

Philip Boo Riley  
Local Religion Project/Religious Studies Department  
Bannan Dialog and Design Grant  
November 1, 2005

***Title***

Local Religion Research Project: Comparative Study of Contemplative Practices in the Silicon Valley

***Statement of the Problem***

In addition to documenting congregations and organizations, the Local Religion Project (LRP) is developing research projects on religion in the Silicon Valley. Each project is conceived as a response to faculty and student interest and energy on a specific question and will be designed to study how those questions play out in the south bay area. Ideally they will capitalize on LRP's undergraduate research program and involve collaboration among faculty at SCU, local institutions, and community leaders. For example, LRP is in the beginning stages of two such projects: religious diversity and secondary education, and social capital formation in Indonesian immigrant communities. When/if these show promise of developing into publications and a larger research program, LRP will nurture them along with internal grant funding requests as steps towards forming a major foundation grant request.

The project outlined in this proposal, a comparative study of contemplation in the region, is one of these research projects. The proposed study emerged from meetings and conversations among LRP director Philip Boo Riley, Sarita Tamayo-Moraga, Ph.D. (lecturer in SCU's religious studies department) and Fr. Kevin Joyce, Ph.D. (founding director of SpiritSite whose interest in LRP stems from his participation in the March 2005 discussion of Hans Kung's "Global Ethics" project; Fr. Joyce holds a Ph.D. in spirituality from Catholic University). Several interests surfaced:

- Prof. Tamayo-Moraga's scholarly expertise in mysticism and the need to create two new courses on mystical traditions in religious studies (Comparative Contemplative Practices in World Religions and Contemplation in Action: Zen and Catholicism);
- Fr. Joyce's positive response to LRP's desire to collaborate with local congregations or organizations on research projects ;
- Prof. Riley's need to document contemplative practice and inter-faith activity as part of LRP's growing profiles of religion in the Valley and in relationship to courses he is developing (Religions@SiliconValley and Inter-faith Dialogue in the Bay Area); and
- The opportunity to focus on Buddhist-Catholic contemplative practices and dialogue presented by the return to SCU in Spring 2006 of the Venerable Anil Sakya, a monk who teaches at the Buddhist University in Thailand and has participated in and organized several conferences and dialogues in Thailand and Nepal in recent years.

Discussions between Riley, Tamayo-Moraga and Joyce over Summer and Fall 2005 about these interests generated possible approaches and ideas for a collaborative LRP research project: documentation and analysis of the many communities in the Valley offering workshops, courses, and direction in contemplative practices; the opportunity to study

SpiritSite as a “start up” contemplative practice program in the San Jose Diocese; comparative studies of contemplation in Christian, Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu communities in the area; ties to the Spirituality and Health Institute research and outreach projects developed by SCU and other faculty in the region that is now part of the Ignatian Center; using contemplation as a focus within the “difficult dialogues” proposal LRP submitted to the Ford Foundation in October; and the need for critical study of contemplation that yielded insights into the potential downsides as well as benefits of contemplative practices.

In order to focus these varied ideas and possibilities for a research project and at the same time serve our various teaching interests we decided to start with strategies to engage undergraduate students in both the study and practice of contemplation as it is practiced in the South Bay Area. How can we do this?

### ***Methods and Time Table***

We propose a research project that develops over one year, from Spring 2006 to Spring 2007, in which undergraduate students play a vital role. Prof. Tamayo-Moraga’s two courses--Comparative Mysticism in World Religions (Spring 2006) and Mysticism in Action: Zen and Catholicism (Winter 2007)—provide us the “captive audience” with which to develop it. We intend to use the two classes to develop a project that would unfold in four stages:

- 1) The *Spring 2006* course covers contemplative practice in Buddhism, Islam, Judaism and Catholicism. The course will complement its broad approach to the topic with in-depth work in Catholic mystical tradition by having the students i) complete three workshops during class time with Fr. Joyce based on SpiritSite’s course on the Jesus Prayer, and ii) keep a journal for the remainder of the quarter on their experience trying to practice the techniques they have studied. Those journals will be analyzed by Tamayo-Moraga, Riley and Joyce to develop the surveys and checklists for the second stage in Winter 2007. In addition, Venerable Anil Sakya and Fr. Joyce will join Prof. Tamayo-Moraga for one class session and one public session which explores comparisons between Buddhist and Catholic meditative practices and experiences.
- 2) In *Fall 2006* Tamayo-Moraga, Riley and Joyce will host a research conversation and dinner at SpiritSites’s center at nearby St. Clare’s parish for approximately fifteen people drawn from SCU faculty (e.g. faculty working on the Spirituality and Health initiative or participating in Prof. Tamayo-Moraga’s mysticism reading group) and religious community leaders (e.g. the abbot of Woodside Priory or the abbot of the Duc Vien Buddhist center). The purpose would be to present the evolving research project, obtain comment and suggestions for the surveys and checklists we will have drafted, and invite interested people to consider ways they could participate in or shape the future development of the research project.
- 3) The *Winter 2007* course covers contemporary contemplative practices in Zen and Catholicism, and compares how these practices present both healthy and unhealthy responses to human suffering, the demands of social justice, and the challenges of solidarity in a globalized world. In this course one-half of the students will complete the SpiritSite workshops with Father Joyce, and the second half will complete a

comparable introduction to Zen sitting with Prof. Tamayo-Moraga. Both sets of students will keep a journal regarding their practices during the quarter based on the checklists developed out of the student journal from the previous course. In addition, both groups of students will work with LRP research guidelines and the checklist and survey instruments developed from the previous course to undertake field research tied to their practice: those who completed the SpiritSite workshop will administer interviews and surveys at parishes who are participating in SpiritSite's four-week "mission;" and those who completed the Zen instruction will administer interviews and surveys at Zen centers with whom LRP will have secured permission for research (most likely the Sunnyvale Chung Tzu Zen Center, and the Mercy Center Crystal Springs sangha led by Zen master Darlene Cohen, who participated in SCU's Spring 2005 Valley of the Gods series).

