

THE PRINCIPLES AND MEANING
OF THE STUDY
OF RELIGION

PROFESSOR N. SMART
M.A., B.Phil. (Oxford)

THE PRINCIPLES AND MEANING OF THE STUDY OF RELIGION

PROFESSOR N. SMART, M.A., B.Phil. (Oxford)

PROFESSOR OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

[Delivered on 14 February 1968]

INTROIT

I am very conscious of the honour which the University of Lancaster has done me in electing me into the Chair of Religious Studies. One way of expressing my gratitude is to offer a sketch of the fundamental principles of this subject. It is indeed time that thinking about religion in the context of higher and other forms of education was clarified and reformed. I shall concentrate on the theoretical side of the subject: practical matters, such as the relation between Religious Studies and the world outside the University, I shall leave to a Concluding Unscientific Postscript; and I shall not attempt to delineate in detail the social confusions and anxieties which have tended to put a question-mark over many of the theological studies in our British universities. There is much to commend in what goes on elsewhere, but the fundamental basis of the study of religion has scarcely been thought out. If someone complains that my theoretical approach is divorced from the practical applications of religion or atheism, my reply is that applications presuppose understanding and clarity of aim.

I cannot pay tribute to a predecessor, but it is very fitting to express my gratitude to my colleagues Adrian Cunningham and Robert Morgan. A professor is only a figurehead, and the creation of the present pattern of Religious Studies in this University owes a very great amount to their insights, enthusiasms and abilities. The theory of Religious Studies belongs to them as well as to me: mind you, they may not agree with all that I shall say, but it is precisely the virtue of a team that its members influence one another, and this possibility presupposes that they start from different understandings. I might add that the multidisciplinary character of the subject means that it is through teamwork, and not just the pursuit of specialisms, that the subject is advanced.

What kind of discipline, then, is the study of religion? If it tenderly embraces such figures as Weber, Durkheim, Lévi-Strauss, Evans-Pritchard; Otto, Pettazzoni, Eliade, Van der Leeuw, Zachner; Feuerbach, Marx, Schweitzer, Barth, Buber, Bultmann, Gogarten, Ebeling, Karl Rahner; Sartre; Aquinas, Hume, Kant, Schleiermacher, Kierkegaard, William James, John Wisdom – not to mention Isaiah, Jesus, Paul, the Buddha, Nagarjuna, Ramanuja, Muhammad and Al-Ghazzali: if it involves the consideration of all these, what form and meaning can it have?

THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE STUDY OF RELIGION

Religion is concretely manifested in a variety of traditions, social structures, forms. Just as there is no colour which is not one of the colours, so there is no religion which is not a particular religion. This multiplicity of form is highly important to the establishing of the foundations of the subject, as we shall see. But there is a further complexity which needs attention.

A religion is complex, organic and subject to change. By saying that it is complex, I mean that there are, so to speak, different dimensions of religion. Thus a religion typically incorporates doctrines, myths, ethical injunctions, rituals and styles of experience, and these are all embodied and manifested in social institutions. It has, in other words, a doctrinal, a mythic, an ethical, a ritual, an experiential and a social dimension. Perhaps the study of religion has too often been over-intellectualistic, and has concentrated too much upon the doctrinal dimension of religion, and the history of religious ideas. This can involve a distortion, precisely because religions are organic. By saying that they are organic, I mean that the different elements and dimensions interpenetrate one another. Thus the meaning of doctrinal concepts has to be understood in the milieu of such activities as worship and of such personal and communal experiences as give vitality to belief. One might in this sense say that religions are 'vertically organic'; but even within one of the dimensions which I have referred to, there is a kind of 'horizontal' organicness. For instance, within the doctrinal dimension, it is not possible to understand the concept of Nirvana in Buddhism, without seeing the way in which it is embedded in a whole fabric of doctrines – about the self, about the impermanence of things, about the role of the Buddha, etc. Religious concepts typically come 'not in utter nakedness / But trailing clouds of doctrine do they come'. These concepts also in part gain their meaning from their 'vertical' relationship to practices such as meditation, institutions such as the Sangha, and so forth. In brief, a religion is both complex and organic. Understanding one feature of a religion involves looking more widely at the whole, just as the meaning of a particular patch of colour in a painting is seen by reference to the rest of the painting. The attempt to describe the inter-relationships between the elements in a faith may be called a 'structural description'.

