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THE STUDY OF RELIGIONS IN AMERICA AND
THE DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SANTA
BARBARA

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The article¹ discusses the American study of religions as it has been reflected in the history of a particular university department, namely the Department of Religious Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. It is the department I know a great deal about; I met its first faculty members in the 1960s shortly after the department was established when I was undergraduate student studying philosophy and I had the great fortune to return to the campus in 1974 for my teaching and research career until the present; when I first came to the campus it had barely 6,500 students and 320 faculty members and when I returned for my career it had grown to 16,000 and today has 22,500 students and 1,100 faculty members. When I joined the faculty there were only 7 of us; today we have 27 and we are conducting two searches this academic year (in American religious history and in Jewish Studies). My department is among the oldest programs in the study of religion in public universities in North America; this year we will mark our 50th anniversary.

The story of my department is also the story of the American study of religions since the middle of the 20th century. Of course, we Americans have very curious senses of time and history; we think 50 years is a long time. You know that the study of religion in Europe is much longer than our meager half century. However, the story of my department will I think have resonance with your experiences.

1 The article grows out of a lecture presented 8th and 9th October 2012. I would like to thank Tomáš Bubík for making all of the arrangements for our visit in the Czech Republic and Professor David Václavík for his kind invitation to speak to the faculty members and researcher who are interested in the study of religions. As some of you may know, Tomáš spent the past academic year with us in the Department of Religious Studies. In our first meeting I told Tomáš about my previous two trips to Prague, the first in 1979 on my way to Odessa to find members of my extended family and the second in 2010 when everything had changed. My wife and I wanted to return to spend a bit more time here and to meet colleagues in the Czech universities. I recognized in Tomáš a kindred-spirit in how we understood the study of religions and the challenges it faces today. He encouraged me to speak on how the American study of religions has been reflected in my department.

1. TAKING STOCK OF THE AMERICAN STUDY OF RELIGION

In 1959, the distinguished historian of religions Joseph Kitagawa wrote a short essay in which he attempted to lay out the history of the study of religion in the United States from the perspective of *Religionswissenschaft*. Looking back the essay is fascinating. He began by quoting Joachim Wach a decade before at a conference celebrating the sixtieth birthday of Gerardus van der Leeuw that there was no one method that could characterize the "history of religions." Kitagawa noted the specific history of the United States made for an environment in which the relations between Protestantism and Catholicism and between Christianity and Judaism did not provoke much interest in religions beyond these three which had been present from the colonial period onward.² However, in the years following the Civil War interest in the world's religions became widespread in America as philosophers, theologians, philologists, historians and ethnographers became fascinated with comparison or the comparative approach. For example, Samuel Johnson, a Unitarian minister, published a very popular book titled *Oriental Religions and Their Relations to Universal Religion* (1875); Boston University appointed William Fairfield Warren, author of *The Quest of the Perfect Religion*, as its first professor of comparative theology and of the history and philosophy of religion in 1873; in the 1880s and 1890s chairs in the philosophy of religions and comparative religions were being established in Princeton Theological Seminary, Cornell University, Harvard University, and the University of Chicago; the first professional society for the study of religion, the American Society of Comparative Religion, was founded in 1890; in 1892 a committee representing Columbia University, Cornell, Johns Hopkins, University of Pennsylvania, Yale, and several others established "The American Lectures on the History of Religions."

Kitagawa, along with many recent scholars, pointed to the World Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893 as being the most significant event to stimulate interest and the study of religion. But this was not direct. Most of the participants and supporters of the parliament were interested in the possibility of the unity of all religions and were far-removed from what might be described as the infant scholarly study of religion or what we might call the religio-scientific study of religions. Nevertheless, the history of religions and comparative religion – however they might be interpreted – became favorite subjects in various educational institutions in America. For example, he noted that the Foreign Missions Boards of the Christian Church of America and Canada thought it necessary that all theological schools, irrespective of denominations, provide young missionary candidates with instruction in comparative religion.

2 This description would not be judged as correct today with more recent scholarship on Native American religions and also African traditional religions and Islam which came to the American colonies with the slave trade.

Kitagawa argued that the widespread interest and validation of the study of comparative religion or the history of religions in American universities and seminaries was supported by the "religious liberalism" of the first three decades of the twentieth century. But this trend began to decline in the 1930's with what Kitagawa described as "the theological renaissance." I think he meant the growth of American Fundamentalist and Evangelical denominations which began to take hold of the seminaries of those same institutions which were so positive about the study of religion thirty or forty years before. A harbinger of this was the State of Tennessee *vs* John Scopes, the famous "Monkey Trial" which took place in 1925.

