

Narrative: Theology and the Integration of Self with Society and the Globe



Spring Semester, 2006

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Goal: the student will learn that the current times call for a fresh understanding of the moral necessity to care for the natural order. Thus, we will examine the religious traditions of the great civilizations, as well as those of the primordial cultures, in order to rediscover the moral declaration that arises out of the operations of nature, and is expressed within religion. That declaration asserts: Human dignity is ultimately and absolutely tied to respect for our home, the cosmos. The universe, in turn, considered from the religious perspective is our grand physical dwelling, but it is much more. The majesty and power reveal the dignity of self and society. Furthermore, the natural order is a revelation of the Mystery of nature's Emergence, and eventual Convergence back into the Great Source.

Course Objectives for the student:

- To recognize that we live in a time of crisis, that is, a time when the natural order deteriorates because of our overuse of limited resources and our damage to both the physical world and its processes through industrialization, overpopulation and greed. Damage to the universe inevitably leads to the damage of all life, human life included
- To revisit the scriptures of the great world traditions for the purpose of finding our dignity as revealed through our home, the cosmos as expressed in the sacred texts
- To revisit the great scriptures in order to understand that love of self, love of other, and respect for the cosmos—our mutual home—are inseparable moral demands. This insight will enhance the developing integration of Eastern and Western religions.

Readings:

Readings will be selections from the texts listed below; most of the readings will be provided as hand-outs in class, but some of the readings the student is expected to find in the school library or in the community library.

Theme One: Self-Integration

Readings from the following texts:

Sigmund Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents

Karl Jung, Memories, Dreams and Reflections

John Keats, La Belle Dame sans Merci

Eve of Saint Agnes

Matthean Gospel, chs 5-7

Fourteenth Dalai Lama, Little Book of Inner Peace

Theme Two: Self, Society and the Globe

Readings from the following texts:

From the Judeo-Christian Tradition

Genesis 2-3

Vatican II, Church in the Modern World

Saint Paul's Letters to the Ephesians, Collosians

Gospel of Saint John

Hildegard of Bingham. *Scivias*.

Julian of Norwich. Revelations of Divine Love

From the Native American Tradition

Navajo Night Chant, *In Tse'gihi*, "House Made of Dawn"

N Scott Momaday, House Made of Dawn

Modern American and English texts

Wendell Berry, Culture of Agriculture

Rachel Carlson, Silent Spring

Annie Dillard, Pilgrim at Tinker's Creek.

Aldo Leopold, A Sand County Almanac

Arthur Conan Doyle, Crime of the Congo

Joseph Conrad, Heart of Darkness

Moore, James, "Puzzling Origin of Aids," American Scientist, December 4, 2004

Writings from the Asian Traditions

Hindu *Vedas* and *Upanishads*

Heart of Wisdom Sutrya

Nagarjuna, Fundamentals of the Middle Way

Santideva, Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life

Way of Chuang-tze

Way of Lao-tze

Theme Three: Self and the Integration of Society

Reading from the following texts:

Martin Luther King, "Letter from a Birmingham Jail"

Harper Lee, To Kill a Mockingbird

Thomas Berry, The Great Work

Theme Four: The Integration of Eastern and Western Cultures

Vatican II, The Church in the Modern World:

Fourteenth Dalai Lama, Little Book of Inner Peace

Thomas Moore, Original Self

Thomas Moore, Care of the Soul

NB! Other readings may be assigned during the course.

Expectations

- Regular attendance is part of earning a good grade; if you foresee that you will be out of class (Senior Trip, Sports, etc) the expectation is that you will complete the work BEFORE you leave. In practical terms that means that the week before the missed classes, you will double up and get the assignment for the missed classes done in advance of leaving, and have those assignments checked off by the instructor. The student is responsible for planning and acting upon this eventuality
- All assigned reading requires that the student write a response BEFORE that reading is discussed in class. The response should be typed and include the following information:
 1. Author and date of original publication (this includes scriptural readings as well as other primary texts such as Freud and Jung)
 2. Vocabulary: assignments of 250 words or less, no less than 2 words; assignments of five pages or less, no less than five words; for To Kill a Mockingbird, Care of the Soul, and Pilgrim at Tinker's Creek, 40 words each.
 3. Statement of theme or thesis
 4. five quotations which highlight the theme
 5. Brief synopsis, one paragraph of no more than 100 words
 6. Your response to the quality and meaning of the text, 250 words
 7. Name and date of two critical reviewers of the text and their response, 100 words each—please include the source of your reviewer
 8. The response includes a concluding paragraph in which insight into the nature of the current ecological crisis is adequately addressed by the writer, and an expansion into how that writer has led you to create solutions to the crisis
- Ongoing additions to the journal as assigned, completed and prepared for presentation. The journal will ask you to respond to both the power and the vulnerability of the cosmos, and to address this dichotomy with an eye to healing the damages our species has wrought
- Handing in the journal at the end of the course *as part of* a final project to include all responses to the readings and ongoing journal assignments
- midterm test
- Quizzes will occasionally occur on readings and/or class discussions
- Other than the typed responses the journal entries can be hand-written

Science

This is an interdisciplinary course. It will be taught by faculty from the sciences and religious studies.

Scientific investigation of the subject of Selfless Love as it relates to the environment will be conducted in the following ways:

Multidisciplinary Science Projects include, building a zero emissions machine, and xero-scape gardening, and a third investigation which the class will choose and conduct as a class. Also, a special “ Unconditional Love” Category for the school’s annual science fair will be included so that all students have the opportunity to participate in this theme.

