

UPDATED: April 14, 2019

Krishna and Christ: Text, Practice, Person, Experience

HDS 3070 / Rel 64

Monday and Wednesday 1030-1145 Classroom: Barker Center 114

Professor: Francis X. Clooney, SJ: <fclooney@hds.harvard.edu> Office: CSWR 2

Office Hours: ordinarily, Thursdays 2-4; appointments made by contacting Herch Blemur <hblemur@hds.harvard.edu>

Teaching Fellow: Joseph Kimmel <jlk623@mail.harvard.edu> (office hours by appointment)

Course in relation to curricular requirements

MTS Area(s) of Focus: Comparative Studies; Hindu Studies; Theology

MDiv Distribution Category/ies: Christianity; Hinduism

Course Rationale

For centuries, people have compared and contrasted Jesus Christ, the central figure of Christian faith, and Krishna, a supreme deity of Hindu tradition, both understood as loving, saving figures who descend into this world and are embodied here, gather followers and offer instructions, and are to be approached by love and devotion. Yet they are also figures in very different cultures, histories, social and intellectual contexts. Attention will be paid to their locations respectively in Hindu and Christian theologies; expert and popular attitudes; similarities and differences; the meaning of each figure for believers in the other tradition.

Course readings will deal with great scriptural texts, worship practices, devotions, images, and their destinies as universal figures. Larger questions related to the nature of God, of religions, and of theology itself will be raised. The course proceeds by key readings, discussed vigorously in class.

Requirements

Course requirements include regular class attendance and participation; weekly response (1-2 pp.), on the reading of the week unless otherwise specified, due on Wednesdays, as a Word document posted at the course site; mid-term paper (approx. 12 pages) and end term paper (approx. 12 pages) as scheduled and noted below, but no final examination. Papers must be related to course theme and to a course reading or readings, but the actual theme is to be chosen by the student in consultation with the professor and teaching assistant.

Readings

As noted, the readings are available online, or pdfs of the readings are at the course site, and are for the use only of students in the course and not for further dissemination. Schedule of readings and themes: The syllabus, with dates, is below; by prior notice, it will be subject to change during the semester.

Special Considerations

Students with concerns about the style of the course or with any special learning needs are requested to consult the professor as soon as possible, to ensure that accommodations are made to enhance your learning experience as much as possible.

Introduction

1. January 28: Introduction to the Course: Knowing Christ, Knowing Krsna – Christ *and* Krsna? Christ or Krsna? Selected views (Wilkins, Dayananda, Caldwell, Saradananda, Adicary, Catholic Encyclopedia, Reed--excerpts distributed in class, full pdfs at course site (under "Assignments"))
2. January 30: Introduction continued: selected views (continued); a comparison: *John* 1 and *Gita* 4

Christ and Krishna: Children, and Cosmic

3. February 4: The young Krsna: select stories from the *Bhagavata Purana* (Gupta and Valpey 160-171; Bryant 111-133). Recommended background: Largen, *Baby Krishna, Infant Christ*: c. 2 A Savior in Disguise: The Stories, c. 3, cœKrsna and His Followers: How He Savesœ
4. February 6: Infancy narrative of Jesus, from Luke 1-2, and the Infancy Gospel of Thomas, using the online [Tony Burke translation](#); Recommended background: Largen, *Baby Krishna, Infant Christ*: c. 4, cœImmanuel: the Storiesœ
5. February 11: Comparing the Young Krsna and the Young Jesus: Largen, "God at Play"
6. February 13: Overview of *Bhagavad Gita*; *Gita* 1-2 (Note: Recommended background for *Gita* and Gospel of John: Saunders, *Gospel for Asia*, 7: cœTheir Ethical Heritage,œ 8: cœTheir Ethical Ideals,œ and 9: cœTheir Doctrinal Heritage and Teachingœ)

The Teachers

February 18 Presidentœ™s Day, no class.

