Council on the Study of Religion

RELIGIOUS STUDIES IN AN AGE OF LIMITS

Notes from the Wingspread Conference

by

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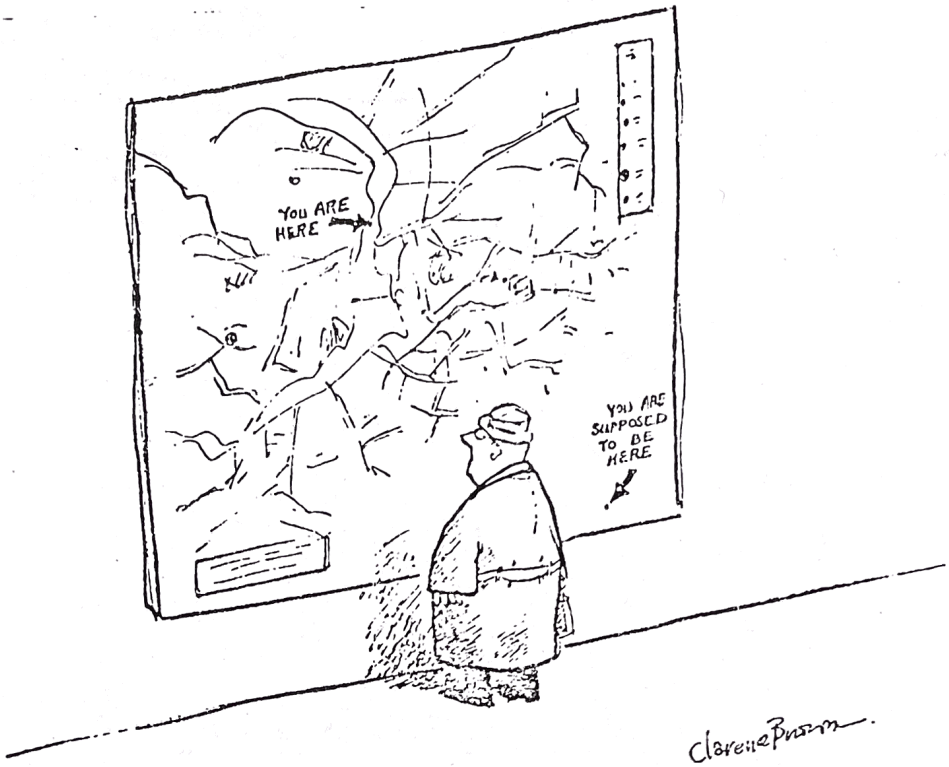

PART ONE: BACKGROUND FACTORS

Not long ago, The Saturday Review presented a cartoon that pictured a man standing in front of a city map. On the map there was an arrow pointing, "You are here." Down in the bottom right-hand corner was another arrow over which was inscribed these words, "You are supposed to be here."

The cartoon captures the sense of the "Wingspread Conference," held February 16-18, 1978 at the Wingspread Conference Center in Racine, Wisconsin, sponsored by the Council on the Study of Religion, funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Johnson Foundation, and organized by the Council, the Johnson Foundation, and the Institute of Religious Studies of the Santa Barbara campus of the University of California. The purpose of the conference was to create a perspective on where the academic study of religion is in relation to where it is supposed to be, where it might beneficially be, and, perhaps, where it may be in the future.

The project was given two titles. First, and in the language of the proposal submitted to the National Endowment for the Humanities, the conference was designed to provide an "inventory of research needs" within the academic study of religion. The category of "inventory" was kept expansive and flexible. It was used to denote research needs in the literal and physical sense: research collections, book series, publications, technical innovations in gathering and disseminating

the products of research, and the like. But it was also intended to function in a larger and broader sense, that is, to include whatever supports are required for the on-going "caring and feeding of scholarship."

Secondly, the project also had the function of identifying "new directions" in the academic study of religion. This, too, has to do with the vitality of the undertaking, and requires that there be an assessment of scholarly durability.

Consequently, the two foci were approached as correlative dimensions of a single project. They were treated side by side, components of an integrated inquiry.

Genesis of the Conference

The Council on the Study of Religion became involved in these objectives through the work of a Task Force for Professional Development (now called Committee on Scholarly Development) that was established three years ago. The members of the Committee have included: Leonard Biallas, Quincy College; M. Gerald Bradford, Bowdoin College; Donald Capps, Phillips University; Anne Carr, University of Chicago; Bernard Cooke, University of Calgary; Mary Gerhart, Hobart and William Smith Colleges; Wayne Meeks, Yale University; Douglas Sturm, Bucknell University; and James Wiggins, Syracuse University. In recent years, CSR has placed items on its work agenda rather systematically.

