

M. CHRISTOPHER WHITE SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

HOW IS RELIGIOUS STUDIES DIFFERENT FROM BIBLICAL STUDIES?

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THOMAS J. WHITLEY

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# CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
RELIGIOUS STUDIES.....	2
Definition.....	2
History.....	3
Nineteenth Century.....	3
Friedrich Daniel Ernest Schleiermacher.....	4
Friedrich Max Müller.....	5
Twentieth Century.....	5
Pierre Daniel Chantepie de la Saussaye.....	6
Mircea Eliade.....	7
BIBLICAL STUDIES.....	8
Definition.....	8
History.....	8
Baruch Spinoza.....	10
David Friedrich Strauss.....	11
Johannes Heinrich Hermann Gunkel.....	12
Rudolf Karl Bultmann.....	12
RELIGION AND THE AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM.....	14
The Early Years.....	14
APPLICATION.....	17
Religious Studies in a State-Supported University.....	17
Related Issues.....	17
Teaching.....	19
Religious Studies in a Church-Related University.....	20

Related Issues.....	20
Teaching.....	21
CONCLUSION.....	23

## INTRODUCTION

This paper will focus on two disciplines; religious studies and biblical studies. Differences between these two disciplines will be examined as well as the implications thereof. Each discipline will be defined and its respective history will be examined. Both religious studies and biblical studies have exceptionally rich histories and much-needed background and understanding can be gained by exploring them.

This venture is vitally important, because the study of religion is becoming pervasive in this country and it should be taught appropriately in the respective settings that it is found. Accordingly, this paper will offer application that is informed by the delineation of religious studies and biblical studies. This application will address the teaching of religion in state-supported universities as well as in church-related universities with specific focus on the differences, implications and advantages of each setting.

## RELIGIOUS STUDIES

### Definition

Religious studies is the academic study of religion.<sup>1</sup> As such it is greatly different from the study of religion that takes place within a church or church-related context. Religious studies is a secular study that focuses on being cross-cultural and comparative.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, religious studies, as a secular endeavor, works to not privilege the truth claims of any particular religious tradition nor to make any assumptions about their inherent veracity.<sup>3</sup> Religious studies strives for objectivity in its approach to the study of religion and understands the interdisciplinary nature of its endeavor. Mircea Eliade, a 20<sup>th</sup> Century philosopher, accurately states that “there is no such thing as a ‘pure’ religious fact.”<sup>4</sup> This is because a fact of this nature is “always *also* a historical, sociological, cultural and psychological fact, to name the most important contexts.”<sup>5</sup> Thus, the field of religious studies employs the work and knowledge

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<sup>1</sup> Wikipedia contributors, “Religious Studies.” *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, n.p. [cited 22 October 2007]. Online: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religious\\_studies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religious_studies).

<sup>2</sup> “Religious Studies.” University of Wisconsin Stevens Point, n.p. [cited 22 October 2007]. Online: <http://www.uwsp.edu/news/UWSPCatalog/religious.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> D. G. Hart, *The University Gets Religion: Religious Studies in American Higher Education* (Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 5-6.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted from Robert Michaelson, *The Scholarly Study of Religion in College and University* (New Haven, Conn.: The Society for Religion in Higher Education, 1964), 22.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

of various disciplines when working to gain understanding about religion; both generally and specifically.

## History

The study of religion has existed almost as long as humanity itself. This, however, does not mean that it has always been an academic endeavor, as it is understood today. Moreover, the term currently in question, religious studies, is an academic term and has its roots in nineteenth century Europe. There are many figures and factors that contributed to the birth of the field “religious studies.” Some of the more noteworthy recent figures include Max Weber, Mircea Eliade, Emile Durkheim, Friedrich Max Müller, Friedrich Schleiermacher, David Friedrich Strauss and Pierre Daniel Chantepie de la Saussaye. Only a few of these will be dealt with specifically, but it must be understood that there were numerous factors and figures which have been at play in the rich history of religious studies.

