



DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

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A COMPREHENSIVE INVENTORY OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

The Council on the Study of Religion, acting as coordinating agency for the major professional societies in religious studies and theology in North America, is making application for supporting funds in order to conduct a full descriptive inventory of the functions, capacities, and programmatic and intellectual resources of the academic study of religion.

Such an analysis of the intellectual vitality and educational effectiveness of the discipline has never been comprehensively undertaken, though there have been numerous and significant projects of lesser scope. In 1972, for example, and under similar sponsorship, disciplined attention was given to the needs and capacities of graduate education in religious studies in a study most commonly referred to as THE WELCH REPORT. In 1977, and conceived and organized by the Council on the Study of Religion, and through funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities in cooperation with the Johnson Foundation, an "inventory of research needs in religious studies" was initiated with a conference at Wingspread, near Racine, Wisconsin. The conference was followed by a series of reports that were published in THE BULLETIN OF THE COUNCIL ON THE STUDY OF RELIGION, and circulated widely through the Council's constituent societies. And there have been efforts in briefer scope to come to terms with the intellec-

tual capacities of this still relatively embryonic field.

The pursuit of the present project is to build upon these precedents and to make the information gathered and analyzed more accessible to the profession and more useful in lending direction to its ongoing activities.

The proposal has been encouraged by a set of interacting factors. One very compelling reason is that religious studies is a relative newcomer to the academic scene (as we have already noted), having come into educational prominence as recently as the late 1950s and early to mid 1960s. Thus, there has been sufficient time for the discipline to take several definitive paths of educational and intellectual development. In that time it has also varieties of opportunities to test its intellectual strengths and to be able to identify and describe some of the obstacles it has encountered along the way. It is important that the discipline have an educated selfconsciousness regarding its accomplishments and achievements, and that teachers and researchers within the profession be encouraged to develop intellectual strategies to keep this momentum going.

The inventory we are calling for will be conducted within an intellectual and educational climate that is being formed or altered today by significant developments, challenges and transformations throughout the humanities and social sciences. In this regard, religious studies knows what it is to have a supply of qualified members of its workforce that far exceeds the availability of employment opportunities. The dynamics of faculty mobi-

lity have also been effected significantly, and the degree of extra-mural assistance available to the scientific and technological fields does not appear to have been matched proportionately within the humanities. On the other hand, the humanities are also experiencing a kind of renaissance in the sense that general education requirements throughout the country are being strengthened. Humanities components are being required of many incoming freshmen in the nation's colleges and universities. Concerted efforts are being made to improve the quality of humanities education in the elementary and secondary schools. And new partnerships between elementary/secondary and college/university institutions are being recommended and established -- not least by the recent report of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. The inventory of religious studies that we are calling for seems implicit within the larger, more comprehensive assessment that is occurring within the humanities generally. And there are additional special and more specific reasons for an inventory of the field of religious studies, each being explicit in the need and desire of the profession, as it were, to take its future more deliberately into its own hands.

For example, we within the profession have no clear understanding and no complete and accurate information regarding the essential statistical and demographic factors pertaining to our discipline. We estimate somewhat reliably that there are some 15,000 teachers and researchers who identify with the field, and we believe there are approximately 950 to 1000 regularly-established departments and/or programs of study exclusive of divinity

schools and theological seminaries. But none of this is very accurate, nor has any of it been adequately interpreted. In this regard we would like to know how many institutions offer regular academic programs. How many persons are employed within the work force? How many hold regular academic appointments? How many woman and how many men? What are the proportions of minority representation? How have such factors been altered during the past decade, during the past two decades? What do such employment patterns imply with regard to longer-range future developments? How many students -- both graduate and undergraduate, and in both the United States and Canada -- are enrolled in courses in the field? How many individuals are introduced to the subject in a given year? How many majors are there? How many doctoral candidates? How many doctoral candidates have been graduated, say, in the past decade and more? How does religious studies' performance, in this regard, compare with that of other fields and disciplines? If we are falling short, where and for what reasons does this seem to be occurring? If we have been successful, what lessons can our successes convey? In short, we covet more accurate figures.