Following the Welch report on Graduate Education in Religion (1971), there have been attempts to analyze other areas of critical attention affecting the workings of religious studies as a whole. A concerted effort was made, for example, to identify publication needs and trends. This analysis, in turn, resulted in the inauguration of the review journal, Religious Studies Review, in 1975. It also became apparent that the time had come for a new, updated directory of departments and members of faculty teaching therein. The product of this effort, the Directory of Departments and Programs of Religion in North America appeared during the summer of 1978. But so far, nothing deliberate had been done about research needs and related matters pertaining to on-going professional development.

One of the first activities of the Task Force was to submit a brief questionnaire to the constituency through the medium of the Bulletin of the Council on the Study of Religion. From the responses to the questionnaire, the Committee reached certain general impressions regarding the present status of things in the academic study of religion. It learned, first, that there is widespread lack of clarity about how religious studies is integrated and what makes it cohesive. There is strong sentiment among many teachers and researchers in this subject area that the field is remarkably disparate, of enormous range and variety, always threatening to burst its very fragile and imprecise bounds. Consequently, there is a significant number of colleagues who believe that the

work that goes on within the field should be more carefully integrated, and in terms that belong to the workings of the humanities and social sciences.

The questionnaire also disclosed a great need to clarify the relationship between the academic study of religion and the intended and/or actual outcomes of that study. The Committee recognized that this concern directs attention to vocational matters, as well as to ways in which personal interests and professional goals are both present, often in conflict, in the study of religion. This matter raises questions about the purpose and design of graduate studies in religion--a matter, too, of increasing importance. And it points attention to the dynamics of the entire sequence of religious studies--from the first undergraduate course through the content of doctoral studies. The questionnaire disclosed considerable interest in the subject of the "Introduction to Religion" course, that is, the first course of study in religious studies that is offered in virtually every program. Apparently, there is interest in finding out what others are doing in this course. There is also widespread lack of satisfaction about what is known about what is being done.

The Committee recognized that many of these issues have been discussed and studied for at least the last decade and a half, or longer. Yet, their persistence indicates that they have not been settled, at least not to the satisfaction of those most effected by them. Or, perhaps it is simply that they are being raised in a new way or in revised terms.

The Shift Toward Planning

From these awarenesses and responses, the Committee developed some rather specific impressions leading to the proposal responsible for initiating the Wingspread Conference. It seemed imperative, for example, that the time had come for a closer look at the overall development of religious studies. It was through this interest that the word "inventory" became attractive. "Inventory" was intended to be just that: the Committee was interested in being able to identify resources and to determine where things stand. It wanted to come to some reliable overall impressions. But the word "projection" also came into prominence more and more as a means of complementing the word "inventory." The Committee sensed that the constituency, or a significant portion of it, had become somewhat uneasy. It wishes to meet the future responsibly, and is less willing than before to leave the on-going development of the academic study of religion to chance or circumstance.

The reason may be that in the situation that prevailed previously, necessary changes and improvements were natural concomitants of an inevitable on-going process of expansion. Whatever lacks or deficiencies became apparent could be remedied by the growth-meaning-increase syndrome. But now that growth is no longer automatic, alternative means must be found to bring about the changes and improvements that are necessary. Thus, it is no

longer responsible to link developmental aspirations to growth expectations. The former is a perennial need. The dynamics of the latter have become complicated and constrained.

Therefore, there seemed to be compelling basis upon which to try to develop a deliberate developmental strategy. Consequently, one of the drafts of the proposal that was submitted to the National Endowment for the Humanities stated that we thought it advisable or necessary to try to find a way "to take the future into our own hands," as it were. The drafters didn't mean this in any simplistic mechanical sense. Nor had they become victims of delusionary assessments of their abilities, power, and authority. They simply wanted to give attention to the possibility that a way might be found to strengthen the future development of the enterprise with greater deliberateness and self-consciousness. They desired to transpose the workings of religious studies into a dynamic anticipatory mode.