The very same philosophers, theologians and social scientist who were fascinated with the comparative study of religion, now turned against *Religionswissenschaft* and denied its integrity as an academic discipline. Their critique was focused around four major points, according to Kitagawa. First, the study of religion is really a poor stepchild of the philosophy of religion, and historians of religions should acknowledge that and join the philosophers in demonstrating that all religions are manifestations of or a search for one underlying primordial "religion." Second, there were those who argued that the so-called objective approach of the study of religion is not rigorous enough and religion scholars should be more rigorous and objective, apprenticing themselves to anthropologists, sociologists, philologists, and historians. Third, historians of religions do not take seriously enough the subjective elements involved in the study of religions. Here, Kitagawa quotes Wilfred Cantwell Smith's example of the scholars of religion being like flies on a goldfish bowl always looking into bowl and contributing much to an understanding of how the goldfish are but never asking how it might feel to be a goldfish in the bowl.³ Of course, this is the issue that later crystalizes in the distinction between emic (the account written from within the culture) and etic (which strives to be culturally neutral). Finally, there can be no real history of religions because the religion scholar is incurably conditioned by his own religious and cultural backgrounds from which he can never liberate himself. What concerned Kitagawa most with these criticisms is the basic unclarity of the discipline of the history of religions in the academic curriculum in the United States. These criticisms are eerily like the criticisms and debates that we have sixty or more years later. And, the lack of clarity Kitagawa saw may be lessened as the discipline has been normalized as a component of the arts and humanities, and the social sciences. Kitagawa might also be concerned by how omnipresent the issue of religion has become in large part because of the new global renaissance of religion of the past forty or so years. Those who might have dismissed religion as epiphenomenal are quick to point out the importance of religion, but they do

3 Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "The Comparative Study of Religion," *Inaugural Lectures* (Montreal: McGill University, 1950), p. 42.

so from a perspective which is woefully absent of any formal training or extensive reading in the history and theory of the study of religion.

Kitagawa had much more to say about the study of religion in the United States, including his conclusion that the confusion about the history religions in undergraduate programs is the result of the lack of adequate graduate training centers for *Religionswissenschaft* in North America or his argument that the *Religionswissenschaft* is to be located between normative disciplines and descriptive discipline or that it represent a particularly novel fusion of both. However, the most fascinating element of his entire analysis is that it is only predicated upon private colleges and universities and theological institutions. Kitagawa knew that there were courses in the study of religion in public colleges and universities, with rare exceptions (such as the School of Religion at the University of Iowa). But what was the situation in the public schools? It is here, I think, that the example of my department becomes important.

2. THE QUIET REVOLUTION

The first discussions about offering courses in the study of religion took place at UCSB in 1954, a decade after the campus' founding and when the campus was still in its early years of transition from a State Teachers College to the fourth campus of the University of California (Berkeley was founded in 1868; San Francisco in 1873; UCLA in 1919; UCSB in 1944; Riverside in 1954; Davis in 1959; San Diego in 1960; Irvine in 1965; Santa Cruz 1965; Merced in 2005). Professor D. Mackenzie Brown (1908-1987) of the Political Science department was made chair of a faculty committee which recommended that courses in religion be offered on the campus.

Mackenzie Brown had no seminary education and this fact alone set the first courses and then the department on a very different course than private universities where the programs or departments were either segments of divinity schools or where the majority of the faculty were from the divinity schools. I have found no evidence that he even belonged to a religious community in Santa Barbara. His interest in the study of religion seems to have arisen from his research. By the time he was made chair of the faculty committee which recommended offering courses in the study of religion he had already published his *The White Umbrella: Indian Political Thought from Manu to Gandhi* (1953) and later would publish *The Nationalist Movement: Indian Political Thought from Ramade to Bhave* (1961). Both of these books suggest that Mackenzie Brown realized that it was not possible to understand the politics of South Asia without understanding of its religions of South Asia. Thus, he situated the study of religion within an institutional context (here I understand politics as institution) and not in the history of religious ideas. Indeed, the first course was titled "Religious Institutions" and was offered by Mackenzie Brown in 1958. As its title suggested the initial orientation of the courses were toward sociology and the social sciences. However,

D. Mackenzie Brown who continued to chair an interdisciplinary committee which oversaw this course and another, later would become the program's first chair, thought of these courses as providing a background for students who might wish to pursue a career in the "ministry" like many other courses which were intended to provide pre-professional training. In 1961 Mackenzie Brown committee put forward a proposal for a major (a study program) in "Religious Institutions" which would provide "a preparatory background of studies for individuals planning post-graduate work or careers in the field of theology." The response of the reviewing agencies and other established departments, program and majors was negative and a year later the major's revised proposal now stated the mission of these courses as being "designed for students desiring a general education with emphasis upon this aspect of Western civilization and comparative cultures."

The infant program benefitted in the early years from one of Mackenzie Brown's young charismatic doctoral student by the name of Larry Adams. Adams was interested in the European classical conservative political tradition which began with Edmund Burke and which led him to the American political journalist Walter Lippmann and to the Protestant liberal theologian Reinhold Niebuhr. It was Lippmann who coined the term "the great society" which would be led by educated elites and Niebuhr's understanding of the social gospel – one of the ways that the great society could be advanced was through reading the teaching of Jesus as providing a map for a new social world. Adams taught the Religious Institutions course twice every year from 1960 until 1963. Adams also read the "New Frontier" of President John Fitzgerald Kennedy as another example of synthesis of liberal religion and liberal politics.

The development of the nucleus of what would become the Department of Religious Studies reflected a slow change in the academic study of religion that had begun after World War II. The study of religion was developing as a field distinct from theology in many public universities and colleges, and this development was taking place without the resolution of the U.S. constitutional problem. Did the study of religion violate the First Amendment of the Constitution of separation of religion and state? Robert Michaelsen who had begun his career at the School of Religion at the University of Iowa before becoming the second chairman at Santa Barbara described this as a "quiet revolution" in that it was taking place "under the radar" and without this central question being resolved.

