THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES UPON RELIGION

Impressions from an Inquiry

The pages following contain a summary of impressions from an inquiry that was conducted from 1976 to 1978 through the Institute of Religious Studies on the subject of "The Influence of Religious Studies upon Religion." The project was funded by the Lilly Endowment, and the principal investigator was Walter H. Capps, Director of the Institute. The formal report from the project was submitted to the Lilly Endowment in February, 1979. The following comments, based in part on the contents of the report, have been prepared to share with others who may be interested in this subject. The proposal for such a project was drafted through a growing awareness that the relationship between religious studies and personal religious persuasions is probably more complex than the statements-of-purpose of established academic programs would indicate. Such complexities are confirmed by the conclusions to which the principal investigator came as a result of the inquiry. It should be emphasized, however, that the impressions contained herein as well as conclusions are entirely his own; they are not offered as being representative of a larger faculty consensus.

Turning to the substance of the report, I want first to indicate what was done. Then I will sketch some of the

findings. Finally, I will indicate the portions of the project that remain in a tentative and/or incomplete state.

PROCEDURES

After several faculty-member discussions of the goals of the project, together with anticipations of findings as well as pitfalls along the way, we embarked by drawing up a simple questionnaire that was submitted to nearly two hundred recent graduates of the University of California, Santa Barbara, former students who had majored in religious studies. We have not polled anyone else in this questionnaire fashion. Instead of asking direct, specific questions--the sort for which neat numerical summaries can be produced after the findings of the questionnaire have been tabulated and evaluated--we asked general thought-response questions. We were interested in gathering information on the theme, "influence" (as in the title of the project, "The Influence of Religious Studies upon Religion"). And we wanted the information we received from the questionnaire to guide us in the organization of the conference. I am happy to report that we received nearly 50% returns on the questionnaire that was submitted to the UCSB religious studies alums.

Following our work with the questionnaire, we organized a conference, in April, 1977, in which graduate students and faculty in the Department of Religious Studies at UCSB participated along with the resource persons we had invited.

These latter included Wilfred Cantwell Smith (then of Dalhousie University and now, again, of Harvard), Jonathan Z. Smith (now Dean of the College, University of Chicago), Robert N. Bellah (Ford Professor of Sociology, University of California, Berkeley), James Wiggins (Chairperson of the Graduate Program in Religious Studies, Syracuse University, and member of the Task Force on Professional and Scholarly Development, Council on the Study of Religion), and Jacob Needleman (then of San Francisco State University, and now also Director of the Center for the Study of New Religious Movements, Graduate Theological Union, in Berkeley). These persons, together with our own faculty members, Robert Michaelsen, specialist in American religious history, Ninian Smart, philosopher and historian of religions, Gerald Larson, specialist in religious traditions of India, W. Richard Comstock, philosopher of religion, Robert Gimello, historian of Asian religious traditions, Birger A. Pearson, specialist in early Christianity and the religions of antiquity, Wilbur Fridell, specialist in religious traditions of Japan, Richard Hecht, a historian of religions, specializing in Judaica and Charles Wendell, specialist in Islam, gave us a very knowledgeable nucleus of co-workers. Principal presentations were offered by Capps, W.C. Smith, Bellah, Smart, Larson, Gimello, Wiggins, Needleman, J.Z. Smith, and doctoral candidates Edward Linenthal and Louise Greene. The conference occurred on the grounds and in the buildings of the beautiful La Casa de Maria Retreat and

Conference Center in nearby Montecito over a three-day period. We requested that the local participants be present for the entire conference. This request was complied with. The result was a stimulating discussion.

Following the conference, we transcribed the tape recordings of the lectures and the discussion following. We then edited the papers, returned them to their authors with the request that they be returned, with corrections, additions, and refinements, for publication in a single volume. As we anticipated, some of the presenters elected not to do this. We have their papers in the files of "the proceedings of the conference," but we do not anticipate offering them for publication, at least not in their present form. The remainder of the papers have been sent to a publisher for possible publication in book form. While doing this, we are preparing a summary of the project as an article for the Bulletin of the Council on the Study of Religion, to be circulated among the 17,500 persons and/or institutions which receive this publication. And we have other possibilities should these arrangements not work out.