Thus, following the evaluation of the results of the questionnaire, the Committee, upon the request of the Council, understood that its mandate had been expanded and more sharply focused. It needed to look at the matter of professional development in more depth and with greater systematic care. To do this, it had to come to terms with the overall development of the subject-field. And to do this, it was necessary that attention be focused on formative developmental tendencies. There was need to identify some of the dominant directions in which the venture seems to be moving, the obstacles that the academic study of religion faces along the way. This, in turn, led to interest in correspondences (and disjunctures) between the development of this particular subject-field of study and more comprehensive tendencies in higher education, particularly those tendencies that effect both the humanities and social sciences. Thus, in proposing that there be a look at the subject-field almost piece by piece, and area by area, the Committee wanted to be able to identify common interests, shared developmental tendencies, overarching themes, stresses, strains, strengths, weaknesses, new ideas, innovations, ventures that had become obsolete, et al.

Admittedly, there was a hint in all of this that what was desired, if a way could be found to do it, was to identify specific kinds of vitality that might be of positive influence to the developmental process. To do this, it is necessary to adopt an attitude, approach, or disposition that has much in common with the dictates and dynamics of planning. Rather than leaving the development of the academic study of religion to amble along as it will, there is interest in encouraging specific forms of motion, growth, depth, and quality to influence that process.

The Larger Academic Scene

In recounting the reasons and occasion for the conference so far, primary reference has been made in this report to matters belonging to the internal, intrinsic development of religious

studies. Certainly, this captures a portion of the background of the meeting. In addition, however, there are urgent and compelling developments lying outside religious studies' direct control that prompted the project and conference.

It is evident, for example, that the climate on the campuses is very different now from what it was a decade or so ago. We cite "a decade or so ago" as a reference point because that was the time in which many new programs were initiated, and enthusiasm about the possibilities of the academic study of religion was large and contagious. Such programs were begun with much excitement, anticipation, celebration, and aplomb. They created considerable interest and stimulated fresh intellectual interests on the campuses and within the profession. In most places, they were warmly welcomed and well accepted, by students, faculty, and administrators of the schools. Religious studies found a viable place in the colleges and universities. It achieved this status because it could be accepted on academic terms. In addition, it was a very interesting and unique endeavor. It carried rapport with the sorts of social and cultural changes that characterized the time, yes, even with the dominant "faiths" and aspirations of the academic community itself. Furthermore, it possessed great resonance with the basic interests of students. The study of religion was supported by a large range of popular intellectual issues. The support it gathered from all sides was manifest.

It is apparent that some of these formative factors have been altered. Hence, religious studies cannot rely upon the same sort of socio-cultural and intellectual support that it had during the time of its founding and flowering. Its supporting environment has changed dramatically. For, during the intervening years, there has been a veritable onrush of now, compelling, but shifting (and sometimes contrary) intellectual interests. Looking back, one recalls the power of the counter-culture, new sensitivities regarding the relationship between eastern and western cultures, the apocalyptic mood of the former time, the climate then of "paradise now" expectations, the ability then of writers like Paul Tillich and Mircea Eliade not only to talk about religion, but to interpret human experience in a manner with which many thousands of students, faculty members, and persons outside the academy could identify. In the earlier situation, many of the most prominent comprehensive and compelling commentaries on the human condition were put in circulation through the workings of religious studies. Religious studies had both academic stature and a larger public utility. In Erik Erikson's terms, it had become "cultural work." At least, this is how the academic study of religion was received and perceived by many, and how those many interpreted the work to themselves. A large proportion of those persons most responsible for the venture's burgeoning were caught up, at the time, in the rather widespread exodus from theology (more strictly speaking) to religious studies. The new set of resources assisted this transition, and provided those in exodus with someplace to go.

Indeed, the situation has changed. In many respects, the change has been dramatic. Much of the momentum coming from that larger range of social, cultural, and deep-seated personal interests has moved away from religious studies into other areas and fields, and, perhaps, to degrees not yet perceptible, beyond the academy itself. As a result, it is to be expected that religious studies is much less resilient now, and thus less inventive, perhaps less creative, and considerably more inflexible. All of this follows upon the achievement of having found a proper place within the academy. All of it can be taken as evidence that religious studies has been established effectively. But what could not be known then, but has become apparent since, is that the very context through which religious studies is being conducted--the academy--is suffering under very critical assessment. Thus, religious studies lives and breathes within an environment whose own health is subject to serious question.

The Vocational Crisis

There are other factors from outside which have influenced, or will influence, the development of religious studies. Here one need only refer again to the vocational crisis, the paucity of vocational opportunities for persons with doctorates in most fields within the humanities, and particularly, for our purposes, in the field of religious studies.