### Nineteenth Century

The nineteenth century saw Charles Darwin’s controversial work *On the Origin of Species by means of Natural Selection* published and saw a seemingly natural reaction. The nineteenth century became increasingly marked by secular scientific studies and agnosticism.<sup>6</sup> In conjunction with the scientific atmosphere of the century, the academic study of religion

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<sup>6</sup> Jan de Vries, *The Study of Religion: A Historical Approach* (trans. K W. Bolle; New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1967), 61-65.

began to focus on a scientific understanding as well.<sup>7</sup> It is during this formative period that the study of religion begins to move from solely being the task of seminaries and divinity schools to being an academic discipline within its own right. The work of Friedrich Schleiermacher and Friedrich Max Müller, respectively, in the nineteenth century marks this beginning.

### **Friedrich Schleiermacher**

Friedrich Daniel Ernest Schleiermacher is not always noted as influential in the early stages of the academic study of religion, but his works exemplify an approach to religion which is scholarly and academic. Schleiermacher's most influential work is *On Religion: Addresses in Response to Its Cultured Critics*. It is, as the title implies, a project to "save religion from the contempt of enlightenment and especially romantic skeptics about religion," but it is also more than that.<sup>8</sup> Schleiermacher is very sympathetic with the skeptics whom he is addressing, because he too is skeptical about certain religious claims, as evidenced in *On Religion* by his skepticism about God and human immortality. Thus, Schleiermacher was very much a part of creating the scientific atmosphere of the nineteenth century. Moreover, he worked to reconcile antithetical conceptions of others and then, only after he had distinctly defined opposing elements, he would attempt to find harmony in a deeper conception. Because of this, and his focus on religion and theology, Schleiermacher is sometimes considered "the classical

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<sup>7</sup> Dr. Chris Partridge, "The Academic Study of Religion," n.p. [cited 10 Oct.2007]. Online: <http://www.uccf.org.uk/yourcourse/rtsf/docs/academicstudyofreligion.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Forster, "Friedrich Daniel Ernest Schleiermacher (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)," n.p. [cited 23 October 2007]. Online: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/schleiermacher/#10>.

representative of modern effort to reconcile science and philosophy with religion and theology.”<sup>9</sup>

### **Friedrich Max Müller**

Friedrich Max Müller was also a major contributor to the academic study of religion during this time. Müller was the first Professor of Comparative Religion at Oxford University, a chair that was created specifically for him.<sup>10</sup> Müller grants, in his *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, that due to a lack of knowledge and materials it was much more difficult for one in the past to seriously engage the study of the science of religious comparison. Müller worked to be an objective scientist of religion and used his acquired language skills, especially in Sanskrit, to aid his comparative study of religions. The contributions of his work can still be seen today with the presence of many universities’ Religion Departments, which are dedicated to an objective and scientific study of religion.

### Twentieth Century

The twentieth century saw the study of religion gain a stronger foothold in the academy. Chris Partridge states that by the latter part of the twentieth century “the study of religion had

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<sup>9</sup> Wikipedia Contributors, “Friedrich Daniel Ernest Schleiermacher.” *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, n.p. [cited 23 October 2007]. Online: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Friedrich\\_Schleiermacher](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Friedrich_Schleiermacher).

<sup>10</sup> Wikipedia Contributors, “Religious Studies.”



emerged as a prominent and important field of academic enquiry.”<sup>11</sup> It was now seen as a “legitimate academic discipline.”<sup>12</sup> As a result, unbiased religion courses in colleges and universities became more prevalent and an objective stance more popular.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, colleges and universities began to actually establish Religion Departments, as opposed to having only offered courses in religion previously. Two important figures in the twentieth century were Pierre Daniel Chantepie de la Saussaye and Mircea Eliade.

### **Pierre Daniel Chantepie de la Saussaye**

Pierre Daniel Chantepie de la Saussaye was important because it is in his work *Lerhbuch der Religionsgeschichte* that the term *religionsphanomenologie* was first used. Chantepie sought to bring together different groups of religious phenomena as they existed in various religious traditions and to classify them in specific categories. Moreover, he offered a division of the science of religion into two main fields, namely, essence and manifestation. These fields were to be approached through philosophy and history, respectively.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Partridge, “The Academic Study of Religion.”