Also, as principal investigator of the project, I have gone back over and over all of the papers, discussion, and the comments we have made on the papers and discussion. Some of the conclusions to which I have come form the basis for this report. Those, and some additional impressions and findings, will be incorporated in the introductory essay I am writing for the single volume of essays that is forthcoming.

Again, in general-outline terms, we did everything we indicated we were going to do, and in the sequence we had projected, though not in accordance with the schedule we had intended.

FINDINGS FROM THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Though we had tutored reasons for drawing up the questionnaire as we did--for we learned what we initially wished to from its disclosures--we also discovered it to be too comprehensive and imprecise in its scope and focus. Were we to do the project over, we would utilize such a questionnaire on a much smaller pre-test basis, then revise it significantly before submitting it to the larger group of respondents. But this is simply one way of admitting that the word "influence" is a difficult one to parse, and one which can be approached in highly ambiguous ways. We learned from the results of the questionnaire that religious studies majors had indeed been influenced both religiously and academically by their course work in religious studies. But when we wanted to probe deeper, as, for example, in wishing to know whether or not religious studies course work increases a positive appreciation for religion, we encountered all sorts of difficulty, all deriving from the fact that the primary words we were using possess no simple or single meaning. Frequently, we suspected that a student had developed a positive attitude toward "religion" through the influence of an academic course in religious studies. But this may well have been a brand or

form of "religion" very different from the one that had been transmitted from parents to child. And, quite possibly, it was not the brand or form of "religion" which had been brought to the beginnings of the academic course. Similarly, when a student reported that the course of studies had not had a positive effect upon his personal religion, we couldn't be sure we knew what this meant. Because the subject is a very complex one, the questionnaire didn't enable us to distinguish the several uses of the words "religion" and "religious" that were implicit in the responses. Hense, one initial general observation is: students enroll in religious studies courses for a variety of academic and/or religious reasons, and most all of these intentions, simultaneously, can find support in the academic work that goes on.

We can, however, be more precise. We can report reliably that the students we questioned had very positive responses to their exposure to academic coursework in religious studies. To a remarkable degree, they were most enthusiastic about our academic program. They found it useful, helpful, worthwile, and necessary both for religious and academic reasons, and also because of the way in which these reasons interpenetrate. In sum, the reports regarding personal responses to religious studies are overwhelmingly positive. Moreover, the students feel very good about their exposure to religious studies regardless of whether they utilized academic work to achieve release from previously-held-religious orientations or whether they had embarked on personal religious quests which either failed or

succeeded (or, most likely, became redefined).

We also looked through the responses to questions and the statements that were submitted for indications of any consensus regarding the nature and complexion of the religious orientation to which the majority or a large percentage of the students felt close identification. Here we can report that a large number of the students who engaged in academic course work from deeply-felt and strongly-adhered-to religious backgrounds were able to maintain the devotion they began with even after they had taken a significant number of courses in religious studies. Similarly, those students who began with no clearly-defined religious orientation frequently seemed to be able to maintain this posture too, though in more sophisticated fashion, after taking a number of courses in religious studies. Frequently, the latter also admit to having profited from exposure to the wide variety of religious options made available to them. Overwhelmingly, they seem to have gotten the message that religious studies is an academic undertaking, and not instruction designed for the would-be devotee to come to terms with available religious options. And yet they do not find it inconsistent to apply this information and knowledge to their own needs and interests. So used and/or applied, the content of religious studies serves both as reinforcer and/or as emancipator, depending upon primary intentions. This confirms for us that there is no built-in force that works its way ineluctably without regard for the intentions and interests of both mind and heart of both teacher and student. While there is not evidence to confirm that

religious studies is demonstratively supportive of personal religion, there is nothing that suggests that it is destructive either. A more appropriate conclusion to which the students came is that religion is "important."

