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Sacred Literature in the Common Era (CE, or AD): What is Salvation? Who Will Be Saved?

Course

In this course we will study of representative works of literature considered sacred by various traditions, and emerging from the Common Era onward, such as the Bhagavad Gita, Christian New Testament and Gnostic texts, the Qur'an, and Native American sacred tales.

Description

In this unique literature offering, we will read from some of the great texts revered by various traditions, both religious and cultural, dating from a few centuries before the shift into the Common Era (CE; before the Common Era = BCE) and moving forward in history to approximately 1500 CE. We will explore their contents and styles in an attempt to appreciate their special designation as "scripture," or sacred literature. We will apply certain forms of literary criticism in order to better understand their import and to enjoy the various techniques of genre they display.

We will ask important and stimulating questions: Who wrote them? Where? When? For whom and to what purpose? How does translation affect them? What roles are played by symbol, metaphor, other literary elements?

Ultimately, since these books have been the foundations of vital civilizations, religions, and philosophies, can they still offer us wisdom toward the living of our modern lives?

Theme: What Is Salvation? Who Will Be Saved?

Salvation: define it. "Preservation or deliverance from destruction, difficulty, or evil. Deliverance from the power or penalty of sin; redemption" (*American Heritage Dictionary*). That is the denotation, but what about this highly connotative word as it is used in religion? And are such understandings the products of the original texts or of the development of the theologies that grew from them?

What is salvific according to the Bhagavad Gita, the "gospel of Hinduism" which fascinated the American transcendentalists Emerson and Thoreau? A lot of people think they know what salvation is in the New Testament, but how many of them know how many versions of this idea exist across the four different gospels, the many epistles, and the infamous Book of Revelation? How similar is the Qur'an's idea of salvation? What in this life or in "the between" is salvific according to the Tibetan Book of the Dead?

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Texts

Required:

The Bhagavad Gita, trans. Easwaran

New Oxford Annotated Bible (New Revised Standard Version)

Understanding the Bible, Harris

“The Gospel of Thomas,” in *The Secret Teachings of Jesus: Four Gnostic Gospels*, trans. Meyer

The Koran, trans. Dawood

The Koran: A Very Short Introduction, Cook

The Tibetan Book of the Dead, trans. Thurman

Native American sacred texts*

(*This needs to be assembled; no textbook of Native American prayers and cosmologies exists that I know of.)

For most of the books listed here, many other translations exist. The syllabus is geared to the particular editions of the texts for this course, as given above. (See the bibliographies.) If students choose to read a different edition, they must be alert to the fact that its format and its translation may vary to a small or a very large degree.

Recommended:

An English or writer’s handbook

A college-level dictionary

The Bible as Literature, Gabel and Wheeler

Course Requirements

A grade for the course will be based on two essays, a film review, a midterm, and final. All assignments for credit must be typed or word-processed and must adhere to MLA standards of presentation (review will be provided). Close reading, response exercises, lecture, group and individual tasks will help us work through each of the texts.

Student Learning Outcomes

- Distinguish among the stylistic and thematic characteristics of the texts.
- Determine how the content is being conveyed, specifically what literary elements are being employed.
- Evaluate the effects of translation on both content and style.

Table of Contents

The contents of this module are as follows.

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Course Structure and Description of Texts

Our starting point is the **Bhagavad Gita**. Often called the gospel of Hinduism, this dramatic philosophical poem illumines the four paths, or yogas, which one may follow, choosing that best suited to one’s temperament, to realize the Supreme Self within. Preserved as the sixth chapter in the Mahabharata (one of two giant Indian epics) and difficult to date (anywhere from 300 BCE to 100 CE is likely), the Gita (or song) opens theatrically on the plain of Kuru where a great battle is about to be fought. Our hero Arjuna, sick at heart over the potential slaughter to ensue not only of enemies but of relatives (it’s a civil war), questions the duty of a just man in time of war. Lord Krishna (or Bhagavan) happens to be incarnated as his chariot-driver, and he has an answer for Arjuna which spans the next eighteen chapters, delivered while time and action are held in a kind of suspended animation. The Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita constitute Vedanta, a spiritual philosophy which has taken hold in the United States.

We push fully into the Common Era reading several selections from the **New Testament**: this is a collection of twenty-seven different compositions exploring the meaning of the life, ministry, and death of Jesus of Nazareth. Because it’s reputed to be the earliest Christian document, we start with Paul’s First Letter to the Thessalonians, where we can see how Paul’s particular theology is already taking clear shape and will influence the several narratives (the gospels) which will soon be written. We read Mark’s Gospel in full because it is understood by scholars to be the first version (or the earliest of what has survived), on which Matthew and Luke will draw, edit, and expand. We read the first several chapters of the other gospels, then sample pericopes (textual units theorized by source critics to have lived independently before being blended into a narrative). We read Paul’s theophany chapters in the Book of Acts, all of Revelation, and all of the famous non-canonical Gospel of Thomas.

Then on to the **Qur’an** (or **Koran**): to Muslims, the holiest object on earth, a miracle in and of itself, and the very words of Allah (God) Himself, as mediated by the angel Gabriel and received by The Prophet, Muhammad. Sent as a correction to Allah’s previous revelations to the Hebrews and Christians, the Qur’an, which means primarily the Recitation or the Reminder, is God’s final and infallible revelation to humankind. Its meaning is tied integrally to the sounds of the classical Arabic in which it was transmitted, between 610 and 630 CE, and it is intended to be chanted in both

communal and private devotion. It is a text close in length to the New Testament, but is not arranged in separate books or documents; it is comprised of 114 suras (chapters) which vary in length—the shortest at only four lines, the longest at 715—and arranged from longest to shortest, after a brief opening chapter which sets the essential tone and thematic concerns. In a theme-and-variation style, the Qur'an's reminders are centered on God's sovereignty, humankind's surrender to that sovereignty, judgment, and resurrection. Anyone who knows his or her Bible, even marginally, may be surprised to see familiar characters: Abraham, Moses, Joseph, even Mary and Jesus, alongside less familiar prophets and sages such as Hud and Silah.

The **Tibetan Book of the Dead**, like the Egyptian Book of the Dead, is also misnamed and purports to be a guide for the soul in its perilous journey—this time through a multilayered yet fairly sequential “between” (very generally, the afterlife) experience in which the aim is liberation from the cycle of rebirth, or reincarnation. More properly titled the Bardo Thodol, or the Book of Liberation through Understanding in the Between, this is an extremely esoteric text based on a highly developed Tibetan psychology and a complex science of death. Its series of prayers and instructional recitations are read to the body of the deceased over a period of some forty days, during which it is hoped that the decedent's soul is able to overcome fearful spectacles in order to recognize and merge with ultimate Buddha consciousness. For those unable to do so, the last third of the text is instruction for selecting a propitious womb through which to reincarnate.

We conclude with **Native American prayers and cosmogonies**. Despite the essential impossibility of establishing a Native American *sacred text*—since this is a purely oral tradition and a tradition in which Everything is sacred—I felt I had to include something and in some form, no matter how many degrees removed. After consulting with a colleague of mine in our Ethnic Studies Department, I searched out and culled a small packet-worth of creation stories and various prayers representing many of the better known tribes indigenous to North America. In spite of their over-layering by the influence of the European perceptions which gathered and translated them, they can still inspire a powerful reverence for Nature, the Land, and the Earth herself (and can't we all use more of that?).

“Literary Function” and Importance of Translation

Even though my course description asks, “Ultimately, since these books have been the foundations of vital civilizations, religions, and philosophies, can they still offer us wisdom toward the living of our modern lives?” I emphasize to my students that acquiring, developing, or enhancing a personal set of values or beliefs, *or not*, is entirely up to them.

This part, I tell them at the beginning of the semester, is not in my course—our job as a learning community is to comprehend (as best we can) these often inspiring but frequently elusive texts, and, secondly, to appreciate how the normal aspects of literature (metaphor, analogy, symbol, irony, and so on) serve the essential function of carrying these books' powerful and provocative ideas. I call this the *Literary Function*. By which I mean: it *is* what Fine Literature *does* which even makes it possible to speak of what is essentially ineffable. The power to image is the primary tool of the revelatory mind to express the inexpressible, to convey the inaudible, to clothe the invisible... If the *what* (content) and the *how* (style) of great literature are inextricable, then here in a literature which probes the ultimate mysteries of existence, we can see the ultimate example of that integral nature.

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It is also our job, as I see it, to become sensitive to the challenges, problems, and effects of *translation*. The act of translating complex ideas from ancient languages into modern English is difficult enough; add to that the near-impossibility of expressing the Ineffable even in a familiar tongue, and how often imagery is culture-bound! While I have carefully selected the translations we use for the courses, I bring other versions into the classroom for constant reference and comparison. Further, the major paper for each course is a detailed study of three versions of the same passage—students get to select the passage and the alternate translations guided by my annotated bibliographies.

A Few Cautions

In my course description, distributed as part of my syllabus, I have the following paragraph:

Text and Context: It will be essential to our success as a community of learners to keep in mind that this is not a comparative or world religions course, nor is it a forum for debating personal beliefs. (If you should fall into discussing an idea or term from a position of belief only, I will intervene to alert you to this and you need simply to reevaluate your approach.) On the other hand, we will always try to keep in mind that millions of people throughout the world base their beliefs, their morals, their very lives upon these texts; therefore, we will approach them with respect.

Obviously, the biggest problem facing a course like this is *personal beliefs* getting in the way of learning. That's one reason I keep scheduling this course during the evening session, which typically draws a more mature student population than the day session. I'm sure religion courses are faced with this constantly. Being clear and up front in the semester about the ground rules—I always spend overt time on this paragraph during the first class—helps establish an effective tone.

Speaking of beliefs... *So many beliefs (sects, versions, interpretations)* have grown out of one text that it is shaky at best to even engage in talk about personally held religious beliefs. There are so many versions of Buddhism and Christianity, for example, that it's impossible to speak on anything in this regard except the text as the start-up or foundation for any of those versions of tradition.

Having a *degree in literature* and *not having a degree in either religion or history* can be both a plus and a minus. The plus is that I can use the lack of the other degree to avoid being pulled into debates or discussion of religion (or history). The minus is, of course, that I can't always answer questions that naturally arise about the contexts of these texts. I've learned just enough about the traditions to teach the specific books; that in itself has been a lot of work—any one of these books normally represents an entire academic career in a university.

The *variety of translations* now available for most of these texts is mostly a plus; students really experience how the holy word is not carved in stone. Differing versions often stimulate discussion and challenge our thinking. The minus is that sometimes the differences bog down or divert discussion. I spent a good amount of time researching various versions to select those required for the course. My criteria were sensitivity to the receptor language, no archaic grammar (thou, thy, doth, etc.), a sense of a balanced blend of concerns between East and West, and good apparatus—glossaries, substantial introductions, afterwards, commentaries, and footnotes.

Keeping a "Wisdom Log"

Note: This assignment is for additional credit (optional assignment).

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Log Type 1

The students should consider this ongoing assignment as their personal laboratory for exploring the concepts, adages, ideas, precepts, and admonitions offered by our sacred texts. In this laboratory, each student will select those passages which strike him/her as worth further time, thought, and investigation, and which ultimately he/she may find worth applying to how the student leads his/her life. This wisdom log is intended to be the student's personal book of collected wisdom.

I recommend the student make or buy a notebook just for this purpose. Title it: The Book of Jason or Sharon's Book of Wisdom... or something along such lines.

What the student should do:

1. *Each week* (beginning with week 2 of the course, and until Due Date on syllabus) select one brief passage from our current text(s).*

a. Copy the passage into your notebook *onto a left-hand page*, noting title, section, chapter, verse as appropriate, and date of your entry.

b. Then *across from it on the right-hand page*, respond to it: your thoughts, reactions, feelings, connections... genuine response (average = one handwritten page).

(Some students really enjoy this thoughtful activity; please feel free to do more than 1 entry per week, but mark it as additional.)

*When more than one book is scheduled in a week's time, you may choose which one to respond to.

Log Type 2

If you are interested in and have the time to explore *applying and experimenting* with the insights from our texts in your daily life, Log 2 may be a better choice.

With the text we are reading at the time (apply for four weeks minimum; notice special due date for Wisdom Logs and allow time accordingly), select one passage to *actively experiment with in your daily life*. Record what you're doing and make observations... Is it difficult to apply? If so, why? How does it change you? and so forth... These entries should constitute a series of dated reports on how the experience is going. Make a minimum of two entries per week and date them clearly.

Note: Wisdom Log 2 is about *doing something*.

*Besides obvious activities like meditation or alms giving, this could include changing or fostering attitudes, responding to others in new ways, promoting or preventing certain mental processes...

For either log project: *points will be awarded based mostly on thorough attention to activities required and thoughtfulness in the written expression.*

If there's anything you'd rather I not read, just fold the page.

Sample Syllabus

- Prior to class, you should have read the week's assignment.
- Page #s in () = *recommended* reading (if you have time after required reading)
- This syllabus is geared to the particular editions of the texts ordered for this course. If you choose to read a different edition, be alert to the fact that its format may vary and its translation may vary to a small or very large degree.
- In general, I recommend that you read the sacred text itself (or portion assigned) before reading the introductory or support materials; then recommended reading.

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- Week One:** introduction to course... + introduction to Bhagavad Gita.
- Week Two:** Bhagavad Gita chapters 1–9 + introduction
- Week Three:** Bhagavad Gita chaps. 10–18
Discuss essay 1
- Week Four:** read in your Bible: The First Letter of Paul to the Thessalonians; The Gospel According to Mark, ch. 1–5
read in *Understanding the Bible*: pp. 1–37 Bible Overview; (348–354) 354–367 (368–376), 376–381 Intertestamental Period; read definitions on 369 (Pharisees) and 371 (Sadducees); 538–540 Thess.; 535–538 Paul's theology
- Week Five:** read in your Bible: Mark's Gospel, ch. 6–16; Luke's Gospel, ch. 1–3; Matthew's Gospel, ch. 1–2; John's Gospel, ch. 1–2
read in *Understanding the Bible*: pp. 387–419 New Testament introduction and Mark; read boxes, charts, or maps on pp. 422, 428–429, 436, 445–446, 448, 455, 458–459, 462, 467, 473; (421–474)
- Week Six:** read in your Bible: ch. 9, 10, 11 of Acts of the Apostles; (browse the rest of Acts); (browse more of Luke's Gospel?)
read in *Understanding the Bible*: pp. 511–514; boxes and maps 513, 518, 522, 524; (511–538)
Essay 1 due
- Week Seven:** read in your Bible: The Revelation of John; (Daniel, in Old Testament; 2 Esdras, in Apocrypha); read in *Understanding the Bible*: pp. 592–603 Rev.; 316–320 apocalyptic lit.; (320–328)
- Week Eight:** read The Gospel of Thomas; read in *Understanding the Bible*: pp. 476–481 beyond canon; 498–504 agreement on historical Jesus; (488–508); * 27–37 if not already
Midterm
- Week Nine:** Koran: suras 114–50 + introduction
Discuss essay 2
- Week Ten:** Koran: suras 49–113
- Week Eleven:** Koran: suras 12–48
Film review deadline
- Week Twelve:** Tibetan Book of the Dead, part 1: ch. 1, 2, 4 (3)
(wisdom logs due)

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Week Thirteen: Tibetan Book of the Dead, part 2 , (part 3)
Essay 2 due

Week Fourteen: Native American creation myths
(general Additional Credit deadline)

Week Fifteen: Native American prayers
Discuss and prepare for final

Week Sixteen:Final

Lecture Notes

Bhagavad Gita

Sanskrit = the Song of God, the Lord's Song, the Celestial Song.
A dramatic, philosophical poem of 18 short chapters.
The most celebrated and revered text in Hinduism.

"It is the most popular book in Hindu religious literature; the Gospel, one may say, of India. It has profoundly influenced the spiritual, cultural, intellectual and political life of the country throughout the centuries and it continues to do so today."
(Prabhavananda and Isherwood 28)

Preserved in sixth book of the epic The Mahabharata.

(Composed c. 400 BCE to 400 CE; original form 2,400 verses grew to 100,000 verses; it is really more than one work by more than one author; traditionally ascribed to Vyasa.)

Gita estimated to have been composed c. 300 BCE to 100 CE; it existed independently, by CE absorbed into the epic c. 100 BCE.

Traditionally ascribed to Vyasa, a revered sage with mystical powers, the legendary composer of the Mahabharata.

Upanishadic quality -- mystical, authoritative, revelatory, ecstatic, visionary.

