

# Eisenman teaches "objective" religion

by Robert Breunig

Bob Eisenman is a professor of religious studies who believes that many students' sense of truth has been damaged, probably as a result of their early religious upbringing.

Religious studies attract upwards of 1,000 students to the classes of two full-time faculty persons at CSULB—part of a national boom in the secular study of religion.

Eisenman believes that the study of religion is crucial on a secular campus. He is quick to point out that he and his faculty associate, Tony Battaglia, do not teach religious dogma, but instead examine religious experience objectively and within a critical intellectual framework.

In this context, Eisenman says, "It is interesting to share the reactions of students whose only knowledge concerning religion is the dogma taught them as children. For many, the objective study of religion is upsetting and they are filled with considerable anxiety.

The sense of truth of these students has been severely damaged; they find it difficult to examine religious history critically and factually without feeling threatened. Yet the very progenitors of their religious background would no doubt have laid it upon them as a prime responsibility to get at the truth of any historical happening or religious event.

"If, for example, students cannot look at the Old Testament objectively and not simply as 'the Word of God' and see that there are actually several different textual lines at work there, some of which sometimes conflict, then how are they to come to an objective decision about questions posed by the 'Nixon tapes'? Their damaged sense of truth," he believes, "later leads to an inability to separate out what is possible and what is impossible in every day life."

In his two years at the University, Eisenman has also taught the literature and religion of the Old Testament; the history of Jewish thought; Western religious thought; the Koran and Islamic civilization; and religion in 19th and 20th century literature.

"Religious studies is getting a push from students," Eisenman believes, "because such teaching uses a secular, non-denominational, yet not impious approach. The teaching might therefore turn out to be different from what one might expect from one's own priests, ministers, or rabbis. To bolster a student's sense of truth with regard to his religious



Robert Eisenman, Professor of Religious Studies at CSULB, believes that the objective study of religion has an important place on a secular campus. Approximately 1,000 students have enrolled in religion courses at CSULB—part of a trend evident on a number of campuses throughout the nation.

heritage, the educational setting is cultural and the approach is critical. There is no preaching."

Eisenman's interests are not bounded by time or circumstance. He looks at the post-Civil War period as a time in which the direction of the American nation was radically changed. "America was never the same after that," he believes. "The nation lost more than immense numbers of persons killed and wounded and property destroyed. Perhaps the most destructive and lasting result of the war, despite the freeing of the slaves, was the loss of the American sense of righteousness and pioneer spirit. This was the dividing line in American history where the balance was tipped in the direction of acquisitiveness.

"I believe that if Lincoln had not been killed, there would have been an opportunity to reconstruct the country in a more equitable, socially righteous manner. The post-war period was marked by vast exploitation of the land and resources, destruction of the Indians, herds of buffalo, and the importation of millions of persons in an indiscriminate manner for the purposes of cheap labor.

"The country has never had that wonderful sense of purpose, honor and spirit since; and as a reflection of this, we have not had the same statesmanship and leadership in the second hundred years we had in the first hundred years."

Eisenman is enthusiastic concerning two events which will occur this coming academic year. On Nov. 8 the Religious Studies program will sponsor a presentation by a world-renowned collector of folklore, Deben Bhattacharya. "This will be relevant for us," Dr. Eisenman believes, "for this is folk religion as it is expressed among the people in music, art, dance, poetry and folklore."

"The title of the program is 'Mysticism in Folk Religions' and Deben Bhattacharya will project film never seen in America dealing with the Bauls of Bengal, a mystic sect of folk musicians of East India; the music and religion from Temple Island in Bali, Indonesia — an ethnic Southeast Asian expression of Hinduism; and the Whirling Dervishes of Turkey, dancing and singing sufis living in the heart of Anatolia. The Dervish footage is the first such presentation in

## Summer Session

# Critics featured in culture course

Film critic Charles Champlin, pop music critic Robert Hilburn, drama critic Dan Sullivan and music critic Martin Bernheimer, all reviewers for the Los Angeles *Times*, are among the featured speakers for a summer class at CSULB.