In 1963 the program made its first appointments, hiring W. Richard Comstock who had a Th.D. from Union Theological Seminary and Walter H. Capps who had his Ph.D. from Yale University, both hired as Assistant Professors. The program also achieved the status of a Department with Mackenzie Brown as its first chairman. Capps taught courses in the history of Christian thought ("Christianity from Augustine to Luther" and "Contemporary Trends in Christian Theology") Comstock had written his doctoral dissertation on George Santayana and he offered a number of "Religion and...", including "Religion and Science," "Religion and Literature," and "Religion and Existentialism." The courses which

seek to demonstrate the complex relationships between religion and culture have remained the most avidly attended courses in the department from its inception to the present. These religion and culture courses enroll almost twice as many students as a traditions based course (e.g., contemporary Catholicism), and include courses like religion and contemporary art, religion and journalism, the impact of the Vietnam War on American religion and culture, religion, archaeology and material culture, religion and healing, religion and film, religion and contemporary music, religion and literature, and religion and philosophy.

Capps, while hired to teach the history of Christian thought, was interested in the history of religious studies and his last published book is *Religious Studies: The Making of a Discipline* (2000), but there were earlier works including *Ways of Understanding Religion* (1971), and others on monasticism, Native American religions, and mysticism. Capps also became involved in the California Council on the Humanities, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and successfully ran for the United States House of Representatives in 1996 (unfortunately Capps died of a massive heart attack after serving for only a few short months). From the very beginning the department with these two foundational appointments was interested in a broad and comparative view of religion, and not religious traditions. Here, I must note that Capps was a liberal Swedish Lutheran in his religious orientation and a few years after he was joined by Birger Pearson who offered courses in Christian origins and Gnosticism (he was one of the first persons recruited by James Robinson to participate in the Nag Hammadi translation project) and Gerald Larson (who specialized in madyamika Hindu philosophy, but who was intensely interested in Marxism and Jean-Paul Sartre). All three were liberal Swedish Lutherans and the first fifteen years of the department's intellectual life was impacted by other Swedish scholars, most importantly, Geo Widengren and Lke Hultakrantz who were committed to comparative study.

3. THE SCHEMPPE DECISION AND THE WELCH REPORT

Two events transformed the study of religion in the United States in the decade of the 1960s. The first one was the Supreme Court decision in Abington Township (Pennsylvania) *vs* Schempp in 1963, just as the small program in the study of religion at Santa Barbara was moving from a handful of courses to a program and then to an independent department. The second event was the completion at the end of the decade of a national survey of graduate education in religion, referred to as the Welch Report after its director Claude Welch.

The public place of religion is determined by our separation of church and state as enshrined in the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. This amendment is often described as the amendment of "Freedom of Religion and Expression" and states as follows: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging

the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble and to petition the government for a redress of grievances." There are two clauses with regard to the freedom of religion: the establishment clause ("Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion") and the free exercise clause ("or prohibiting the free exercise thereof"). Schempp was a Unitarian Universalist who challenged a Pennsylvania state law that dated from 1928 requiring "at least ten verses from the Holy Bible be read without comment at the opening of each school day." Schempp believed that specific religious doctrines were presented in the literal reading of the Bible and these were contrary to their family understanding. Two federal courts had struck down the Pennsylvania law but the Abington School District appealed their decisions to the Supreme Court. The Court found in an 8 to 1 decision that school sponsored Bible reading was unconstitutional, it violated the establishment clause of the First Amendment. Justice Tom Clark wrote the opinion for the court and there are two distinctive parts of the decision. First, Clark wrote "The reading of the verses, even without comment, possesses a devotional and religious character and constitutes in effect a religious observance." Pennsylvania sought to retain the law by providing exemptions for students and parents who objected to the reading of the Bible verses. However, Schempp contested this change arguing that the exemption would necessarily change the relationships between his children and their teachers and fellow students. Clark's opinion was very clear as to the Court's understanding of the reading of the verses. "Since the state," he wrote, "requires that the reading of the 'Holy Bible,' a Christian document, the practice prefers the Christian religion." The original law made no mention of which Bible was to be read – was it the Catholic Douay translation, the Hebrew Bible, or the King James Versions. The Abington Township required the teachers to use the King James translation and would penalize teachers who did not enforce the law in their classrooms. Clark addressed the issue even more bluntly: "It was the intention of the Pennsylvania Commonwealth to introduce a religious ceremony into the public schools of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania," and thus violated the establishment clause. The Court's decision laid to rest the argument that the Establishment Clause was intended only to forbid government from "establishing" or manifesting a preference for one religious tradition over others. Justice Clark cited Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black in an earlier case (*Torcaso vs Watkins*) who reaffirmed that neither a State nor the Federal Government can constitutionally force a person to believe or disbelieve in any religion. Neither the State nor the Federal Government, Justice Black continued, can constitutionally pass laws or impose requirements which aid all religions as against non-believers or secularists, nor can they aid a religious community with a specific feature of a religion (e.g., belief in the existence of God) against others with different features or structures. The Pennsylvania law

4 For more on the decision see for example Robert R. Mathisen, *Critical Issues in American Religious History* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2006), chapter 14, § 123.

requiring Bible reading and the recitation of the Lord's Prayer in its public school clearly violated this neutrality.