<sup>12</sup> Hart, *The University Gets Religion*, 12.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Wikipedia Contributors, “Phenomenology of Religion.” *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, n.p. [cited 23 October 2007]. Online: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phenomenology\\_of\\_religion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phenomenology_of_religion).

## Mircea Eliade

Mircea Eliade was a historian of religion, philosopher and professor at the University of Chicago. He is largely important because of his intense work on myth and splitting the human experience of reality into two categories – sacred and profane. Eliade’s work on myth has been extremely influential in the areas of the history of religion, the practices of religion, the purposes of religion and, of course, the academic study of religion. Moreover, Eliade began two academic journals, *History of Religions* and *The Journal of Religion*, and was chief editor for Macmillian’s *Encyclopedia of Religion*.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Bryan Rennie, “Mircea Eliade – biography,” n.p. [cited 23 October 2007]. Online: <http://www.westminster.edu/staff/brennie/eliade/mebio.htm>.

## BIBLICAL STUDIES

### Definition

Biblical studies is the academic study of the Bible. This sounds simplistic, and it is on some levels, but it is largely accurate. Biblical studies is a “historical discipline”<sup>16</sup> focused on studying the Judeo-Christian Bible with respect to its interpretation, but does also study other associated texts such as the Jewish Apocrypha, the pseudepigrapha and the Christian Apocrypha. Though Biblical studies does tend to be more confessional in nature than religious studies, there are two distinct approaches within the field of biblical studies – biblical interpretation and biblical criticism.<sup>17</sup>

### History

Biblical studies has essentially been around since before the time of Jesus with the work of rabbis on the Hebrew Bible. As far as biblical studies relates to the study of the New Testament, this has been taking place since about the second century. Since even the earliest forms of biblical studies have been around various methods have been employed to gain more

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<sup>16</sup> Krister Stendahl, “Biblical Studies,” in *The Study of Religion in Colleges and Universities* (eds. Paul Ramsey and John F. Wilson; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), 36.

<sup>17</sup> Wikipedia contributors, “Biblical Studies.” *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, n.p. [cited 22 October 2007]. Online: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biblical\\_studies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biblical_studies).

understanding of the text. Allegory was used for some time as a viable means of interpretation. This approach is exhibited best by the work of Origen. That the Bible should be interpreted allegorically was the most important presupposition which Origen held. Under this presupposition Origen believed that “all Scripture has more than a literal meaning, though, encompassing in addition a moral and a spiritual meaning which can be discerned by the allegorical method.”<sup>18</sup> This approach, however, came to be replaced by more modern and more scientific methods. For, many viewed this approach as allowing the interpreter “to find whatever suited his purpose or need within the pages of Scripture.”<sup>19</sup> Duncan Ferguson states very straightforwardly that “Origen’s allegorical method of biblical interpretation is inadequate.”<sup>20</sup>

Allegory came to be replaced by biblical criticism, sometimes referred to as historical criticism. This method looks at the historical aspects which surround a text and attempts to build a context within which that text should be understood. Biblical criticism asks the who, what, where, why and when questions of a text. In doing this, however, many things are brought to light which caused many scholars to denounce numerous previously held understandings and beliefs about a text.

As biblical studies continued to flourish, other types of criticism, such as source criticism and form criticism, came to the fore. Source criticism attempted to establish the sources used by the author and/or redactor of a text. Source critical scholars began, during the eighteenth

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<sup>18</sup> Duncan S. Ferguson, *Biblical Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1986), 144-5.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

and nineteenth centuries, to make many new and interesting discoveries about the text of the Bible. One of these findings was that the Pentateuch, which is traditionally held to have been written by Moses, was written by at least four different sources and compiled sometime near the end of the Israelite Monarchy. Two other paramount discoveries of this time were that the gospels were not composed independently of each other, but, at least in the case of the synoptic gospels, rather used each other as sources and had other outside sources as well and that some of the letters that had traditionally been ascribed to Paul were actually not written by him. A prime example of source criticism is the work of David Friedrich Strauss. The twentieth century then saw the emergence of form criticism. Form criticism analyzed features of the text to relate the text to its sociological context. Form criticism searched for a text's *Sitz im Leben* in order to better understand the text based on its genre. Two of the quintessential examples of form critics were Hermann Gunkel and Rudolf Bultmann.