But also a religion changes, and thus a central place in religious studies must always be given to history. Indeed, the historical descriptions of religious changes themselves generate historical explanations; and in understanding a religion from the structural point of view, one tends to be driven to consider the historical origins of particular features of a faith.

But it is necessary, in describing the past, to look at it both from an inward and

from an outer perspective. By this I mean that one is not only concerned with the 'outer' fact that the Buddha preached at a certain time or that Paul went on a particular voyage. One is concerned too with the inner intentions and attitudes of the participants in historical events. We might call this *the principle of inwardness*.

This means that the study of religion has some of the properties of anthropology. The anthropologist can scarcely be a mere observer of externals. To understand the meaning of the belief-system of the people with whom he is concerned, he has to engage with them. He may not belong to the group that he studies, but the encounter with people and his own imaginative capacities can lift him from the condition of not belonging to a position of imaginative participation. At least this is required in the study of religion. Some people would go further, and say that there could be no proper structural description of a faith save by those who belong to it. The only description of a religion worth having is one that comes from within, it may be said. There is an important truth contained in this thesis, and I would not wish to under-estimate the problems of entering into other men's religious beliefs, feelings and experiences. Nevertheless, the need to believe in order to understand, in this sense, can be exaggerated. Indeed, if the thesis were taken rigorously, a whole number of important studies would collapse – history, for instance, would become trapped in insuperable problems if ever the historian were concerned with the impact of more than one religious faith on any given phase of human culture. Further, if we think that only a person of the same faith or the same community can understand that faith and that community, then we must ask: What counts as the *same faith* or the *same community*? For example, the modern Christian will regard himself as belonging to a community and faith line going back to New Testament times. But the early adherents of Christianity lived in a cultural milieu highly different from our own today. This, indeed, is a main reason for self-conscious contemporary attempts within Christianity to 'de-mythologise', namely to re-present the essential meaning of New Testament myths, but without using the New Testament cultural clothing. (When I speak of myths here, of course, I do not mean the word in the vulgar sense, to indicate stories which are false, but rather to mean a certain style of expressing beliefs.) In principle, even where a linear identity of community is claimed, the exercise of understanding early phases of the community's faith involves cross-cultural understanding. To put the point crudely: Is the contemporary Christian culturally not more different from the primitive Christian than he is from the present-day Jew?

Again, in regard to the problem of understanding a religion's inwardness, it should be noted that not only are there degrees of understanding, but there are relevant forms of understanding other than the understanding of inwardness.

For instance, historical and structural explanations can be relevant to the way a person expresses his inner understanding of his own religion. Belonging to a faith is no guarantee of a *superior* understanding of the religion in question, though it *helps*. A danger of appealing to the principle of inwardness is that a handle is given to artificial restrictions upon the study of religion which are common in our culture.

To sum up so far: a religion is complex, organic, subject to change. It contains both an inward and an outer aspect. Because of its changing character, the history of religion is important. Because of its complex and organic nature, the structural study of religion is important. Because of its inward nature, both historical and structural studies require imaginative participation.

I have attempted to sketch what is meant by a structural description. To some extent the very achievement of a structural description of a religion forms a kind of explanation of its particular features, for the meaning of a given element is brought out by placing it in its living and complex milieu. For instance, to understand what some Christians mean by Real Presence, one has to place this idea in the context of a fabric of ideas and of a fabric of sacramental activities and worship. But in addition to this sort of explanation, which I shall call an internal explanation, there is another kind which ranges further afield. One might, for instance, consider Freud's theory of religion as an attempt at a structural rather than an historical explanation of certain kinds of religious ideas. It is true that Freud himself had a compulsion to back his structural theory by pseudo-historical explanations as well. The tendency in anthropological, psychological and sociological studies of religion is towards such structural explanations of religious phenomena. These, clearly, also become relevant to our treatment of history. If Freud were correct about religion, which I personally partly doubt, his theory would help to explain the appeal and therefore the spread of certain cults.