Attention to Genre and Style

A dramatic, philosophical poem.

Its over-structure is dramatic: characters, dialog, setting, (action) interior structure is poetic: verse and prose of a philosophical-spiritual-theological nature in speech form.

characters = *Arjuna*, warrior-prince, a son of Pandu

Krishna, his chariot-driver (incarnationally)

Lord of All (transcendentally)

Sanjaya, an all-seeing narrator

Dhritarashtra, blind king of the Kurus

Krishna, a Hindu deity of many versions, in this work is the incarnation of divine cosmic power who periodically descends to earth to assist in the restoration of order and righteousness (*dharma*) in times of chaos and unrighteousness [see 4:7].

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Arjuna, a legendary hero, exalted warrior, noble man of action struggling with ultimate questions; seeks to understand self, world, God, his place, his duty; becomes Krishna's disciple-student, receiving Krishna's teachings on the four yogas (action, knowledge, devotion, meditation).
Simile, see 2:22, 3:38, 5:10, 6:19, 7:7, 13:33... this literary device is used liberally throughout the text.
Metaphor, see 4:42, 6:5, 14:4.
Symbolism and allegory work closely together in the idea of the battlefield being the human mind-body or human life; also look at 2:69, 4:37.

Essential Terms

Dharma is a word with several, fluid meanings...sacred duty, sacred knowledge or teaching, cosmic order, ultimate reality... (also see above).

Yoga (+ four types) is also fluid term... (from *yuj*, "to unite") union with Ultimate, realization of unity of all; action, a path or discipline which leads to such realization; also a specific branch of Hindu philosophy.

Four types as explored in Gita:

jnana (knowledge, insight)

bhakti (devotion, love)

karma (action, service)

raja (meditation)

Atman: Self within the self, innermost substance of all beings; the noumenal within the phenomenal, the eternal within the temporal.

Karma is another multi-meaning word... action, discipline, path; accumulation of action and its results or influences.

Samsara: the world of change and shift, flux; cycle of birth, death, rebirth *moksha* illumination, spiritual liberation, goal of the life cycle.

"To explore the paradoxical interconnectedness of disciplined action and freedom, Krishna develops his ideas in improvisational ways, not in linear arguments that lead to immediate resolution. The dialog moves through a series of questions and answers that elucidate key words, concepts, and seeming contradictions in order to establish the crucial relationships among duty (*dharmā*), discipline (*yoga*), action (*karma*), knowledge (*jnana*), and devotion (*bhakti*). The concepts are drawn from many sources: Sankhya, the dualistic philosophy that analyzes the constituents of phenomenal existence; Yoga, the code of practical discipline based on dualism; Vedanta, the pantheistic doctrine of metaphysical knowledge; as well as Buddhism."
(Miller 8)

Thematic (and Doctrinal) Concerns

A central thematic concern = *dharmā*: sacred duty; role and action required to sustain the moral order of the cosmos; code of conduct appropriate for each group in the hierarchically ordered Hindu cosmology.

According to H. Smith, "In Sanskrit the word dharma translates as 'truth, nature, and duty,' which means here that, accurately discerned, one's duty derives from one's nature" (Miller xiii).
universe

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world
society
individual

Dharma as natural order, see 3:21... 3:30.

Dharma as one's particular duty, see 2:31, 3:35.

Dharma as ground of being, see 14:26.

Premise doctrines:

- an infinite, changeless reality supports the world of change
- humans are capable of knowing this divine ground, the Infinite
- this same Reality lies at the core of every human personality; humans possess a double nature: the finite self (ego) and the infinite Self
- the purpose of life is to discover this reality experientially
- reincarnation

"True knowledge of the Self does not lead to salvation: it is salvation. But this is not an intellectual knowledge or even a poetical vision: 'In the union with Him is the supreme proof of His reality.'" (Mascaro xvii)

Dualism, see 2:16, 4:6, 7:4-15, 15:16-20.

Pantheism and panentheism, see chapters 6, 9, 10, especially 6:28-32, 9:4, 10:8.

The nature of God, see chapter 8, godhead... chapter 9, theology... and chapter 11, the great theophany!

ALL is in the Divine Ultimacy, see 6:28-32, 15:15,

Faith and reason, knowledge and experience, see 18:51, 57,

"Spiritual experience is the only source of true spiritual faith, and this must never contradict reason... the first condition for a man to be worthy of God is that his reason should be pure -- 18:51, 18:57.

Reason is the faculty given to man to distinguish true emotion from false emotionalism, faith from fanaticism, imagination from fancy, a true vision from a visionary illusion." (Mascaro xxvii-xxviii)

Equanimity, see 2:15, 2:48, 6:9; self-control, see 2:56-72, 6:5-8.

Work as sacrifice, see 2:47; chapter 4... + doctrine of karma yoga, throughout.

Rareness of the seeker, see 7:3.

"The Bhagavad Gita is also known as the Geetopanishad. It is the essence of Vedic knowledge and one of the most important Upanishads in Vedic literature."

(Bhaktivedanta 23; cf. Upanishads)

Overview Comment

Hinduism -- old, vast, and varied!

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Not based on the teachings of a founder (no Buddha, Christ, Muhammad)...

Evolved over centuries via continual interplay of diverse religious beliefs and practices: local popular cults, orthodox traditions (primarily the ancient Vedic), ritualism of the Brahmanas, the mysticism of the Upanishads, challenge and influences of Buddhism and Jainism...

Text History and Translation

Gita composed c. 300 BCE to 100 CE, traditionally ascribed to Vyasa as the traditional author of the Mahabharata; existed independently, absorbed into the epic c. 100 BCE.

Officially it is *smriti*, "remembered", "heard", "traditional" text; rather than *shruti*, "scripture", "revealed."

Three important Indian commentators

Sankara (788–820 CE)

Ramanuja (1017–1137)

Maddhva (1199–1276)

1785, first English translation by Charles Wilkins.

The work was so enthusiastically received that it spurred translation of many other sacred and traditional Indian literary works through the rest of that century; this also ignited interest in the study of Sanskrit which was particularly taken up by English and German scholars into the 1800s.

"The study of Sanskrit led to the comparative study of languages. It was found that Sanskrit, Persian, Greek, and Latin, and also the Celtic, Germanic, and Slavonic languages came from a primitive unwritten language called Aryan." (Mascaro ix)

"The Gita's dramatic power, compressed language, and network of complex ideas offer a daunting challenge to the translator." (Miller 14)

"I would not hesitate to call it India's most important gift to the world. It has been translated into every major language and perhaps a hundred times into English alone." (Easwaran 2)

Universal value

"The dramatic moral crisis that is central to the Bhagavad-Gita has inspired centuries of Indian philosophers and practical men of wisdom, as well as Western thinkers such as Thoreau, Emerson, and Eliot. Interpretations of the Gita...are varied as the figures who have commented on it. From Shankara, the great Hindu philosopher of the eighth century, to Mahatma Gandhi, the leader of India's independence struggle in the twentieth century, each thinker has emphasized the path to spiritual liberation that was suited to his view of reality. These various interpretations reflect the intentionally multifaceted message of Krishna's teaching." (Miller 1, Bantam ed.)

"The yogas, which are four in number, have proven to be so astute in their analysis of differing spiritual temperaments -- Carl Jung adapted his four psychological types

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from them -- that they now belong to the world. Reflective persons (jnana yogis) advance toward God by knowing him, but it is important to realize that the kind of knowing involved is an intuitive discernment that is more like seeing than thinking. Affective persons (bhakti yogis), who live more in their hearts than in their heads, draw close to God by loving him. Wired with energy, active people (karma yogis) advance toward God by serving him. And finally, those with an aptitude for meditation (raja yogis) realize God by that route. Everyone possesses all four aptitudes to some degree, but it makes sense to lead with one's long suit. The Bhagavad Gita delineates these four approaches to God in greater detail than we find in other religions, but one point in the Gita's treatment of them may seem confusing. When Krishna is describing the path of love, say, he gets carried away to the point of giving the impression that it is God's favorite approach, until we come to the next yoga, which he extols in the same way... It is part of the genius of the Gita that it leaves readers of every spiritual temperament with the impression that the book was written especially for them." (H. Smith in Miller xii)

Recommended reading: "The Significance of the Bhagavad Gita" by Thomas Merton, an introductory essay in Bhaktivedanta's translation and commentary.

Recommended reading: "Why Did Henry David Thoreau Take the Bhagavad-Gita to Walden Pond?" Miller's Afterward essay (Bantam ed.).

New Testament

Overview

Not one book but a collection of Christian compositions

The term *new testament* is a Latinized rendering of the Greek *new covenant* -- as employed in earliest Christianity new covenant did not refer to a collection of writings but to the new understanding of salvation as it was believed to have been inaugurated by the Messiah event (in correlation and contrast to the old covenant of God with Israel).

The canon = 27 works:

- 4 gospel versions
- 1 historical book
- 1 prophetic book
- 21 letters

- written over approximately 100-year period (c. 50 CE to 150 CE) by a dozen or more authors
- in *koine* Greek
- representing variety of theological expression concerning the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth and his apostles
- established as authorized scripture in late 4th century CE

(See the full canon composition timeline in Harris.)

Brief History of New Testament Canon

Sparse and fragmentary evidence exists as to the actual process: best evidence comes from the use of and reference to early Christian documents by 2nd–4th century church writers.

Much of the "authority" of a text rested upon its (1) association with an apostle and/or (2) its use by the various churches.

Tradition of the above grew until ecclesiastical councils applied criteria of: apostolicity, catholicity, orthodoxy, traditional usage.

Earliest compositions were the missionary and pastoral letters of Paul, written c. 50 CE to 62 CE, to the churches he helped establish.

The collected letters of Paul were probably available by the late 1st century or early 2nd, as deduced from references, citations, and lists made by Christian writers of the period (see Gamble 41).

First evidence of a collection of four versions of the Gospel and first attempt to assert its exclusive authority is provided by Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons, writing in 180 CE (see Gamble 31).

Writers of 2nd–3rd centuries refer to *many other* gospels and other Christian compositions; 20th-century manuscript discoveries have unearthed many of these texts previously only known by name (see Gamble 25).

Late in 4th century, efforts began to draw up definitive list of Christian scripture.

One such list preserved from 4th century includes *the 4 gospels, 10 letters of Paul, and the 7 "catholic" epistles, Barnabas, Revelation, Acts, the Shepherd of Hermas, the Acts of Paul, and the Apocalypse of Peter.*

Council of Laodicea, 363 CE, identified "the canonical books," listing 26 -- all those in present canon minus Revelation.

39th Festal Letter of Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, issued in 367 CE, lists as authoritative exactly the 27 we now observe.

Council of Hippo in 393, and the Council of Carthage in 397, both named the 27 books of our New Testament.

Gospels: An Introduction

Gospel = Greek "good news."

A theological, not a literary (genre) term.

One gospel expressed in (canonically) four versions; a "four-fold gospel"; gospels *according to* authors are anonymous; attributions are traditional; titles did not exist on originals.

"Mark," probably written c. 65–70 CE, appears to be the first full narrative gospel, its author drawing on various smaller written and many oral traditions.

"Matthew," probably written c. 80–85 CE, appropriates much of "Mark" and uses at least two other sources.

"Luke" is first of a two-volume composition ("Acts of the Apostles"), probably composed c. 85–90 CE, using much of "Mark" and at least two other sources (appears to be independent of "Matthew").

These three are referred to as synoptic (seen together, or sharing a common viewpoint) as the stories they tell are fairly parallel.

"John," written c. 90–95 CE independently of the others, presents a strikingly different chronology and characterization of Jesus.

Styles and thematic emphases are distinct.

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Each gospel writer had a different set of circumstances and concerns in terms of audience and purpose.

"Source criticism has shown that the Gospel writers not only used existing written sources but also exercised great editorial freedom in adapting them. This makes it plain that the Gospel writers did not attach any special sanctity or even adequacy to their sources and that each meant to provide something better. This must have been the attitude of the authors of Matthew and Luke even toward the Gospel of Mark. Indeed, it was apparently the aim of each Gospel writer to offer an adequately comprehensive document which would stand on its own." (Gamble 24)

The Other Texts: Acts, Letters, Revelation

"Acts of the Apostles," second or companion volume of "Gospel According to Luke"; a history of the growth, expansion, development of the Christian Church in the immediate aftermath of Jesus' crucifixion.

Begins with testimonials to individual and group experiences of the risen Christ.

Accounts of leadership and organizational decisions by the apostles.

Dramatic narratives of confrontations with Jewish authorities... latter half chronicles the dramatic conversion of Paul and the three missionary journeys he undertakes over several years establishing churches throughout the Mediterranean world..

"Epistles," a collection of missionary and pastoral letters... many written by the apostle Paul to the several churches he established in Asia Minor and Greece, and pastoral letters to individuals associated with his evangelizing work.

Also letters ascribed pseudonymously to Paul.

Letters attributed to the apostles John, Peter, James, and Jude.

The "Revelation to John," traditionally attributed to the apostle John who is also attributed with the "Gospel According to John"; an eschatological apocalypse (a particular type of prophetic or revelatory literature) concerning the end times, Christ's imminent return in glory to preside over God's Day of Judgment, and God's ultimate reign over a new Creation ... highly imagistic and symbolic, characteristic of its genre.

Acts of the Apostles

"Luke" continues his two-part narrative of Christian origins (note opening [1:1-5])

Subject: account of church's beginning; as history it is highly selective and idealized

Themes: Christianity as a spirit-directed faith
innocent of sedition against Rome
divinely destined *universal* way
the unity and cooperation within this new church

Characters: these themes are embodied in the speeches and actions of the two main characters, Peter and Paul; these two also symbolize the consecutive phases of the religion's development.

Peter: An original eyewitness follower of Jesus. His actions dominate the first half of book, chapters 1-12. He represents the original Jewish community centered in Jerusalem.

After converting thousands of his fellow Jews to the new Way, Peter converts Cornelius, a Roman centurion, and his family; this is the "transitional act," for Cornelius is a Gentile.

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The complementary transition is the conversion of Paul, the other main character, whose actions dominate the rest of the book, chapters 13–28.

Paul: A convert by direct, supernatural experience of the risen Christ. The great missionary to the Gentiles. His three tours through the Mediterranean world are featured in this second half of the book

Luke's Paul is a team-player who accommodates himself to the authority of the Jerusalem leaders. (Yet, in Paul's letters we often see quite a different relationship!)

Paul holds a unique position in the New Testament, being both a major character in one of its longer books and one of the collection's major authors (his letters). The action of the narrative is concerned with the spread of the new Way from Jerusalem to Rome (symbolically, the ends of the earth)... but concentrates exclusively on the northern Mediterranean, ignoring the expansion into northern African cities (i.e., Alexandria)... It also does not explain how and by whom Christianity actually arrives in Rome—it is simply there by the time Paul gets there at close of the book

The action is frequently stalled by long speeches, rehearsing past events or explaining their theological significance; while the movement is not without struggle, conflict, and confrontation, there is a sense of its inevitable nature.

“The only first century account of Christian origins, Acts preserves important traditions about the first Christians, even while revising them to minimize theological controversies and present Church leaders as exemplary models for his readers to imitate” (Harris 448, 5th ed.).

The ancient historian's job was not just to compile facts; it was to present people, their actions, and events in an ethical or moral light -- he was more concerned with what the facts *meant*.

Luke presents a harmonious partnership between Peter and Paul and a smoothly flowing narrative that will demonstrate Christianity's divinely inspired and ordained birth and growth.

“Although we cannot be sure why Luke ignores the southern Mediterranean churches, his silence may result from strong preference for Pauline Christianity, a branch of the faith that historically came to dominate the Western church.” (Harris 514, 6th ed.)

The Letter as Literary Form

Letters in the ancient world were used to transact business and politics.

In time they became an early and simple form of literature.

Concerned with style, rhetoric, tone

Intended for a broader (more public) audience

Preserving and transmitting ideas (purpose)

Influenced by oratory which was important in the Greco-Roman world

The letter was the most popular literary form in early Christianity

Characteristics of ancient Hellenistic letters:

formulas (specific devices and forms for openings, closings, and transitions within main material)

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epistolary “topoi” (commonly used themes and motifs used to develop the specific content)

Early Christian letters:

Opening formulas: prescript (sender, addressee, salutations) + thanksgiving

The main body expresses the matter for which the letter was written, developed through the use of certain formulaic devices:

Transitional formulas (disclosure, appeal, confidence)

“Topoi” (letter writing, health, business, domestic events, reunion with addressee; authority, love, right behavior, end times, faith)

Autobiographical statements

Travel plans

Concluding paraenesis (advice, moral exhortation)

Closing formulas: final salutations, request for prayer, autographed greetings, a “charis” (grace) benediction

These often have a liturgical tone to them, as the letter would probably be read as part of worship.

