recognition that his own faith is one among many, and that "faith cannot adequately be expressed in words, not even by a man who holds it devoutly" (39 n.18). There are also six other elements which can be seen to develop in his later works: (1) his recognition that the secular rationalist is a person like any other not substantially different from, and certainly not superior to, the committed religionist. Smith posits rationalism as a "tradition" like the Christian, Hindu or whatever (46). (2) His urging of the general principle that one can only understand a great religion if one approach it with humility and love (50 n.39). (3) His contention that comparative religion must formulate statements intelligible from within both of the traditions involved and in the academic world (52/53). (4) His suggestion that "comparative religion may become the disciplined self-consciousness of man's variegated and developing religious life" (55). (5) His consideration of the writing of a "religious history of man" (56), and (6) his contention that "Since every religion has to do with transcendent reality, it is part of the truth of that religion to be dissatisfied with its external forms" (50 n.39).

This may be seen as the final and inevitable fruit of the treatment of religious experience as an experiential moment irreducible to either science or morality, belief or conduct, free from the requirement that it be justified by reference to non-religious thought and action. As such a subjective classification persons are *necessarily* the locus of an unreifiable religion. *Faith is the response to personal experience* and so is *necessarily* a quality of human life. Finally each person and each life is an equally valid source of experience and faith and thus the secular humanist, like everyone else, *must* be considered equally. Although Smith's other points are not logically entailed they are an inevitable conclusion considering Smith's Christian faith in which "you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Mt. 2237, Mk. 1231, Lk. 1027) is one of two commandment upon which "depend all the law and the prophets." (Mt. 2240) The religious commandment to "love one's neighbor as oneself" constitutes a revelation of sacred knowledge of the equal value of the subjective experience of others, an injunction to accord to the experience of others value equal to one's own personal experience. With such an injunction as this and the insistence on personal experience as the fundamental source of religion it is understandable how belief has developed in both the final ineffability of religious sentiment and in the final equality of alternate religions.

Another point of view: John Hick's Complex of Arguments for the change from Christocentrism to "Reality-Centeredness." (adapted from Gavin D'Costa's *The Theology of John Hick*)

Argument 1. The argument from the untenable Ptolemaic theology of religions (v. 73-92). This basically revolves around the apparent paradox of the doctrine "*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*" (there is no salvation outside the Church) with the salvific will of a benevolent and omnipotent deity.

Argument 2. The argument from encountering saintly and holy people within non-Christian religions. This is a tremendously important point and deserves full attention. Many of the pluralist theologians of our day have been deeply influenced by the fact that no one tradition can claim a monopoly of apparently genuinely holy adherents. The exemplary lives of Christocentric persons find correspondence in all other traditions.

Argument 3. The argument from an all-loving God. This strand of Hick's argument is inextricably linked with argument #1 above as it is characterized by D'Costa. Given an understanding of the deity as "all-loving", Hick's *point* is that the majority of humankind living outside the boundaries of Christendom cannot be lost by such a geographical accident.

Argument 4. The argument from a proper understanding of Jesus. This argument is a composite skein of thought, incorporating, (a) the tendency evinced by other religions to divinize their founders; (b) the distinction between mythic and literal language; and (c) historical skepticism towards the biblical texts, cumulatively, these arguments form a single attack on what Hick considers to be "traditional" Christology.

Argument 5. The argument from the nature of religion and religious history. 1. Hick's agreement with W.C.Smith's conception of religious faith as a universal human constant; 2. the criticism of organized religious communities as contrary to the intentions of their founders and/or socially divisive; 3. "genetic confessionalism", that is, the obvious tendency to adhere to the religion of one's parents or place of birth; and 4. the necessity of discrimination between religious beliefs. Can one meaningfully say, asks D'Costa, that the "faith" of X (a materialist humanist), Y (a Roman Catholic) and Z (a Theravada Buddhist) is the same thing, let alone identify any characteristics by which to make such an assertion without references to the community and its practices to which X, Y and Z belong? (136) It would appear that Hick can answer this question affirmatively. Although the form and content of these faiths may differ they are alike in giving meaning, coherence and continuity to the lives of the faithful and the characteristics they share are the resultant irenic and benevolent lifestyles which they avow. While altruism, caritas and ahimsa are themselves tradition-related terms the characteristics of the actions which they ideally inculcate in their respective proponents transcend the specific references of the words used to describe them. Hick himself identifies these characteristics to be "acceptance, compassion, love for

all human kind or even all life." (The Problem of Religious Pluralism, 81)

Argument 6. The argument from the theological and practical benefits of the Copernican revolution. D'Costa suggests that the dialogical benefits of Hick's theology are open to doubt. "Unless Copernicans limit their dialogue exclusively to other like-minded Copernicans they will implicitly entertain a view which holds that the partner has a relative truth compared to their own absolute Copernican perspective" (145). Hick, however, has specifically repudiated such a view in "God Has Many Names" where he criticized the "confessional end of dialogical spectrum" and warned against that very position wherein one's own view is granted "absolute truth whilst his partner's has only relative truth" (81). The basic point of Hick's reality-centered stance is that one's dialogue partner is held to be centered on that same reality, in a similarly though not identically limited manner.