7. February 20: *Gita* 7, 9
8. February 25: *Gita* 11-12, 18:49-78
9. February 27: Overview of *John*; *John* 1-4
10. March 4: *John* 12-13
11. March 6: *John* 18-20
12. March 11: The Cosmic Krsna of the *Brahma Samhita* c. 5 and the Cosmic Christ of St. Paulœ™s *Letter to the Colossians* 1
13. March 13: Cosmic Krishna and Christ; review of first half of course

First Paper Due: March 18

March 18-22 Spring Break

Mystical Union

14. March 25: Looking Back and Looking Forward
15. March 27: Mystical union with Krsna the Cowherd: Gupta and Valpey, 171-181; three songs from *Nacciyar Tirumoli* of cœāāā, 9th century Hindu saint; background: Tracy Coleman, cœViraha-Bhakti and Strœ«dharma: Re-Reading the Story of Kāāā and the Gopœ«s in the *Harivaāā* and the *Bhāgavata Purāāā*œ
16. April 1: Mystical union with Christ the Bridegroom: Excerpts on the cœBride of Christœ in the writings of the Cistercian Catholic monk John of Ford (1140-1214), as collected in *Sky-blue is the Sapphire, Crimson the Rose*; excerpts on mystical marriage from the *Interior Castle* of St Teresa of Avila (1515-1582)
17. April 3: Comparing the mystical unions

Worship

(Students are urged to visit a church and/or a temple during this part of the course; there are many churches nearby; for Krsna worship, the [ISKCON \(Hare Krishna\) Center in Boston](#) is recommended, particularly on a Wednesday or Sunday evening)

18. April 8 Christ Worship at a Daily Mass: the Ordinary of the Mass, and the Prayers for the Feast of the Sacred Heart, as in the *Roman Missal*
19. April 10 Krsna Worship: *Arcana Paddhati*, Part II, pp. 23-78
20. April 15 Christ worship and Krsna Worship continued

A Theological Problem: Avatāra or Incarnation?

21. April 17: Avatara and Incarnation: Steven Tsoukalas, cœKrishna and Christ: The Body-Divine Relation in Human Form;œ recommended: Noel Sheth, SJ (1943-2017), cœHindu Avatāra and Christian Incarnation: A Comparison;œ background: *Gita* 4 and *John* 1
22. April 22: Swami Satprakashananda (1888-1979), cœGreat Teachers and Divine Incarnationœ

Mixing It Up: Krishna and Christ

23. April 24: A Hindu-Christian view of Krishna: cœKrishnaœ by Brahmabandhab Upadhyay (1861-

1907), a Hindu convert to Christianity; a Christian-Hindu View of Krishna, from the letters of Krishna Prem (aka Ronald Nixon, 1898-1965), a Christian convert to Hinduism (collected in Dilip Kumar Roy); background: David Haberman, "A Cross-cultural Adventure: The Transformation of Ronald Nixon"

24. April 29: Hindu views of Christ: Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902): "Christ the Messenger"; Paramahansa Yogananda (1893-1952) on Christ (Selections from *The Second Coming of Christ*); recommended: Clooney blog posts on Yogananda on Christ

25. May 1: Hindus Worshipping Christ: Kerry San Chirico, "Between Christian and Hindu: Christ Bhaktas, Catholics, and the Negotiation of Devotion in the Banaras Region"

Second Paper Due: May 13

Bibliography (required and as additional resources; at the course site, or available widely online)

Scripture and Ritual Texts

Brahma Samhita, [Chapter 5](#)

The Bhagavad Gita. Translated by Georg Feuerstein. Shambala Books, 2014.

The Bhagavata Purana: Selected Readings. Selected by Ravi M. Gupta and Kenneth R. Valpey. Columbia University Press, 2017.

"Krishna in the Tenth Book of the *Bhagavata Purana*." Selections by Edwin F. Bryant, in Edwin F. Bryant editor, *Krishna: A Sourcebook*. Oxford University Press, 2007.

The Gospel according to John. The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible. Available online.

The Gospel according to Luke. The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible. Available online.

St. Paul's *Letter to the Colossians*. The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible. Available online.