The First Letter of Paul to the Thessalonians

First extant writing of Paul.

First extant New Testament writing (c. 50 CE).

Thessalonica was the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia, an important crossroads of both sea and land routes.

Paul founded a church there on his second missionary journey after leaving Philippi (2:1; cf. Acts 17:1–8).

While Paul’s initial contact in Thessalonica was probably the local synagogue, this letter is addressed to Gentile believers (1:9).

Some distinctive features:

Superscript and salutation are shorter than usual

Thanksgiving section is longest of all his letters (1:2–3:13)

The only Pauline letter in which the “concluding” hortatory section (4:1–5:22) constitutes the main body

Primary theme = Do what you have done, but even more (4:1–2, 10b–12, 1 Thessalonians, continued)

Purposes: encourage them against opposition; praise their steadfastness; remind them of their past accomplishments in faith; defend his motives; express his care for them; answer theological queries.

Identifiable topoi : “Concerning those who have died” (4:13–18), and “Concerning times and seasons” (5:1–11) appear to be responses to questions relayed to Paul from the congregation.

Autobiographical statements in chapters 1–3 appear to rehearse his previous relationship with the community and emphasize his role as exemplar.

Notice primary imagery is of care-taking: nurse... father... mentor.

Types of Christian letters

paraenetic (advice, exhortation); example, 1 Thessalonians

deliberative (deliberates an issue); ex. Galatians, 1 Clement

gratitude; ex. Philippians

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recommendation; ex. Philemon, 3 John
composite (conflation of several letters by a later editor); ex. 2 Corinthians
homiletic; ex. Hebrews

Most early Christian letters are multifunctional and have mixed character.

“Paul in particular was both a creative and eclectic letter writer. The epistolary situations he faced were... complex... Many letters therefore exhibit combinations of styles.” (Aune 203)

The Revelation to John

When? C. 95 CE; government hostilities toward Christians during reign of Emperor Domitian (ruled 81–96 CE) appear to be referenced in 1:9; 2:10, 13; 6:9–11; 14:12; 16:6; 21:4.

Irenaeus (180 CE) states that this writing was produced late in Domitian’s reign.

Who? Traditionally ascribed to apostle John, along with “Gospel of John”; however, this was debated from the beginning. Author is possibly one known as John the Elder, c. 100 CE in Ephesus (as with the Gospel of John). Author refers to himself (1:1, 4, 9; 22:8), but only as God’s “servant John.”

Seems evident that this writer is writing well after the generation of eyewitnesses -- those apostles are now the twelve “cornerstones” of the heavenly temple (21:14).

Author seems to be acquainted with the seven churches addressed in chapters 2 and 3 possibly an itinerant Christian prophet.

His style of Greek (sometimes stiff, awkward) suggests he was a native of Palestine; perhaps he had contact with the community of John’s Gospel -- he refers to Christ as Logos, Lamb, Shepherd, Temple -- motifs in John’s Gospel.

Where? Patmos (author’s assertion), a tiny Aegean island off Asia Minor.

For whom? Community suffering political oppression and probably religious persecution.

Sociopolitical oppression and religious suffering in cosmic perspective (audience).

Rome as new Babylon, destroyer of God’s people (*symbolism, motif*).

God’s select as a tiny point of light in a great battleground of warring Good and Evil (*metaphor*).

Message of hope (and ultimate triumph) for believers. Encourage them to maintain strict separatism and adherence to beliefs (purpose).

Characterization of Jesus is quite different from anything seen in the rest of the New Testament: all-powerful cosmic deity; Messiah of popular expectation, divine warrior king, slaying enemies, vanguard of heavenly reign; comes not to forgive sinners (synoptics) nor as God’s logos incarnate (John), but to inflict punishment upon his opponents (19:11–21).

This characterization owes much (perhaps all) to the author’s rigorously apocalyptic view of world history, e.g., present world is hopelessly corrupt vs. God’s planned future world of righteousness; only God’s direct intervention can bring this about; Jesus must play God’s judge and destroyer in the calamitous event.

Apocalyptic Literature

Literary tradition and attention to genre (or characteristics and sources).

Apocalypse = unveiling (revealing) of unseen realities both in heaven as it is now and on earth as it will be shortly to come.

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This genre owes an inheritance to both the traditions of Jewish prophecy (often incorporated reports of dreams and visions) and of Greco-Roman oracles.

While we see apocalyptic and eschatological aspects in nearly all New Testament documents, this book is dedicated entirely to that *theme* alone.

Apocalypse becomes a recognized literary form during the intertestamental period, c. 200–100 BCE. “Enoch,” “Daniel” are composed c. 100 BCE.

Two “Esdras,” composed approximately same time as “Revelation” (c. 95 CE), uses some of the same cryptic *imagery* and is cast in same visionary *structure*.

Like the term *gospel*, *apocalypse* is not technically a literary form but has become one through usage.

“While an apocalypse is a first-person report of a transcendent reality, ancients used the term more broadly.” (Aune 226)

Characteristics, or Common Themes and Motifs

- Universality (all of human history, all humankind)
- Cosmic dualism (matter vs. spirit; earth vs. heaven; Good vs. Evil)
- Chronologic dualism (current wicked age vs. future righteous age)
- Ethical dualism (faithful vs. unfaithful; those who walk in spiritual darkness vs. those who walk in light)
- Predestination (future has been determined; no escape)
- Exclusivism (sectarian, separatist attitude)
- Limited theology (simplistic black and white; no complexity)
- Violent divinity (God as angry, retributive destroyer)
- Eschatological preoccupation (revealing of human fate; focus on afterlife; rewards and punishments; compensatory blessing)
- Highly symbolic and coded (arcane knowledge; deliberately obscure for outsiders; words and numbers)

The Tradition

Old Testament/Jewish Scriptures : Daniel; Ezekiel (30, 37–39);

Zechariah (3; 9–14); Isaiah (6, 24–27)

Apocrypha :

2 Esdras

New Testament :

Mark 13; Matt. 24; Luke 21; 1 and 2 Thess.; 1 Cor.; Peter; Jude (quotes 1 Enoch)

Revelation to John as Most Celebrated Work of This Genre

“John of Patmos” is one of New Testament’s most consciously literary writers.

Over-structure = the revealing; internal structures = spirit journeys, visions, letters.

Imagery, symbolism, hyperbole are prominent literary elements.

Many *symbols* and motifs are borrowed from the books of Daniel, Ezekiel, Joel, Zechariah:

Rome/Babylon as beast or whore

Israel as good woman

scrolls, trumpets

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multi-eyed beings, winged beings, enthroned beings
journey from earth to spirit realms

Some 500 allusions occur; also heavy paraphrasing; see Dan. chapters 7–10; 2 Esdras 14:22–38.

Hyperbole can alert, alarm, inspire, incite. Shocking, grotesque, startling images get attention. Cosmic imagery increases the stakes, heightens sense of importance of even small roles.

Imagery, both descriptive and figurative, conjure vivid pictures. Astronomical imagery suggests universality -- a cosmic Christ surpassing all other Greco-Roman celestial deities. (Cf. Dan. 12:3 ; 1 Enoch chapters 72–82.)

churches as lampstands -- holders of divine light

Satan as dragon

Conquest, War, Famine, Death as four horsemen

Thematic and imagistic emphases on violence, destruction, torment, etc., coupled with Jesus' harsh characterization, are what made this book controversial for so long within the early church; leaders doubted its theological or ethical validity (for example, divine love is mentioned only once!).

Placed thematically at end of New Testament, according to Harris and others, as an omega to the alpha of Genesis.

trees of life as New Eden

restoration of humanity

renewal of God's creation

Notice the closing: final expectations reiterated, and a curse on anyone who alters this text!

"Whereas the prophet Daniel had been instructed to seal his vision until End time (Dan. 12:4), John is told not to do so because 'the hour of fulfillment is near' (Rev. 22:10). The writer apparently expected an immediate vindication of his eschatological hopes. Cursing anyone who tampers with his manuscript, the author ends his cosmic vision by passionately invoking Jesus' speedy return." (Harris 600)

Gospel of Thomas

What: A collection of sayings attributed to Jesus (a sayings gospel), 4th-century Coptic manuscript, translated from Greek original; discovered at Nag Hammadi, Egypt, in 1945.

Greek fragment found in 1897 -- Oxyrynchus Papyri discovery -- and known as "Sayings of our Lord" and "Fragments of a Lost Gospel."

When: Earliest version would have existed before end of 1st century (80s?).

- sayings collections still prominent
- local communities still appealed to competing apostolic authorities
- Jesus not referred to by any Christological terms

Who: *These are the hidden words that the living Jesus spoke.*

And Didymus Judas Thomas wrote them down.

Judas, the twin (Didymus = "twin" in Greek; Thomas = "twin" in Aramaic) popular legendary figure of Syrian Christianity, traditionally associated with the Apostle Thomas. Member of a socially radical, gnostic-leaning, Eastern community of early Jesus followers.

Where written: Syria (traditionally, Thomas was patron apostle of Syria)

For whom: Eastern Syrian Christian community, perhaps recently settled, and following itinerant lifestyle.

- socially radical
- critical of conventional family and town life
- critical of common piety
- ideal of voluntary poverty / viewed wealth as useless
- ascetic leanings
- Gnostic-influenced

Sources: circulating and developing oral traditions.

Characteristics: mystical, psychological, metaphysical:

- Wisdom Literature inheritance
- Gnostic influences
- negative attitude toward world spirit vs. matter dualism
- little attention to afterlife
- no Christology
- yet compatible with Synoptic, Johannine, and Pauline theologies

Themes:

- salvation attained via insight (or knowledge, or secret wisdom), into Jesus' words
- locus of salvation is within the self
- (does not look to Jesus' death/resurrection as key, nor even to Jesus himself as the savior)
- salvation is as much for here/now as future life

Beyond the Canon

The Q hypothesis: theory that a sayings gospel existed prior to and was used by writers of what became the canonical gospels (see Harris 359).

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For a glimpse into how hypothesis arose, see Harris; for whole story and subsequent theory regarding the very first Jesus followers, see Burton Mack, *The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q and Christian Origins*.

Dead Sea Scrolls: ancient library of Hebrew scriptural and pseudoepigraphical writings dating c. 100 BCE to 70 CE, found in caves near the Dead Sea settlement of Qumran (associated with Jewish separatist sect called Essenes); discovered in 1947; contained complete scrolls of Deuteronomy, Isaiah, Psalms, Daniel; contained communal instructional books; provides a provocative glimpse into pre-Christian history.

Nag Hammadi Library: collection of documents found in grave near Nag Hammadi, Egypt in 1945; 13 codices, 52 texts, representative of Gnostic Christianity, a mystical, esoteric version of early Christianity; full book of “Gospel of Thomas” and many other texts mentioned by title by early Christian writers in 1st to 3rd centuries CE.

Recommended reading: Meyer, Patterson, Robinson (see the bibliography).

Oxyrynchus Papyri: papyrus fragments unearthed at an archaeological site, Oxyrynchus, on the Nile, in 1897; included some scraps of a Greek version of “Gospel of Thomas.”

The Jesus Seminar: a diverse panel of scholars gathered to produce a new translation of the New Testament (now known as the Scholars Version, or S.V.), but specifically to come to a publishable consensus as to *what Jesus really said*. (See Harris 433 passim.)

Qur'an, or Koran

Qur'an = Arabic, “the Recitation” (alternately, the Reading; also the Criterion, the Reminder, the Clarification).

An earlier but, according to many scholars today, less exact translation of “Qur'an” is something meant to be recited, in public and private worship; recitation as integral to its existence and meaning.

The Qur'an is pure revealed literature. It is considered by the faithful to be the actual speech of God, through the angel Gabriel, and mediated by the prophet Muhammad (see sura 53.1–10).

It is venerated as miraculous and the holiest object on earth.

The Qur'an is a revealed text whose purpose is to restore the faithful to the One God .

Its oracular, dramatic poetic prose comprised of 114 chapters (*suras*) of varying length and divided into verses.

Muslims regard only the Arabic text as the true, holy Qur'an.

Normally only Arabic is used liturgically.

Muslims believe the Qur'an is untranslatable; its meaning and worth are inextricable from the actual Arabic words themselves (yet, since it is a message for all humankind, most think it better to be translated than not read at all).

Qur'an: Creation of the Text

Beginning in 610 and for approximately 20 years, Muhammad (570–632 CE) received the *tanzil* -- the “coming down” -- of the textual units of the Qur'an, first in Mecca, then in Medina; at his death the text was complete.

Each utterance was an oracle proclaimed by Muhammad in the name of the one God, and as the words of the one God.

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Memorized by Muhammad and those who heard them, written down, initially on various fragmentary objects (palm leaves, stones, bark); these were collected into a single book 1–2 years after Muhammad's death.

Some 20 years later an official recension of the text was authorized under Caliph 'Uthman (ruled. 644–656) and copies were sent to the great capitals of the Arab empire.

The Qur'an is a dramatic poetic prose comprised of 114 *suras* (alt. *surah*, *surat*) of varying length and divided into verses. Verse = *aya* (singular), *ayat* (plural), also means "sign(s)."

Traditional arrangement of *suras* is from longest to shortest, rather than by chronology of revelation or thematic development. For example, sura 2 has 715 lines, while sura 112 has only 4 lines.

Each sura has a name or title; this -- not the number -- is the normative reference.

As a rule, the name has little or nothing to do with the content of the sura, but is taken from some unusual or prominent word which appears in its text.

For example, sura 16 is entitled "The Bee" but does not mention a bee until verse 68; however, it is the only verse in the Qur'an which uses the word "bee."

Example: sura 26, entitled "The Poets," does not mention poets until the end, but it is the only sura to speak of poets (except for those references to Muhammad having been accused of being one).

It is likely that these titles were added later and were not part of Muhammad's original utterances (cf. Watt 58–59). Perhaps they were mnemonic devices.

Generally, there are two groups of *suras*, historically:

those from Mecca (610–622)

those from Medina (622–632)

The dating of *suras* is no more than an identification of whether it was spoken at Mecca or at Medina.

Sequence and continuity may be challenging for an outsider; ideas move from one context to another, circle back, recycle; apparently unconcerned with logic of chronology or theme; this allows conflation of historical time periods wherein, for example, the struggles of Muhammad and Moses may look contemporaneous.

Chronology is not important to believers because the meaning of the work is timeless and the scripture itself eternal (Cragg 14).

Qur'an

Attention to Style and Genre

Style

Dramatic poetic prose is meant to be recited, not perused; "oracle, not treatise" (Cragg 50).

Dramatic: the speaker is God, or His angels, speaking through Muhammad, the Messenger; immediate, declamatory, frequent use of interrogative "excited, unpremeditated, rhapsodical" (Watt 75).

Poetic: the dominant poetic device is *assonance*; occasional consonance, internal rhyme, refrain, and rhythm (but not meter).

Assonance occurs predominantly at end of suras and may involve a few or several lines:

Examples: ... *lumaḥa*
 ... *akblada*
 ... *al-butama* (cf. Watt 70)

Tonality of letters, rhythm of syllables, the "music" of the sounds of the original language play critical roles in expression conveyed.

(Unfortunately, much, sometimes all, of these stirring and beautiful aspects of language will be lost in translation.)

Simile, metaphor (imagery, figures of speech):

Examples: heaven rolled up like a scroll (21.104)
 people like moths blown about (101.4)
 polytheist like a spider weaving its frail house (29.41)

Metaphors are numerous, a large proportion of them are derived from commerce: man's deeds are weighed; souls are held in pledge; each receives an account at judgment.

Prose lacks metrical structure and, while broken into verses and lines, there is not an abundance of characteristics to classify it strictly as poetry (earliest suras are more poetry; later ones are more prose).

Shifting pronouns: use of unsignaled multiple pronouns + shifts in plural/singular and case challenge hearer/reader to know who is who (cf. Psalms).

Small number of *themes* repeated in variation (and in varied *subgenres*):

- supreme majesty of God the Creator
- place and duty of man
- sacred books and prophets
- Judgment
- life of community

Subgenres

Sayings, pronouncements: aphorisms, exhortations, creedal statements, retorts to opponents, answers to questions, clarification of Muhammad's position. Many short statements are introduced by imperative, "Say."