It was reported at a recent Washington conference on "alternate vocations for humanists" that only 10% of those persons currently working toward Ph.D. degrees in the humanities can expect to find regular academic teaching positions after they complete their degree requirements. In addition, over 30% of those who have received doctorates in the past three or four years are without regular academic positions. And as the era of the early and mid 80's approaches, these bleak figures turn into dire projections: faculty positions will become even fewer, that is, if the educational matrix remains the way it is now. Eventually, the resolution of this problem, if there is either resolution or clarification, will require an analysis of graduate education. For there are some who suspect that the "vocational crisis" is a product of a growing misalignment between assumed but obsolete patterns of educational coherence and the sorts of revised intellectual patterns that a more vital and resilient sociology of knowledge could support. And this lead, if taken seriously and explored more fully, may require an eventual adjustment of persistent faculty energies, enthusiasms, and sources of personal satisfaction.

But whatever responses are evoked, it is evident that this recent forceful development is bound to effect the vitality of the entire undertaking. It effects graduate studies markedly. And since much of undergraduate education is conceived in the image of graduate education, this development has also effected the substance of undergraduate work, and will continue to do so until something is done to alter the terms of the alliance between these

two levels of higher education. The vocational factor strongly effects the character of the entire educational undertaking. It is confirming evidence, too, that a conference on "inventory" must also deal with future projections.

A Time of Inventory Taking

Finally, it is fitting that this is the time in which the inventory is being conducted. This suggests that religious studies' gestation period has already passed. In coming to terms with the needs of religious studies, the profession is not dealing with a phenomenon still in its infancy, but with an organism that has been alive and well for some time. There are some components in its present life (both of its own devising and in the educational network upon which it has been dependent) that make for hard going. But there is nothing in the picture, it appears, that can be used to frustrate goal-setting and direction-finding.

The time has come both for inventory-taking and projecting. And, as the profession tries to evaluate the trajectories that have been formed from the past, it is also in position to be thinking of new possibilities. These might include the establishment of lateral relationships between religious studies and the workings of the professional schools. It may imply new forms of cooperation between the various disciplines, new alliances and altered combinations of sub-fields, and disciplines, as well as new and/or refurbished sorts of intellectual industry and creativity. It was to these tasks that the conference addressed itself.

PART TWO: MECHANICS OF THE CONFERENCE

The Conference itself occurred over a nearly forty-eight hour period in the Wingspread Conference Center, the multi-tentacled house designed by Frank Lloyd Wright for the Johnson family, on the gently rolling land nearly adjacent to the waters of Lake Michigan, south of Milwaukee, near Racine, Wisconsin.

The moderator of all of the discussions of the conference was Jaroslav J. Pelikan, then Dean of the Graduate School, Yale University. And the participants--some twenty-five in all--consisted of persons selected to speak specifically about the needs and new directions of selected sub-fields and disciplines in the academic study of religion.

The Process of Selection

The process by which the participants were selected was governed by the intentions of the conference. In the first place, there were limits on the number of persons the grant could provide for and the conference facilities could accommodate. In addition, there were limits on the number of hours that could be devoted to this form of corporate inquiry, and this restricted

the number of participants. Additional principles were at stake too. Above all, the planners wanted to avoid giving an impression that the participants had been invited simply on the basis of scholarly esteem or recognized high achievement within their respective sub-fields and disciplines. In no sense was the conference billed as a meeting of a star caste of the academic field. Neither could persons be invited to participate as delegates of the constituent societies of CSR, or as representatives of faculties, departments, or schools involved in the academic study of religion. And choices had to be made regarding the areas that could come under special scrutiny. This paring down required that the subject areas be reclassified in more inclusive groupings. The group assembled could not be expected to take on all areas of scholarly endeavor with systematic coverage.

The way in which the selection of participants was made was in keeping with the goals and temper of the conference. Persons selected were not asked to pose as authorities, or as spokepersons for academic, professional, or field-and-disciplinary constituencies. Rather, they were looked to as persons who work day by day in an area of scholarly research and teaching belonging to the academic study of religion. This meant that their most important role was to supply data and impressions from within that perspective, just as respondents to the questionnaire had supplied data and had reflected impressions. The goal was to create a reliable composite perspective from which some significant overall impressions might be drawn. There was never the presumption that this group of persons would be deciding the fate of religious studies for everyone else. The goals of the conference were infinitely more modest and much more precise.