St. Paul's *Letter to the Ephesians*. The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible. Available online.

The Roman Missal of the Roman Catholic Church.

The Infancy Gospel of Thomas. The online [Tony Burke translation](#)

The Process of Deity Worship (Arcana-Paddhati). Translated by Jayanandana dāsa Adhikārī and edited by Jayatārtha dāsa Adhikārī. The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust. 1978.

Historical and Secondary Sources

R.C. Adhicary, "Krishna and Christ: A Critical Estimate of Their Messages," *The Methodist Review* 43.1, Jan 1927

Teresa of Avila. *The Interior Castle or Mansions*. Translated (?) by Benedict Zimmerman, OCD. London: Thomas Baker and Sons, 1921. (available online, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/teresa/castle2.html>)

Robert Caldwell. *Bishop Caldwell on Krishna and the Bhagavad Gita* (1863). Reprint. Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1894.

Francis X. Clooney, *His Hiding Place Is Darkness: A Hindu-Catholic Theopoetics of Divine Absence*. Stanford University Press, 2013.

Francis X. Clooney, [blog posts](#) on Krsna, and on Paramahansa Yogananda on Krsna

Tracy Coleman, "Viraha-Bhakti and Strādharmā: Re-Reading the Story of Kāśī and the Gopās in the Harivaṃśa and the Bhāgavata Purāṇa," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 130 (2010), 385-412

Swami Dayananda Sarasvati. *Satyarthaprakash* (The Light of Truth). Translated by Chiranjiva

Gharadwaya. Allahabad : K.C. Bhalla (1915)

John of Ford, *Sky-blue is the Sapphire, Crimson the Rose: Stillpoint of Desire in John of Forde*. Cistercian Publications, 2006.

Gilbert of Hoyland, *Sermons on the Song of Songs, I*. Translated and introduced by Lawrence C. Braceland, SJ. Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1978.

Ravi Gupta, "He is our master: Jesus in the Thought of Swami Prabhupada" *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies* 23 (2010), 15-19.

Kristin Johnson Largen, *Baby Krishna, Infant Christ: A Comparative Theology of Salvation*. Orbis, 2011.

Kristin Johnson Largen, "God at Play: Seeing God Through the Lens of the Young Krishna," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 50.3 (2011), 253-261.

1. Frank Reed, "Christ and Krishna," *The Aryan Path* 5 (1934), 569-571, with an appended explanation of "Christos" by Madame Blavatsky.

Kerry San Chirico, "Between Christian and Hindu: Khrist Bhaktas, Catholics, and the Negotiation of Devotion in the Banaras Region," in Richard Fox Young and Chad Bauman, *Constructing Indian Christianities: Culture, Conversion and Caste*. Oxford: Routledge, 2014.

Satakopan, *Holy Word of Mouth (TiruvÄymoli)*. Select songs translated by Francis X. Clooney.

Swami Saradananda, *The Great Master*. (Serialized 1909 ff.) Tr. by Swami Jagadananda. Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1963.

Kenneth Saunders, *The Gospel for Asia: A Study of Three Religious Masterpieces, Gita, Lotus, and Fourth Gospel*. Macmillan Company, 1928. Available online.

Steven Tsoukalas, "Krishna and Christ: The Body-Divine Relation in Human Form," in Catherine Cornille, *Song Divine: Christian Commentaries on the Bhagavad Gita*. Peeters/Eerdmans, 2006. Bangalore: The United Theological College, 2002.

Brahmobandhab Upadhyay, *The Writings of Brahmabandhab Upadhyay*. Vol. II. Edited and annotated by Julius Lipner and George Gispert-Sauch, SJ.

Swami Vivekananda, "Christ the Messenger," Boston: Vedanta Centre. nd

Charles Wilkins, "The Translator's Preface" to his English translation, *The Bhagavat-Geeta, or Dialogues of Kreeshna and Arjoon*, as printed for C. Nourse, 1785, 23-26.

Paramahansa Yogananda, *The Second Coming of Christ*. 2 volumes. Self-Realization Fellowship, 2008.