

TEACHERS GUIDE

RELIGION

A Course on Comparative Religion or World Religions

RATIONALE

Narrative has long been an effective tool in teaching comparative religion. *The Extinction of Desire* would fit into this tradition by offering: (a) a contemporary view; (b) a presentation of both Buddhist and Christian themes against the backdrop of U.S./Occidental culture. For the instructor interested in narrative s/he might adopt two or three works of fiction and use them in conjunction with a standard text on world religions.

KEY THEMES OF THE BOOK

- The role of *desire* as the driving aspect of worldview. The place and function of desire as an element of reflected worldview is highlighted.
- Materialism as an element in one's worldview and in the world at large.
- Trust in others (Michael's separation from Aisling).
- The way that the U.S./Occidental frame changes the presentation of Buddhism.
- The way that the Christian standpoint of the narrator frames his coming onto Buddhist themes (some comparisons to Sidhartha's own background are of interest here).
- Love and its power to shape our lives.
- The roles of gender within the community of characters (the interplay between the affective, the rational, and self-interest).

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- To be able to become acquainted with both the sociological elements of religion and the broader worldview implied by certain key doctrines.
- To be able to situate one's self within a fictive worldview construct.
- To be able to evaluate various outcomes that flow from the worldview construct.
- To be able to compare and contrast cultures and religious tenets in an empirically rich fashion

SAMPLE SEMESTER SYLLABUS

Sub-SYLLABUS: **Required books** -

World Religion Reader: Ian Markham, *A World Religions Reader*

Text; Michael Boylan, *The Extinction of Desire* (for Christianity and Buddhism)
Night (for Judaism)

Midnight's Children (for Hinduism and Islam).

(assuming that the "big five" Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism are given each 2.5 weeks)

4.5 Week Session: Buddhism and Christianity

Week One

Examine Buddhism in terms of general concepts via selected readings

Week Two

Read and discuss *The Extinction of Desire*. What parts are Buddhist? What parts are not? How do they relate to the sacred texts discussed in Week One?

Week Three

Examine the following practices/themes in Buddhism based upon week one and the novel.

- Desire
- Materialism
- Trust
- Love
- Gender Roles
- Cultural filters in national settings

Week Four

Examine Christianity in terms of key concepts through selected readings

Half-Week

Contrast and Compare the following practices/themes in Buddhism and Christianity

- Desire
- Materialism
- Trust
- Love
- Gender Roles
- Cultural filters in national settings

At the end of the week a five-page paper is due.

Continue in this fashion with the other religions and narratives.

A Course on Buddhism

The Extinction of Desire could be used to depict various attitudes toward desire that are set within the American (instead of an Asian) context. It could also be used alongside Yukio Mishima for contrasting uses of the narrative to describe some Buddhist themes, e.g., *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*. In this case there would be contrasts between cultural perspectives (Japan v. US/Occidental).