Responsibilities of Participants

Once selected, each participant was asked to prepare a brief statement, one that could be presented in no more than ten to fifteen minutes, on the present state of things in a designated subject-area belonging to the academic study of religion. The planners recognized this to be an impossible assignment. Everyone present would have been able to talk for hours and hours (and some for days and days) about the needs, strengths, and weaknesses of their respective vocational areas. Yet the planners also understood there to be some strategic value in the demand for focus and concentrated attention. The challenge was to identify primary needs and subjects requiring concerted attention after hours and hours had been devoted to reflection on the issues. After hearing these capsule summaries, the attempt was made to gain some impressions and to develop some common insights.

In this respect, the planners of the conference were not disappointed. Some persons were better able than others to focus in the requested fashion. Others seemed to make their most salient points in the discussion periods following the brief presentations. Others gave evidence of not having been encouraged before either to focus in this way or to reflect on the totality of the enterprise. And others, rather expectedly, found it impossible to keep

to the fifteen-minute limit. In short, it was an interesting corporate intellectual exercise, one that appeared to hold the attention of all participants right up through the closing session.

Procedures Following the Conference

The Johnson Foundation tape-recorded the entire proceedings, and turned the tapes over to the Institute of Religious Studies of UCSB. Following the conference, the papers were transcribed from the tape-recordings, edited lightly, then typed. The work of transcription and reproduction was effected by Mr. David Chidester, Research Associate in the Institute. Next, the manuscripts were read carefully and repeatedly, primarily by Walter H. Capps and Deborah Sills (Administrative Assistant in the Institute and for the Council), and then also by various members of the Committee, various participants, and by others upon the request of the president of the Council.

At the time that these "Notes" are being prepared, the Task Force remains undecided about the form and manner in which the report(s) will appear. Capps' "Notes" together with a response by Claude Welch, President and Dean of the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, served as the basis for an extensive discussion at the regular meeting of the Council on the Study of Religion, Saturday, October 14, 1978, in Chicago. The same materials--amended and extended--will serve as background for the CSR-sponsored departmental chairperson caucus at the New Orleans meeting of AAR, SBL, and ASOR on November 18, at which Professor David Burrell of Notre Dame University will offer a response, and various members of the Committee will participate. Some of the papers given in the conference itself will be published in upcoming issues of the Bulletin of the Council on the Study of Religion. Harold Cannon's and Bernard Spilka's papers appeared in the October issue. Others are scheduled to appear in succeeding issues. The possibility of publishing all or nearly all of the papers in one volume continues to be considered and discussed; a decision about this will be made during a consultation of the Task Force and some of the officers of CSR in New Orleans. Also, a comprehensive report will be submitted both to the Division of Research of the National Endowment for the Humanities and to the Johnson Foundation. The extent to which it may also function as a guide in the future work and deliberations of the Council and/or in marking out directions for the fuller development of religious studies will depend entirely on the force it is perceived to carry, especially by persons not present.

PART THREE: FINDINGS OF THE CONFERENCE

In identifying some of the principal findings of the Wingspread Conference, care has been taken to list only those items that pertain to the complexion of the subject-field as a whole. The more particular and specialized insights and observations

regarding the workings of the various sub-fields and disciplines have been utilized as the basis for these more comprehensive conclusions. But the insights and observations themselves are neither identified nor reproduced in this report. Much of this first-hand information will become accessible in other ways, however, since edited versions of some of the papers will be published in future issues of the Bulletin of the Council on the Study of Religion, and, quite possibly, in other scholarly journals.

It must also be said that the items of interest have been identified in a somewhat impressionistic manner. The findings listed below have not been assembled on the basis of any deliberate or conscious intellectual consensus or via a polling of the participants in the conference. The findings stand as interpretations of the data. They are based on a composite reading of the papers and the transcriptions of the discussions of the papers. The entire interpretive process is regulated by an expectation that the findings will be discussed further in various forms.

Thus, it hardly needs to be said that the findings have been refined and sharpened as the evaluatory process has progressed. They are findings that can be presented in this stage of an on-going process on the basis of methods that have been identified and described herein. They are intended to be stimulating, and, perhaps, provocative. And they are intended to serve as bases upon which specific recommendations can be made regarding the improvement of conditions and the on-going strengthening of the academic study of religion and the well-being of the profession. In their present form, therefore, the findings are given a somewhat tentative status. They are organized here under five categories of interest.

Conceptual Difficulties: The Sense of the Whole

The first set of impressions pertains to the sense-of-the-whole by which those working within religious studies have identified their field of scholarly endeavor. And the largest impression here is that the sense-of-the-whole within religious studies is markedly tenuous and indefinite. It is tenuous. Paradoxically, perhaps, it also seems somewhat inflexible. It is tenuous and indefinite, though without being willing to be subjected to significant structural reconfiguration.