But this means that the study of religion must be comparative, for the nearest thing to experimentation as a test of structural theories is seeing how they work in relation to separate cultures and historical traditions. For instance Freudian theory of religion seems to break down in Rangoon and Kandy, where Father-figures in religion are notoriously absent. Again, recently I was reading an account of a contemporary debate about religion between Marxists in China: but the Marxist classifications of religion which they used do not strictly apply to Chinese religion, even if they may have applied in the West. Weber's account of Indian religion, in the attempt to establish experimentally his theory about religion and the rise of capitalism, is partly outmoded because the secondary sources have changed so much. The comparative study of religion, unfortu-

nately, is not always geared to this task of the testing of theories, but it has nevertheless been vital to many studies of religion, and remains so. Consider the following quotation from Lévi-Strauss, which indicates also that some of the most exciting problems in the social sciences arise about religion. He writes:

Of all the chapters of religious anthropology, probably none has tarried to the same extent as studies in the field of mythology. From a theoretical point of view the situation remains very much the same as it was fifty years ago, namely chaotic. Myths are still widely interpreted in conflicting ways: as collective dreams, as the outcome of a kind of aesthetic play, or as the basis of ritual. Mythological figures are considered as personified abstractions, divinised heroes or fallen gods. Whatever the hypothesis, the choice amounts to reducing mythology either to idle play or to a crude kind of philosophic speculation.¹

But if Lévi-Strauss' diagnosis is correct, think what it means for a whole range of inquiries – for anthropology itself, for biblical studies, for some aspects of the philosophy of religion, for some areas of literature, for some areas of history. If we have indeed failed to understand the nature of myth, these studies to that extent rest upon insecure foundations. Where such great problems exist, there is bound to be excitement and the promise of fruitful advances in understanding. Thus in the sphere of biblical studies, for various reasons, people want to penetrate to the real meaning of early Christian faith. But how can we do this without knowing what it is like to look at, say, the Ascension not from a modern perspective, as an apparently miraculous historical event, but from the perspective of mythic thinking, where *our* distinctions between history and interpretation are not made?

To sum up so far: the fact that the study of religion must be both historical and structural entails that it must also be comparative. Much is lost in understanding if the study of religion is confined simply to one line and one tradition.

I suggested earlier that *at least* what is required for the understanding of religion is a kind of imaginative participation. I say *at least*, but one might better say that actual participation itself is a form of imaginative participation. But clearly the imaginative entering in to other people's perspectives becomes vital and necessary if the study of religion is unavoidably in part comparative. But one needs to say more about this form of participation, which involves, as I said earlier, the encounter with people. To understand others one has to understand oneself. Some of the misinterpretations of religion in anthropology, for instance, have occurred because investigators and theorists have tended to adopt the rationalistic assumptions of their particular society. It is too easy to look upon certain myth-oriented rituals as simply irrational. If they are treated from such a modern, technological perspective, their real significance is lost, and one is liable to invent such theories as that of Lévy-Bruhl, where a pre-logical way of thinking is ascribed to 'primitives'. The way in which one's own cultural

assumptions can distort is brought out in a nice comment by Franz Steiner:

But we need not retain Lévy-Bruhl's independent category 'primitive punishment' as opposed to the *rational* concept of punishment – as if, since the beginning of the world, there had ever been a rational punishment!²

In brief, the understanding of others, whether in the past of one's own tradition or in other cultures, requires self-understanding – the understanding of one's own milieu. The observer is not wholly detached: in encountering others and in participating imaginatively in their life, he as it were enters into the very field which he is contemplating. In entering into that field, he himself becomes a subject of his own investigation and he must question his own assumptions. I would therefore argue that historical studies themselves, in the case of religion, need to be co-ordinated to modern structural studies. There is a continuing dialectic between the ancient and the modern, and between our culture and others.

The combination of the need for imaginative participation and the fact that the study of religion is necessarily bound up with modern structural approaches entails another important side to the whole subject. I have referred to a certain assumption about rationality in Lévy-Bruhl. One can find similar assumptions elsewhere. Thus, in regard to the sociology of religion, Talcott Parsons remarks:

Weber's theoretical analysis of the role of nonempirical ideas is in fact part of a much broader system of analytical social theory, the emergence of which can be traced in a number of sources quite independent of Weber.