This brings up another interesting matter, namely, the role of the instructor or professor in whatever process is occurring by means of the classroom and the course with respect to the cultivation of interest in religion. We gave the respondents opportunity to offer comments about the role of the instructor. We found, to our delight, that the responses included appreciative and sometimes glowing comments about the influence of each one of us. We also found it a bit surprising, though perhaps explainable, that those members of the faculty who tend to function more in the guru-model, say, than in a stricter non-involvement, analytical, dispassionate role--though we probably have no one who embodies either of these modes in a strict fashion--seem to have no more personal influence over students than their more analytically-circumspect professorial counterparts. Again, the students had good things to say about the personal influences of all of us, in varying degrees, of course. What did stand out from this aspect of our analysis is that the professor of Christian Biblical studies, particularly in his courses on the New Testament, has immense influence, sometimes judged to be positive, sometimes judged to be denigrating. And we conclude from this that the influence he has--or is assumed to have--is directly related to the controversial nature of the subject matter with which he is dealing. Indeed, it is

in those courses in Christian source materials that a large proportion of personal religious-intellectual shifts, say from conservative to liberal points of view are worked out. And the professor who presides over that operation is regarded both as an upholder and as negator, depending upon the vantage point from which he is perceived. It is clear that, by virtue of the nature of the materials which he presents and interprets, the professor of New Testament is approached as performing a religious function. That is, whether he wishes to or not, he assists and influences the process by which students come to terms with some of the fundamental tenets of the Christian faith. It also appears that these issues are both more prevalent and acute in the courses in Christian beginnings than in any other set of courses, including those in western thought and in the philosophy of religion. Most of all, this tells us about the mind-set of the students, and, at the same time, about the religious and ideological climate of the west coast and southern California region from which the majority of our students come. In short, conservative Christianity remains a very strong force in this locale. Because of this, the differences between conservative and liberal forms of Christian belief are remain compelling and lively issues for a large number of the students we see. The predilections of conservative Christianity are brought up for discussion and analysis in the classroom primarily because many of the students enrolled in the courses represent this orientation.

We conclude from this, in principle, at least in our situation,

that the position in which the professor is cast has as much to do with the influence he carries as does his style or intent to function in guru-like or non-guru-like capacity. We recognize that were the scope of our questionnaire larger, there would be significant additions and modifications and/or refinements here. We add, and will continue to ponder that the courses in which Christian theological issues arise seem to be the ones in which the relation of religion to religious studies becomes the most complex.

As indicated, we were interested in being able to identify some kind of consensual religious orientation (if there is one), to which persons may have come, in part, as a result of their course work in religious studies. We want to know whether there is a particular brand of religion that is being presented under the guise (intellectually and academically respectable) of religious studies. It is apparent that some of the religions of the middle 1960's to which college and university students warmed were influenced by the conceptual orientations of Pual Tillich and Mircea Eliade, thinkers whose approaches to human life were made most accessible on college and university campuses through course work in religious studies. And, it is most evident that religious studies came into being, in part, as a result of the influence of Tillich and Eliade. Since they were religious thinkers, it was via religious studies that their thought and work became available and was made comprehensible. Students took analytical course work in the study of religion

because this was a subject area through which the world could be viewed to make sense. With these precedents in mind, we asked a significant number of questions about the personal religious inclinations of the students we had had in courses. The conclusions (not surprisingly) were: the religious perspectives the religious-studies majors understand to be their own--that is, religious perspectives that can be distinguished from those of the churches, or the major religious traditions of the world, et al.--are similar in all respects to the religious perspectives that became prevalent on college and university campuses (and within dominant intellectual circles) precisely during the years that the students were enrolled.

From this vantage point, the role played by academic programs in religious studies seem limited, relative and perhaps corroborative. For it is evident that such factors as the Vietnam War, the disappointments over the fate of a previous counter-culture, the turn to Asian religious sensitivities, and the like, possess more of an influence in directing students to forms of personal and intellectual coherence than do regular academic courses. Said in another way, the personal religious attitudes of many of the students look very much like the personal religious attitudes of many of the professors, both within and outside the field of religious studies. And these personal religious attitudes correspond in all respects with more widespread dispositions within the social, cultural, and political milieu.