Lyrical oaths (or soothsayer utterances): rhymed, cryptic series of phrases leading to statement.

Examples: By the runners panting
 By the kindlers sparking

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SACRED LITERATURE (CE)

By the raiders early starting
Truly man to his Lord is ungrateful (from sura 79; Watt 78)
Example: By the night, when she lets fall her darkness, and by the radiant day! By Him
that created the male and the female, your endeavors have varied ends!
(from sura 92, Dawood)

Liturgical: prayers, felicitous phrases for repetition.

Example: opening sura is short declaratory prayer used
constantly in worship

Scenes and narratives: descriptive scenes of Judgment Day, afterlife; historical narratives; some with
direct speech of characters (i.e. Moses).

Parables (short teaching tales; see sura 68; 18 as example): biblical and traditional Arabic stories are
always interrupted by homiletic comment (many are punishment stories). Conciseness of
majority of these narratives gives an elliptical quality requiring engagement on the part of
hearer/reader (cf. Psalms).

Legislation: rights, ethics, laws, commandments.

Purpose, Audience, Thematic Concerns

The power of the Qur'an depends not only on its teachings but also on its emotional impact (much
of this is a result of style).

A revealed text whose purpose is to restore the faithful to the One God :

God created the Universe, then angels, then humankind.

Human history begins with expulsion from Paradise, but God does not abandon humanity. He
sends prophets with sacred books (Torah, Psalms, Gospel), but these were misused and
corrupted. Finally He sends Muhammad with the Qur'an and promised that this last text would
never be corrupted; the Qur'an reiterates these former scriptures, setting forth again the eternal
doctrine

Qur'an is essentially theology, pure theism -- summoning humankind to obedience and submission
(*islam* = submission, surrender).

Uncomplicated absolutism

Its teaching revolves around central ideas repeated in variation, to be imprinted upon the hearts and
minds of its listeners and reciters.

Themes and Motifs

God is all powerful; God is One; He is sole creator and maintainer of all that is. He is infinitely good
and forgiving, but also strict. All that humanity has is gifted from God. Humankind is good and
bad; God guides them with his Books and His Messengers. The communities preceding Islam
had Truth for a time (they were sent their prophets and their books), but then fell away. Qur'an
alone is now the criterion of Truth, and the world has been entrusted to the Muslim
community, which should reign peacefully but if necessary by war -- this is God's law. All men
will die, will one day be raised, judged, punished, or rewarded for the conduct of their lives
(Jomier 3-4).

Creation is to be revered and read (signs): hymns to the Creator... 16.3-8; 27.59-64; 30.17-27; 56.57-
74; 67.16-30. Other important creation passages... 6.95-99; 13.8-15; 17; 16.65-70; 34.11-14,
27-28; 36.33-44, 68-73; 55.1-34.

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Humankind is fallen from Paradise due to Adam and Eve's expulsion, but humans are not essentially sinners (no original sin doctrine).

Eden texts describe rather than explain human condition.

Human life is now a journey (full of good and bad, choice and temptation); heed God's laws ; perform required duties ; keep God above all else; you will be rewarded at the Resurrection; God and the Qur'an are guides; adhere to them!

Adam, father of humankind; Abraham, first Muslim.

Prophets: Moses sent to Jews; Jesus sent to Christians; Muhammad sent as ultimate prophet to Arabs.

Resurrection; Judgment Day; Afterlife.

Humankind must recognize God as absolute Lord; one must *surrender* to Him and regard none/nothing as His equal.

"The Qur'an takes men as they are and commands the natural, social values that are found in all societies governed by the Decalogue. It reminds them that they are not alone in the world, free to act according to their whim or caprice....The Qur'an appeals to the intellect, reflection, and memory. It promises man happiness in this world and the next, but in case of a conflict between the two, the concerns of the hereafter take precedence." (Jomier 38)

Qur'an/Koran

Text History

"The collecting of the Qur'an is attributed to Abu Bakr, the first caliph, and the standard version to 'Uthman, the third caliph, who established the textual tradition at Medina as the normative one and who fixed the sequence of the 114 surahs, more or less the longest to the shortest. Many Western scholars tend to think that the Qur'an in its present form began to be set down about 650 CE, but that the text was not definitively fixed until the tenth century of the Common Era." (Pelikan, intro., Ali xiv)

"The Arabic script then in usage was still rather like shorthand, less accurate than the present script and open to ambiguous interpretations. The orthography was slowly perfected and two centuries later the text was definitively established. There were a few variant readings arising from schools in different countries; but these variants did not affect the meaning of the text. Thus orthodox Islam officially admits a certain number of canonical readings. In addition, at the beginning of Islam, there were distinctive ways of reading particular verses that were favored by certain Companions [Muhammad's immediate followers]. The commentators of the Qur'an sometimes cite these divergent opinions." (Jomier 5)

For a detailed discussion of the compiling and canonization of the Arabic Qur'an, see Watt, "The History of the Text," in *Introduction to the Qur'an*, 40–56.

Translations

1143, Qur'an translated into Latin, sponsored by Peter the Venerable, abbot of the monastery at Cluny; this served as the basis for translations into other Western languages until 18th century, when scholarly study of Arabic had developed enough to allow for translations from the original.

1734, first translation from Arabic into English, by British scholar, George Sale, who had translated the New Testament into Arabic.

1800s saw good editions from French, German, and English scholars.

1930, Marmaduke Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran*, an explanatory translation/

1955, Arthur J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted* (2 vols.).

1956, N. J. Dawood, *The Koran* -- first modern English edition.

See the bibliography for other modern editions.

For a complete history of Western translations and scholarship see Watt, "The Qur'an and Occidental Scholarship," in *Introduction to the Qur'an*, 173–86.

"Modern study of the Qur'an has not in fact raised any serious question of its authenticity. The style varies, but is almost unmistakable. So clearly does the whole bear the stamp of uniformity that doubts of its genuineness hardly arise." (Watt 51)

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"Translations are authorized in order to make the ideas of the Qur'an known to the faithful, when ignorance of Arabic would prevent a fruitful reading of the original text. But the sacred character of the Arabic language and the scrupulous respect for the smallest letter accord a unique place to the Arabic original." (Jomier x)

Accepted variant readings affect translated editions.

Verse breaks were not consistent among all schools; this results in discrepancies in the numbering found in translations.

Old translations (by Orientalists) used the numbering of editions from North Africa; today it is standard to follow the Cairo edition (Jomier x).

Muhammad's Call

Muhammad's call to mission is preserved in sura 96: "Recite!..."

Qur'an uses Muhammad's personal name only four times -- throughout he is referred to as *al-Rasul* (The Messenger).

He was born in 570 CE in Mecca, an important trade city and also already a city of pilgrimage.

"At heart of Mecca was the sacred 'haram,' or enclosure, to which pagans came during the months of truce in tribal feuding -- months vital to the prosperity of the shrine... The control both of commerce and of the pagan pilgrims belonged to Mecca's rulers -- the Quraish, whose hegemony owed much to the acumen of Muhammad's great-grandfather." (Cragg 20)

The Ka'bah was the center of the sacred enclosure (like a temple).

"Built at the navel of the earth by the prototype of all true worship, Abraham, it [Ka'bah] had long been degraded by pagan rites, the purging of which was to be the burden of Muhammad's call." (Cragg 20)

He was married at 25. Muhammad's journeys as part of a merchant family would have taken him into Jewish and Christian communities, peoples of Books and monotheists.

"The Qur'an refers to the heritage from Abraham by those known as *hanifa* (singular *hanif*) who, though 'neither Jews nor Christians,' nonetheless believed in 'a pure worship' or monotheism." (Cragg 21)

Muhammad's habit of meditation intensified in his fortieth year.

"Vision and voice, in one, summoned him to 'recite in the Name of thy Lord'... he was called to 'arise and warn.'" (Cragg 21)

(Cf. suras 96; 73.1–10; 74.1–7; 76.23–31; Cragg 177 passim)

SACRED LITERATURE (CE)

Muhammad began to urge his Meccan hearers to worship God alone, to repudiate idols and polytheism, to submit to and obey the one God, and to prepare for the Day of Judgment. This public message was steadily renewed and furthered by the continuance of the *tanziil*. Controversy ensued; many believed, many did not; notion of resurrection to judgment was challenging; idea of One God was not just religiously challenging but economically unsound (many gods/many shrines/many offerings).

Muhammad was rejected by many as a soothsayer, poet, jinn-possessed, insane, magician.
(Cf. sura 52.29–47; Cragg 184)

Controversy -- confrontation -- hostility -- conflict.

622, *Hijrah* (= emigration): Muhammad and his followers left Mecca for Yathrib (later Medina). This is such a decisive event in Islamic history that its calendar begins with this year. (Qur'an, however, makes little reference to *Hijrah*.)

Contents of revelations now move into liturgical, communal, ethical, legal areas; five-fold daily prayer established and direction shifts from Jerusalem to Mecca.

Tone: exile, not abandonment.

Eventually the mother-city of Mecca is reclaimed after eight years of war.

"Thus the transcendent dimension of worship and the lively vigilance of the soldier marry together in the characteristic vigor of the later Qur'an." (Cragg 24) (See sura 4.101–2)

For prescription of war, see suras 2.190 passim; 4.88–91; 8; 9.73–89; 22; 47; and 49.

Tibetan Book of the Dead

Also known as the Bardo Thodol (alternatively, Bardo Thos Grol).

“Tibetan Book of the Dead” is how this work is popularly known in the West,

but this is a misnomer; better translations are: “The Great Liberation through Hearing in the Bardo” (Fremantle and Trungpa); “The Great Book of Natural Liberation through Understanding in the Between; or The Book of Natural Liberation (Thurman); or “Liberation by Hearing on the After-death Plane” (Wentz). (*Bardo* = between; *thodol* = liberation by hearing.)

What is it? A book of instructions for and explanations of the recitations, prayers, chants, and actions which should be performed for and to the dying and the dead which will guide, assist, and comfort them on their soul’s passage in the “between of death.”

Transformative *Being*: a series of opportunities for liberation from the cycle of rebirth, culminating in guidance for selecting a propitious womb if rebirth is inevitable.

Conciliatory *Becoming*

Elaborate, systematic, esoteric, imagistic, symbolic, theatrical, ecstatic.

The Tibetan Book of the Dead was composed in the 8th century CE and is ascribed to Padma Sambhava, a mystic, scholar, spiritual adept, one of the semi-legendary founding fathers of Tibetan Buddhism. He hid his texts in the 9th century, anticipating a political reversal resulting in the suppression of Tibetan Buddhism and the destruction of many of its scriptures.

The work was “discovered” in the 14th century by Karma Lingpa, a “treasure-teachings” discoverer, who is claimed by some to have been a reincarnation of Padma Sambhava.

Karma Lingpa is reputed to have unearthed “the Book of Natural Liberation collection in a cave on the Gampo Dar mountain in central Tibet” (Thurman 84).

The Tibetan Book of the Dead is a collection of texts (instructions, prayers, explanatory discourses, and the recitations) more or less divided into three parts.

This collection, known as the Bardo Thodol, is part of a larger collection known as The Profound Teaching of the Natural Liberation through Contemplating the Mild and Fierce Deities.

Purpose and Audience

“A scientific handbook on the realities and experiences of death. It provides guidance on what the death process is, how [one’s] present actions can affect it, and how [one] can manage it as it happens.” (Thurman 51)

“A guidebook for spiritual practice on two levels: It helps the yogi and yogini develop the abilities they need to traverse the death crisis with skill and confidence: and it gives those who feel unable to prepare fully for death, and are not confident of their abilities, a religious sense of how to seek help from enlightened divine and angelic beings.” (Thurman 51)

“A manual of useful instructions for people who are facing their death as well as for their relatives and friends. It is connected with a larger literature in Tibetan that thoroughly investigates the phenomena of dying.” (Dalai Lama, foreword to *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, Thurman, xvii)

SACRED LITERATURE (CE)

Genre, Style, Themes, Structure

Genre: prayers
 instructions to reader
 recitations

Literary elements (style):

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| imagery | primarily in the deity portraits descriptive (visual), simile |
| metaphor | |
| personification | the various deities and visions |
| symbolism | especially in the portraits and the prayers |
| idealized abstraction | especially in the prayers; also in the instructions |

Example: "By the power of the truth of reality-perfection."

Central Thematic Concerns

Spiritual liberation can be achieved by all, if not by a lifetime of learning and training, then by the Hearing, and understanding, of the Great Liberation text.

What interferes or sabotages the effort/desire to liberation?

- lack of knowledge, training
- lack of right effort (responsiveness to the Hearing)
- faith, concentration (single-mindedness)
- density of sin, ignorance, confusion
- base emotions (greed, hatred, lust, aggression)

Cautionary message, or exhortation: prepare now !

- seek instruction from a guru
- train your mind through meditation
- cleanse yourself of wrong emotions
- avoid sinful actions
- study the text of The Great Liberation so you will recognize its words and images when you reach the Between
- apply symbolically now, to a life well-lived

We experience constant "betweens"; they are the moments of moral or karmic choice.

"The 'between' between past and future is so close to a mathematical point that it seems scarcely to exist, yet paradoxically it is everything in being the only thing we directly experience, for the past is gone and the future has yet to arrive. It is also everything for being the locus of our decisions, which is where we take control of our lives." (from Huston Smith's introduction to Thurman's edition of the Tibetan Book of the Dead in his *Mystical Classics of the World*, 1968)

Structure of Text and the Process of Liberation through Hearing

Days 1–4... a first clear light and then a second clear light dawn for the deceased... a great spiritual adept may achieve "soul-ejection" and be immediately liberated; a person of some training may recognize the truth of this dawning and be liberated through the hearing.

Days 1–7 (following the first 4)... a "third between phase" during which the "evolutionary hallucinations" dawn, the "mild deities and scientist-heroes"; also called *the dangerous straits*... opportunities to be led by benign, though often daunting, deities (many with complementary horrific sides or aspects); the test is to see through the illusion, recognize these visions as projections of one's own mind, keep faith with light (harsh) of wisdom and be drawn into it; but chance for misunderstanding, misinterpretation, fear, aversion, and therefore wrong choice, is great!

Days 8–12... *the fierce between* brings encounters with fierce, frightening deities, growing more loathsome and horrific as the soul spirals downward due to fear, delusion, aversion; unable to manage the earlier experiences with faith and concentration, the soul is now in jeopardy of losing all control to the baser subconscious drives; in such a realm one is vulnerable to one's own panic and the chance for liberation now resides in the startling concentration provoked by terror--at any moment the soul may hear, recognize, respond and be liberated; the irony is that each "avoidance" (non-recognition) sends soul to even more frightening (wish to avoid) circumstances! if no one is guiding (reading) them now, they will be lost to rebirth.

Beyond... *orientation to the existence between* ... having failed to gain liberation in the previous stages, it is now recognized that rebirth is probably inevitable (there always remains a chance, however, by responding to the instructions for "avoiding a womb!"). The focus now is the concern for good rebirth circumstances, including a family, nation, even continent, where dharma is strong.

Structure and Motif

Dominant pattern: for the emerging experiences in part 1 of the Tibetan Book of the Dead, dawning of the Mild Deities:

1. positive (color) light... bright, dazzling...
2. associated Mild Deity... dawns and is described in rich imagery... his consort... a sacred direction or throne...
3. another, softer, light shines also... alluring, inviting...
4. exhortation to avoid being drawn to it! It is a diverting obstacle to liberation; its tempting power is strong...
5. exhortation to have faith in the dazzling, harshly-bright light... aim your will-power and concentrate!
6. make the following prayer...

Commentary

“At first glance, the Tibetan Book of the Dead, or the Bardo Thodol, looks like an odd choice to represent Buddhism... for Tibetan Buddhism is the smallest of Buddhism’s three branches, the other two being southern Buddhism’s Theravada (Way of the Elders) and the Mahayana (Great Vehicle) of China, Korea, and Japan; and even in Tibet, until recently, the Bardo Thodol was tucked away in something of a corner as being the possession of only one of its four Buddhist sects, the Nyingma. Another possible question is whether its adherence to a single subject, death, can do

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SACRED LITERATURE (CE)

justice to the mystical resources of a religion as vast as Buddhism. Both of these questions are easily answered. Beginning with the second, the Book of the Dead uses death as its point of entry, but its subject is life in its entirety. Nyingma is the oldest Tibetan sect, and some of the strange, almost preternatural, insights of the Bardo Thodol probably derive from Tibet's pre-Buddhist, heavily shamanic Bon religion, from which it draws. And, even if that were not the case, there is no way that this edition could be charged with parochialism, for its translator has prefaced it with as masterful a summary of Buddhism as exists." (from Huston Smith's introduction to Thurman's edition of the Tibetan Book of the Dead as published in his *Mystical Classics of the World*, 1998)

Fremantle and Trungpa's take on the Book of the Dead's structure:

part 1... "The Great Liberation Through Hearing", first part: "showing the luminosity during the bardo of the moment before death, and showing during the peaceful bardo of the dharmata." (Fremantle and Trungpa 56)

part 2... "The Great Liberation Through Hearing," second part, "the showing of the bardo of dharmata, the bardo teaching which liberates just by being heard and seen... If one hears it, one is liberated simply by not disbelieving." (Fremantle and Trungpa 71)

part 3... "the reminder of the bardo of becoming." (Fremantle and Trungpa 72)

Native American Sacred Texts

Initial Remarks

The near impossibility of such a category.

