Center and Programs. Office for Programs in Comparative Religion

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Descriptive Summary

Title: Center and Programs. Office for Programs in Comparative Religion


Collection Number: GTU 92-1-1

Creator/Collector: Jurgensmeyer, Mark; Hawley, John; Stratton, 1941-; Wilfred Cantwell, 1916-Reynolds, Frank, 1930-Martin, John Hilary, 1929-Smith, Ninian, 1927-Bellah, Robert Neelly, 1927-2013-Mansanger, Douglas; Fischer, Clare Benedicts; O'Flaherty, Wendy; Berkeley-Harvard Program in Comparative Religion; Berkeley-Chicago-Harvard Summer Institutes for the Study of Religion in the Liberal Arts; Berkeley Religious Studies Series; Harvard University. Center for the Study of World Religions; Graduate Theological Union

Extent: 7 linear feet (10 record boxes)

Repository: Graduate Theological Union

Abstract: What became the Office for Programs in Comparative Religion Collection began in 1976 with a National Endowment of the Humanities grant to develop a curriculum that focused on a phenomenological approach to religion. With this area established at Gradute Theological Union, Dr. Mark Jurgensmeyer obtained a second NEH grant in 1979. This became the Berkeley/ Harvard Cooperative Program that studied social values such as morality from a comparative sacred perspective. A third grant was received in 1985 that explored teaching methods and curricula in entry level religious studies. The Office was established in 1985 to oversee research and teaching programs in comparative religion. By 1991, the grants were completed, no additional funding was obtained, and the office closed.

Language of Material: English

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Preferred Citation

Center and Programs. Office for Programs in Comparative Religion. Graduate Theological Union

Acquisition Information

The collection was transferred as a whole from the OPCR office to the GTU archivist in 1992.

Biography/Administrative History

What became the Office for Programs in Comparative Religion at the Graduate Theological Union began in 1976 through a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. The grant was written and headed by Mark Juergensmeyer, GTU Professor of Ethics and Phenomenology of Religions. This was a development grant, 1976-79, for the Graduate Program in the History and Phenomenology of Religions at the GTU which became known as Area VIII. The goal was to develop a curriculum which emphasized the phenomenological approach to the study of religious experience. By involving both theological and non-theological students and faculty at the GTU and University of California, Berkeley, it was hoped that this new approach developed at the GTU would make a unique contribution to the concept of the religious studies field nationwide. With Area VIII firmly established at the GTU, Dr. Juergensmeyer sought in the second NEH grant, 1979-82, to expand the field and work cooperatively with Harvard University, particularly John S. Hawley at the Center for the Study of World Religions. This grant, the Berkeley/Harvard Cooperative Program in Comparative Religion: Social Values in a Comparative Perspective focused on established scholars at the GTU, Harvard, and other invited institutions. They met periodically in conferences and through working groups to study paradigms in descriptive ethics, sacred law as the basis for morality, sacred persons as moral guides, and the possibility of a global ethic through the application of shared values. The third NEH grant, the Berkeley/Chicago/Harvard Summer Institutes for the Study of Religion in the Liberal Arts: Towards a Global Perspective, 1985 - 1988, expanded again on teaching religious studies. These Institutes, alternately held in the three areas, brought entry-level religious studies instructors and professors together with established scholars to explore, discuss, and network on the field, teaching methods, and curricula. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Frank Reynolds, Huston Smith, Ninian Smart, Robert Bellah, and Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty all participated in one or more of the various grant conferences and programs. It was in 1985 that the Office for Programs in Comparative Religion was established as a coordinating office within the administrative structure of the GTU to support research and teaching programs in the comparative and
intercultural study of world religions. OPCR promoted programs dedicated to the study of religious pluralism. These included developing comparative studies within seminary programs, providing a liaison between and among faculties at the GTU, the University of California, Berkeley and neighboring institutions, and sponsoring conferences, forums, symposia, and lectures. First Mark Juergensmeyer then John Hilary Martin served as Directors of OPCR. Clare Fischer served as Acting Director and on the Executive Committee. The Luce Foundation also contributed grant monies toward the programs and operation of OPCR. Throughout the years of the grants, there was a strong program of publishing materials related to the focused subjects. The Berkeley Religious Studies Series published four books: The Critical Study of Sacred Texts, The Sants: Studies in a Devotional Tradition of India, The Divine Consort: Radha and the Goddesses of India, and Sikh Studies: Comparative Perspectives on a Changing Tradition. Douglas Mansanger, who served as assistant in several of the grant periods, edited A Bibliographic Guide to the Comparative Study of Ethics. Among the other publications were Sourcebooks for the Summer Institutes and teaching religious studies, and books of collected essays on relevant subjects.

**Scope and Content of Collection**


**Indexing Terms**

Religion and ethics -- Comparative studies
Religions -- Congresses
Religion and ethics -- Congresses
Religion -- Study and teaching -- United States
Ethics -- Study and teaching -- United States

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