Argument 7. The argument from the infinite divine nature. Hick's point here is that God, as infinite, can be both personal and impersonal and thus may be genuinely experienced as personal and genuinely experienced as impersonal. It is crucial to Hick's position that the God/theos/Real at the center of his paradigm is infinite, ineffable, including all the characteristics attributed to deity or absolute reality by all the traditions (and more, infinitely more). In agreement with W.C.Smith, Hick conceives God as both/and not either/or (Smith, *The Faith of Other Men*, 17).

SOME NOTES ON THE ESSAY.

These are not reports but argumentative essays: that is to say they are editorialism rather than journalism--your own views are as essential as knowledge of your subject material. The standard of your technical writing as well as your accuracy and argument will be taken into consideration. To that end, here is a short list of common avoidable writing errors which should help you to avoid simple mistakes which will otherwise reduce your grade.

Papers cannot be accepted after the due date (Friday December 4th). YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED OF THIS THREE MONTHS BEFORE THEY ARE DUE. NO EXCUSES WILL BE ACCEPTED.

You may hand in a rough draft of your paper to be checked anytime up to Monday November 30th.

General requirements of an argumentative essay .

1. You must have a thesis, argument, and a conclusion. That is, a specific statement you want to make, an attempt to persuade your reader that your statement is correct, and a conclusion to your thought. This is mainly to help you to focus your thoughts. Papers must have a title which states the topic of your essay. In order to maintain the focus on religious experience as the topic of this course your papers should be entitled "Religious Experience:

... " with your topic or focus following the colon. Papers must be typed on standard 8 1/2 x 11 paper (no folders please!). Papers will be kept by the professor.

2. The arguments and research which support your thesis should make the main body of the essay.

Source material (books, but don't forget articles in journals and encyclopedias, even newspapers and personal interviews) should be integrated into your argument as evidence, example, or illustration. You **MUST** document the sources of *all* quotations, statistical information, and paraphrased material.

3. Your conclusions must be clearly stated. They can be negative as well as positive. Don't worry if you find that your original thesis is insupportable. As long as your conclusion is based on your research negative results areas valuable as positive ones. Just re-write your introduction to reflect your results.

4. You must give a separate list of sources (entitled "References" or "Bibliography" or "Works Cited") at the end of your paper. In *alphabetical order* give the full name of each author, surname first, then first name, followed by the title of the work. Book and journal titles should be underlined or italicized. Article titles should be in quotation marks. Details of publication must be included. For example:

Batson, C. Daniel and W. Larry Ventis. *The Religious Experience*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982.

Ferré, Frederick. "The Definition of Religion." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 38, no.1 (1970): 3-16.

Your bibliography does *not* count as part of your length (8 -10 pages as stated above).

PLEASE ASK ME IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT ANY OF THIS!

Possible topics.

These are only suggestions to give an idea of the type of topics possible. I much prefer that students select topics of their own which particularly interest them and discuss their titles with me so that I can recommend reading material.

The essence of religious experience.

(Is there such a thing, if so what is it, if not then how can we speak of "religion" at all?)

The definition of religion.

(Possible suggestions or consideration of the possibility or utility of such a definition)

Common elements in religious experience or expression around the world.

(Remember that experience and expression are very different concepts.)

Mysticism and religious experience.

(What is Mysticism? Is it common to all religions? What are its benefits , its disadvantages?)

Your own personal religious experience.

(Such a topic is perfectly acceptable but you must be careful to fulfill the requirements of an argumentative essay--make some claim or statement *about* your experience and support that statement with reference to the class material.)

Religious experience in current affairs.

(This can include *anything*, from David Koresh to Mother Theresa, from Black Holes to Noah's Ark, but once again it must not be a simple report but an argument of some kind.)

The function of religion.

(This could focus on psychological functions such as the reduction of anxiety, epistemological functions such as the explanation of human existence, sociological functions such as the definition of the social unit etc. etc.)

The academic study of religion.

(What is its history? What influence has it had? What can it achieve? Can we study an experience we have not ourselves had?)