In the second part of the opinion, Clark wrote of the place of religion within education and lives of American citizens. The breadth of Clark's thought was unexpected. He argued that religious ideas are valuable to the citizens of the United States and thus, regardless of the religious identities or religious convictions of its citizens, the court must remain scrupulously neutral in matters of religion, while "protecting all, prefer[ing] none, and disparag(ing) none." This line of analysis was prescient; the 1965 Immigration Reform Act would dramatically transform the American religious landscape, or as one of my colleagues Ninian Smart, who joined the department in 1978, remarked "it was no longer necessary to go to Benares to find Hindus; all one needed to do was look across the lawn or backyard fence and speak with your neighbor."

The center piece of Justice Clark's opinion read as follows:

[...] It might well be said that one's education is not complete without a study of comparative religion or the history of religion and its relationship to the advancement of civilization. It certainly may be said that the Bible is worthy of study for its literary and historical qualities. Nothing we have said here indicates that such a study of the Bible or of religion, when presented objectively as part of a secular program of education, may not be effected consistent with the First Amendment.⁵

Clark would later abbreviate this portion of the Court's opinion by stating that the First Amendment prohibits the teaching of religion in public schools, colleges and universities, but not the teaching about religion.

Justice William J. Brennan wrote a lengthy concurrence in which he sought to elaborate the Constitution's framers intent of the First Amendment in order to provide a modern defense of the First Amendment in response to the critics of the Court's decision in the *Engel v. Vitali* case (where the Court struck down the use of government written prayers in public institutions in 1962) who argued that there was a long-standing tradition of the recitation of prayer in many areas of public life going back to the framers of the constitution and the Bill of Rights. Brennan noted the ambiguities in the history of the First Amendment, but stated:

Whatever Jefferson or Madison would have thought of Bible reading and the recital of the Lord's Prayer in...public schools..., our use of the history...must limit itself to broad purposes, not specifics...[Pennsylvania and the Abington schools] offend the First Amendment because they sufficiently threaten in our day those substantive evils the fear of which called forth the Establishment Clause. Our interpretation of the First Amendment must necessarily be responsive to the much more highly charged nature of religious questions in contemporary

⁵ Available for example at: http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/dispatch_textbook.cfm?smtID=3&psid=4087.

society. A too literal quest for the advice of Founding Fathers upon the issues of these cases seems to me futile and misdirected.⁶

There are several important aspects of Brennan's opinion. First, the intent (i.e., "the specifics") of the Framers is not the most important issue in determining the whether or not the First Amendment has been abrogated. The very same concerns (i.e., "broad purposes") which summoned the First Amendment remain at issue for contemporary Americans. In other words, the concerns of the Framers and contemporary Americans citizens are the same. Second, Brennan noted the First Amendment must be attentive to the fact that today religious questions are even more highly charged. This means that the First Amendment is the guardian of pluralism and thus the basic flaw in the Pennsylvania law was its lack of appreciation of the pluralistic nature of American society and indeed that this 1963 view of pluralism is an essential part of the American ethos.

Joachim Wach used the term "self-emancipation" to describe how the study of religion developed or evolved from 19th century theological schools and institutes in Europe. We might describe the impact of the Schempp Decision on the study of religion in the United States as a "second" self-emancipation. More than 700 departments and undergraduate and graduate programs were established in the 30 years following the Schempp Decision. Many state boards of education adopted standards and frameworks for the study of religion K-12; for example, the study of religion was integrated into the California public schools 9th grade social studies curriculum in 1987. Yet, the impact of the Schempp Decision was uneven, especially in places with long traditions in which the study of religion was thoroughly identified with theological education. For example, Rebecca Raphael reported in her "Religious Studies in Texas: A Mission without a Major" (Leadership Workshop, 2007 American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, San Diego) that ninety-eight percent of the faculty at the multiple campuses of the University of Texas believe that religion has an important role in domestic and international affairs. Yet, ten percent of the same faculty continue to believe that the study of religion in a public university is unconstitutional.⁷

Another important outcome of the Schempp Decision was that it also stimulated or energized departments of religion at universities where there were also theological seminaries. These seminaries often provided the majority of faculty members for these departments or programs and also exercised considerable power in defining the subjects of study or how the study of religion was organized, giving much greater authority to examination of textual traditions. Here, of course, the model for study came directly from biblical studies. Asian religions were not fully

⁶ Available for example at: <http://caselaw.lp.findlaw.com/scripts/getcase.pl?court=US&vol=370&invol=421>.

⁷ "The Religion Major and Liberal Education – A White Paper," *Religious Studies News*, 23.4 (October, 2008).

integrated into these departments, but existed on the periphery in programs of Chinese, Japanese, and Indic languages and literatures. The Schempp Decision provided new energy for these departments and programs to chart their own development and new faculty appointments.