The development of modern biblical studies was a result of many social climates and the work of numerous scholars. These scholars were forerunners and pioneers in many cases and lead to new and different ways to interpret and understand the text of the Bible. Some of the most influential scholars in the history of biblical studies were Baruch Spinoza, David Friedrich Strauss, Hermann Gunkel and Rudolf Bultmann.

### Baruch Spinoza

Baruch Spinoza was an extremely influential figure. His work paved the way for the eighteenth century Enlightenment and for biblical criticism. Spinoza was a rationalist philosopher and as

such sought to provide a rational reading of the biblical text, not one that merely acquiesced to traditional Christian thoughts and interpretations. Spinoza exhibited a historical approach to understanding the text when he proposed that the text of the Bible was not comprised of eternal words of divine revelation, but rather was a product of the customs and rituals of the specific setting and culture in which it was written/compiled. Spinoza's work, then allowed subsequent scholars to abandon the traditional view that the Bible was a divinely inspired work and to further begin to see it in its appropriate historical context.<sup>21</sup>

#### David Friedrich Strauss

David Friedrich Strauss was a German theologian and writer whose work was connected to the Tübingen School. His most famous and controversial work was *Das Leben Jesu*, in which his task was a critical treatment of Jesus as a historical figure. He concluded that Jesus was indeed not the son of God and thus not divine. Schleiermacher influenced Strauss and that can be seen in his works. However, the most noteworthy points are that Strauss was the epitome of the historical-critical method, which sought completely objective and scientific answers, and was a pioneer in the historical investigation of Jesus.

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<sup>21</sup> William Yarchin, *History of Biblical Interpretation: A Reader* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2004), 195-7.

## Johannes Heinrich Hermann Gunkel

Hermann Gunkel was associated with *die religionsgeschichte Schule* from Göttingen<sup>22</sup> and contributed greatly to the field of biblical studies. Gunkel is noted for his study of the oral tradition of biblical texts and, consequently, his work in form criticism. Most notable is Gunkel's work on Genesis and the Psalms.<sup>23</sup> Gunkel's chief contribution to biblical studies was his form-critical interpretation of the Bible which saw different genres within the text.

## Rudolf Karl Bultmann

Rudolf Bultmann, as mentioned earlier, is a quintessential example of a form critic. He was a prolific writer, producing more than three hundred books, essays, monographs, articles and reviews. Bultmann was influenced by Gunkel and, thus, closely examined the text with which he was working, namely the gospels. His most significant work was that of demythologizing the New Testament. Bultmann held that the New Testament proclamations were told as myths because that was the world-view of the time and thus the stories could be understood naturally in that context. Further, Bultmann held that the proclamations were offering theology in story form. Of the use of mythological language in the New Testament he says that "the question becomes pressing whether the point of such mythological talk is not simply to express the significance of the historical figure of Jesus and his story, namely, their

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<sup>22</sup> It should also be noted that Gunkel was joined by William Wrede in this group. Wrede will not otherwise be dealt with in this paper, but he was in many ways the epitome of early expressions of biblical studies, especially for how he was able to separate his religious and academic sides.

<sup>23</sup> These works are *The Legends of Genesis* and *The Psalms: A Form-Critical Introduction*, respectively.

significance as saving figure and salvation occurrence.”<sup>24</sup> Bultmann’s influence on the field of biblical studies cannot be overstated.

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<sup>24</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *New Testament and Mythology and Other Basic Writings* (trans. S. M. Ogden; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1984), 33.