Profound challenges in studying Native American sacred texts.

A general belief that all is sacred.

A nearly exclusively oral tradition.

Marked motivation toward secrecy of ceremonial "texts."

Influence of contact with European-American culture.

What has been collected of Native American "texts" has been predominantly recorded by members of the outside culture.

Translation of Native American languages into English is often very difficult.

The result of the above challenges is that in reading a Native American text, we are frequently several times removed from its authentic form, style, and content.

Breadth and variety of cultural expression within what we collectively refer to as Native American society.

“Linguists have estimated that in 1492 there were between 2,000 and 2,200 languages spoken in the New World, each at least as distant in vocabulary and grammar from the other as English is from German.” (Sanders and Marino 16)

In the 16th century, there were 300 separate societies north of Mexico (Foss).

“The U.S. government acknowledges 267 different tribes.” (Renault and Freke 9)

“A rich plurality of highly differentiated types of religious traditions, making it impossible to define or describe American Indian religions in generalities.” (Brown 1)

Misunderstandings, Misnomers, and Other Influences of Contact

“In fact, the ‘American Indians’ were neither ‘American’ nor ‘Indians.’ It was the European invaders who gave the name ‘America’ to the place the indigenous people called ‘Turtle Island,’ and who gave the blanket term ‘Indians’ to the many nations and cultures that flourished there. Many of the names by which we know the different tribes are actually distorted versions of nicknames -- often insulting or humorous -- given by one people to its neighbors. Most tribes called themselves simply ‘The People’ or ‘The Two-Leggeds,’ or ‘The People Who Live in This Place.’” (Renault and Freke 9)

“Ever increasing contacts since the late fifteenth century with... cultures of Europe and Euro-Americans led to a vast spectrum of change within and across indigenous Indian cultures. Under this impact certain tribal groups and even linguistic families became extinct, while others acculturated to varying degrees.” (Brown 2)

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Controversy among Scholars

“The earliest definite evidence of man in the New World dates from about 10,000 BC. Tool complexes from this period represent a culture already well adapted to the New World environment.” (26)

“Charcoal samples from supposed hearths in North American sites have been found (by carbon-14 method) to date from between 38,000 and 22,000 years ago. None of these claims has been fully accepted by American archaeologists.” (27)

Can we authenticate any *oral text*?

Can we see through European influence?

What Can Be Said...

The predecessors of today’s tribes were well established in all environmental niches of North America by 5000 BCE; how much continuity of culture up to historic period (15th century) is debatable.

The Native Americans’ spiritual values and religious rites are diverse.

“Native American spirituality is rooted in a living, vibrant, animate Creation. It is an ancient wisdom, with a proud history, but... it always points to the present; to the magic of an immediate, intimate, personal connection with the natural world.”
(Renault and Freke xiii)

“At the center of all aspects of Native American life was a profound sense of *spirit*.”
(18)

“In no Native American language is there a single term that can be translated as ‘religion,’ because all acts are seen as religious acts. Likewise, Native Americans do not have a concept of ‘art.’ [The materials used and the designs made] were regarded as manifestations of sacred powers, or energies.” (24)

“There were no holy scriptures, seen as divine revelations. Great Spirit revealed itself each day, in the miracles of natural life and the visions of the people.” (23)

Key Terminology

allegory
analogy
ascribed
attributed, attribution
belief
canon
codex, codices
cosmology
cosmogony
doctrine, doctrinal
dualism
deuterocanonical
epiphany
epistemology
etiology
exegesis
faith
immanent
incarnation
manifestation
mantra
metaphor
metaphysics, metaphysical
monism
mysticism, mystical
myth
mythos
ontology
orthodox
pantheism

panentheism
paradox
parallelism
proverb
recension
redaction
reincarnation
religion
sacrifice
sage
salvation, salvific
simile
sutra
symbol
tantra
theism
theology
theophany
transcendent, transcendental

Essay Assignments

Essay 1: Response/Critique

1. Select a passage/section/chapter from ANY of the texts listed on our syllabus; you are free to look as far ahead as you wish.

2. Clearly identify the section with appropriate terminology within the opening paragraph and *offer an appreciation of or assertion about the text* which you will support in the body of the essay (this is your thesis).

3. In the body of the essay, discuss more specifically why you respond to this text: identify what you feel is its theme; speak to other ideas which get your attention; point to specific metaphors, similes, analogies, etc., which convey and enliven the content.

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4. Conclude with some evaluative comment on this text's universal importance (beyond its time and place, beyond your personal appreciation, what do you see as the value of this passage?).

MLA documentation: internal parenthetical citations (appropriate to the specific text) and Work(s) Cited at end of essay.

Consult a handbook

900 words (target)

Essay 1: Grading Rubrics

| | Content | Organization | Development | Style | Correctness |
|----------|---|---|---|---|--|
| A | Response to assignment is insightful, original. Essay reflects depth of thought. Excellent analysis of reading. Effective selection of topic passage. | Thesis is well-focused. Paragraph sequence is logical; transitions clarify relationships of ideas. Introduction is engaging; conclusion is substantive. | Sections are unified and coherent. Observations are clear and comments on them are well-developed. Relevant quotations are skillfully integrated. | General expression is skillful, even distinctive. Especially smooth incorporation of quotations and other outside material. | Consistent use of standard grammar, syntax, punctuation, spelling. Correct internal citations and end documentation. |
| B | Response to assignment is thoughtful; purpose is clear. Close reading is evident. Effective selection of topic passage. | Thesis is focused. Sequence of paragraphs is logical; transitions are generally smooth. Introduction is informative; conclusion goes beyond summary. | Sections are unified and coherent. Observations are supported with effective commentary. Quotations are generally relevant and integrated. | General expression is concise and fluent. Smooth incorporation of quotations and other outside material. | Few deviations of standard grammar, syntax, punctuation, spelling. Correct internal citations and end documentation. |
| | Response to | Thesis is evident, but may | Sections are generally | General | Occasional |

| | | | | | |
|----------|--|---|--|---|--|
| C | assignment is appropriate but needs more sustained thinking. Essay may not be fully developed. Analysis of reading may be superficial. Appropriate selection of topic passage. | need sharper focus. Organization is apparent but not consistent. Transitions are lacking. Introduction and/or conclusion may be weak. | developed but have occasional lapses in coherence or unity. Observations may be unsupported. Adequate incorporation of relevant quotations. | expression is mostly fluent but may have lapses in clarity. Occasional awkwardness. Diction and syntax are generally clear and idiomatic. Occasional inappropriate wording or awkwardness in incorporation of quotations. | syntax, grammar, or other errors. Errors in citation or documentation. |
| D | Assignment addressed inadequately. Ideas lack development. Understanding of reading is not demonstrated. | Thesis is weak. Organization is haphazard; paragraph breaks are illogical. Some paragraphs are repetitious or irrelevant. Introduction and conclusion are weak. | Sections lack coherence; may be too short. Observations may not be grounded in text. Quotations may be insufficient, excessive, or inaccurate. | Awkward syntax; occasionally obscured train of thought. Diction frequently vague, repetitive, incorrect, or unidiomatic. Slang. | Frequent grammar, syntax, and other errors. Failure to cite or document. |

| | | | | | |
|----------|--|---|---|---|--|
| | | | | Ineffective incorporation of quotations. | |
| F | Assignment goals not in evidence. Off topic. Unacceptable length. Failure to incorporate or identify the selected passage. | No thesis. No plan or organization evident. | Sections are inadequately developed, lack coherence, or are too short. Few, if any, transitions. Quotations are insufficient, excessive, or inaccurate. | Train of thought frequently obscured by problems in diction or syntax. Slang. No relevant quotations. | Serious or repeated errors. Failure to cite or document. |

Essay 2: A Study in Translation

1. Select a passage/section/chapter from any of the texts on our syllabus.
2. Locate two other translations. General goal: make a close study of differences and similarities between the translations and how these modify and enhance your understanding of the text.
3. Specifically: clearly identify the section (applying text-specific terminology) and the translator and edition which will serve as your primary text (to which you will compare and contrast the other two); identify the other two versions; make some introductory assertions or comments.
 - Begin by presenting your general understanding of the text.
 - Then discuss its theme, or related themes.
 - Point to specific metaphors, similes, analogies, etc., which convey and enliven the transmission of ideas and how each translator presents them.
 - The heart of this essay is the interweaving of the comparison/contrast. How do different editors translate key ideas, images, symbols, metaphors? How do their lexical choices vary (be sensitive to connotation as well as denotation)?
 - Ultimately, how do these variations affect interpretation? (Much of your evaluation on this may be interspersed in the body of the essay; however, you should conclude with a summary evaluation of these effects.)
 - A comparison-contrast study can be organized in two ways—please remind me to review these in class—either is appropriate.

MLA documentation: 3 sources minimum (the 3 translations);

commentary or other resources are optional

1,700 words (target)

This is a formal, primarily objective and analytical essay: Please use a formal title page.

Essay 2: Grading Rubrics

| | Content | Organization | Development | Style |
|----------|---|--|---|---|
| A | Challenging selection of passage. Excellent analysis of aspects of language, including literary elements, and keen observations which are well-supported. Exceptional attention to goals of assignment. | Thesis is well-focused. Paragraph sequence is logical; transitions clarify relationships of ideas. Introduction is engaging; conclusion is substantive. | Sections are unified and coherent. Ideas are well-supported with significant and persuasive discourse. Comparative observations are astute. Passages are skillfully integrated. | General expressions are skillful and distinctive. Diction is precise. Syntax is concise and substantive. Smooth and complete integration of resource materials. |
| B | Substantive selection of passage. Solid analysis of aspects of language, including literary elements, and keen observations which are well-supported. Effective attention to goals of assignment. | Thesis is focused. Sequence of paragraphs is logical; transitions are generally smooth. Introduction is informative; conclusion goes beyond summary. | Sections are unified and coherent. Ideas are supported with effective discourse. Comparative observations are substantive. Passages are smoothly incorporated. | General expressions are fluent and concise. Smooth and complete integration of resource materials. |
| C | Adequate selection of material but needs greater attention to details of language. Analysis of literary aspects may be superficial. Minimal attention to goals of assignment. | Thesis is evident, but may need sharper focus. Organization is apparent but not consistent. Transitions are lacking. Introduction and/or conclusion may be weak. | Subpoints of discussion are generally supported but may have lapses in development. Some obvious opportunities for comparison have been overlooked. Passages are adequately incorporated. | General expressions are mostly fluent but with occasional lapses in clarity or precision. Occasional awkwardness in integration of resource materials. |
| D | Selection of material is inadequate. Identification of aspects of language is insufficient. | Thesis is weak. Organization is insufficient to support topic. Some repetition or irrelevant areas. Introduction or conclusion is weak or absent. | Discussion lacks coherence; may be overly generalized. Many opportunities for comparison have been overlooked. Passages may be awkwardly or insufficiently incorporated. | Awkward syntax. Inappropriate diction. Sometimes obscure train of thought. Repetitive or unidiomatic diction. Slang. Ineffective use of resource materials. |
| F | Selection of material is inadequate. Insufficient discussion. Failure to identify aspects of language. Unacceptable length. | Thesis is unidentifiable. Plan is not in evidence. | Undeveloped. Off topic. No comparisons identified. No attempt to incorporate passages. | Train of thought is frequently obscure. Problems in diction and syntax. Slang. Abuse of resource materials. |

Sample Student Essay 2

SACRED LITERATURE

By Kim Fitzgerald

In the Seventeenth Century, Blaise Pascal wisely observed, "All of man's miseries derive from not being able to sit quiet in a room alone" (qtd. in Al-Anon 306). Four centuries later, this criticism is especially applicable to object-oriented Western culture, where societal pressure to acquire, achieve, and multi-task makes it all too easy to allow one's mind to race from one fleeting intention to the next, leaving one's true Self behind in the process. A more peaceful and rewarding alternative path, however, has quietly existed for many centuries. Eastern mystics have long been practicing raja yoga, the discipline of mind stillness, detailed in Chapter Six of *The Bhagavad Gita* translated for the modern reader by Eknath Easwaran. In the dedicated practice of meditation, the consciousness is withdrawn from the pull of sense objects and allowed to rest in the healing stillness of the Self; in this state, the "dream of waking life - the dream of a separate, merely physical existence" begins to fade (Easwaran 13). This ancient discipline, according to Easwaran, offers "the direct means of becoming integrated, united with one's truest, deepest Self" (100). What an alluring proposition.

The beauty of these and other timeless truths of the Gita would lie hidden in Sanskrit, inaccessible to most people, were it not for the determined and talented translator. Yet for the translator, no matter how carefully he makes lexical and grammatical choices or how thoughtfully he considers whether a specific symbol or image will transmit successfully in the receptor language, much of the ultimate impact of his translation lies beyond his control; the "best" translation for a particular audience depends on how well the translator's background and purposes resonate with those of the audience. Recognizing that the evaluation of a translation is subject to this interplay between translator and audience, I have found Easwaran's version of the *Bhagavad Gita* to be ideal for an audience made up of people similar to me: Westerners who have little prior knowledge of and some preconceived notions about Hinduism, who have both a personal and a scholarly interest in the *Bhagavad Gita*, and who have a visual learning style.

Easwaran, the editors of his 1985 translation inform us, learned one of the purest forms of Sanskrit in India before coming to the U.S. as a Fulbright scholar in 1959. A professor of English literature, he also taught the *Bhagavad Gita* to Americans at his Blue Mountain Center of Meditation in Berkeley, California. His intimate, personal knowledge of the Gita, his experience as both teacher and aspirant, his sensitivity to Eastern and Western cultural differences, and his obvious linguistic talents come through in his very clear, accessible translation, in which he uses dynamic equivalence.

Similarly, in Juan Mascaro's 1962 translation of the *Bhagavad Gita*, he is as much concerned with how as with what; he says, "I venture to hope that I have been true to the spirit of the original and to myself" (Mascaro xxviii). He is, like Easwaran, both scholar and practitioner: "We cannot know the taste of the fruit or of a wine by reading words about them; we must eat the fruit and drink the wine" (Mascaro xvii).

On the other hand, Barbara Stoler Miller's 1986 translation, *The Bhagavad-Gita Krishna's Counsel in Time of War*, takes a more purely scholarly approach, emphasizing formal

correspondence. She says, "I have chosen to maintain a consistency of technical terms in translation in order to represent the texture of the original. Almost every Sanskrit term has been given the same English translation each time it occurs ... Such a lexicon should help the English reader to grasp the central concepts of the text" (Miller 16). Her more literal approach gives her translation a more distant tone than Easwaran's and Mascaro's, and a sampling of just two verses reveals how these subtle and not-so-subtle differences create different impressions. Chapter Six, verse three of the Bhagavad Gita reads:

For aspirants who want to climb the mountain of spiritual awareness, the path is selfless work;
for those who have ascended to yoga the path is stillness and peace. (Easwaran 6:3)
or:

When the sage climbs the heights of Yoga, he follows the path of work;
but when he reaches the heights of Yoga, he is in the land of peace. (Mascaro 6:3)
or:

Action is the means for a sage
who seeks to mature in discipline;
tranquility is the means
for one who is mature in discipline. (Miller 6:3)

Most immediately noticeable are the similarities between Easwaran's and Mascaro's translations. Both use the fitting metaphor of spiritual awareness as a "mountain" or "heights" which must be climbed. Furthermore, they both choose the image of a "path" to convey the discipline as a road, course, or trajectory one walks upwards towards Self-realization. In their translations, the focus is on the spiritual seeker making his ascent; both convey a clear and striking picture of the journey as a challenging, upward struggle in which the aspirant makes progress only by his own efforts.