Moreover not only did Weber, Durkheim, and others converge on this particular part of a theoretical system, dealing mainly with religion, but as, among other things, very important parts of the work of both men show, this common scheme of the sociology of religion is in turn part of a still broader theoretical system which includes the economic and technological analysis of the role of empirical knowledge in relation to rationality of action.³

It is clear here that a certain model of the relation between scientific and empirical ideas on the one hand and those of religion on the other is implied. But such a model is, in part at least, the consequence of a certain philosophical position. Many of the notorious problems in the sociology of knowledge and in the history of ideas arise from uncertainty about the interplay between the inner logic of a branch of inquiry and the structural and historical factors in society influencing its development. Consequently, it is not possible to avoid conceptual issues in structural and historical explanations in sociology of religion and elsewhere. The question of the relation between different styles of discourse and ways of thinking is a philosophical question. It follows, therefore, that the logic of the study of religion itself impels one towards taking the philosophy of religion seriously.

But how is the philosophy of religion seriously to be conducted? It should be firmly analytic, in the sense that we should take a careful look at the nature of religious concepts and their logical and other relationships to concepts in different spheres. Thus, for instance, much depends, if we are contemplating the relation between religious concepts and those of science, on conclusions about the real significance of seemingly cosmological statements in religion. Crudely, is *Genesis* playing in the same league as Fred Hoyle? This crude question, on examination, crumbles into many lesser questions about the proper way of analysing and interpreting mythic language, etc. So then philosophy of religion must at least be strongly conceptual and analytic in its concerns. But by the same token, philosophy of religion must be realistic about its subject matter. There is a danger that one may philosophize not about religious language as it actually is and has been, but about a reconstruction of religious language as it ought to be. Thus some supposed recent analyses of religious language turn out to be partly in the nature of apologetics – either in favour of Christianity, etc., or in favour of an atheistic standpoint. If philosophy of religion is to be realistic, then it must be closely related to descriptive and comparative inquiries, and also must be sensitive to the ways in which the understanding of religion changes.

This last remark could be expressed in a different way. One important mode in which a religion may change is the continuing reinterpretation of its meaning in the light of cultural and other changes. It follows from an earlier point in my argument, the point namely that a single community or faith line stretches through a diversity of cultures, that even an appearance of being static involves a changed interpretation of meaning. For instance, the theology of St. Thomas Aquinas as used by many Roman Catholic theologians since Leo XIII's Encyclical *Aeterni Patris* has quite a different flavour and significance in the context of these latter days from its flavour and significance in the time of Aquinas himself. To complicate matters, a religious tradition at a given time tends to be variegated, so that different positions are held within it. Sometimes an important point about these positions is that they represent themselves criticisms of current and older interpretations of the faith. This is why we sometimes want to make a distinction between empirical Christianity, say, and 'true' or 'authentic' Christianity: one who speaks thus is implicitly criticizing aspects of the tradition. Further, changes in the expression of a religion themselves may be a response to external criticisms. It is, for instance, difficult to understand the nineteenth- and twentieth-century developments in Christianity in the West without paying attention to atheistic and agnostic criticisms of Christianity. To some degree, the converse is also true.

In the light of such changes and critical positions, the engagement with religion

which is necessary to the project of imaginative participation (including in this, as I said earlier, actual participation) must incorporate engagement with the changing ideas of the religion one is concerned with. Here the concern is not directly descriptive or explanatory, though it is very relevant to these concerns, since the latter themselves, as I have argued, drive one towards philosophical problems about religion, which themselves in turn drive one to a realistic evaluation of religious and atheistic positions. But in being engaged with these, one is placed in the same arena. One might call this engagement with ideas and positions the 'expressive-critical' side of the study of religion. One is liable to be expressing a position within the field, or criticising a position within the field. By the principle I enunciated earlier, namely that ancient studies should always be placed in relationship to modern ones, the most natural way of incorporating the expressive-critical side of the study of religion is by treating it in the modern and even strictly contemporary context. In any event, the only direct access which we have to the inwardness of religion is in the present.

It should be noted that the expressive-critical principle implies that religious studies must always have a penumbra. If we define religion in such a way that it does not include anti-religious atheism – and there seems to be a good reason for defining it in this way, or the atheist is deprived of his anti-religion – then the study of religion itself must always move out into the consideration of positions, such as atheism, which in some respects at least play in the same league.