## RELIGION AND THE AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

The American higher education system undoubtedly has religion as one of the major pillars of its foundation. For, many of the foremost colleges and universities in America today began as institutions to educate and train clergy.<sup>25</sup> The idea was that clergy should be educated so as to be better equipped for their tasks as clergy. Thus, the purpose of many of the earliest institutions of higher education in America was clear, namely; to educate and train ministers and to equip individuals with the necessary tools to become responsible leaders.<sup>26</sup>

### The Early Years

As it has been previously said, most of the earliest colleges that were founded in the United States were founded for religious purposes. The first colleges founded are exemplary of this. Religious groups founded the first four colleges in America and were unabashed about their objectives. Moreover, these institutions are still staples in the current scene of American Higher education. Sixteen Thirty Six marked the inception of the American higher education system with the founding of Harvard College. Though Harvard never held any affiliations with specific religious denominations, its first benefactor, John Harvard, was a minister and many of the first graduates went on to be ministers in Puritan congregations. Moreover, a 1643

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<sup>25</sup> David A. Hollinger, "Enough Already: Universities Do Not Need More Christianity," in *Religion, Scholarship & Higher Education: Perspectives, Models and Future Prospects: Essays from the Lilly Seminar on Religion and Higher Education* (ed. Andrea Sterk; Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2002), 40.

<sup>26</sup> Christopher J. Lucas, *American Higher Education: A History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 105.

brochure gives reason for the college's existence: "To advance Learning and perpetuate it to Posterity; dreading to leave an illiterate Ministry to the Churches."<sup>27</sup> Harvard was the first institution of higher education in America. Academics and religion were growing close in America. The second college to be founded in America was William and Mary in 1693. The clergy of the Church of England in Virginia lead the efforts that resulted in the founding of The College of William and Mary in Virginia.<sup>28</sup> Shortly after William and Mary's inauguration, Yale was founded by Congregationalists in 1701. Yale's initial charter stated that it would be an institution "wherein Youth may be instructed in the Arts and Sciences [and] through the blessing of Almighty God may be fitted for Publick employment both in Church and Civil State."<sup>29</sup> Then, in 1746 Princeton was founded by the Presbyterians.<sup>30</sup> Princeton's motto is "*Die Sub Numine Viget*," which translated is "Under God's power she flourishes."<sup>31</sup>

The American scene of higher education has been coupled with religion since the beginning and this aspect of its history has had tremendous influence. It was early Christians in America that saw the need and possessed the desire for higher education. Their desire for higher education was very much shaped by their inherent desire to spread their religious

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<sup>27</sup> Harvard News Office, "The Harvard Guide: The Early History of Harvard University," n.p. [cited 26 October 2007]. Online: <http://www.news.harvard.edu/guide/intro/index.html>.

<sup>28</sup> College of William and Mary, "1618-1699 | Historical Facts," n.p. [cited 26 October 2007]. Online: <http://www.wm.edu/vitalfacts/seventeenth.php>.

<sup>29</sup> Yale University, "About Yale | History," n.p. [cited 26 October 2007]. Online: <http://www.yale.edu/about/history.html>.

<sup>30</sup> William Jeynes, *Religion, Education and Academic Success* (Greenwich, Conn.: Information Age Publishing, Inc., 2003), 19-21.

<sup>31</sup> Trustees of Princeton University, "Princeton – Parent's Handbook, 2007-08," n.p. [cited 26 October 2007]. Online: <http://www.princeton.edu/pr/pub/ph/07/history/>.

message. The strong link between religion and the American higher education system becomes even more obvious when one considers that for one hundred and sixty years following the Pilgrim's arrival at Plymouth, almost every college/university founded in America was done so by a Protestant group.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Jeynes, *Religion*, 21.

## APPLICATION

The study of religion is not quite ubiquitous in the American higher education scene, but it is indeed very prevalent. As such, the previously made distinctions between religious studies and biblical studies are significant. More important, though, are the issues that one needs to be cognizant of when considering just how religious studies and biblical studies should be taught in various higher education settings. This section will address the different manners in which religious studies should be taught at a state-supported university and a church-related university, respectively.