We couldn't spot the points at which religious studies plays anything more than a supportive role in this formative and integrative process, except in one regard. From time to time, certainly in the early, middle, and late 1960's, religious studies served as a primary means of transmitting available ideological data--the uses made of the positions of Tillich and Eliade is arguing the most apparent case in point--in terms of which receptors made sense of the modern world. In the early 1970's, religious studies functioned in the same capacity, but by then interest had turned to cross-cultural sensitivities. Again, religious studies made the data available by shifting to a cross-cultural mode of address. And this pattern has been repeated. All of it suggests that religious studies has exhibited larger socio-cultural resonances from time to time. For reasons not always in keeping with its explicit senses of purpose, it has supplied materials that have been useful in lending formation to new or revised ideological consensuses.

We can generalize further by suggesting that religious studies' place in this process of "cultural work" (as Erik Erikson would call it) is neither as obvious nor as direct today as it was, say a decade ago. In other words, the precise way in which religious studies functions ideologically now is different from the way it functioned in the mid or late 1960's. And yet, the "cultural work" function, or indeed the capacity for it, remains. What has changed, perhaps, is the ideology itself. The ideology more prominent in the 60's was one to

which the content of religious studies owed real congeniality; the one more prominent today is more difficult for religious studies to approach or support. It is clear, for example, that the great turn to the resources of Asian cultures could be supported throughout by the cross-cultural scope of the academic study of religion. And to this extent, students enrolled in religious studies courses were utilizing the proper materials of legitimate academic inquiry to foster and guide individual religious quests. As indicated, the correlations between the substance of the course work, the emergent ideology, and the personal aspirations of those persons enrolled in such courses are neither as direct nor as clear today as they were a decade or so ago. Over the past ten years, the academic enterprise has become more stabilized, less open to the dictates of stimulus-and-response, and more committed to agreed upon intellectual and professional standards regarding the nature of the inquiry, its scope, and the methods that are to be used in facilitating it.

When we say that there is "personal religion" in religious studies in the sense suggested above, we are probably not using "religion" as the word is intended via the interests of America's established churches. But here it must also be observed that the churches also contribute to the process of "cultural work" and ideological formation in ways that also are also distinguishable from their statements of purpose.

Furthermore, "religious studies" as students refer to it may differ widely from the ways in which "religious studies"

is defined by faculty or by the stated intentions of the undergraduate and graduate academic programs. It is conceivable, of course, that religious studies, in the pure and formal academic sense of the term, has never deliberately intended to engage in any additional form of "cultural work," but, instead, has come to perform this function only by virtue of the uses and intentions to which it has been put. It is understandable that faculty members, committed to the purer formal academic nature of the enterprise, will view any "cultural-work" function as something which religious studies may enjoin inadvertently, but certainly not by design or intention. It is a very complicated matter, particularly because an academic enterprise plays multiple roles, has nearly boundless influences, and performs various functions in addition to those explicityly stated in college and university catalogues and in published descriptions of programs and courses. But it is a historical consideration worth pondering whether there would be "religious studies" in any significant distinguishable academic sense--that is, as distinct from history courses in religious traditions, courses in the classical languages of religious traditions, and as differentiable from the work of chaplaincy programs and that of campus ministers--had the enterprise not performed a "cultural-work" role during the time of its inception and large growth.

In summary, students respond positively to religious studies. They find it interesting and useful not simply as a springboard to further academic work and/or as vocational

training, but also as a means to help clarify more comprehensive personal attitudes toward human life. From the students' perspective, religious studies has functioned in this capacity, and continues to do so, sometimes in spite of its stated and more formally academic intentions.