To sum up this phase of the argument: the descriptive and explanatory aspects of the study of religion themselves raise conceptual issues, and therefore imply the necessity of the philosophy of religion. In turn, the philosophy of religion has to take account of the changing interpretations of religious traditions and in general needs to be realistic. By the principle of imaginative participation, and so engagement with the object, philosophy of religion is bound to take seriously the expressive-critical side. To put this in another way, theological and other expressions of the contemporary tradition, together with external criticisms of these expressions, have a necessary function in the study of religion.

Since concern with the expressive-critical side has sometimes been much abused in the shaping of religious studies, I would wish to insist that, however seriously positions within the field may be taken, the shape of religious studies must not be determined by a single position within the field. I believe that no field of inquiry should have its total shape determined by a position within it. The position within the field which has determined the shape of many university studies of theology has been this – that biblical and early Church ideas and realities are normative for Christian faith, and that the task of theology

is somehow to study the latter. There are at least two ways of treating this task. One is to confine inquiries to the empirical level – to turn them into historical and to some extent structural inquiries, though restricting attention primarily to the early material. The other is to accept the logic of the term 'normative' and to use the material as a basis for *expressing* the Christian faith. The former way of approaching the study of religion is defective because of its confinement to a small area of empirical data. If my argument hitherto has been persuasive, a very restricted understanding of religion, or of a particular phase of religion, is bound to accrue upon the ancient-history approach to Christianity. The second way of approaching the study of religion is at least more candid, but has a double defect: firstly it tends to be insulated from the wider understanding of religion which structural and comparative studies can bring;⁴ and secondly, by the very fact that it begins from an exclusive position within the expressive-critical field, it is liable to become inhibited and even secretive in the context of academic institutions devoted to an open and critical pursuit of truth. The logic of religious studies leads to a degree of pluralism, and it is in the pluralistic situation in any case that expressions and criticisms of religious faith can be candidly and excitingly made.

The danger of the dominance of a particular position in shaping the study of religion implies that a clearer pattern of studies will always emerge if one sees the expressive-critical side as following logically from the descriptive and explanatory sides, rather than conversely. I would as a matter of fact argue that the converse logic works also. But it should not escape attention that the study of religion is so often treated by reference to a single tradition and on the basis of a particular position. Too often the deeper consideration of modern social anthropology, sociology, psychology, philosophy and history has been neglected, as though an elucidation of biblical and early Christian ideas were sufficient and as if interest in these other matters were an amateurish luxury. By the converse logic I would argue that in any event the elucidation of those early ideas requires a very ramified, modern and imaginative structure of enquiry.

I have attempted to formulate the principles for the study of religion. I have not been concerned with the application and usefulness of this study to society at large. I reserve this for my Concluding Unscientific-Postscript, to which I shall shortly turn. Meanwhile, the nerve of the argument can be summed up as follows. The study of religion must be in part historical and therefore descriptive. But the principle of inwardness must be employed, so that historical and other descriptions must incorporate descriptions of the perspectives of those who hold religious beliefs, etc. In view of the complex and organic nature of religious belief-systems, inner description involves a form of structural description. Both historical accounts and structural descriptions in some measure

function in an explanatory manner, and one is thus driven in the study of religion to wider forms of explanation, chiefly structural. These themselves need to be tested comparatively, and therefore the study of religion itself must involve some multiplicity. The principle of inwardness implies that the investigator himself must engage with the belief and positions that he seeks to understand. He thus enters the field of his own investigation, and thus must have an understanding of his own individual and cultural condition. This implies that there must always be a dialectic between ancient and modern studies and between one's own culture and others'. But also, attempts at explanation themselves generate conceptual issues, philosophical ones. This is a further reason for engagement with the expressive-critical side of religion, for philosophical approaches need to be living and realistic. Thus a necessary feature of the study of religion is the interplay from within it of expressive-critical positions, and it is in this sense that religious studies incorporate theology. But the shape of the field must not be determined from a position within it. Concretely it follows from all this that at least the following branches of study are necessary.