Certainly, the department at Santa Barbara came into being as a direct result of the Schempp Decision. While there were a few classes as we noted earlier, the quiet revolution was now given a mandate, a legal and intellectual foundation for expansion. The department was founded as a department in 1964 and a number of important appointments were made which set the direction of the department and clearly separated it from a theological model. In 1967, Thomas O'Dea was appointed to the faculty. O'Dea came from Columbia where he was already a senior sociologist of religion – he had written a classic book on the Mormons, another book on the crisis within the Catholic Church after the Second Vatican Council, a textbook on the sociology of religion, and a very important essay on Catholicism in America in the *Daedalus* issue "Religion in America"⁸ which also contained Robert Bellah's extraordinary essay on Civil Religion in America⁹. Wilbur Fridell joined the faculty to teach courses in Asian religions, although his specialization was the 20th century Japanese religions prior to WWII. Jonathan Z. Smith was also appointed in 1967 to offer courses on Judaism, Greco-Roman Religions and the New Testament while he was finishing his dissertation at Yale University. The department also opened its first graduate degree program, an M.A. in Religious Studies and the university approved the formation of the Institute of Religious Studies which was intended to advance faculty research and support academic conferences. Of equal importance, was the appointment of Mircea Eliade as a Visiting Professor for the 1966-67 academic year. Eliade offered two courses – an undergraduate course on yoga and the first seminar in theory and method taught with Thomas O'Dea for the new graduate students.

If Robert Michaelsen's term "the quiet revolution" was accurate for the development of the study of religion after WWII, the development of Religious Studies after the Schempp Decision quickly became a loud roar. One of the most important documents we have from the first decade after the Schempp Decision is a survey study sponsored by the American Council of Learned Societies and the Henry Luce Foundation, Inc., and directed by Claude Welch, titled *Graduate Education in Religion: A Critical Appraisal*¹⁰ (1971). Welch was a scholar

⁸„Religion in America,“ special issue of the *Daedalus, Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 1.96 (Winter 1967).

For a discussion on Bellah's concept of Civil Religion and its inspiring comparison with Czech philosophy of religion see Tomáš Bubík, "Robert Bellah's Concept of Civil Religion in America and the Idea of New Religion in Czech Thinking of the Twentieth Century," *American and British Studies Annual* 5 (2012): 70-83.

Claude Welch, *Graduate Education in Religion: A Critical Appraisal* (Missoula: University of Montana Press, 1971).

of Protestant thought who began the project while being a faculty member of the University of Pennsylvania and concluded it as the President of the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California. The study came to be known simply as "the Welch Report," named after its director. The report was intended to guide the expansion of the study of religion, whose researchers believed was only partially due to the Schempp Decision. The United States economy in the late 1960s and early 1970s had slowed considerably and while it was not technically declared a recession, times were tough and universities and colleges had to invest their funds in programs of high caliber and intellectual worth. The writers of the report were keenly aware of this and a substantial component of the report is how to increase academic quality and rigor. The fiscal impact on the study of religion has been judged as the report's most important contribution.

The Advisory Committee was made up of senior scholars and administrators from eight private universities (Notre Dame, Jewish Theological Seminary, Yale University, Vanderbilt University, Duke University, Columbia University, Princeton University, and Harvard University) and only two public universities (Indiana University and the University of Iowa). Despite the absence of significant numbers of scholars from the newly emerging departments and programs involved with the Advisory Committee, the project noted that one of the most significant events in the recent history of the study of religion was the significant (although not yet massive) establishment of programs in Religious Studies in public universities in both the United States and Canada. The study also noted the changes taking place in the graduate study of religion where new Ph.D. programs were being established in public and private universities which had no theological schools attached to them. The study also took note of the fact that some theological schools were in a state of ferment, with one powerful tendency being what the report called "clustering" of these schools with other institutions. Welch wrote:

Further, in the recent general studies of higher education, neither the magnitude of undergraduate and graduate religious studies, nor the changes that have taken place in them, has been noted or interpreted.

As a major attack, therefore, on the problems of the development of religious studies at all levels, we proposed a critical review of graduate programs in the field of religion in the United States and Canada. Our intention was both to assist in the formation of policy for the future and to provide a body of reliable information and assessment to which educators, administrators, and public servants could turn.¹¹

The writers of the report used a survey to collect their data and reached nineteen conclusions and recommendations. Among these were that graduate education in the study of religion must include more extensive exploration of the several methodologies, including linguistic, historical, philosophical, sociological,

¹¹ Welch, *Graduate Education in Religion*, viii.

anthropological, and phenomenological or as we might describe today, interdisciplinary. They suggested that certain areas of the study of religion which were not well represented in the discipline's earlier stages, including Eastern religious traditions, Islam, African religions, African American religious experience in North America must be included. They concluded that graduate studies in religion need to be strengthened by fuller attention to the social scientific approaches to religion, including sociology, psychology, and anthropology. Here perhaps they were thinking of how to broaden the inherited theological model of the study of religion which had given such great emphasis to textual studies. The writers concluded that one of the most important issues that needed attention was the creation of devices for over-all planning in the use of resources and for the allocation of responsibility for the development of particular fields of specialization. The report also called for the creation of a scholarly and administrative body that might help guide the graduate study of religion in North America. This recommendation was realized almost immediately in the creation of the Council for the Study of Religion whose first president was Walter Capps. The report also called for closer contacts between the various learned societies in the study of religion which led to the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature holding their national meetings together, and closer ties between American learned societies and the International Association of the History of Religions and other professional associations in Europe.

Perhaps most controversial of the report's recommendations was its call for the significant reduction of doctoral programs in religion and theology, though as the report stated, in a few instances new programs should be encouraged and supported. For many in public universities this recommendation was seen as an effort by the old guard, pre-Schempp Decision, departments to establish a two tier system – the private universities would be the places where doctoral studies would be conducted and the public universities would be confined to undergraduate programs and a few M.A. programs which might serve as “feeder” programs to the private universities. The absence of graduate programs in public universities would also mean that the differential budgeting systems which gave more state funding to graduate programs would negatively impact the public university programs.