"Culture in Los Angeles" is a directed exposure to the theatre, music, art exhibits, dance productions, films and museums in Los Angeles. The course is offered as part of the CSULB 1975 Summer Sessions program. Sponsored by the Comparative Literature Dept., it will meet every Monday and Wednesday evening, 6:30-9:30 p.m., from June 23 to July 18.

Students in the class will meet reviewers from the *Times* personally in class interviews. The course will consist of guest speakers and attending and discussing various amateur and professional cultural activities, all at reduced rates.

Helen Mossman, graduate assistant in the Comparative Literature Department, has been handling the reservations for group trips and class speakers for instructor Roberta Markman. Markman is currently on sabbatical leave from CSULB. She is working on a book about Thomas Mann, researching at the Thomas Mann Archives in Switzerland.

"In the past, this course has been like a journalism class," Mossman said. "The students wrote reviews on everything they saw."

"This year," she continued, "we are trying to make it an interdisciplinary experience...to show how the arts are interrelated. We want to make it a more direct experience."

Mossman said that part of the course goals are to discover the pleasure that comes through better understanding of the arts and to experience the excitement stimulated by sharing personal insights in the group discussions.

Enrollment, she said, has been limited to 25 to enhance personal contact between student and teacher and to encourage individual participation in

discussions.

According to Mossman, arrangements have already been made to see "The Island" at the Mark Taper Forum and "The Magic Show" at the Shubert Theatre. She hopes to arrange a special tour of the UCLA art exhibits.

The three-unit class will have a total of eight three-hour group sessions and eight three-hour independent experiences worked out in group blocks and independent community visitations.

For more information, contact the Summer Session Office at CSULB.

## Metrics system examined

In the not-too-distant future, Americans will be buying milk, wine and gasoline by the liter instead of by the quart and gallon. Butter and meat will be purchased in grams and kilograms rather than in ounces and pounds. Perhaps even the quarterback of a football team will be tackled for a ten-meter loss.

To help ease the confusion of America's move towards the metric system, a special summer course entitled "Workshop in Metrics" will be offered at CSULB from June 23 to August 1.

The course will take an interdisciplinary focus and be team taught by George Randall, Industrial Education; Marina Krause, Elementary Education; and Kathy Morris, Home Economics. After two weeks of general introduction to the metric system, the class will be divided into groups specializing in business and industrial applications, teaching metrics and consumer education.

According to Randall, the course material will be well within the grasp of the layman. The instruction will cover all seven units of the international metric system and how to convert from English units. The history of the metric system and why America is changing to it will also be discussed.

Randall claims a knowledge of metrics has and will become increasingly valuable in the United States. Congress, he says, is likely to pass legislation that will provide for a voluntary ten-year conversion period, at the end of which metric units would predominate in the U.S.

The federal government and a number of state and local agencies are

already converting to the metric system, says Randall, and international trade is requiring business and industry to adopt conversion programs. "IBM, for example, recently embarked on a ten-year program to implement the metric system as the company's basic form of measurement," he said.

Persons interested in enrolling for the course should contact the Summer Session Office at CSULB. Students in the workshop may elect credit in Elementary Education, Secondary Education, Industrial Arts, or Home Economics.

## Eisenman

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the world. The sect has been outlawed in modern Turkey since the Attaturk revolution of the 1920's. The Dervish ritual has persisted underground as an expression of the folk culture of its people.

A second event of significance is a one-day panel presentation dealing with American Indian Religion and featuring John Bierhorst, well-known author and authority on Indian affairs; Gary Snyder, one of the original "Beat" poets, now returned from a decade of living in Buddhist monasteries in Japan; and N. Scott Momaday, one of the most respected American Indian writers and poets.

The scope of interest developed by the faculty of the Religious Studies program encompasses all the world's peoples. All are examined with respect. All examined fairly. The first and only commandment for the work is "Search for the truth."

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