First, there must be history of religions, for without it there are no data for a testing of structural explanations. *Second*, there must be phenomenology of religion, in which a sound classification and understanding of elements of religion can be reached: without this the data supplied by the history of religions are unfruitful. *Third*, there must be sociology of religion and its kin, such as social anthropology and the psychology of religion; for without these our understanding of religious ideas and phenomena become unstructural, unselfcritical and over-intellectualistic. *Fourth*, there must be philosophy of religion, for conceptual decisions are deeply embedded in structural explanations and descriptions within the social sciences. *Fifth*, there must be engagement with modern religious and atheistic thought, for without this philosophical and structural approaches to religion become insensitive to change and to one aspect of the inwardness of description; moreover they are necessary to self-understanding, without which the attempt to understand others by engagement and imaginative participation can be grossly distorted. *Sixth*, in our culture and because modern studies of religion have so far been primarily developed in the West, the engagement with modern religious thought most naturally is tied to an understanding of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, and part of the contemporary inwardness of this tradition is that it looks to origins. Hence, there is a strong argument for maintaining a dialectic between biblical studies and modern expressive-critical positions. It happens too that such studies raise actually the problems of anachronism that beset understanding. Thus the New Testament must be seen both historically and

dialectically, where the dialectic is between ancient and modern, between the origins and their re-presentation.

There are other aspects of the study of religion which ought also to be developed, but these at least seem the most necessary.

The student of religion thus needs to have historical knowledge and expertise, sensitivity and imagination in crossing cultures and time, and analytical grasp. He has to be a latter-day Leonardo. This shows why Religious Studies is neither the Queen of the Sciences nor the Knave of Arts; but it is one of the foci of the humanities and social sciences. In it some of the most engaging and perplexing problems in these disciplines have a meeting point. For to tell the truth, we are all of us far from having anything but a rather superficial grasp of the multiple structures of religious faith, myths and institutions.

So much for a theoretical delineation of the study of religion. I now turn irreverently to considering its applications in a wider world.

CONCLUDING UNSCIENTIFIC POSTSCRIPT

The first way the theory can be put into practice is by distilling it into a syllabus. A three-pronged and selective attack on the topics necessary to the study of religion can be made, as here at Lancaster so far, by concentrating on the study of modern religious and atheistic thought in the West, on comparative and descriptive studies of religion, including the history of Indian religions, sociology of religion and the phenomenology of religion, and on biblical studies, chiefly the New Testament. The three parts are closely related, but I need not spell out how they are, since the forms of integration are implied in the theoretical treatment of the subject I have just offered.

The simplest way to show the relevance of such an approach to the problems of the consumer and of the wider world is to summon up some familiar ghosts. Let them enter. The first few of them originate in universities, but the rest come from outside the ivory-coated towers of Academe.

The first is the ghost of Mr. Biblical Studies. I address him thus:

You are a learned person and gifted with tongues. I admire your capacities in ancient hear-eastern history. But why are so many resources of talent tied up in your subject? Do you not develop it strongly out of regard for the Christian faith? Do not many of your students want to teach religion in schools? I hope they can apply the ancient history to contemporary experience, and are *au fait* with a modern understanding of myth. You may perhaps think that we under-value languages, but we encourage Greek, and graduate students are liable to know German or Pali, both important languages this side of heaven.

Next there is the ghost of Mr. Ancient History Extended. I exorcise him thus:

You bring the history forward to the Fathers of the Church and you make a dash into the Reformation. You do all this because you think this history is relevant to theology. But you do not do theology. 'Give them the tools,' you say, 'and they will do the job outside the ivory-coated walls.' Imagine a French Professor saying: 'My students will grasp the language, and they should be interested in literature; but they must never read Racine or Flaubert, Balzac or Sartre within these precincts.' So your scholarship is in its way excellent, but where is your logic? I know that *odium theologicum* and atheistic suspicion have queered your pitch, but perhaps times have changed.

Next there enters the ghost of Mr. Theology. I say to him:

You go beyond Mr. Ancient History Extended. You think that Theology should pronounce upon the world and illuminate opinion, as well as show its scholarly-historical foundations. But perhaps you are a little uneasy, in that you determine the nature of the subject from a position within the field. This indeed is what much of the trouble has been about. Caesar's wife must be above suspicion, and this is done by rendering unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's. I hope, too, that all the ancient history does not get in the way of modern self-understanding and comparative sympathies.