Religion and gender.

(To what extent has religion contributed to the establishment of a male-dominated society, to what extent does it challenge such a society?)

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

These are the sort of questions which you should be able to answer after taking this course, and they are the sort of questions you will be asked in the quizzes and in the final examination. You could also adapt some of these questions for your papers if you really cannot find your own topic.

Section 1. This Course and the Phenomenology of Religion.

What is the "phenomenology of religion" in this class? Try to explain by giving some examples. Do you think that it is a constructive way to come to an understanding of religion. Explain your response.

Explain what C. J. Arthur means by "imaginative re-experiencing." Do you think such an idea would be useful in the study of religion? Why or why not?

Consider the description of this course as a study of religion. Explain what you like or dislike about it. Remember to give examples, illustrations, or explanations.

Describe Huston Smith's "point of departure." How does he treat religion? Do you think that this is a fair and adequate treatment?

Section 2. Primal Religions - The Experience of Non-Literate Peoples

- 1. What general characteristics of non-literate religions distinguish them from the great global religions?**
- 2. Australian Aborigines seem to find meaning for life, sanction for conduct and hope for the future in the secret rites and sacred myths of the elders. Do you think this experience is common or uncommon?**

Section 3. Hinduism.

- 1. "The Hindu scriptures move from a simple polytheism in the Rg Veda to speculative philosophy in the Upaniads and then to a more sophisticated theism in the Bhagavadgta." Explain what this means and comment on the significance of such a progression as an expression of religious experience.**
- 2. Traditional Hindu life and society are ideally divided up into several groups, pursuits, and stages. Describe these and consider the experiences which lie behind them.**
- 3. The whole process of Yoga is grounded in the experiential states of the practitioner. How does the Yogi's experience relate to mystical experience?**

Section 4. Buddhism

- 1. Recount the Legend of the Buddha's life and enlightenment. What sort of experience of life does this legend presuppose?**
- 2. Apparently the Buddha's experience of asceticism and mystical self-deprivation proved unsatisfactory to him. How did he describe the state which he desired to experience?**
- 3. How did Gautama the Buddha use the parable of the poisoned arrow? Relate this to the religious life.**

Section 5. The Chinese Experience

- 1. It has been argued that Confucianism is not really a "religion." What do you think? Explain your reply with reference to the concepts and definitions of religion discussed in class.**

2. What is the San Chiao in China? What is unusual about this from the common Western point of view?

Section 6. Islam

1. There are five practices which are fundamental to the expression of Islam. What are these "five pillars?" What sort of religious experience do you think could be associated with them?

2. What evidence is there that the religion of Muhammad was conditioned by earlier Hebrew religion? Is this the only source of his experience? Definitions.

1. Select two or more of the definitions of religion suggested on the class handout and either defend or attack them. You must attack at least one and defend at least one.

2. Suggest your own definition of religion and explain what you feel is useful or informative about it. Make references and comparisons to the definitions on the class handout.

3. What exactly is "experience"? Try to be as precise as possible in your explanation.

Section 7. The Dimensions of Religion

1. Give your own account of the "dimensions" of religion. Explain how and why your account differs from those of Ninian Smart and Bryan Rennie.

2. Discuss the analyses of the dimensions of religion according to Smart and Rennie. Where do they differ, which do you prefer? What do they achieve, in what ways are they useful?

Section 8. The Experience of Scholarship

1. Describe the three major concepts which were used to attempt an explanation of the origin of religion in the 19th century? With which scholars were they associated?

2. How does the history of the study of religion parallel popular experience of religious realities?

3. What specific methods have been applied to the study of religion? What are their strengths and their shortcomings?

4. What was the common feature of nineteenth century scholarship on religion? Was their attempt really feasible?

Section 9. Specific Scholars of Religion

1. Describe and evaluate W. C. Smith's assessment of the study of religion.

- 2. Discuss the understanding of religion of some of the modern scholars we have examined. How does their experience and expression inter-relate?**
- 3. What does John Hick's expression of religious realities indicate about his experience of religions other than his own?**

Section 10. Myths, Models, and Metaphors

- 1. In what ways do religious narratives operate as models of and for human life and human experience? Give examples.**
- 2. In what ways might religious narratives constitute metaphors for ideas which are otherwise extremely difficult to express? Give examples.**

Some Recommended Reading

W. Paden *Religious Worlds*

R. O Ballou *The Nature of Religion*

M. H. Barnes *In the Presence of Mystery*

W. P. Alston *Perceiving God*

W. C. Smith *The Meaning and End of Religion*

M. Eliade *The Quest*



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