### **Religious Studies in a State-Supported University**

#### Related Issues

The state-supported university is a place where people are supposed to be objective, removed and have the freedom of choice. This is accomplished in the state-supported university largely through pluralism. A wealth of various ideas are presented without priority being given to any one particular 'truth.' Choice is paramount in a state-supported university. Alan Wolfe exemplifies this when he says, "no one approach to the understanding of human beings ought ever to be permitted to drive all others out of existence."<sup>33</sup> Due, at least partially,

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<sup>33</sup> Alan Wolfe, "The Potential for Pluralism: Religious Responses to the Triumph of Theory and Method in American Academic Culture," in *Religion, Scholarship & Higher Education: Perspectives, Models and Future*

to this desire to see pluralism thrive in the state-supported university, these universities and colleges have move more and more toward increasingly scientific and scholarly interpretations and explanations of religions and phenomena.<sup>34</sup> This is completely appropriate and brings us directly to the task of religious studies. For, religious studies should deal with religion in a critical manner, much the same way that any other department handles its subject matter.

It should also be noted that when addressing the topic of religion and the public school system in America, there are laws that must be taken into account on top of the standards, spoken and unspoken, put upon the field of religious studies by the academic community. Principle in this discussion is the First Amendment and its understood implications. The First Amendment Center is an organization that “works to preserve and protect First Amendment freedoms through information and education.”<sup>35</sup> As a part of their work, the First Amendment Center composed summary guidelines for teaching religion in a public school. They are as follows:

1. The School’s approach to religion is academic, not *devotional*
2. The school strives for student *awareness* of religions, but does not press for student *acceptance* of any religion
3. The school sponsors *study* about religion, not the *practice* of religion
4. The school may *expose* students to a diversity of religious views, but may not *impose* any particular view
5. The school *educates* about all religions; it does not *promote* or *denigrate* religion

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*Prospects: Essays from the Lilly Seminar on Religion and Higher Education* (ed. Andrea Sterk; Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2002), 22.

<sup>34</sup> Hollinger, “Enough Already,” 40.

<sup>35</sup> First Amendment Center, “firstamendmentcenter.org: About,” n.p. [cited 27 October 2007]. Online: [http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/about.aspx?item=about\\_fac](http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/about.aspx?item=about_fac).

6. The school *informs* students about various beliefs; it does not seek to *conform* students to any particular belief<sup>36</sup>

There is probably no better summary available for how religion should be taught in public schools, as it relates to the presentation of religion and the promotion of academic objectivity in the classroom.

### Teaching

It may seem redundant to now outline just how religious studies should be taught in a state-supported university, but the methods are vital. As aforementioned, and as with any other topic, when religion is the topic and religious studies is the field the delivery should be purely scientific and impartial. The professor should make no assertions of truth, nor advocate any particular belief over any other. This type of impartiality makes religious studies just like any of the other humanities fields. Whether one holds a particular set of beliefs is irrelevant to the work that is done in the classroom, in a state-supported university. Indoctrination is wholly disallowed in the state-supported university and open-mindedness and neutrality are its replacements. This position allows for a balanced variety of knowledge to be presented and allots the students, and the professor for that matter, a freedom of choice that is otherwise impossible. Ideally, unbiased learning can now ensue.

Moreover, moving more specifically to Christianity and the Bible, when the Bible is taken out of its solely religious context so much learning is possible. The Bible is an extremely

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<sup>36</sup> Charles C. Haynes, *A Teacher's Guide to Religion in the Public Schools* (Tennessee: First Amendment Center, 1999), 3.

important set of documents that has influenced a large part of the world for the better part of two millennia. The Bible either addresses or is directly related to several other disciplines, including history, literature, classics and philosophy.<sup>37</sup> As such, the Bible, as a primary source, is able to offer many insights into these and other disciplines. The Bible has been used in this manner persistently and the academic community continues to benefit. Leaving the devotional aspect of the Bible out of the classroom does not render it void of meaning, but rather offers insight and meaning that is just not feasible when the devotional aspect is the focus.