The next is the ghost of Mr. Atheistic Professor. I address him thus:

I can understand why you are not too happy with Mr. Theology. You like pluralism at least. Happily the logic of the subject entails a plurality of approaches. A Department of Atheism, incidentally, would be entertaining, and it would educate men in the understanding of such a pervasive and attractive folly (in your eyes) as religion. Even you would have to read some German theology. But you are in some respects a naughty man. Your suspicions of Mr. Theology drove him to withdraw in favour of Messrs. Biblical Studies and Ancient History Extended. You are a factor in the narrowness which you rightly condemn.

Next there enters the ghost of Mr. Librarian. I say to him:

We shall attempt to make the task of re-classifying the books as painless as possible.

Next there enters the ghost of a Bishop. I say to him:

My lord, I expect that you want parsons who are professional and relevant. You are fortunate, of course, because many of them can get an education at the university at the expense of the State. But I.C.I. and the Rationalist Press Association have the same advantage. Perhaps you would prefer your men to study ancient history. But the questions there are for them less exciting. It may be useful for your men to understand the modern situation of religion, and it may be that many of their parishioners will turn out to be Muslims.

Next there enters the ghost of Mr. Moralist. I say to him:

You are rightly concerned that religious education should help to give moral sensitivity. All education should. We consider that moral issues are so important that we treat of the churches in the Nazi period.

Next there enters the ghost of Mr. College of Education. I say to him:

If my argument be sound, the general structure of religious studies might apply in your sphere too. Of course, since you excellently train teachers, you feel yourself to be determined in large measure by the kind of teaching which is going on in schools. This, in the past, has tended to take its cue from Mr. Biblical Studies. Some wish to go beyond, and take their cue from Mr. Theology. But boys will be boys, and they ask too many questions about Buddhism. We know the results of the present pattern of religious education in schools. Some religious educationists, trusting the magic name of Goldman, think that it is the technology which is at fault and not the aims. Religious Instruction belongs to the churches, and it has its importance *there*. Religious education perhaps should throw off the shackles of its past. So it may well be that the time is ripe for a thorough revolution.

Next there enters the ghost of Mr. Employer. I say to him:

I am glad that you are interested in arts graduates. If you want them to have some analytical grasp, some understanding of one of the more difficult-to-understand features of society, some sensitivity to other cultures and other times, you might look favourably on one of our graduates.

Next there enters the ghost of Mr. Jew. I say to him:

I know that so far we have concentrated rather more on Christian origins and the like than on the interpretation of Judaism. What we need is more people teaching.

Next there enters the ghost of a saint. I say to him:

I recognize that there are good and exciting people in the world: what they do is vastly more important than anything we do here.

I live in some faith, hope and charity: faith that the principles that I have outlined are correct, hope that we can live up to them, and charity towards those who have so excellently taught and researched in those narrower disciplines which I have so brashly criticised. But as the generals know, the best time to blow your trumpet is before you have actually done anything.

The study of religion as I have outlined it contains its satisfactions. The Humanist can be happy, because the study of religion is not determined by one slant. The Christian Theologian can be happy because an open situation gives him freedom to express himself. The Atheist can be himself, because he does not feel that he has to obstruct an obscure establishment. The Buddhist can be cheerful in thinking that his challenge and his insight are taken seriously. The churchman can be happy because the study of religion is relevant to the modern situation. The educationist is cheered because the constrictions of the past have gone. The biblicist can rejoice in his liberation from mere ancient history. The moralist can be comforted by concreteness. The teacher can rejoice that he can participate in perspectives which go beyond the historical. The internationalist can be comforted, for sensitivity to a variety of positions and cultures, both in

the past and in the present, is of the essence, although it has been grossly underdeveloped in this country. All this might seem to be chance, for the pattern of religious studies is determined by an inner logic. This pattern of a pluralistic, structural, ancient and modern study of religion suits all interests. Is this providential? But hush: I do not want to start an argument.

REFERENCES

- ¹ *Structural Anthropology*, tr. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (1963), p. 207.
- ² *Taboo* (1956), p. 113.
- ³ *Essays in Sociological Theory* (revised edition, 1954), p. 32.
- ⁴ For instance, Christian mysticism may be taken seriously, but the question of whether similar types of experience occur in, say, Buddhism is not raised.