In contrast, Miller's indirect description differs in both tone and structure. In her scholarly approach, she does not evoke any dramatic imagery of the spiritual ascent for the mind's eye. With its more removed, objective tone, created by the choice of abstract terms such as "means" (method, process, technique) versus "path," her description is more vague and less appealing to the visually oriented. Yet she does achieve a sense of translated poetry through the visual layout of her verse and the use of poetic repetition: "action is the means" and "tranquility is the means." She says, "To reflect the rhetorical rhythms I have... preserved the metrical variations in the original text" (Miller 16). But, while Miller employs the structural shape of poetic verse, it is Easwaran and Mascaro who achieve the impact of poetic verse, conveying in a few carefully selected words imagery dense in meaning. And there are additional subtle differences.

Mascaro and Miller describe the seeker as a "sage," which to some will mean simply "wise person," but to others will imply "guru, oracle, or expert." Easwaran, sensitive to the connotation terms such as "sage" or "yogi" will have for some Westerners, chooses "aspirants" instead (99). Additionally, Easwaran's seekers are qualified as those "who want to climb," because "... the Gita is not a book of commandments but a book of choices" (44). Easwaran consistently seeks the one

word or phrase which conveys as much specific information as possible. Even the fact that Mascaro and Miller translate a single aspirant, while Easwaran's seekers are plural, is a seemingly small but significant difference: the implication to some readers will be a path open to a select few (maybe even the lone ascetic) versus a path open to all.

In Easwaran's translation, Krishna explains to Arjuna that the way to begin the challenging journey of spiritual growth is specifically through "selfless work." In karma yoga, the elements of sacrifice and selflessness are critical. However, in Mascaro's translation, Krishna states simply that "he follows the path of work," leaving open to supposition what type of work that might be. Perhaps this means any type of work, even work performed in the expectation of reward or honor. Likewise, Miller translates Krishna's teaching in even more vague terms: "action is the means." This very broad phrase, along with work, could encompass any number of physical or mental activities, none of them performed necessarily in the spirit of selfless service.

While Easwaran and Mascaro both use the term "yoga," it is to slightly different effect. While yoga is a fluid term which means union with the Ultimate or the path or discipline which leads to such realization, in this context, Easwaran explains that "the word yoga is... often used as a synonym for raja yoga, the practice of meditation..." (100). Easwaran's "yoga" in this passage means meditation, and he makes a careful distinction between the journey (the discipline) and the destination (union with the Ultimate). In Easwaran's translation, Krishna, now ready to introduce the seeker to the discipline of meditation, tells Arjuna that after practicing selfless service, the aspirant rises to the practice of meditation; Easwaran describes the nature of the journey as changing to one characterized by "stillness and peace." The path is still present, conveying the precept that life is a continuum, that enlightenment is an evolution and a journey, not a destination.

Mascaro, on the other hand, describes the sage reaching the "heights of Yoga." The plural inflection of "heights" combined with the capitalization of "Yoga" signals not only the superlative or ultimate, but also implies a place or destination. When Mascaro's sage "reaches the heights of Yoga," the path disappears; he is simply "in the land of peace." This description could be interpreted as, "This is it! I've arrived!" One could argue that Mascaro's seeker seems to have reached the state of total integration with the Ultimate. The sense of the ongoing process of spiritual evolution captured by Easwaran is absent.

In Miller's less concrete translation, the sage seeks to mature in discipline, but whether that discipline is physical, mental, or spiritual is not clear. "Tranquility" does not necessarily equate with meditation; in fact, the line "tranquility is the means for one who is mature in discipline" could mean that once he excels at self-control, the sage withdraws to a life of peaceful contemplation. Miller's description is more open to interpretation and not particularly instructive for visual learners.

Additional sampling of this passage takes us to verse five, translated as:

Reshape yourself through the power of your will; never let yourself be degraded by self will.
The will is the only friend of the Self, and the will is the only enemy of the Self.

(Easwaran 6:5)

or:

Arise therefore! And with the help of thy Spirit lift up thy soul: allow not thy soul to fail.

For thy soul can be thy friend, and thy soul can be thine enemy. (Mascaro 6:5)

or:

He should elevate himself by the self,
not degrade himself;
for the self is its own friend
and its own worst foe. (Miller 6:5)

Here, all three translators employ metaphor to convey Krishna's admonition that Arjuna's intention, depending on how it is directed, can be his greatest spiritual asset or his greatest spiritual weakness. Miller enlivens her verse when she uses metaphor, yet the tone employed by Easwaran and Mascaro is much more powerful. By employing the imperative, Krishna manages to speak not only to Arjuna, but directly to the audience.

"Reshape yourself" is an uncommon phrase and is evidence of Easwaran's inventive and specific translation style. Easwaran's Krishna suggests that we humans can take on a new form of our own making. "Reshape" conveys the Gita's theme of reincarnation, that one determines both the nature of his present life and the form he will take in his future life by what he thinks about in this lifetime. Once again, Easwaran pinpoints the perfect, compact phrase to evoke specific imagery and meaning.

Likewise, Mascaro signals the import of what Krishna has to say by changing the whole tone of this verse. The command "Arise therefore!" has a heightened, liturgical feel augmented by Mascaro's noticeable change to archaic lexicon "thy and thine" and syntax "allow not," a style markedly different than employed in adjacent verses. These purposeful, thoughtful changes signal the importance and power of Krishna's inspiring message to Arjuna that he must rise up to the noble challenge and exercise the power that he did not know he possessed.

Mascaro and Easwaran also capitalize "Spirit" and "Self" respectively, giving slightly different renderings of which aspect of oneself is the helper. In Easwaran's interpretation, Krishna warns Arjuna not to let himself be lowered or corrupted by an unruly self-will. One's intention, rightly focused, is the only helper to his higher Self; one's intention, selfishly directed, is the only hindrance to realizing his authentic Self. The only thing, in Easwaran's interpretation, standing between the seeker and realization of the truth is how he disciplines his (lower) self-will. Based on Mascaro's capitalization of Spirit, his Krishna tells Arjuna to use the help of the higher Spirit to lift up his lower soul or essence; here the need to discipline the lower self is not as clear. Mascaro's juxtaposition of "Spirit" and "soul," terms which are closely related and interchangeable, does not convey the internal struggle between two distinct aspects of the self as clearly as Easwaran's lexical choices of "will" and "Self."

Although Miller's verse employs metaphor, her translation maintains her more abstract and removed tone. Her Krishna makes an indirect third-person suggestion, "He should," compared to the majestic direct commands "Arise therefore!" and "Reshape yourself," resulting in a much less compelling statement. Compared to Easwaran's and Mascaro's differentiation between Self-will and higher Self, or Spirit versus soul, her juxtaposition of "self" versus the reflexive pronoun "itself" delivers a less distinct, less powerful impression.

As has been shown, the study of translated literature is only enriched by comparing the primary work with the secondary translations. Close comparison reveals the many challenges and choices the translator faces and raises questions for the researcher which result in a better understanding of the primary translation. But no matter which translation one reads, his experience with the text will be singular, the product of the mingling of his own prejudices and purposes with those of the translator. For aspirants approaching the Gita as a handbook for self-realization, as Easwaran suggests (30), the clear and specific lexical choices and imagery used by Easwaran primarily, or Mascaro secondarily, will be ideal. For scholars seeking a more abstract, objective, and unemotional translation, Miller's rendering may mesh perfectly with their expectations and purposes. Whatever the translation, each deserves to be recognized as a complex work of art, a unique rendering of the ineffable for an audience which would be excluded from access were it not for the selfless service of the translator.

Works Cited

- Al-Anon Family Groups, Inc. *Courage to Change*. One Day at a Time in Al-Anon II. New York: Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, 1992.
- Easwaran, Eknath, trans. *The Bhagavad Gita*. Tomales, Ca.: Nilgiri Press, 1985.
- Mascaro, Juan, trans. *The Bhagavad Gita*. London: Penguin Classics, 1962.
- Miller, Barbara Stoler, trans. *The Bhagavad-Gita*. Krishna's Counsel in Time of War. New York: Bantam Classics, 1986.

Exams

Midterm Study Questions

What genre is the Bhagavad Gita?

In what language are the gospels written? What language did Jesus and his immediate followers speak?

How many documents make up the New Testament?

What is the earliest piece of extant Christian writing?

Is it canonized?

How many gospel versions appear in the New Testament?

What is an apocalypse?

What is eschatology?

Who holds the unique position as a primary character and a primary writer in the New Testament?

Who are the central characters of the Bhagavad Gita?

Is it more appropriate to interpret the Gita symbolically or to understand it as mythologized history?

What is the Q gospel?

Why is it important?

Approx. when did the New Testament canon close?

Why did Christians include the Hebrew scriptures, as they knew them, in their Bible?

What is the simplest and perhaps oldest form of literary imagery ?

What is one of the most challenging forms of imagery ? why?

Who is credited with composing the Bhagavad Gita? What else did he write?

Final Topics

Topics for finals (I usually offer two or three, asking them to select one only). Sometimes the essay topic is combined with an objective portion

Select 3–4 passages or ideas from the texts we've read which might serve as foundation stones for your own developing world view. Discuss your selections... why... how do they inspire you... etc.

Respond.

Take a general concept -- such as Self-discipline, Charity, Devotion, Dharma -- and explore how 2–3 texts address it, use it, or promote it. (The concept's expression in a single statement, verse, or passage is sufficient.) **Analyze.**

The second type of Wisdom Log entry asked you to experiment with implementing conceptual activities (or spiritual actions) from the texts. Perhaps there is one pursuit you found so worthwhile you have incorporated it into your life. Explain the activity, its source, and how it is affecting you.

Explain.

Using Huston Smith's metaphor of "pointing to the moon" (final lecture), select several (2–5) passages which have "pointed to the moon" for you personally, e.g., they have implied something about the sacred in a particularly meaningful way. **Explain.**

Design your own creed; select 3–5 assertions from among the texts we've studied this term (minimum of 2 different texts). Identify their sources as exemplified below. Then explain what you've done and why.

Example:

You have the right to work but never to the fruit of your work. (Bhagavad Gita 2.47)

If anyone seeks glory, let him know that glory is God's alone. (Koran 35.11)

It is to such as these [little children] that the kingdom of God belongs. (Mark 10.14)

They are forever free who renounce the all selfish desires and break away from the ego-cage of "I," "me," and "mine" to be united with the Lord. (Bhagavad Gita 2.71)

Write the creed at the top of your paper, as shown above. Then write your essay explaining why you chose these items.

Why is it important for anyone living in Western society to read the Bible? (Implicit here is the Christian Bible which includes both the New Testament and their version of the Jewish scriptures, the Old Testament.) Make specific assertions and support them with examples. You may want to cite from Harris as well as the Bible itself.

Final: Short-Answer Portion

50 pts.

1. Identify the 3 simple genres which are used in the Tibetan Book of the Dead: (3)
2. The purpose of the Tibetan Book of the Dead is... (4)
3. Probably composed in the _____ century, the Tibetan Book of the Dead is traditionally ascribed to _____ (2)
4. We've learned that "Tibetan Book of the Dead" is actually a misnomer; a more accurate translation of the Bardo Thodol is: (3)
5. Who received the Qur'an? _____ In what century? _____ (2)
6. The Koran is held by its believers to be the actual _____ of _____. (2)
7. The Koran's chapters are known as _____; there are _____ of them. (2)
8. Identify 3 major themes in the Qur'an: (6)
9. Identify 2 conditions which make it difficult to study Native American sacred texts: (4)
10. Identify 2 archetypal elements found across a majority of creation myths: (2)
11. Identify 2 types (or categories) of creation myths, in general: (2)

circle

12. TRUE or FALSE: The Qur'an narrates the life and work of Muhammad. (2)
13. TRUE or FALSE: The Tibetan Book of the Dead is revered and practiced by all types of Buddhists. (2)
14. TRUE or FALSE: Native Americans enjoyed a highly developed written literary tradition before the efforts of European translators destroyed it. (2)

Based on the thematic ideas or motifs expressed, judge what text these excerpts are from (3 each). These will come from the texts over the full semester.

15. The mind is restless, turbulent, powerful, violent; trying to control it is like trying to tame the wind.
16. Then he whose good deeds weigh heavy in the scales shall dwell in bliss; but he whose deeds are light, the Abyss shall be his home.
17. At this time, the great red wind of evolution will drive you from behind, fiercely, unbearably, terrifyingly. Don't be afraid of it! It is your own hallucination!
18. These are the secret teachings that the living Jesus spoke and _____
_____ recorded. He said, 'Whoever finds the interpretation of these sayings will not taste death.'

Final: Essay Portion

150 pts.

Choose *one* below and write a brief (no more than 2 pages) essay

1.

"The Wayfarer"
by Stephen Crane

The Wayfarer,
Perceiving the path to truth,
Was struck with astonishment.
It was thickly grown with weeds.
"Ha," he said,
"I see that none has passed here
In a long time."
Later he saw that each weed was a singular knife.
"Well," he mumbled at last,
"Doubtless there are other roads."

Respond to this poem based on what you've experienced in this course.

2. Design your own creed: select some assertions from among the texts we've studied this term and explain why they would be part of your belief system...
3. Salvation. What is salvific according to the various texts we've read this semester? What has the study of these texts shown you about the notion of salvation? Respond to either or both of these questions.

- (5) 1. What text is known as the "gospel of Hinduism"? _____
- (10) 2. _____ and _____ are the central characters of the Bhagavad Gita, which in terms of genre we would classify as a _____.
- (5) 3. Many interpreters of the Gita consider the setting to be symbolic; what might it symbolize?
- (5) 4. How many *yogas* does the Gita offer as promising paths of discipline toward Self-realization? _____ Name one: _____
- (10) 5. Traditionally, the composition of the Gita is attributed to _____ who also, according to tradition, wrote the _____.
- (5) 6. How many documents make up the New Testament? _____
7. The canonical document believed by scholars to be the earliest written is _____.
- (5) 8. There are _____ gospels in the New Testament.
- (3) 9. The document known as the New Testament's history book is titled _____.
- (5) 10. As a leading character in that book as well as a writer of several New Testament documents, _____ is a unique and significant figure in the New Testament.
- (12) 11. Define apocalyptic eschatology:
- (12) 12. In which New Testament documents we read in full is this apocalyptic eschatology a significant theme?
- (4) 13. What is the Q gospel?

Identify what text these following excerpts reside in.

- (5) 14. As a man abandons worn-out clothes and acquires new ones, so when the body is worn out a new one is acquired by the Self, who lives within.
- (5) 15. His head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire...his voice was like the sound of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and from his mouth came a two-edged sword... (be specific as to book title)
- (4) 16. What type of *imagery* dominates both of these above excerpts?
- (8) *Bonus*: Name and characterize each of the New Testament gospels by providing a thematic statement after its name.

Example:

The Gospel According to _____ understood Jesus as _____

- (3) *Bonus*: Name the other (besides that mentioned in question 4 above) *yogas* addressed in the Gita (in English or Sanskrit):

Film Review

Notice that at the end of the annotated bibliographies in your Syllabus-Supplemental Readings Packet, there are short lists of approved documentary films or videos and a few trade films.

What to do: Arrange to view one of these films or videos and write a *one-page summary plus a two-page response*, word-processed, and submit any time before the deadline on our syllabus. Be alert to the fact that you are not evaluating the film or video as such (we are not film students), but that "review" is just a handy title for this assignment. Be sure to include comments that link the film you watch to one or more of the texts we read. You need not provide a bibliographic entry.

Some of these films/videos will be used (partially) in class, but even those are worth a closer and complete viewing, so there are no restrictions on which you may select.

List the films and videos.

Bibliographies

Bhagavad Gita

Text

Besant, Annie, trans. *The Bhagavad Gita: the Lord's Song*. Madras: Theosophical Publishing House, 1953 (1895). SBCC 294.5924 B554b

This translation is of interest historically as an earlier translation and as made by one of the founders of Theosophy, an intricate meeting of Eastern and Western religious thought, but the translation feels stiff to the modern ear; no apparatus, few notations.

Easwaran, Eknath, trans. *The Bhagavad Gita*. Tomales, CA: Nilgiri Press, 1985. SBCC 294.5924 E13b

Easwaran's work is consistently my choice for classroom texts because of his insightful, comfortable translation for the modern ear and mind and his superb introductory materials. A thorough introduction covers all aspects of context and acquaints us with key terms and concepts; then each chapter has its own brief, helpful mini-introduction; good glossary and pronunciation guide at back

Malhotra, Ashok Kumar. *Transcreation of the Bhagavad Gita*. Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, Library of Liberal Arts, 1999.