- 4) In *Spring 2007* Prof. Tamayo-Moraga and Fr. Joyce will present the research project and tentative findings in one of the "demonstration workshops" that is part of the LRP academic-community conference planned for that quarter as part of SCU's Ford Foundation Difficult Dialogues project. (If the Ford funding for the difficult dialogues project does not materialize, Prof. Riley will join them and together they would present their project in a LRP research colloquium for faculty and community leaders that Spring.

On this plan we will have moved a project from an undergraduate course assignment to a research presentation at a conference. Throughout these three stages Riley, Tamayo-Moraga and Joyce will monitor what we are learning about conducting research on local contemplative practices and individuals who could contribute to further studies with an eye to defining the scope and methods for the LRP research project on contemplative practices in the Valley we hope to undertake.

### ***Relevance to past and future teaching and research***

LRP has been a major focus of Prof. Riley's teaching, service and scholarship since returning full-time to the religious studies department Fall 2003.

This project ties into his future research work in two ways: i) as it develops he anticipates participating as one of several faculty studying how local communities are shaped by and engage in the culture and public life of the Silicon Valley; and ii) as LRP director he will support the project by organizing the undergraduate research component and the collaboration with local communities. Prof. Riley will be editing the conference proceedings from the Spring 2007 "Difficult Dialogues" academic/community conference that would include this project (contingent on the Ford Foundation funding). It should be noted that the teaching demands on lecturers leave little time for scholarly research; this project provides an opportunity for Prof. Tamayo-Moraga to develop course materials and projects into research.

Should this project develop into a viable long range project, Prof. Tamayo-Moraga and Fr. Joyce are interested in expanding the practice and study of contemplative projects to other settings, (e.g. gang prevention programs, prisons); and in expanding the field research to oral history-based profiles of individuals engaged in contemplative practices in different

communities in the local area. Both would fit into the book-length study of religion in the Valley that Dr. Riley is planning.

This project ties into future teaching by providing focus and potentially materials for two of Prof. Riley's courses under development: the "Religions@SiliconValley" seminar offered in Spring 2006 and a mid-level course on inter-faith dialogue in the region to be offered during the 2006-07 academic year. As outlined above, the project also feeds into two different courses Prof. Tamayo-Moraga is developing over the same time period.

### ***Relevance to Bannan Institute Criteria for Funding***

This project ties directly to criteria cited in the Bannan grant overview (<http://www.scu.edu/ignatiancenter/bannan/grants/index.cfm>)

Integration of teaching and scholarship: This project begins within courses offered by Prof. Tamayo-Moraga, engages students in research in the community, ends with a scholarly presentation at either a SCU conference or LRP research colloquium, and lays the groundwork for additional research in the area. It thus illustrates the integration of teaching and scholarship Bannan supports, and provides one way of realizing the teaching scholar vision embraced by the University's faculty.

Education of the whole person: Like other LRP endeavors, this project captures multiple facets of the integrated education at the heart of the University's current strategic plan. It helps students bridge classroom and community work; it provides the opportunity to connect spiritual formation and intellectual inquiry; and its comparative dimensions help students see their studies within a global context.

### The practical Spirituality of the Spiritual Exercises

Although not literally focused on Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises, this project takes students very much into the heart of that tradition. Through the course readings, workshops and community-based research students will experience for themselves and speak with one another and individuals in various walks of life in the Valley about the benefits and challenges of integrating contemplative practices into one's daily life and spiritual journey. Students will have the opportunity to discover the ways in which both theistic and non-theistic contemplative practices can reveal and support the compassion and wisdom required that underpin a commitment to social justice at a personal and communal level. The comparative aspect of the project again allows students to see how these practices are grounded in and developed by two major faith traditions, Buddhism and Catholicism. In addition, the comparative aspect will provide students with the tools necessary to ask difficult questions about fundamental differences between non-theistic and theistic contemplative practices. The project has the potential to engage students in various ways, from deeply personal and potentially transformative spiritual practice to simply seeing the pragmatic value of maintaining a spiritual and reflective component in one's life.

### ***Grants and fellowships received during the past three year***

In Spring 2003 LRP received two internal grants: CML and TSC funded student hires to complete field work, prepare materials for a Local Religion Project web site for use in religious studies classes, and pilot collaboration with a high school. In Fall 2003 LRP received a Thomas Terry curriculum development grant for further documentation and a

portion of the Valley of the Gods series, and a TSC grant for software and multimedia equipment. LRP was also part of a FS-RAP grant during the 2003-04 academic year. Prof. Tamayo-Moraga received a professional development grant that led to the development of one of the courses included in this project.

***Publication Or Other Results Of Most Recent Internal Grant Completed***

Research completed by Prof. Riley and undergraduates through the LRP internal grants has yielded the following: “Inter-religious Encounter and the Local Religion Project,” *Explore* (Spring 2005) (part of a longer study on teaching local religion for *Teaching Theology and Religion*); “Local Religion Project,” a paper presented to the AAR Western Regional Meeting (Spring 2004) by David Laws (SCU 04) and Philip Boo Riley; “Local Religion, Images and Teaching Religion,” a paper presented to the AAR Western Regional Meeting (Spring 2005) by Ashley Ator; and a proposal to the Ford Foundation for funding through their Difficult Dialogues initiative, “Representing Religious Diversity in Public” (October 2005).

***Itemized Budget***

Please send an e-mail to [priley@scu.edu](mailto:priley@scu.edu) to see the itemized budget.