This observation is based on a recognition that religious studies consists of an amazing array of activities, ranging all the way from the most sophisticated and extensive sorts of linguistic, textual, historical, and critical training to courses in subject areas that might as appropriately be offered as general studies, interdisciplinary studies, general education courses in the humanities, or even in after-supper adult education programs. Some take the phenomenon of variety-and-versatility as evidence of the subject-field's uncommon vitality. Others believe it to be a sign of a threatening, perhaps destructive, over-extension, all deriving from a lack of clarity about fundamental

intentions and a corresponding inability to distinguish priorities. Both opinions are agreed on the facts of the matter; both recognize that there is an enormous range and an unusual multiplicity of enterprises which occur under religious studies' auspices. It can be argued that both range and multiplicity are larger, grander, and more extensive than that of any other subject-field within the humanities and social sciences.

Accordingly, some present at the conference decried religious studies' penchant for incorporating so much within that range of things over which it claims responsibility and competence. They believed its miscellaneous posture to be detrimental to the academic respect it wishes to maintain. They contended that the longer-range vitality of the enterprise will become more and more dependent upon the cultivation of a capacity to refuse overtures, resist new possibilities, and close out ventures no longer useful. They also believe it imperative that those within the field learn to distinguish religious studies' proper sphere(s) of operation from those of others within the academy. They wished that the extent of the range of interest and competence might be demarcated clearly.

Others insisted that the scope of the enterprise is what it is because of the nature of the subject matter of the inquiry. They believe it important to recognize that religion is global in its scope, nearly as extensive as human experience itself, and social, cultural, and historical in its dimensionalities. It is understandable, then, that many tend to view the workings of religious studies as being something like the workings of a college of liberal arts in miniature, or like a combined humanities and social science program in microcosm. Conceived in this latter fashion, the enterprise has become unusually dependent upon the presence of effective cognate fields. Its very existence, in this form, requires an extensive supporting environment within the academy.

The prevalence of the liberal-arts model became evident at Wingspread when there was a request to identify the specific research needs of religious studies (the announced purpose of the conference). The group assembled seemed disturbingly incapable of (or disinterested in) listing specific concrete research needs. However, when such needs were talked about, cognate-field supports were mentioned most prominently and given top priority. In other words, when research needs are identified, they are defined more as support services than as intrinsic requirements. One can gain a strong impression that the existence of religious studies requires the existence of other academic programs; this seems to be true whether the supporting unit is some combination of the humanities and social sciences, or, as is the situation in some colleges, the entire spectrum of undergraduate liberal-arts curricular offerings. This tendency, especially during a time of decreasing budgetary capacities and in an era in which a diminishing premium is placed on training in classical and foreign languages, has created frustrations that

promise to become larger and may even become paralyzing.

There are more technical ways of arriving at the same impression. For example, religious studies currently exists without support or benefit of any reigning or even discernible overarching general theory. There is widespread lack of awareness, and very little use, of the general theories that were conceived by the classical researchers of the nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries. (Again, it may be less a lack of awareness than a lack of enthusiasm.) And there is diminishing regard for the prevalent modified Christian theological constructs that functioned in this capacity in the sixties and early seventies. To be sure, there are remnants from these previous mindsets, but they are functioning only in a manifestly piecemeal fashion. Generally speaking, the functioning overarching schematisms that seem to be on the ascendency are imports from other fields within the humanities and social sciences. The most prominent current ones have come from the more speculative and ideological sides of anthropology. There is great fascination, that is to say, with the theories and methodological stances of Mary Douglas, Victor Turner, and Clifford Geertz. But this development can be taken as a sign that religious studies seems to have no effective general theories of its own.

It has become apparent, too, that there is as yet no comprehensive history of religious studies. There are histories of many of the components of religious studies, histories of many of the sub-fields, histories of the disciplines, but no history of the composite or totality. Neither is there a comprehensive tracing of the process by which the coordination of the various entities was achieved.

There is an important and discernible dispositional product of this lack of a sense of the totality. More and more, the sub-fields and disciplines are developing in a manifestly atomistic way. The past few years have seen them grow in strength as they have also achieved a greater independence. Increasingly, they are developing out of their own dynamics, frequently without reference to or in correspondence with parallel developments in other sub-field areas. While such developments appear strong, there are also some troublesome accompanying signs. For there is danger from all sides that the sub-fields and disciplines of religious studies have assumed an increasingly insular and isolated position. And there is further danger that religious studies, left to develop in this fashion, will eventually consist of a loose collection of satellite enterprises, lacking any coordinating consensus, no longer ordered by any specific or conscious principle of organization.