This has been translated (he uses the term "transcreated," which underscores his dynamic equivalence approach intended for a specific audience) for undergraduates, for whom other, scholarly, translations have not been especially accessible; each chapter begins with a summary; footnotes throughout.

Mascaro, Juan, trans. *The Bhagavad Gita*. London: Penguin Classics, 1962. SBCC 294.5924 M395b

A fairly personal and broad-ranging introduction gives little insight into context but does emphasize the text's main themes in accessible terms. As always with Mascaro, there are plenty of comparison texts: from Christian scripture, Western poets, and previous Hindu sacred literature, especially the Upanishads. The translation is comfortable even with the use of archaic pronoun and verb forms. The standardized verse prose is clearly numbered; scant notes; no glossary.

Miller, Barbara Stoler, trans. *The Bhagavad-Gita: Krishna's Counsel in Time of War*. New York: Bantam Classics, 1986. 168 pgs. SBCC 294.5924 M6476

This is a very readable new verse translation, of which my only criticism is that her choices are often abstract. An excellent introduction discusses the value of the Gita for India and for many important Western thinkers; explains the Mahabharata; gives an overview of the Gita's structure and themes; and a short history of translation. There is a very good glossary at the back following a wonderful little essay titled "Why Did Henry David Thoreau Take the Bhagavad-Gita to Walden Pond?" I have used this translation in my Adult Education version of the course to much success. It's also cheap.

Prabhavananda, Swami, and Christopher Isherwood, trans. *The Song of God: Bhagavad-Gita*. Introduction by Aldous Huxley. New York: New American Library, a Mentor Book, 1951 (1944); Hollywood: Vedanta Society Press, 1987. 180 pgs. SBCC 294.5924 P895s

This is a poetic, elegant translation presented in both poetry and prose form, yet by now a little less modern than it must have seemed in 1944. The new edition by Vedanta Society Press is nicely presented in handsome, easily readable trade size (the Mentor edition is pocket-sized). A very good introduction defines and discusses the Gita's themes, concepts, and its place in the world's mystical literature. The book also includes a forward essay on the Gita and the Mahabharata, and appended essays on the Gita's cosmology and the Gita and war; minimal footnotes.

Commentary and Context

Bhaktivedanta, A. C., Swami. *The Bhagavad Gita As It Is*. With introduction, translation, and authorized purport, and with appreciations by Allen Ginsberg, Denise Levertov, Thomas Merton. New York: Macmillan, 1968. SBCC 294.5924 M215Bh

This is virtually a verse-by-verse explication of and commentary on the text which may appeal primarily to the scholar or enthusiast. Bhaktivedanta is understood to be a literalist interpreter of the Gita; the essay by Merton is quite worthwhile and provides an especially open Christian view of the essence and value of the Gita.

Chatterji, Mohini, trans. *The Bhagavad-Gita, or the Lord's Lay*. With commentary, notes, and references to Christian scriptures. New York: Causeway Books, 1960. SBCC 294.5924 C495b

This translation has stimulating cross-referencing between Christianity and the Hinduism of the Gita.

Deutsch, Eliot, trans. *The Bhagavad Gita*. With introduction and critical essays. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968. SBCC 294.5924 M215xD

Includes essays on karma yoga, ceremonial religion, the Gita's so-called meta-theology, and the concepts of freedom and determinism.

Feuerstein, George. *Introduction to the Bhagavad Gita*. Wheaton: Quest Books, 1983.

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A very helpful and readable background on the Gita, focusing on its composition and dating, historical setting, philosophical and literary environment, essential doctrines, dramatis personae, and main interpretations. Does not include the text.

Iyer, Rhagavan, trans. and ed. *The Bhagavad Gita, with the Uttara Gita*. London and Santa Barbara, CA: Concord Grove Press, 1985. SBCC 294.5924 I97b

Perhaps the magnum opus on the Gita's universality, this amazing work gives us the Gita's text in Sanskrit and modern Hindi as well as English. It also provides commentary and amplification of the Gita's text through excerpts from other sources of literature and tradition.

Miller, Barbara Stoler, trans. *Yoga: Discipline of Freedom. The Yoga Sutra attributed to Patanjali*. New York: Bantam, 1998

Patanjali's Yoga Sutra is at the heart of this Eastern spiritual discipline; a welcome modern rendition of this classic text of mental and physical enlightenment.

Nikhilananda, Swami, trans. *The Bhagavad Gita*. Translated from the Sanskrit, with notes, comments, and introduction. New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1952. SBCC 294.5924 N692b

This includes a summary of the Mahabharata and a translation of Sankara's introduction to his famous 9th-century commentary

Purohit, Swami, trans. *The Bhagavad-Gita: The Gospel of the Lord Shri Krishna*. With photography by Curt Bruce and parallel Sanskrit text. New York: Knopf, 1977. SBCC 294.5924 M215Bha

A beautiful book of black-and-white photography expressing the humanity and spirit of India and the gospel of Krishna. The translation from 1935 feels formal now.

Radhakrishnan, S., trans. *The Bhagavad Gita*. With introductory essay, Sanskrit text, and notes. New Delhi: HarperCollins, 1948.

This is one of the most esteemed translations and commentaries on the Gita and is an excellent resource for both scholars and students. It provides virtually verse-by-verse commentary, along with footnotes. A lengthy introduction provides a wealth of background information. While Radhakrishnan's translation is more comfortable to the modern ear than many of those of his contemporaries, it uses the archaisms of scriptural style.

Videos

Hinduism and the Song of God

Peter Brook's Mahabharata

The Razor's Edge (film), old and new versions

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New Testament

Text

The Holy Bible. New Revised Standard Version. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990.

Holy Bible: New American. Nashville: Catholic Bible Press, 1987.

New English Bible. With Apocrypha. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1961. SBCC 220.52 B582n

The New International Version (NIV) Study Bible. Grande Rapids: Zondervan, 1985.

New Oxford Annotated Bible. With Apocrypha. New Revised Standard Version. Ed. B. Metzger and R. Murphy. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.

This is one of the very best study Bibles! There's now a college paperback version (SBCC 220.52 B582ne).

The New Testament of the Jerusalem Bible. New York: Doubleday, 1966. SBCC 225.52 B582n

Funk, Hoover, and the Jesus Seminar. *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993. SBCC 226 F982f

The results of a diverse and large panel of scholars have been brought together to produce a new translation of the New Testament, now known as the Scholars Version, or S.V. The panel was specifically assembled to come to a publishable consensus as to *what Jesus really said*. The book includes the non-canonical Gospel of Thomas; and fascinating background on the process, goals, and procedures of the panel as they wrestled with their central question: what did Jesus really say? Also fascinating are those results (a must read).

Commentary and Context

Ackroyd, P. R. and C. F. Evans, eds. *The Cambridge History of the Bible*. 2 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970. SBCC 220.09 C178

An excellent history of the development of the Bible, Old Testament to New, via topical chapters from various contributing scholars.

Aune, David E. *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment*, ed. Wayne Meeks. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987. SBCC 225.6 A926n

This work takes a thorough look at Greco-Roman and Israelite literary genres as the environment in which New Testament compositions arose. The book provides an in-depth discussion of each genre as it appears in the New Testament, and the genre's models and influences. Excellent "further reading" lists complement each chapter. Scholarly appeal; not for student use.

Borg, Marcus, ed. *The Lost Gospel of Q: The Original Sayings of Jesus*, trans. M. Powellson and R. Riegert. With an introduction by Th. Moore. Berkeley: Ulysses Press, 1996.

This book explains the Q hypothesis, then provides the full text, as hypothesized. The essays by Borg and Moore are gems.

Brown, Raymond Edward. *An Introduction to the New Testament*. New York: Doubleday, 1997. SBCC 225.6 B879i

Bruce, F. F. *The English Bible: A History of Translation*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1970. SBCC 220.52 B887e

A comprehensive study of the history of translating the Bible into English.

Bstan-dzin-rgya-mtsho, Dalai Lama XIV. *The Good Heart: A Buddhist Perspective on the Teachings of Jesus*. Paperback ed. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1998. SBCC 232.9 B916g

Dart, John, and Ray Riegbert. *Unearthing the Lost Words of Jesus: The Discovery and Text of the Lost Gospel of Thomas*. Berkeley: Ulysses Press, 1997.

Fokkelman, J. P. *Reading Biblical Narrative: An Introductory Guide*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, c. 1999. SBCC 220.6 F662r

Friedman, Richard Elliott. *Who Wrote the Bible?* New York: Harper and Row, Perennial Library, 1989. SBCC 221.1 F911w

This book includes a complete study of the Documentary Hypothesis as it pertains to the Old Testament and a look at the various writers of the New Testament compositions.

Gabel, John B., and Charles Wheeler. *The Bible as Literature: An Introduction*. 2nd ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990. SBCC 809.93522 G112b

An excellent guide to the Bible as a whole in literary terms. Various genres and literary techniques are identified, explained, and exemplified; there is discussion concerning composition; and there are excellent chapters on the history of the text and its history of translation. This book is my second choice for in-class use (though it lacks the historical information in Harris).

Gamble, Harry Y. *The New Testament Canon: Its Making and Meaning*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985 SBCC 225.12 G191n

This book takes a close look at the history of canon formation: factors, influences, and results. It includes an etymological history of the "canon," and semantic clarifications of "Scripture" and "New Testament." A teacher's or advanced student's resource.

Gaus, Andy, trans. *The Unvarnished Gospels*. Putney, VT: Threshold Books, 1988.

A contemporary translation of the four gospels which "lets the original Greek speak for itself." The translator has a fresh ear for the less elevated language we are used to; there is more colloquial language, use of progressive past, etc. Helpful glossary; different.

Gottcent, John H. *The Bible: A Literary Study*. Boston: Twayne, 1986 SBCC 09.93522 G685b

Greenlee, Harold. *Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism*. Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995.

A thorough, readable explanation of textual criticism of New Testament which includes a look at paleography, and identifies and describes the important early manuscripts.

Hanson, K. C. *Palestine in the Time of Jesus: Social Structures and Social Conflicts*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998. SBCC 225.95 H251p

Harris, Stephen L. *Understanding the Bible*. 4th ed. Sacramento: California University Press, 1997. (Now in 6th ed.)

This is an excellent accompanying study text for both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament! It is thorough, readable, concise, and up-to-date in its attention to history, literature, and religion. There are helpful tables and timelines, photos, and diagrams; a close look at every text, canonical and extra-canonical; important terms in boldface; a glossary, bibliographies, chapter vocabulary, and study questions.

Harvey, A. E. *Companion to the New Testament*. Oxford and Cambridge University Press, 1970. SBCC 225.7 H34ln

Juel, Donald. *Augsberg Commentary on the New Testament: Mark*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1990

This is one of the better commentary series for academic purposes; it offers explication plus lots of other useful information on terms, concepts, etc.

Kee, Howard Clark. *Understanding the New Testament*. 5th ed. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1993.

Kee, Howard Clark, et al. *Christianity: A Social and Cultural History*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1998

Kloppenber, John S. *Excavating Q: The History and Setting of the Sayings Gospel*. Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 2000. SBCC 226.K66e

Kock, Klaus. *The Prophets*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983. SBCC 224.06 K76p

Mack, Burton L. *The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q and Christian Origins*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993. SBCC 226 M1531

This is an exciting and controversial analysis (some say, attack) on the traditional idea of the origins of Christianity, based on Mack's investigative scholarship with the Q hypothesis. Mack is frequently overconfident and presumptuous but always tantalizing. His premise and discussion -- that Q establishes a quite different story of the *earliest* Christians - - is well reasoned and often compelling. The book includes the full hypothesized text of Q with an analysis of its hypothesized three layers of composition.

McKnight, Edgar, and Eliz. Malbon, eds. *The New Literary Criticism and the New Testament*. Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1994.

This is a rich collection of scholarly essays applying formalist, historical, feminist, and socio-rhetorical criticism to New Testament texts.

Metzger, Bruce M. *Breaking the Code: Understanding the Book of Revelation*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993. SBCC 228 M596b

Meyer, Marvin M., trans. *The Secret Teachings of Jesus: Four Gnostic Gospels*. New York: Random House, Vintage Books, 1986. SBCC 273.1 M613s

This book includes a general introduction to the Nag Hammadi manuscript discoveries of 1945; translations of The Secret Book of James, The Gospel of Thomas, The Book of Thomas, The Secret Book of John; and full endnotes.

Mitchell, Stephen. *The Gospel According to Jesus*. New York: HarperCollins, 1993.

This is a refreshing, sometimes radical assessment of what *Jesus* said (as opposed to what the gospels say *about* him). It is an inspiring look at the essential figure of Jesus from one of sacred literature's most popular and provocative translators.

The Oxford Illustrated History of the Bible. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001. SBCC 220.92 E19n

Patterson, Stephen, and James Robinson. *The Fifth Gospel: The Gospel of Thomas Comes of Age*. Harrisburg: Trinity Press, 1998.

This is the latest offering on the Gospel of Thomas, translated by Hans-Gebhard Bethge. It is nicely footnoted and is accompanied by essays on history, context, and content. (I would recommend this edition if purchasing a separate text for the study of this work.)

Rhein, F. *Barron's Simplified Approach to the New Testament*. Woodbury: Barron's Educational Series, 1968. SBCC 225.02 R469b

Robinson, James M., gen. ed. *The Nag Hammadi Library*. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978 SBCC. (3rd edition, 1990 -- 299 R662n)

This book provides the full Nag Hammadi library in English translated by various scholars. There is an informative preface by Marvin Meyer and an introduction by Robinson. A solid reference source.

Sheeley, Steven, and Robert Nash. *The Bible in English Translation: An Essential Guide*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997. SBCC 220.52 S541b

A guide to evaluating the various translations of the Bible in English; it includes a discussion of how translations are made.

Stenger, Werner. *Introduction to New Testament Exegesis*. Grand Rapids: Eardmans Publishing, 1993 (in German 1987).

This is a user-friendly manual that centers on the application of interpretive strategies, demonstrating how the structures, genres, and literary histories of New Testament writings can be discerned; it includes ten applied examples.

Thuesen, Peter Johannes. *In Discordance with the Scriptures: American Protestant Battles over Translating the Bible*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Valantasis, Richard. *The Gospel of Thomas*. London: Rutledge Press, 1997.

Vermes, Geza. *An Introduction to the Complete Dead Sea Scrolls*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000.

Wells, G. A. *The Jesus of the Early Christians*. London: Peaberton Books, 1971. SBCC 200 W454j

Beyond the question of Jesus' historicity, Wells takes a closer look at the development of the gospel accounts; what Paul is silent on; the influence of powerful religious motifs such as the dying god; and the rise of Christianity.

Wells, George Albert. *The Jesus Myth*. Chicago: Open Court, c. 1999. SBCC 232.908 W454jm

Weber, Eugen Joseph. *Apocalypses: Prophecies, Cults, and Millennial Beliefs through the Ages*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999. SBCC 291.23 W373a

Videos and Films

Videos

Who Wrote the Bible? (part 2)

The Last Supper

The Execution of Jesus

The Apocalypse: The Puzzle of Revelation

Christianity, the First Thousand Years: Founding of the Faith

Christianity, the First Thousand Years: Church and Empire

The Bible in Translation: God's Word vs. Man's Word

Frontline: From Jesus to Christ (2 hrs. 40 min.)

The Search for Jesus (Peter Jennings)

The Word Inscribed: Illuminated Manuscripts

Films

The Passion of the Christ

The Last Temptation of Christ

Jesus of Nazareth (Zeffereilli)

King of Kings (1961)

The Robe

The Silver Chalice

Qur'an, or Koran

Text

Ali, Abdullah Yusuf, trans. *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*. 9th ed. Beltsville, MD: Amana Publications, 1997 (1989). 1,759 pgs. (hardcover) SBCC297.122 A398m

This is a comprehensive study and translation with Arabic parallel text and voluminous footnotes (6311 of them), which make this *the* edition for a thorough explication of the Qur'an. It is reverential but fully scholarly, and includes a running devotional poetic commentary; the ultimate reference! But the translation is in scriptural style (archaisms).

Ali, Ahmed, trans. *Al-Qur'an: A Contemporary Translation*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984.

The complete text in verse form and with parallel Arabic, and English and Arabic titles for each sura. There are good footnotes. Although the subtitle claims it as a contemporary translation, I find it is frequently stiff.