I. THE PARADIGM SHIFT

The department at Santa Barbara was an example of several of the report's main recommendations. It was interdisciplinary from its very beginnings having a real commitment to both the humanistic and social scientific studies of religion. After Thomas O'Dea died in 1974, the social scientific study of religion was continued by Phillip Hammond who came to the department after collaborating with Robert Bellah on the study of civil religions outside the United States, and then in the 1980s with Wade Clark Roof's interest in mainline Protestant churches,

the “baby boomers” and the religion of “Generation X,” and then in the 1990s with Roger Friedland's interests in social theory and state formation (or religion and politics). The department also learned quite early that the success of its graduate program and its students was dependent upon language study. This was particularly difficult in the early years because the campus administration was not entirely convinced that Sanskrit and Hebrew should be offered in the department. The battle over language study has largely been won – we currently offer Sanskrit, Pali, Tibetan, Turkish, Classical Persian and Farsi, Biblical Hebrew and other Northwestern Semitic languages like Ugaritic, Aramaic and Syriac, as well as Rabbinic Hebrew and Modern Hebrew, Classical Arabic, Modern Standard Arabic, Medieval Arabic.

In the critical decade of the 1960s there were two paradigms in the study of religion in the United States. First, the one of Paul Tillich who was appointed as a visiting professor twice. Tillich had offered the expansive definition of religion as “ultimate concern” and during the early years of the department and indeed the public university study of religion provided a particularly powerful interpretation of religion that made it possible to see culture as religion or having religious dimensions. But, Tillich was a theologian who in the end had to square his normative beliefs with ultimate concern as is evident in his *Systematic Theology*.¹² But there was a second paradigm for the study of religion – that of Mircea Eliade and his “morphology of the sacred.”

Both of these paradigms were represented in later appointments made in my department. In 1972, Raimundo Panikkar joined the faculty and represented the continuation of the Tillichian paradigm. Panikkar was a Catholic priest who had doctoral degrees in Chemistry and Philosophy and saw his work as a grand effort to develop dialogue between religious traditions and communities. He was a religious genius whose work was a product of the Second Vatican Council. He played a very significant role in the department's development. His theological positions forced the department to distinguish itself from his work, pushing us toward the study of religion which was free from theology.

Ninian Smart joined the faculty in 1977 and represented the phenomenological study of religion, yet his dimensional analysis of religion was quite distinctive from the phenomenology of Eliade. During the first years of his appointment he retained his faculty position at the University of Lancaster and was at Santa Barbara two teaching quarters each year until he retired from Lancaster in 1988. His years at Santa Barbara were quite productive; he published 12 books before his retirement in 2001 and conceptually advanced his ideas of “religion on the ground,” “worldview analysis” and the “comparative philosophies of religions.” He exercised considerable influence within the department and its self-definition. We were a department of religion which did comparative work, was interested in

¹² Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951–1963).

religious traditions in regard to how they influenced our understanding of religion as a human phenomenon, rather than simply a collection of specialized fields. Smart served as President of the American Academy of Religion near the end of his career, and joined several others before him and after including Michaelsen, Catherine Albanese, Charles Long, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Ann Taves.

There is no shortage of colleagues in the study of religion who remember the field being driven and dominated by the “Chicago School” of the history of religion, and more particularly, the phenomenology of Eliade in the first decades after the Schempp Decision. By the time of the Court’s decision, all of Eliade’s major contributions to the study of religion had been completed with the exception of his *Histoire des croyances et des idées religieuses* (1976 and following). Eliade saw himself as the inheritor of an intellectual tradition which began with F. Max Müller and continued through Durkheim, Rudolf Otto, Gerardus van der Leeuw, Raffael Pettazzoni, and Joachim Wach, his immediate predecessor at the University of Chicago. In the final paragraph of his short history of the study of religion which was appended to his *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (1959) he attempted to describe the then current intellectual milieu and debate: “At present, historians of religions are divided between divergent but complementary methodological orientations. One group concentrate primarily on the characteristic structures of religious phenomena, the other choose to investigate their historical context. The former seek to understand the essence of religion, the latter to discover and communicate its history.”¹³ He identified his “morphology of the sacred” with the first group. In another respect, Eliade saw this “morphology of the sacred,” which he identified as the *histoire des religions*, as an effort to synthesize the rival European intellectual traditions of *Religionswissenschaft* (first used by F. Max Müller in 1867) and *Religionsgeschichte*. Eliade’s synthesis may be one of the last “grand theories” in the study of religion in the twentieth century. And in the wake of the Schempp Case, it became one of the dominant intellectual paradigms of the study of religions in the second half of the century.