We are also in need of a clearer and more accurate assessment of our collective organized research capacities. For example, how many regularly-established organized research units are there? What are their primary research foci? To what extent do they cooperate with each other, and, if so, on what basis? What problems does collective organized research in the field of religion encounter? What tasks do they perceive they are leaving un-

done? How do they measure their successes? To what extent are the products of their efforts known to others? How do they disseminate their work? What percentage of the religious studies profession is involved in collective research endeavors. What is the extent and what are the levels of extramural support for such collective research endeavors? In short, we wish to know more about the research accomplishments, together with the collective research potential, of our discipline, and the extent to which the same finds or enjoys institutional sponsorship.

We also want and need a clearer understanding of the operational coherence of the field. For example, what curricular models appear prominently? How would the range of such curricular models be delimited? Are there specific ways -- supported by curricular models -- by which students are introduced to the subject matter of the field? Does it appear that such models are intrinsic to religious studies, or have they been imported from other fields and disciplines within both the humanities and the social sciences? To what extent does the profession give deliberate attention to the matter of constructing, designing and revising such curricular models? How selfconscious is the field concerning the intellectual means and methods it employs to illumine its subject matter and to make it accessible? In short, we envision the inventory to contribute to methodological clarity regarding the prevailing intellectual questions.

In this regard, we wish to focus special attention on the content of the introductory course. For example, what do tea-

chairs wish to convey to students who are being exposed to the subject for the very first time? How deliberate are they in employing the introductory course to introduce students to religious studies as well as to the nature of religion? To what extent does the subject matter of the first course stand on its own ground, as it were? To what extent is it selected to serve as a "feeder" for other courses? We wish to know more about ways in which initial interest in the subject is directed toward exposure to the interest and dimensions of the academic work that constitutes the field of religious studies.

We'd like to know more about ways in which religious studies may be contributing -- both in content and in curricular organization -- to undergraduate general educational requirements. For example, how prominent is religious studies in the undergraduate humanities sequences (e.g., the intellectual histories of western civilization, the special programs in "humanities and values," et al.) that are being more frequently required of first and second-year undergraduate students? To what extent is religious studies an integral part of recent revisions of general education expectations? Are there instances that show deliberate and fruitful curricular cooperation? Do we have good examples, effective case studies? Where are they and who is responsible for their creation? To what extent can such examples be utilized as models? How can such information be shared with the constituency?

We wish a clearer understanding, too, of the dynamics of the

growth of sub-fields and disciplines within religious studies. For example, the past decade -- and longer -- has witnessed the birth and growth of a number of new and revised fields and disciplines within religious studies. One thinks specifically of the attention that has been directed toward Native American Religion, the "New Religions in America" (and elsewhere), and to "Women in Religion." One also thinks of the proliferation of courses in Ethnic Studies, to new courses in Environmental Studies, and to increased sensitivity to cross-cultural knowledge. We wish to know more about the extent to which these new features have been incorporated within religious studies -- if, indeed, they have been. To what extent do such new foci of inquiry and attention belong to already-established curricular sequences. Can an analyst generalize on the obstacles they have encountered when seeking curricular and methodological recognition and sanction. Are there significant success stories? Are there cooperative interdisciplinary ventures of note? How can this information -- if it exists -- be shared with the constituency? And more importantly, how, and in what ways, has the presence and growth of new sub-fields and sub-disciplines affected conceptions of the function and scope of religious studies?

We also need a clearer understanding of the financial vitality of the enterprise. In this regard, we'd like to know more about significant trends in sponsor-support of the field. We hear that programs, in some institutions, are experiencing significant diminishment of financial resources, and that some of these programs qualify to be called "endangered species." Has

institutional sponsorship of religious studies been significantly reduced or curtailed over the past several years or months? Are there significant patterns in funding that might be discerned? To what extent does the religious studies profession take advantage of extra-mural funding possibilities? How deliberate have such efforts been? How cooperative? How knowledgeable are rank and file teachers and researchers concerning extra-mural funding opportunities? How knowledgeable are those who have exercised leadership in this respect? How is such information disseminated and interpreted? In all of these respects, we need to know a lot more.

In this regard, we also need to know how much it costs to carry on our graduate programs nationwide? How expensive has it been to produce Ph.Ds in the field? Would there be ways in which institutions might cooperate to utilize funds and resources more effectively?