### **Religious Studies in a Church-Related University**

#### Related Issues

When teaching religious studies in a church-related university freedom is still highly valued – it is just a different type of freedom; namely, freedom to purport one’s own religious and theological views and perspectives. In this setting, not only is it common, but it is also expected that one particular religion will be given priority over others.<sup>38</sup> Complete objectivity and impartiality are not required in church-related universities since it is presumed that all, or at least most, who are in attendance hold similar beliefs. Now, the professor may present readings or other teaching tools and interpret them within the context of her faith tradition. She does not have to say in a detached manner that this piece was written by someone who believed in a Just and Loving God, but rather she can speak to how it has impacted her life and

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<sup>37</sup> Krister Stendahl, “Biblical Studies,” 35.

<sup>38</sup> Alan Wolfe, “Potential for Pluralism,” 29.

caused her to deepen her belief in a Just and Loving God. This is indeed an insider approach that many view as counterproductive when it comes to academics, but that is not always the case.

## Teaching

An insider approach has advantages that are not available to an objective, outsider approach. For one, an insider is approaching the text, in the case of the Bible, from a religious perspective. This is the same approach that the authors of the Bible had. Thus, an outsider will always propose theories and ideas that reject religious or phenomenological understandings and interpretations and may potentially miss the understanding of a text that is very clear if only it is approached from a religious perspective. In addition, an insider has the potential to better understand the language and references made in the texts.

Additionally, teaching religious studies in a church-related university works against the disconnect that is created in state-supported universities between intellect and emotion.<sup>39</sup> Students and professors alike are able to share personal experiences related to the religion and/or text being examined. Different aspects of the religion and text will be brought out that are simply off limits in a state-supported university. All of this should not be taken, however, to mean that the academic fervor should be lessened or that academic standards be lowered. It is quite the contrary, for now the endeavor could be described as “faith seeking understanding, in

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<sup>39</sup> Susan Handelman, ““Stopping the Heart”: The Spiritual Search of Students and the Challenge to a Professor in an Undergraduate Literature Class,” in *Religion, Scholarship & Higher Education: Perspectives, Models and Future Prospects: Essays from the Lilly Seminar on Religion and Higher Education* (ed. Andrea Sterk; Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2002), 219.



Anselm's phrase; faith reverently but seriously examined, by all the available strategies of rational reflection."<sup>40</sup> That is to say that the work done in the classrooms of church-related universities is to be just as academic and rigorous, even if a different purpose exists in the learning.

Nevertheless, what should not take place in a church-related university is presenting how other religions are wrong. A well-rounded and unbiased presentation of other religions should always be encouraged. Opinions and beliefs are allowed to be presented in a church-related university and assertions of truth are definitely allowed to be made, but indoctrination – with the negative connotation that it is most commonly understood – is never desirable or beneficial to any community, be it academic or religious.

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<sup>40</sup> Brian E. Daley, S.J., "Historical Theology Today and Tomorrow," in *Religion, Scholarship & Higher Education: Perspectives, Models and Future Prospects: Essays from the Lilly Seminar on Religion and Higher Education* (ed. Andrea Sterk; Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2002), 117.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has attempted to show how religious studies and biblical studies differ and to offer some application; namely, projecting how religious studies should be taught in a church-related university as opposed to a state-supported university. Religious studies is a secular, cross-cultural, comparative, objective academic endeavor that strives to gain knowledge about religion; whereas biblical studies is a “historical discipline”<sup>41</sup> that is focused on studying the Judeo-Christian Bible and interpretations thereof. The two disciplines overlap in many areas and aspects, but the differences are foundational in separating them; namely, religious studies is dispassionate while biblical studies is very interested, involved and invested.

This paper has shown some of the different ways that the topic of religion can be addressed and handled. Moreover, it has shown the benefits of a purely scientific and objective approach and the benefits of a more involved and specific academic approach to the Bible. Both enterprises are fruitful. For, sometimes it is simply better and more appropriate to study historical truths, as related to religion, through an objective lens. Conversely, other times a possibly less objective approach that employs an insider approach is more suitable.

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<sup>41</sup> See note 16.

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