However, well before Eliade’s death in 1986 his work came under increasing scrutiny and criticism. The ascendance, criticism, and decline of Eliade’s paradigm is yet another example of Thomas Kuhn’s model of scientific revolutions in which a new scientific paradigm emerges and becomes the dominant theoretical paradigm, followed by debate and criticism producing new theoretical position, and often a very long period before a new paradigm emerges and there is a clear shift to a new compelling theory. Why did Eliade’s phenomenological work become so popular and so influential? Here again is the influence of the Schempp Decision, and I might be so bold as to suggest that without Schempp, Eliade’s work would have remained significant, but perhaps not dominant. Eliade’s work appeared far less theological than its competitors, such as Tillich. He developed

an analytic language and conceptual structure which appeared scientific and comparative – terms and concepts like kratophany, hierophany, *axis mundi*, *in illo tempore*, “creative hermeneutics,” archaic ontology, camouflages of religious symbolisms, and each of us could easily add more. The conceptual world of Eliade was well-suited for the world after Schempp when it could be harnessed to proposals for new programs. Even more significantly, Eliade had prepared a generation of young scholars to fill the burgeoning positions that were beginning to appear in North America; these included Charles Long, Jerome Long, Hans Penner, R.J. Tzvi Werblowsky, Mac Linscott Ricketts, and Kees Bolle.

The criticism of Eliade’s paradigm focused on three issues and each of these generated new ways of going about the discipline of the study of religion. First, Eliade steadfastly maintained that he was doing the history of religions. But what kind of history was it. Kurt Rudolf argued that Eliade’s history was only about meta-historical events that might not qualify as providing historical analysis at least among professional historians. What did Eliade mean or understand by history? There is only one place in his corpus where he offers a definition of history – history is the devalorizations and revalorizations of the sacred. While distinguishing between the archaic and the modern, between archaic “man” and archaic ontologies and modern people with modern ontologies, he could not fully demonstrate when the break between the archaic and the modern took place. Was it the linear history which was presented in the prophets of the Hebrew Bible which broke out of the cyclical time of the archaic which allowed humans to protect themselves from the terror of history (as he wrote and said at many points) or was it the rational and critical philosophy of Plato and Aristotle who ruptured cyclical time and challenged the integrity of myth (as he wrote and said many times)? Historians work with events and individuals, but individuals, real historical actors, are curiously absent in much of Eliade’s work. We might say today that his paradigm lacks “agency” and is an ahistorical paradigm.

Second, Eliade’s paradigm tried to harmonize all manifestations of the sacred. In his *Traité de histoire des religions* he provided a telling example of what would characterize all of his work. He describes a ritual at the Kali *ghat* in Benares where worshipers make *puja* to the *lingam* of Śiva. The common worshipers understand the *lingam* to be only a sexual organ of procreation, while the religious elite understand the *lingam* as the realization of the eternal cycle of death and rebirth. And then Eliade tells us that his history of religions will show us that both are correct, both represent the ambiguity of the sacred, and that he will show the reader that they are essentially the same. Eliade’s paradigm was consensual; there were no necessary conflicts, no contestations of meaning, and that religious traditions were essentially traditions of great unity.

Third, if there are no actors and religious traditions are consensual, there are no politics in the history of religions. It is intensely interesting to consider what drove Eliade to create a paradigm which was ahistorical, consensual and apolitical. He tried to respond to the question of history in his last major work, *The History of Religious Ideas* where he attempted to arrange chronologically the phenomenological

¹³ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1959), 232.

structures he has explicated in his *Traité* which he published thirty years before. Both works however remain valuable resources for us. His bibliographies in both, for example, are exceedingly helpful in where he traces out traditions of scholarship, or his efforts to resolve very creatively long-standing problems in religious scholarship (e.g., the relationship of the ancient Greek agricultural mythologies of Demeter and Persephone and the later Olympian deities).

Examples of scholarship which challenged Eliade's ahistorical, consensual and apolitical paradigm are Jonathan Z. Smith's *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* and Bruce Lincoln's *Discourse and the Construction of Society: Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual and Classification*. Smith's *Imagining Religion* challenges the absence of history of in Eliade's paradigm: the myth of Io, one of Eliade's favorite examples to demonstrate the centrality of the cosmogonic myth, is set in a specific and rigorous historical context of the recording and transcription of the myth by Christian missionaries; the Enuma Elish and the myth of Hainuwele do not represent ancient mythologems whose histories are shrouded in darkness – both are the result of what he calls “situational incongruities” and are mythological efforts to control situations in which the world has been turned upside-down for the ancient Babylonians and the Wemale of Ceram, the loss of native kingship in the former and Dutch colonial rule which has created the perfect “cargo situation.” Bruce Lincoln's *Discourse and the Construction of Society* demonstrates that myths are essentially political and the consensual nature of tradition disappears in his analysis of the powers of classification, myths and rituals. For example, in one of his most interesting chapters he shows how the exhumations of priests and nuns during the Spanish Civil War in Barcelona are not examples of the inhumanity and barbarism of the anarchist Republicans as Franco's fascist press and government described them, but ritual mechanisms, he calls them “prophanophanies,” which were intended to reveal the Spanish church's vacuous claims to power. Exhumed and displayed in Barcelona's streets, the bodies of priest and nuns had fallen prey to deathly degeneration. The critique of the paradigm demonstrated that history and politics matter in the analysis of symbols, and conflict over their meanings is an essential aspect of symbols (rather than how they are used in an instrumental fashion).