Grading

While I will grade the individual responses to the readings separately, and will collect some of the ongoing journal assignments for grading, the ultimate grade for the quarter and the semester will be based on:

- Typed responses 30%
- Class participation 10%
- Other journal entries 20%
- Journal project as a whole 20% (adequacy and thoughtfulness of presentation and organization)
- Multidisciplinary Science Projects 20%

The assignments above will regularly receive grades on Edline, so you will see where you stand. However, the grade is more than a sum of these parts; seriousness of intent, thoughtfulness of participation, and a general sense of depth and quality in response to the issues will be evaluated at the end of the semester, and included in the grade for the Journal project as a whole.

Additionally:

On-time work is crucial. Without an excused absence, work turned in late will be devalued to a C. Work turned in more than a week late can be devalued to an F worth 50%. After that point, I will not accept late work, and the recorded grade will be a 0. There are deadlines; it is strongly advised that you meet them.

Students are expected to come to class on time with the assignment(s), and are expected to stay in class unless there is a genuine emergency until dismissal.

The Syllabus

Below is a generalized outline of the coursework. Alterations can be made if the instructor sees a need to move at a different pace, or alter the assignments to meet the needs of the class.

February: Theme one: Integration of Self

Weeks of February 1 and 7: read Freud and Jung, responses due on 2/2 Freud and 2/7-8 Jung.

Week of February 14: Responses to Keats due on 2/15

Week of February 21: Response to Matthew due on 2/22

KAIROS IS THIS WEEK—GET YOUR RESPONSES IN BEFORE 2/22

Other journal entries will be assigned for this theme: the due date for each will be the last class meeting of the week. Be prepared to discuss these entries in class.

To prepare for Theme two, read the hand-outs given during class so that your responses can come in on a timely fashion.

March: Theme two: Self, Society and the Globe

Weeks of February 28 and March 7: read Navajo Chant, Church Today, and House Made of Dawn—responses to Navajo Chant due on March 1; to the others on March 8.

Week of March 14—response to Abbey, Berry and Dillard due on March 15

Week of March 21—response to Ephesians due on March 22

Other journal entries as assigned due the last class meeting of the week

MIDTERM: March 18

March 19-31: read Harper Lee, To Kill a Mockingbird

April: Theme three: The Integration of Society

Week of April 4: response to Harper Lee due on April 5

Week of April 11: readings from Neruda and King, responses due on April 12

Weeks of April 18 and 25: journal activities

May: Theme four: Eastern and Western Cultures

Week of May 2: response to Dalai Lama readings due on May 3

Week of May 9: response to Thomas Moore and Vatican II readings due on May 10

Week of May 16: pulling the final project together, completing the journal activities

Final Projects due May 25—no exceptions without written request and written permission with alternate date written and mutually agreed upon

Spirituality

Narrative is an academic course which requires readings in the humanities, and scientific investigation. The third component is spiritual growth. Through the opening Senior Retreat, and by means of liturgical celebrations and all-school assemblies, we will celebrate the earth, listen to the moral demand which comes from the great texts to protect and enhance the earth and its life, and recognize that the earth has an *eschaton*, an end point that is not the result of destruction or the limit of finite energy, but is entry into the Mystery of the Great Force from which life emerged out of love and design. That end point is Convergence. To co-create Convergence, we use the same Energy which the Mystery who created us has used.

In the East that potent force is variously named Buddha-Nature, *chi*, entry into *Nirvana* or *satori*. Though named differently, the creative activity is letting go of the ego so that Reality—its Beauty and its Mystery—find a place within us. Compassion is the expression of having found Buddha-Nature. Buddha teaches us that happiness comes from Compassion, or Love, and happiness is the goal of religious striving. Happiness, then, is the ambience of the Convergence we all strive for.

In the Native American tradition, specifically the Navajo practice, harmony is happiness. Harmony is achieved by being physically, emotionally, and spiritually in tune with the Great Forces that create and drive the universe to its ultimate moment. All Native American traditions recognize the sacredness of the cosmos and the objects and persons within. All participate in a Driving Force that guides, unites, and encourages each of us.

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, creation is the result of God brooding over the deep. He saw disorder there, but replaced chaos with his Spirit. His Spirit is Love. Selfishness disorders ourseelves, our community, our cosmos. But the Spirit guides us to brood over the depths of ourselves and of our cosmic home, not to despair at the nothingness or the sinfulness, or the disorder, but to rejoice that precisely where such entities are at play, there is the Spirit. The Spirit is Love. The Spirit is stronger than any ego, any domination, any will to power. The Spirit is order, respect and creativity. The Spirit is Love.

Love is crucial for personal growth. It is crucial for the growth of our community. It is crucial for Convergence. We will write in our journal following liturgies, assemblies and the retreat that will take up the concept of Love, *agape*, unselfish giving. The highlight of our spiritual year will be Globe Day, a day of celebration of the earth and the human community that dwells on the earth. Two guest speakers are invited to attend: one will be a humanities professional, the other will be a scientist. All students, alumnae, parents, the school board, and members of the local community are invited to hear our speakers, engage with them, and answer questions about how we can actively engage in enhancing the globe, and thus, our lives. Your class will sponsor this day. The speakers will also speak with you in the classroom, and will attend a tea so that persons unable to come during the day, or anyone who continues to want to pursue this topic can do so with great minds to help them. At the close of Globe Day, you will write a response in your journal of five pages, quoting our speakers both from their lectures and from written works they had created.