None of this would seem to be in violation of the interests of the separation of church and state (where these must be applied). The personal uses to which students put religious studies is similar in almost all respects to personal uses of courses in psychology, anthropology, sociology, philosophy, indeed, virtually every subject area whose goal is to describe, interpret, and evaluate important aspects of human experience. When religious studies provides materials for such needs, it simply is becoming party to one of the chief enterprises that occurs within the educational process.

Furthermore, none of these uses would seem to be in violation of the distinction scholars and teachers in religious studies have wanted to instill, namely, that between (1) the study of religion, and (2) the advocacy and/or promotion of it. Our questionnaire indicates that students admitted to finding personal worth in religious studies in full recognition of the fact that the purpose of religious studies is to study, analyze, and interpret religious phenomena. This means that students are clear about the fundamental distinction even when utilizing the products of such study for personal interests and needs.

But we can go further. For it is probable that "personal

interests and needs" are met most forcefully and adequately because (and when) religious studies is directed toward study rather than toward responding deliberately religiously to such interests and needs. In short, religious studies seems to meet the multiple demands made upon it most effectively and adequately when it pursues its intrinsic unum necessarium in the most rigorous and resolute fashion possible.

Students have understood the message about the operational distinctions under which religious studies is being conducted. Students respond positively to the "religious utility" of such course work even (or, more properly, especially) when the intention of the programs is academic and not religious. At this stage in our analysis, these issues seem remarkably clear. When we move on to faculty perceptions, there are large differences of opinion regarding the auspices under which religious studies operates. We shall turn to an analysis of the statements made by faculty members next.

FACULTY INTERESTS

The analysis of faculty opinion is based upon the discussions that occurred during the three-day conference, supplemented by the testimony that was offered during the course of two related extended conversations. The first of these was conducted by the Program for the Study of New Religious Movements, of the Graduate Theological Union, in Berkeley, and was held in June, 1977. The second occurred at the Wingspread Conference Center, near Racine

Wisconsin, in February, 1978, at a conference on "research needs in religious studies" sponsored by the Council on the Study or Religion, the Institute of Religious Studies, and the Johnson Foundation, and funded by the Johnson Foundation as well as the Research Division of the National Endowment for the Humanities. The issue of "the influence of religious studies upon religion" was tangential to the subjects addressed at both of these conferences, but it did surface and was discussed repeatedly. The GTU conference dealt primarily with the impact and significance of the new religions. The Wingspread Conference, as indicated, was directed toward identifying areas within religious studies of important and demonstrable "research needs." Both tasks became impossible apart from careful critical assessments of the nature and function of religious studies, its scope, legitimate ranges of interest and concern, and its current strengths and weaknesses. Such issues and interests implied that the ways in which religious sensitivity and the academic study of religion intersect and interact would also become a deliberate and conscious item of inquiry.

From these three events, it is possible to discern some faculty consensus. To be more specific, faculty opinion regarding "the influence of religious studies upon religion" was formulated through a series of attempts logically and conceptually to stipulate relationships and interdependencies between the primary polar terms. In doing this, the faculty members involved

in the effort seemed to agree upon one large and all-controlling principle. There is deep, persistent, and almost unanimous concern, whatever else is said, that religious studies be construed as a legitimate academic undertaking in the fullest and most rigorous senses of the terms. This implies that religious studies must be conducted in objective, scientific, scholarly, methodologically circumspect, and analytically rigorous terms and forms as befits the treatment of any true and proper subject/object of intellectual inquiry within the university. There is a strong consensus among faculty members that this objective must be upheld without qualification. Furthermore, there is no basis upon which to sanction the enterprise, in their opinion, unless such high scholarly standards are upheld. Consequently, there is a tendency to regard any sort of alliance between religious studies and entities fundamentally non-academic, as between "religious studies" and "religion," for example, as a threat, a hindrance or violation of the analytical purity of the intellectual enterprise. There was full agreement here among the faculty persons involved in the several discussions. Their viewpoints are also reflected in nearly all of the papers that came under conference consideration.