The critique of Eliade opened the way for new understandings of religion to emerge. Consider the case of ritual. We know Eliade's theory of rituals; rituals are the actualizations of what is narrated in cosmogonic myths. But Eliade was much more concerned with myth than with ritual and one could argue that his understanding of ritual is a revised form of the myth-ritual school of S.H. Hooke, Gilbert Murray, Jane Ellen Harrison, and Theodor Gaster. While there has been a renewed interest in ritual among anthropologists and performance studies scholars, and even extensive flirtation of religion scholars with Victor Turner, the most significant work on ritual has been done by historians of religions. Catherine Bell's *Ritual and Power* (1992) was one of the first efforts to redefine the powers of ritual and of course, we also have Jonathan Z. Smith's *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (1992). In this volume Smith elaborates upon his

chapter “The Bare Facts of Ritual” where he argued that ritual creates a controlled environment so that there are no accidents. In *To Take Place* his argument becomes ever more complex suggesting, beginning with an account of why ritual has been less important than myth over the history of the discipline. The study of religion emerged from Protestant theological circles and those who became the first generation of religion scholars brought with them a traditional disdain for ritual. We might imagine a different history in which the study of religion had emerged from Catholic or Jewish theological circles and where ritual might have been of a different value because ritual in those traditions is more significant. Smith argues that space focuses attention allowing ritual to reproduce a perfect structure or a perfect set of behaviors and gestures. There is an important political dimension in this prologue to a theory of ritual – political rights are required to have ritual rites.

The decline of Eliade's dominant paradigm has meant that there has been a paradigm shift within the study of religion. But no new paradigm has emerged which had as much impact and consensus as that exercised by Eliade's phenomenology for nearly four decades. One of the results of this has been the rejection of comparative studies. Area studies have emerged with renewed vigor in the study of religion. The Santa Barbara department demonstrates this very clearly. We have not made an appointment to replace the position that Ninian Smart occupied before his retirement and represented the phenomenological and comparative center of the department. Instead, we have hired area specialists, all very strong but with little commitment to the study of religion. We now have specializations in Tibetan Buddhist Studies, in Buddhist Studies, in Sikh Studies, in Catholic Studies, and in Jewish Studies. There is little or no comparative interest within these specializations and areas studies in religion or in other disciplines have proven themselves to be theoretically impotent. Theory is dependent upon comparison.

There is another aspect to the emergence of area studies in our discipline in the United States. The paradigm came under debate at the moment when public universities like Santa Barbara were facing declining state support. This has meant that public universities are now similar to private universities in building general funds to support their campuses and private endowments to support different kinds of teaching and research programs. Endowments have accelerated the development of area studies. In many cases, faculty in public universities did not fully understand how private funding might change disciplines and the agendas set by departments. We were far less experienced than our colleagues in private universities who had decades and decades of experience working out the obvious problems of making what Thomas Hobbes described as the process of making the private vices of endowers into public virtues of a research university.

SUMMARY

My department at the University of California, Santa Barbara reflects the changes that have taken place in the last half century in the study of religions at public universities and colleges. Like many others, the roots or foundations of my department were set in the quiet revolution in the immediate post-WWII and Korean War years when both public and private higher education was expanding as the result of national funding for veterans. However, unlike many others which began in literature or philosophy departments, my department had its beginnings in the social sciences. The Schempp Decision ushered in the most expansive period of development in the study of religion since the last decades of the nineteenth-century when the study of religion emancipated itself from theological studies.

My department also reflected what I have described as the dominant paradigm of Eliade's morphology of religion, and much like paradigm shifts in scientific revolutions, that paradigm was criticized (perhaps rightly so) for being a model which was not sufficiently cognizant of history and agents of change in history, and was fundamentally unconcerned with the political power of religion. I remember quite well how suddenly we realized that the object of our study we had created in our classrooms and in our writing did not accord with the place of religion in the world around us. That moment was the Iranian revolution in 1978 and 1979. Perhaps like many of you, we sat around our tables and said, if only there were religion scholars in Washington, D.C., to advise politicians and legislators and presidents about religion. What we were really telling ourselves was -- we had not helped provide the context for understanding the political powers of religions. We had been captivated by the idea of religion and not the power of religion. Of course what ensued from the criticism of the paradigm was the fragmentation of the discipline into area and traditions studies where little attention is given to primary questions that should drive a discipline.

Implicit in our discussion is another question of whether the paradigm, the phenomenological paradigm, remains useful and if so, what are its strengths and weaknesses? Indeed, the criticism of Eliade's phenomenological work, whether conscious or unconscious, direct or indirect, led to new intellectual fashions that have been very productive, so productive in fact that they constitute a "paradigm shift" in the way the study of religion is conducted. These trends created an imbalance of theoretical trade between the study of religion and other fields. The field quickly began to import more theory than it exported. Among the trends which proved to be most influential and persistent were the renewal of anthropological theory, cross-cultural philosophies of religions, new philosophical hermeneutics, ritual theory, the debate over reflexivity and subjectivity among anthropologists and sociologists and greater insistence by social scientists on the importance of history and case studies, the new historicism, critical theory in literature, including structuralism and its opponents, and post-modernist studies, the Orientalist critique, the debate over post-colonialism, gender studies, and

cultural analysis. And of course there are always new contenders, like cognitive studies. But phenomenology remains one of our most powerful methods, and I would suggest to you that many of the intellectual fashions which have become so popular in the academy are dependent upon being able to do phenomenology in its most exacting terms. What is missing is comparative work and that is what is necessary for study of religion to be the study of religion rather than the study of Catholicism, or the study of Islam, or the study of Hinduism.

KEYWORDS

History of Religious Studies, Department of Religious Studies, University of California, Schempp Decision

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