Perhaps it need not be said, for it may be all too obvious, that there are research needs implicit in each of these observations, even when they are not explicitly identified as such.

Principles of Inclusion and Exclusion: The New Areas

The second set of impressions is prompted by a large conflict, a conflict that can be stated in two ways. First, despite the enormous range and versatility of the subject-field, it seems unable to settle on principles of inclusion and exclusion. Said in another way, religious studies is currently marked by the birth of a large number of new or innovative areas (Native American Studies, Womens' Studies, Afro-American Studies, and Study of the New Religions, to name the most prominent). These, paradoxically, have experienced severe strains when seeking entry, acceptance, sanction, and legitimation. The difficulty can be interpreted in a variety of ways. For example, it may be that implicit boundary principles operate within the field, even when these are not identified in explicit form. Or, perhaps the new areas that have been mentioned are regarded as belonging outside the specific province of religious studies, and are thus viewed as threats to whatever unity and coherence is manifest. Or, conceivably, the difficulty may be due to the fact that the present sub-fields and disciplines are unable, on their own terms, to welcome or accept the new enterprises. Whatever the explanation, religious studies does not seem to have reached the point in its own intrinsic development which urges it to accept the new enterprises as factors necessary to a larger vitality.

There are a host of research needs implicit here. But so far, they are treated, in the main, as being marginal to the more proper interests and scope of the enterprise.

Influence of Increasing Cross-Cultural Sensitivities

The Wingspread conversations also demonstrated that religious studies is being effected increasingly and formatively by cross-cultural sensitivities. Such sensitivities are large, pervasive, and extensive. So forceful has this tendency become that some believe religious studies to have undergone (or to be ready for) a transformation via the dynamics of cross-cultural modalities.

However, despite the prevalence of cross-cultural aspirations and methodological intentions that are frequently cited as standard operating procedures, some gathered at Wingspread believe actual cross-cultural academic programs to be woefully inadequate, and exemplary ones few in number. There is strong feeling that this effort remains very embryonic, still lacking an adequate working vocabulary as well as effective means of communication.

Perennial Conflicts Still Unresolved

The Wingspread conversations also reinforced that there are persistent problems associated with fundamental conceptual and operational distinctions. For example, there continues to be widespread confusion or lack of accurate awareness regarding

the relationship of the humanities and the social sciences in the study of religion. Time and again it became evident that persons approaching the study from one of these orientations have markedly imprecise notions about the approaches of their counterparts. At times, the differences between the two modes create tensions. At other times, it seems more a matter of scholars, in two camps, working in relative isolation from one another.

The same must be said about unsettled issues in the relationship between theological studies and the scientific study of religion, as both are involved in religious studies. Far from being able to come to terms on the issues, the representatives of the two approaches seem to be diverging from one another even more dramatically today than some years before. This confusion may be due to the fact that the distinction between the two approaches cannot be made as neatly as it was during the time when religious studies, as such, found a large portion of its raison d'etre in its emancipation from theological studies.

There are also considerable curious bifurcations between theory and research. Frequently, it seems, research projects are conducted without benefit of carefully-conceived theory, and theory, tied to the work of the classical nineteenth-century researchers or to one of the ideological legacies undergoing increasing obsolescence, seems out of touch with actual research projects.

And, as the future unfolds, one of the most problematical features of religious studies is the status of the Christian religion. This is due to the fact that expanding cross-cultural sensitivities have subjected this, the dominant religious tradition in the west, to kinds of inquiry to which it has not had to respond in the past. There is a developing tendency, for example, still very embryonic in nature, to view the religious traditions of the west through instincts and sensitivities influenced via Asian religious and cultural traditions. At the same time, there is increasing interest within religious studies in subjects that fall outside the range of that which Christian and/or western religions find interesting. Questions about the Christian religion also arise through a growing recognition that many of the working analogies and conceptual distinctions that have functioned as accepted and standard methodology in religious studies have their roots and sanctions in Christian religious sensitivities. As religious studies develops, its Christian derivation is being perceived more clearly. Again, it is not a strong tendency as yet, but it bears watching, for the ramifications run deep and extensively.

In addition, there was an eloquent call during the Wingspread discussion that religious studies should fashion methodological access to the phenomenon of change. For as long as

anyone can remember, its interests have dominated by matters of essence, nature, and structure--all tokens of the quality of permanence. Wingspread reinforced the need to turn to matters of change: changes in religious traditions, changes in religious factors when societies and cultures undergo change, even changes in the ways in which the place of religion is perceived, understood, and interpreted.