But from this initial point of consensus, there is division, which runs all the way from mild deviation to deep disagreement. The point at issue concerns

the extent to which the question of the plausibility of religion should be allowed to become a conscious or explicit component of religious studies. And the corollary focuses upon the role of the teacher in the negotiation of these plausibility issues.

There are good reasons that such questions are raised. There are also good reasons that such issues are difficult to resolve. After all, religious studies deals with a highly controversial subject. It is similar in this respect to "politics," both of which are always surrounded by personal interests and investments as deep, intense, and volatile as any the human being knows. To demand that the subject of religion be treated in a thoroughly objective manner is to require that all participants in the inquiry divest themselves, at least for the duration of the inquiry, of all but purely analytical academic interests. This is not only a large methodological difficulty; it may also be an emotional, psychological, as well as theoretical impossibility. Simply put, the subject/object of inquiry, namely, religion, is not only open to deep and intensive personal interest, but invites the same. Many would contend, on respectable bases, that the nature of religion cannot be penetrated except in a deep and intensive personal way. To approach the matter in this way is less to argue for the propriety of a

particular approach to the subject than to recognize the distinctive nature and quality of the subject that is being approached. Because of its peculiarities, religion can hardly be a subject about which persons will feel neutral or indifferent, certainly not even those professors and instructors who purport and intend to be adopting an objective scholarly attitude. Furthermore, the responses of the students in the questionnaires confirm that academic coursework in religious studies is indeed responsible for occurrences of a religious nature, and not simply for intellectual growth, on the part of some persons who enroll in such courses. The study confirms that there are strong and compelling attitudinal and dispositional bases for Paul Tillich's equation of "religion" with "ultimate concern." Such considerations are bound to influence the auspices under which the subject is presented. They will also affect the manner in which it is received. Religious studies is an enterprise in which a highly controversial subject is presented and scrutinized, a subject which can hardly be examined without prompting questions that the prescribed methods of scholarly approach are not equipped to resolve or even address.

Not all faculty members see it this way, however. There are many of them who would contend that "religious interests" and "academic interests" can be distinguished and separated from each other, to enable the academic

enterprise to be conducted strictly on its own terms. It is by virtue of the strength of this distinction that many believe the primary operating principle to be safeguarded: religious studies is known then to be a thoroughly academic undertaking in the most rigorous and circumspect senses of the term. From this assumption, it follows that whatever else occurs within the execution of a properly-conceived religious studies does not belong to the core of the undertaking. It is, instead, an aberration, misguided extension, and frequently a gross violation of religious studies' fundamental raison d'etre.

Here two observations must be made before we proceed further. First, though the rationale for this would be difficult to uncover, faculty members tend to feel differently about attempts to discredit religion under a religious studies banner than they do about efforts to lend advocacy. The latter seems forbidden under any terms, at least in those situations (primarily within the state-supported public universities) which participants in the conference knew best. Discreditation is another matter, for it is most frequently construed as the expected product of the proper workings of the critical temper. And the critical temper is understood to be an appropriately prominent expression of the exercising of scholarly scientific objectivity. From this vantage point, legitimate criticism is most often viewed as measured judgment in the direction

of question-raising. Were the scholar to employ the techniques of the same critical temper to bolster the worth or adequacy of the materials being examined, he might find himself in near violation of our fundamental distinction.

The second observation is that the primary working distinction seems to be dependent upon rather conventional conceptions of the nature of religion, the nature of religious studies, as well as a unidimensional portrayal of the nature of the educational enterprise. To be sure, in actual practice, to cite an example, the Methodist form of the Protestant version of the Christian religion may not be discernible in the approach a particular professor (who may embody this orientation) displays or cultivates in the classroom. In this sense, it may be impossible for students enrolled in a class in religious studies to identify or classify the religious persuasion of the instructor of the class. Thus, in these conventional senses of the terms, religious studies may be "religiously free," at least most of the time, "free" at least in the most obvious ways. But this is not a very lucid or accurate portrayal of the intentions and workings of religious studies.