We covet, too, a clearer understanding of the vitality and utility of the publications we sponsor. For example, do we have the right kind of publications? Are there areas of our work that are over-emphasized or de-emphasized in our publication. Are the collaborative efforts the profession has made -- both in its own name (as, for example, in the work of Scholars Press) and in cooperation with other presses (as, for example, the joint publication ventures with Fortress Press, Crossroad, Harper and Row, and others -- proving to be effective? Does THE BULLETIN OF THE COUNCIL ON THE STUDY OF RELIGION serve the purposes for which it



was established? Would there be more effective ways to utilize or direct our publication and publishing capacities? Are there other or perhaps alternative cooperative arrangements that ought to be pursued and tested? On the basis of the publications that are available, do teachers and researchers in the field believe that they are being well served? Is it possible that there is actually too much to read, and that the profession is spending too much of its resourcefulness talking to itself, as it were, maintaining communication between its constituent members? Is the field making the best use of the technological resources that are available? Should there be training programs to introduce teachers and researchers to some of the products of the technological revolution? We need to know a lot more about how effectively we are communicating both with and to ourselves and to the communities of respondents beyond our prescribed circles.

A clearer understanding of our alliances and affiliations with other fields and disciplines within the humanities and social sciences, as well as with representative professional societies in these fields, is also desirable. For example, have we been deliberate enough in this regard? Does cooperation and/or contact occur on anything other than an ad hoc basis? To what extent are we isolated from the goings-on within other professional organizations? To what extent do the other professional organizations draw upon our cultivated expertise? Are we learning from them, and do we have much to teach or convey? How can we develop greater expertise and sufficiency? For instance, what percentage of our membership regularly reads THE CHRONICLE OF

HIGHER EDUCATION? What percentage of our readership would be paid subscribers? How familiar are our members with larger and more comprehensive educational trends? To what extent are they aware of the decision-making processes by which such larger and more comprehensive policies are enacted? We need to know considerably more about the effectiveness and/or ineffectiveness of our relationships with other professional organizations, and with other fields and disciplines.

High on the list of incentives responsible for this proposal is the desire to have a clearer understanding of what the study of religion has contributed to a broader comprehension of the nature of religion in society and culture. More precisely, we wish to know what our inquiries and research have accumulated toward. What general theories about the nature and function of religion would the profession be willing to subscribe to (if any)? What have we learned about religion and how can our comprehension be expressed and communicated? How does what we have learned contribute to human understanding in more comprehensive and/or extensive terms? To what extent does any of it translate into the kind of wisdom that is no longer regulated by the dictates of our own methodological and/or substantive provinces? In short, after our collective efforts of more than two decades, what do we know about religion that we didn't know before? And whom do we look to as having provided the most reliable vantage points from which such comprehension can be cultivated? More specifically, we need to know what our most compelling theories are. We need to be aware of the areas upon which most concentrated attention has

been focused. We need to comprehend why some theories have gone awry or have led to dead ends. We need to know how hermeneutics functions within the framework of our larger collective effort.

And finally, we need to take some giant steps to make whatever information and knowledge we uncover and amass available to our constituencies. We need to develop the mechanism for keeping such updated information current. Thus, one of our tasks will be to gather information in such a way that the information can be regularly and easily tapped, regularly and easily updated, and regularly and easily made available to the profession and others for whom it would be useful. In this regard, we need to analyze the effectiveness of our data-gathering and storing mechanisms, and thoroughly revise the procedures -- by creating new ones -- by which this vital information is collected and transmitted.

We conceive of the work on the project to occur in stages. We would like, first, to convene an advisory committee to lay the groundwork for the execution of the project. This group will be made up of the executive committee of the Council on the Study of Religion together with selected scholars and researchers in the field. We envision that the committee members will work together over a full two-day period to establish the specific foci of the project and to identify persons who will assume more specific responsibility. We are seeking \$10,233 (the details of the budget is attached) for this initial consultation, and we anticipate that it will occur in Denver (most probably at the Hilton Hotel

near the airport) -- or, alternatively, in Washington or San Francisco -- during the late winter months, 1984. For our initial consultation, we have invited Dr. Dennis P. Jones, Vice-President of the National Council for Higher Educational Management Systems, in Boulder, Colorado, to help guide our discussion.

We shall utilize subsequent months in 1984 to place the design of the project in final form, and to confirm the appointment of our selected principal investigators and host institution(s). We intend to have the entire project ready for confirmation by the Council on the Study of Religion at its annual meeting in October, 1984. We anticipate work on the project to be completed before the end of the 1985-86 academic year.