Finally, there are a number of serious discrepancies between the way in which religious studies is viewed by those working from within the field, and the way in which it is perceived within the larger academic environment. The economic stringencies of the years ahead may heighten the differences between these two sets of objectives, that is, between (1) the functions religious studies performs for its sponsoring institutions, and (2) the sorts of objectives it would pursue if allowed to follow the inclinations of teachers and scholars in the field. There are some hints that the character of religious studies may be severely altered in the future as necessary economic measures decrease possibilities for intrinsic development, and transfer a larger formative influence to the sponsoring institutions.

Professional Well-Being

With respect to the professional supports of religious studies, the consensus includes the following factors:

First, life within the professional societies in religious studies is active, energetic, and received by the constituency as being beneficial and necessary to the academic enterprise. The professional societies appear to be operating effectively and to be meeting actual expressed needs of the profession. There is also a good spirit of cooperation existing between them.

However, while the societies are strong and vibrant, and intellectual activity within the field is large and intensive, there still is much room for expanding cooperative arrangements between the societies and the departments. And, while efforts are being expended along these lines, care should be taken to identify the needs and fortify the aspirations of "the profession" (an entity equatable with neither departments nor societies). For, as attorneys belong to a legal profession, and physicians to a medical profession, so, too, is there an implied profession for teachers and scholars in religious studies. The time has come to think seriously about religious studies as a "profession," perhaps along lines suggested by Jacques Barzun and Nathum Glatzer who have treated the latter subject in socio-political terms. For it is clear that the interests of the profession can no longer be handled effectively--if ever they were--in the very casual, almost serendipitous fashion that prevails at present.

PART FOUR: SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

In certain respects, the Wingspread Conference can be perceived as addressing the major current problems of religious studies in a comprehensive sense. Each of the subjects it faced deserves to be developed with greater systematic rigor and at much greater length. In this sense, the intended inventory also produced a kind of catalog of present issues and interests, thus providing workable indices into the foci and range of present scholarly enthusiasms. Certainly nothing that Wingspread uncovered should be neglected or overlooked.

At the same time, there are several matters that bear pressing concrete significance, and thus deserve deliberate and immediate attention. We simply list them without a fuller explanation. Each is indication that religious studies has not yet come to terms with "alternatives to growth," or with ways of conducting its business in an age of limits.

The first concerns the nature of graduate study. The difficulties experienced by the "new areas" in gaining entry to the canons of academic respectability raises large questions about the nature of the graduate enterprise. Certainly, the time has come to face the issue as to whether some sort of regulatory or guiding principles should be invoked so that graduate programs in religious studies in North America are made coordinate with each other. The new areas are not gaining coverage, while there is heavy repetition and replication of typical offerings according to a fairly standardized curricular model. In "an age of limits," the nature of graduate education in religious studies deserves to be rethought with a view toward increasing coordinated planning and institutional cooperation.

So, too, in "an age of limits," large attention should be given to seeking out alternative ways to achieve the scholarly purposes that now depend upon graduate education. For it is likely that faculty energies will need increasingly to be redirected in the future. It is to be expected that the training of new scholars and teachers will become of lesser importance than the creation of provisions for the on-going training and education of scholars and teachers already in the field. And, as this occurs, so also are sources of intellectual inspiration significantly modified. Some of that which now gets done within the framework of graduate education will require new means of stimulation. At the same time, the turn toward on-going educational development should also create new intellectual interests and lend fresh vitality to the enterprise.

Finally, the reconception of graduate education promises to alter the nature of undergraduate offerings in religious studies. For, at present, the dominant undergraduate curricular patterns are modelled according to standard graduate patterns.

And, in the main, undergraduate education is perceived as the first stage in an on-going process that requires graduate education for its completion. In "an age of limits," the relationships between these two enterprises must be rethought. It would be appropriate, for example, for undergraduate programs to be reconceived on the basis of objectives that could be achieved by undergraduates. Then, course work in religious studies would not exhibit the "open-endedness" that is so prevalent today, and would not be dominated by pre-graduate school survey courses, but, instead, would strive more and more for coherence on its own terms.

Such conclusions simply reinforce the awareness that research needs cannot be identified apart from a careful assessment of the total work that belongs to the academic study of religion. It is appropriate, then, that we should come full-circle. For, in an age of limits, inventory-taking becomes nearly synonymous with establishing new pathways into the future.

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