Furthermore, there are other distinctions that can be drawn too simply between religious studies and religion when the conventional attitude holds sway. It is simplistic to say, for example, that there are clear differences between

(a) describing a particular religion according to carefully-constructed phenomenological categories, and (b) portraying a religion in a manner that is deliberately designed to attract an audience into a receptive, sympathetic, or advocatory response. This is true, of course. A descriptive and analytical mode can indeed be distinguished from one whose intention is promotional or commendatory. It is a simple matter to become clear about the force of the distinctions when it is posed this way. So too is there virtual unanimity that religious studies is the study about religion and not indoctrination into it.

However, it is when religious studies and religion are construed in less simplistic, non-conventional, but more realistic ways that the distinctions become difficult to sustain. The easy distinctions seem most fitting, for example, when religion is treated primarily in terms of the religions, the religious traditions, or as what many now refer to as "organized religions." The distinctions are harder to maintain when religion is perceived in a variety of other aspects or dimensions, for example, as a factor in psychological development, a component within a more extensive social network or pattern of cultural formation, as "attitude to life" (a near equivalent in force and intention to weltanschauung), or even as a mode of human experience. There is little point in saying that "we are studying religion as a component of society, being

careful not to advocate that it should function this way." Or, "we want to examine the place of religious factors in processes of personality development, but we shall avoid raising the question of their plausibility." In short, the neat distinctions between purely objective portrayal and interpretive evaluative application can hardly be sharply drawn when the key terms are employed in something other than their conventional simplicity.

This helps explain why scholars in religious studies become adept at identifying blatant violations of the distinctions, but are less skillful in detecting subtle misadventures. There is a tendency among Protestant professors of religious studies (though they are not identified this way) to invoke the strictest canons of scholarly objectivity when describing religious studies in general, while inviting representatives of the Catholic persuasion, the Jewish religion, and of religious traditions of Asian cultures to adopt advocates' or insiders' points of view within the classroom. This suggests that the primary operating distinction is self-imposed upon the religious orientation that has achieved majority status within the academy, but is not enforced by the majority upon the others. The others are frequently made exempt from the rule.

So too is there insufficient recognition of the implicit religious quality and status of those working hypotheses and assumptions by which scholarly inquiry itself is directed and supported within the academy. (Professor Bellah's paper dealt with this very issue.) We refer to the tremendous intellectual confidences of the Enlightenment era, the convictions that reside in the usage of the scientific method and support free inquiry, the veritable worldivew that undergirds intellectual expectations and guides the conduct of inquiry. In citing this subject here, we are not interested in casting suspicion upon the conventional understanding of the relation between religious studies and religion by means of cultural and historical sleights-of-hand. It is rather to reiterate considerations that are being raised currently from a variety of viewpoints, both within and outside the academic community. It is becoming more apparent that the entire academic enterprise has been built up on the basis of assumptions and convictions which, once thought to be self-evident, are coming under increasing suspicion, or, rather, are being recognized as being very particular and/or peculiar. These are important issues for religious studies too, for many of its claims to methodological circumspection and theoretical objectivity may be supported by assumptions of a demonstrably particular and perhaps parochial nature.

But the most impressive evidence by far derives from the new situation that exists within colleges and universi-

ties with respect to the study of religion. For, for the first time in the history of learning, the primary scriptures of the major religious traditions of the world have been made accessible in readable fashion all at one time. And not only are these texts and documents available, but they are being illumined by interpreters trained in the several traditions out of which they come. Never before has it been possible to lay out the major teachings of the religious traditions, as it were, on the same table. As a consequence, participants in the learning process find it almost natural to approach religion from within a world-religions context. And it is appropriate to expect that when these same scholars and students come to formulate their own religious orientations, they will create stances that have been influenced by all of the traditions without being synonymous or identifiable with any one of them. It is important to note that this development is a consequence not of any violation of legal or academic rules pertaining to the study of religion, but falls quite naturally from the substance and force of the materials themselves. In this sense, religious studies has an impact upon religion, primarily because religious studies makes the substance of things available by means and in terms of which religious viewpoints are formulated.

RAMIFICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Findings of this sort may easily be misinterpreted and misapplied. It is conceivable that someone might cite our conclusions as evidence that religious studies exists in violation of some of the fundamental operating principles which it pretends to honor and espouse. And that evidence, when motives become subversive, might be employed to show that religious studies is not legitimately an academic enterprise, but, instead, some kind of curious mixture of interests, not all of which are straight-forwardly intellectual. Within the state-university scene in particular, the same contentions may be directed toward illustrating that religious studies does violence to the distinctions between the interests of church and state, that is, to the extent that its analyses and descriptions also interpret and influence.

We firmly believe such responses and applications to be unwarranted. In the first place, the constitutional safeguards protect citizens against comprehensible violations of the law and deviations from the norm. They are not designed to deal directly with more subtle forms of "religious influence" based upon sophisticated nuances and highly-refined conceptual distinctions. We find it difficult to believe that legal and constitutional issues are really at stake here. To recognize that religious studies influences religion in the ways we have identified is not

to provide materials to support the case that the academic study of religion, ipso facto, runs counter to the law or to the dictates of the First Amendment.

In point of fact, the ramifications of our study really belong to other ranges of interest. In the first place, the evidence on all sides supports the view that religious studies seems to have been accepted within American higher education, and as being a constellation of inquiry that deserves more than a marginal status. Religious studies does indeed exhibit an uncommon academic vitality. Its rich multiple contribution to the life of colleges and universities derives, in large part, from the responsibility it exercises on behalf of those disciplines and subject areas--textual studies, philosophical studies, historical studies, art history and theory, social studies, and the like--which constitute higher education and also belong integrally to religious studies' scope and work. It is the nature of religious studies to encourage, support, protect, and invest in both the humanities and the social sciences. Thus there are good reasons for the fact that wherever religious studies has become established on a campus in more than token fashion, it has tended to contribute to the overall academic vitality of its sponsoring institution.

Some go further and look upon religious studies as being in the academic lead, precisely because it is a

subject-area that cannot be effected except in a cross-cultural mode. Few other disciplines exist under the same requirements. And yet in a world growing increasingly smaller, in which contacts and interdependencies between east and west and the "third world" are becoming more frequent, intensive, and customary, it is probable that the other disciplines, to the extent they are able, will eventually adopt similar postures.

All of these factors dictate that there will be multiple overlappings between analytical and constructive factors in the academic study of religion. The same factors make it understandable that religious studies is a multiple contributor to the process by which students and teachers seek and find intelligibility in the universe. And the evidence that we have assembled indicates that the experience is generally positive from all sides. Students, on the whole, admit to coming to a deeper and richer appreciation of the nature of religion, its role in society and culture, and its influences upon individuals. In coming to a greater awareness of religion's impact elsewhere, they are also challenged to consider its actual and potential impact upon themselves. This too can be comprehended within the multi-layered process by which intelligibility and self-understanding are both sought and won.

That religious studies has influence upon religion has become apparent through our study. That it does so while

remaining religious studies can also be confirmed.

Now that we have completed our initial general inquiry, we are ready for some more specific issues and questions. For example, how do courses in religious studies in state-university curricular programs influence persons who approach them as confessing Christians? Or, how shall the actual religious attitudes and orientations of students today be identified and depicted? But these, clearly, are additional questions to which someone else's attention might be devoted. With respect to the subject of our more immediate scrutiny, it is enough to learn that the "doctrine of the two kingdoms" is an effective interpretive analog. For religious studies has indeed been formed and continues to be sustained by interests both academic and religious. It is not a religious undertaking, in the main, but an academic one, which, because of the nature of its subject matter, includes a multiplicty of religious overtones. It is a scholarly enterprise which includes both analytical and constructive components. Because of this, there is constant by-play between canons of religion and canons of criticism. And the combinations between them are probably religious studies' most important formative force. So far, at least, the interaction has been fruitful and positive from both sides. The product, we must add, has been an amazingly resilient undertaking, one which carries strong potential for religious and intellectual stimulation and transformation.