Arberry, A. J., trans. *The Koran Interpreted*. 2 vols. combined in 1 paperback vol. New York: Macmillan Publishing, Collier Books, 1986 (1955).

The complete text; a rather lengthy preface focuses almost entirely on the history of translations into English and the weaknesses thereof. There is no introduction. The Qur'an is presented in verse form with some attempt, it feels like, to suggest the poetry of the original. This is not a modern translation, and much of the vocabulary and phrasing is stiff or too elegant. No footnotes, no apparati except an index at back.

Cleary, Thomas, ed. and trans. *The Essential Koran: Heart of Islam. An Introductory Selection of Readings from the Qur'an*. New York: HarperCollins Paperback Editions, 1994. 203 pgs. SBCC 297.122 C623e

This is an abridged and selected edition of the Qur'an; a concise introduction particularly geared toward the Western reader. The chapters (i.e., suras) are abridged and in traditional order; not every chapter is included; chapter headings are by title (traditional) rather than by number, which is awkward for cross-referencing. The texts are laid out in verse form and are numbered by verse groupings. Textual notes for chapters are at the back of the book -- these are primarily notes on word derivations, usage, and context, but are short on historical-social comment, interpretation and commentary. (I'm occasionally surprised at what does not get a note.) No other apparati, errors in pagination, and the fact that Cleary has selected none of the material which addresses holy war, women's rights, or other legal matters weaken this edition. His translation is in modern free-verse poetics.

Cragg, Kenneth. trans. *Readings in the Qur'an*. London: Fount, a HarperCollins imprint, 1988. 390 pgs.

This is a selected thematic reader. An extensive introduction includes general historical-religious background, attention to major themes of the Qur'an, comments on the challenge of translation, and reflection on the Qur'an's interest and value for the contemporary world. The indices and tables at the back that cross-reference the chapters and address those areas of text not selected in this edition are a bit confusing. the glossary is very helpful; the appendix gives Arabic chapter titles. All this apparatus makes for an attractive teaching edition, but for the fact that this is a thematic selected reader and not a complete text (two-thirds of the Qur'an's text is represented).

Dawood, N. J., trans. *The Koran*. New York: Penguin Books, 1997 (1956). 456 pgs. SBCC 297.122 D271k

This is the complete text of the Qur'an in a very readable modern translation, with the text presented in prose, and with verse numbers in margins. A very brief introduction gives clear but bare-bones historical-religious background. (When this book is used as classroom text, other introductory material should be made available or context lectures expanded.) The timetable of Muhammad's career is clear and helpful. There is an index at the back; few but clear footnotes; and no scholarship or other apparatus.

Irving, T. B., trans. *The Qur'an: The First American Version*. With commentary. Brattleboro, VT: Amana Books, 1985. SBCC 297.122 I72q

The complete text, with a table of contents that includes topical delineations or summaries of most suras. This is a substantial and mostly scholarly introduction that addresses the need and value of an American edition of the Qur'an. The book also addresses the challenges of Arabic grammar and syntax, vocabulary, style, and recitation, and provides an explanation of a rather complex notation system. Brief introductions to each sura (which constitute the "commentary") and margin notes and verse numbering are helpful.

Pickthall, Mohammed Marmaduke, trans. *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran: An Explanatory Translation*. New York: New American Library, a Mentor Book, 1963 (1930). SBCC 297.122 P597m

The complete text; an interesting treatment from an Englishman turned Muslim whose premise is that any translation of this text is by nature an interpretation. The very good introduction centers on Muhammad's career as prophet, founder, and leader and is a more detailed historical account than some. The best thing about this edition are the wonderful brief introductions to *each* sura! The text of the Qur'an is presented in verse form with clear numbering, with each sura identified as revealed at Mecca or Medina. If Pickthall's translation were not in the elevated style of scripture (i.e., use of archaisms), it would make a good classroom text.

Rodwell, J. M., trans. *The Koran*. London: Everyman (J. M. Dent, Orion Publishing Group), 2001 (1909).

A prose translation, with “scriptural” diction, and notes at the back.

Sells, Michael, trans. *Approaching the Qur'an: The Early Revelations*. Ashland: White Cloud Press, 1999.

This book is limited to suras 81 to 114, as the translator’s focus is on the early suras. An excellent introduction includes information on historical aspects of the Qur’an connected to ancient Persian poetry. There is much discussion of sound quality, and the book includes a CD with calls to prayer and several suras in the two recitation styles.

Shakir, M. H., trans. *The Qur'an*. Elmhurst, NY: Tahrike Tarsile Qur’an, 1997 (1959).

This edition is set up in what we would call “reverse” order, so it can give the feel of reading a Semitic book. The text has parallel Arabic, numbered verse breaks; accessible prose; and no notes.

Context and Commentary

Cook, Michael. *The Koran: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Excellent!

Jomier, Jacques. *The Great Themes of the Qur'an*, trans. Zoe Hersov. London: SCM Press, 1997. SBCC 297 J75g

This is a very readable introduction to the major thematic ideas in the Qur’an, with brief text excerpts to illustrate God the Creator Supreme, Adam’s fatherhood of humankind, Abraham the first Muslim, the Prophets, the Jesus and Mary tradition, and community. It also includes other brief but helpful background on early Islam, how Muslims experience the Qur’an, and Muhammad’s call. No apparatus.

Haddad and Esposito, eds. *Islam, Gender, and Social Change*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998
SBCC 297.124 H126I

Haleem, Muhammad Abdel. *Understanding the Qur'an*. London: I. B. Tauris Publishers, 2001.

Though its stance often feels apologetic, this is a concise thematic look at the areas of controversy and misunderstanding in the Qur’an, and is very helpful.

Haneef, Suzanne. *What Everyone Should Know about Islam and Muslims*. 14th ed. South Elgin, IL: Library of Islam, 1996. SBCC 297 H237w

Humphreys, Stephen. *Between Memory and Desire: The Middle East in a Troubled Age*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.

While based on astute scholarship, this is an engaging and accessible read even for the non-academic, and sheds better light on the historical and religious contexts than any book I've yet read. I recommend it.

Lester, Toby. "What Is the Koran?" *Atlantic Monthly*, January 1999, pp. 43–56.

Ruthven, Malise. *Islam: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

This is a concise, readable introduction to the Islamic religion, society, law, ethics, etc. It includes a few photos, and suggestions for further reading, and an appendix outlines the Five Pillars.

Swarup, Ram. *Understanding the Hadith, the Sacred Traditions of Islam*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2002

The Hadith is the secondary sacred scripture of Islam, containing the words of the Prophet while not in trance (not the Qur'an) and his actions. The Hadith is the "most important single source of Islamic laws, precepts, and practices." The complete Hadith is a massive piece of literature; Swarup has selected representative passages touching upon its main tenets.

Watt, W. Montgomery, and Richard Bell. *Introduction to the Qur'an*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1970.

This is a scholarly survey of the history, style, doctrine, and interpretive criticism of the Qur'an. Its chapters treat the historical context (Muhammad's life in Arabia, his career), his prophetic experience (the nature and history of his revelation), the history of the text of the Qur'an, and its form, style, chronology, names (terms, vocabulary), doctrines, and scholarship (theology, exegesis, translation). The book provides excellent and thorough background, which occasionally gets too detailed for the non-expert; tables and indices are geared for the scholar.

Related

McCloud, Aminah Beverly. *African American Islam*. New York: Routledge, 1995. SBCC 297 M127a

Stoddart, William. *Sufism: The Mystical Doctrine and Methods of Islam*. New York: Paragon House (1986), c. 1985. SBCC 297.4 S869S

Videos

I Am a Sufi, I Am a Muslim
Rumi: Poet of the Heart
The Story of Islam
The Hajj (ABC Nightline)
Five Pillars of Islam

Online Article

Lester, Toby. "What Is the Koran?" *Atlantic Monthly*, January 1999,
<http://www.theatlantic.com/issues/99jan/koran.htm>.

The Tibetan Book of the Dead

Text

Evans-Wentz, W. Y. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960 (1927).

This is an early English translation of the Tibetan Book of the Dead that has been revised and reprinted in several editions; this Oxford paperback is its welcome latest incarnation. At least half the book is introductory material, including a very interesting "Psychological Commentary" by C. G. Jung. There are also other helpful apparatus: footnotes, appendix, and an explanatory foreword.

Fremantle, Francesca, and Chogyam Trungpa, trans. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead: The Great Liberation through Hearing in the Bardos*. Boston: Shambhala Press, 1987. 120 pgs. SBCC 294.3923 F869t

An introduction and explanatory commentary comprise the first third of this translation, which is a good first encounter with this unusual text because of its more simplified presentation (it does not attempt to be as thoroughly explanatory as does Thurman's). It leaves many key words untranslated but provides a Sanskrit glossary.

Thurman, Robert A. F., trans. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead: Liberation through Understanding in the Between*. Forward by the Dalai Lama. New York: Bantam Books, 1994. 278 pgs.

This is a very modern, often colloquial, translation with an abundance of introductory and support apparatus (which is why I choose it for classroom use), as well as beautiful color reproductions of Tibetan religious art. A foreword by the Dalai Lama and Thurman's historical-religious-thantological background comprise the first third of the book. The primary text is contained in part 2; and a smaller part 3 is comprised of supplementary texts associated with the primary text. In a special edition of this translation, published by the

Quality Paperback Book Club in a six-book series called Mystical Classics, a lovely and insightful introduction by Huston Smith precedes Thurman's background text.

Context

Evans-Wentz, W. Y. *The Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation, or the Method of Realizing Nirvana through Knowing the Mind*. London: Oxford University Press, 1954. SBCC 294.392 W482t

This is an early English translation of esoteric Tibetan sacred literature associated with the Bardo Thodol texts. Of greatest interest is a fascinating foreword essay by C. G. Jung comparing, contrasting, and analyzing Eastern and Western psychology and by extension their associated religions.

Orofino, Giacomella. *Sacred Tibetan Teachings: On Death and Liberation*. Great Britain: Prism Presses, 1999 (1990).

Rinpoche, Sogyal. *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, ed. P. Gaffney and A. Harvey. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992. SBCC 294.3923 S682t

With the Tibetan Book of the Dead at its center, spiritually and thematically, this is an explanation, exploration, and application of the Book of the Dead's concepts, doctrines, and practices that is intended for all regardless of their religious background or belief. The book's emphasis is on caring for the dying and on spiritual preparation for one's own death, always with living a good life in view. This book is a very readable, personal discussion of the principles underlying the Book of the Dead with broad application to modern Western individual and society: It provides advice on attitudes about death; caring for the dying and the bereaved; preparing *now* for our own good death; and the analysis of mind and the practice of meditation as fundamental premises. The actual text of the Tibetan Book of the Dead does not appear extant within this book, but it is the heart of chapters 14–18

Thurman, Robert. *Essential Tibetan Buddhism*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995. SBCC 294.3923 T539c

This is a concise overview of Buddhism and its expressions in India and Tibet. The author lays the essential groundwork in a nicely readable introduction, which is followed by a selection of primary texts from throughout Tibetan Buddhism's developmental history; these texts are classified thematically (including excerpts from the Tibetan Book of the Dead). There are endnotes for each chapter, including mini-biographies of the illustrious authors of Tibetan Buddhism.

Videos

Tantra of Gyuto (Sacred Rituals of Tibet)

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Tibetan Medicine (Buddhist Approach to Healing)
Tibetan Book of the Dead (2 parts)
Robert Thurman on Buddhism: The Buddha; The Dharma; The Sangha

Films

Kundun
Seven Years in Tibet
Golden Child

Native American Sacred Texts

Texts and Context

Alexander, Hartley Burr. *The World's Rim: Great Mysteries of the North American Indians*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1953. SBCC 299.7 A375w

This is a broad survey of some major Native American religious and philosophical symbolism, exemplified by descriptions of specific tribal customs and rituals. The book has a classic 1950s scholastic tone: the voice of the sympathetic white anthropologist is clearly heard throughout this academic presentation, which draws on Western philosophical background as a springboard for comparison and contrast. The book contains a detailed description of the eight days of the Sun Dance ceremony.

Bierhorst, John. *The Mythology of North America*. New York: William Morrow, 1985. SBCC 299.7 B588m

This is a selective survey of some of the most vital myths supporting religious beliefs and customs or providing instruction and entertainment among eight areas of Native American culture in North America. Illustrations from modern Native American art make relevant these ties to the past.

Bierhorst, John, ed. *The Sacred Path: Spells, Prayers and Power Songs of the Native American Indians*. New York: Quill, 1984.

Brown, Joseph Epes. *The Spiritual Legacy of the American Indian*. New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1996.

This book is a sensitive yet scholarly attempt to reveal the beauty and power of the spiritual life of the Native American. A professor of religious studies at the University of Montana, Brown is regarded as an important initiator of the recent scholarly regard for Indian religions.

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Bullchild, Percy. *American Indian Genesis: The Story of Creation*. Berkeley: Seastone Press. SBCC 299.72 B935a

Gill, Sam D. *Dictionary of Native American Mythology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. R 299.7 G475d

Hoxie, Frederick, ed. *Encyclopedia of North American Indians*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1996.

A survey of Native American history and culture in encyclopedic yet signed articles from Paleo-Indians to the present.

Josephy, Alvin M., Jr. *The Indian Heritage of America*. New York: Bantam Books, 1973 (1968).

This is a comprehensive but concise paperback history of the Indians in North, South, and Central America.

Leeming, David, with Margaret Leeming. *A Dictionary of Creation Myths*. Oxford Paperback Reference. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.

This excellent encyclopedic-type reference book includes descriptions of the various Native American creation stories.

Lyon, William. *Encyclopedia of Native American Shamanism: Sacred Ceremonies of North America*. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO Press, 1998.

Neihardt, John. *Black Elk Speaks: Life Story of a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux*. Lincoln: Nebraska University Press, 1979 (1932).

This modern religious classic is the story of Black Elk, one of the last holy men of the Oglala Sioux, as told through Niehardt. The book is a poignant inside look at a critical transition period in Native American life in the United States.

Novak, Philip. *The World's Wisdom: Sacred Texts of the World's Religions*. With a foreword by Huston Smith. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994.

This is a very pleasing anthology of sacred texts from Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and what the author categorizes as Primal Religions; represented here are many kinds of native cultures from around the globe, including some excellent excerpts from Native American traditions.

Pritzker, Barry. *Native Americans: An Encyclopedia of History, Culture, and Peoples*. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO Press, 1998. SBCC R 970.1 P961n

701615131515151616161611131370

Renault, Dennis (Wa'Na'Nee'Che'), and Timothy Freke. *Principles of Native American Spirituality*. San Francisco: Thorsons, an imprint of HarperCollins, 1996.

A concise study of common Native American aspects of spirituality presented through the unique perspective of a writing team that is both Indian and non-Indian. It treats such topics as the vision quest, medicine tools, sweat lodges, the Great Mystery, herbal healing, and reverence for nature. Each chapter concludes with a personal exercise for applying the chapter's thematic concerns.

Reference *Encyclopedia of the American Indian*. 9th ed. Nyack, NY: Todd Publications, c. 2000.

Roberts, Eliz, and Elias Amidon, eds. *Earth Prayers from Around the World*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991.

"365 prayers, poems, and invocations for honoring the earth"... Various Native American traditions are well represented.

Sanders, William T., and Joseph Marino. *New World Prehistory: Archaeology of the American Indian*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Foundations of Modern Anthropology Series, 1970. SBCC 970.1 S215n

A look at the physical and cultural anthropological history of the American Indian, spanning the North and South American continents: migration, social systems, ecological environments, etc.

Suzuki, David, and Peter Knudtson, eds. *Wisdom of the Elders: Sacred Native Stories of Nature*. New York: Bantam Books, 1993.

This book is a stimulating collection of excerpts and discussion of Native ideas, practices, and worldviews juxtaposed with Western ecological concerns. The "Native" peoples here are not limited to America, but include representation from around the world. The book is a thoughtful exploration of modern scientific challenges and the indigenous religious and philosophical belief systems which speak eloquently to them from conquered or marginalized pasts.

Underhill, Ruth M. *Red Man's America: A History of Indians in the United States*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953. SBCC 970.1 U55

A history of native experience in North America, from discovery and first migrations to U.S. government resettlement. The book is dated in style, but is a solid and fairly comprehensive historical overview.

Videos

Sacred Spirit: Lakota Sioux, Past and Present
Sacred Ground (American Indians and the Land)

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1611131372

The Faith-Keeper (Oren Lyons, chief of the Onondaga Nation)

Film

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Dances with Wolves

731615131515151616161611131373