spotlight on TEACHING

IN THIS ISSUE

Teaching Religion and Theology in Great Britain

Issues in Teaching Religion & Theology in *Great Britain*

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THE UNITED KINGDOM has a long record of high-quality teaching in theology and religious studies, with highly respected institutions, and world-class teachers and scholars. It is also home to rich resources in its libraries, its heritage, and in the increasing cultural diversity of the country. Until now, because there

is no single representative body for theology and religious studies that corresponds to the AAR, finding this information and tracking down contacts has been time-consuming. It has involved searching through the individual web sites of British universities, colleges, and related bodies.

This edition of *Spotlight on Teaching* introduces a new project that, among other things, offers a one-stop site for access to the whole field of theology and religious studies in Britain. The project is particularly concerned to foster the communication of effective practice in teaching and learning. The new site is administered by the Philosophical and Religious Studies Subject Centre of the Learning and Teaching Support Network, or PRS-LTSN. Links to all the British institutions teaching theology and religious studies, and to British colleagues teaching in a particular field, are available at *http://www.prs-ltsn.leeds.ac.uk*. The site also offers discussion groups, web-based publications, and news of conferences. It offers a new possibility for sharing best practice and teaching learning, not just within Britain, but between Britain and the rest of the world. In the following pages, we hope to introduce this project to you and to suggest some topics this new dialogue might cover.

The web site is the most accessible part of the LTSN, but behind it is a great deal of other activity. LTSN offers workshops for teachers involved in particular

subjects or facing particular problems. Research projects into topics such as the use of Web material in teaching, the problems of particular disadvantaged student groups, and creative ways to deal with increasing student numbers, are sponsored by the PRS-LTSN. We are shortly to launch a journal to provide a forum for publication of such material. The aim of the PRS-LTSN is to bring about a change of culture so that talking and writing about teaching becomes as accepted a part of the life of academics as the discussion of research. We are delighted to offer readers of *Religious Studies News* an invitation to learn more about the PRS-LTSN's work, and to become involved in the exciting possibilities of pooling resources and teaching strategies internationally.

Some issues are specific to the British situation, of course, but the basic problems of teaching students to think creatively in these subjects, and of finding and assessing teaching materials to use, cross national boundaries. Common problems exist, for instance, in coming to terms with the proper use of the Internet, the changing educational experience of students at the school level, and the tension between teachers' independence and the need to ensure proper standards. Broadening the dialogue can only help us all. The PRS-LTSN has already benefited from strong links with the Wabash Center for Teaching Theology and Religion based at Wabash College, Crawfordsville, Indiana. The two bodies are co-operating in a Special Session at this year's

AAR/SBL Annual Meeting. The Teaching and Learning Committee of the AAR has been very supportive, and the possibilities of exchange are very promising.

This edition falls into six sections, written by a variety of people involved with the LTSN and its work. Together, they give a window into the teaching of theology and religious studies in Britain today. We hope to explain some of the characteristic features of the educational traditions and systems in Britain in a way that may give food for thought for those in other countries — whether as a source of inspiration or as a cautionary tale.

We begin with a general description of the PRS-LTSN and its purposes written by Hugh Pyper, the Associate Director of the Centre with special responsibility for theology and religious studies. He is also Senior Lecturer in Biblical Studies at the University of Leeds. We then move on to Denise Cush's discussion of teaching religion at school level in Britain, which has some important differences from the situation in the United States. Gary Bunt addresses the role of the Internet in British religious studies education. This is followed by three personal views on teaching religious studies and theology in modern Britain. The first is by Dr Chakravati Ram-Prasad of the University of Lancaster, the second by Professor David Fergusson of the University of Edinburgh, and the third by Bill Campbell, Associate Director of the PRS-LTSn in Lampeter.

An Introduction to the Philosophical and Religious Studies Learning and Teaching Support Network (PRS-LTSN)

Hugh Pyper, University of Leeds

THE PHILOSOPHICAL and Religious Studies Learning and Teaching Support Network (PRS-LTSN) is one of 24 subject centred networks covering the range of subjects studied at the university level. The LTSN centres have been set up by the public bodies that administer funding for higher education in Great Britain. They were launched in 1999 and became fully operational in 2000. The 24 centres cover everything from engineering to media studies. These subject centres — together with a Generic Centre that deals with issues cutting across subject boundaries — are co-ordinated by an executive based in York. A central web site at *http://www.ltsn.ac.uk* gives access to all the subject centres and to the overall aims of the network. These aims include becoming the primary information and advice resource for academics and related staff and actively seeking to import and export information and resources internationally.

This teaching initiative comes at a time of rapid increase in the number of students in higher education — an increase that has brought a new awareness of the need for academics to reflect on how this impacts on their teaching. Almost all higher education institutions in Britain are funded by the government, which means both that government has a direct interest in the quality of teaching provision, and that national schemes can be more easily implemented. Every higher education department in the country, for instance, is being reviewed and assessed for its teaching provision under the auspices of the separate Quality Assurance Agency. There is a real change in the emphasis on teaching as an aspect of the career of an academic that requires reflection, training, and constant development

As part of this wider development, the Philosophical and Religious Studies LTSN covers not only theology and religious studies, but also philosophy and the philosophy and history of science — areas which may be of interest to members of AAR. This wide range is exciting and challenging, but it does leave us with a rather cumbersome title!

Where and who we are

The main office of the PRS-LTSN is based at the University of Leeds in Yorkshire, but the centre is a partnership between Leeds and the University of Wales, Lampeter. In itself, this kind of partnership between universities is a relatively novel venture. Leeds is one of the biggest universities in Britain, situated in a thriving city with a long industrial past and a very religiously and ethnically diverse population. Its large and successful Theology and Religious Studies department was one of the first in Britain to offer a degree that explicitly bridges the two subjects. Lampeter, part of the federal University of Wales, is a smaller and older institution set in an attractive country town in beautiful Welsh hill country. Its highly respected Theology, Religious, and Islamic Studies department is a major component of the university.

Partly due to its location, the Lampeter department has a long tradition of teaching courses by distance learning. It has also built up a body of expertise on widening access to learning. Mature students and those without standard qualifications are an important constituency, raising issues of accessibility for students with a range of different abilities. The department is also able to provide translated material for Welsh-speaking students and staff, thereby acknowledging an important part of British diversity. Between them, the two institutions represent complementary aspects of British higher education.

The staff of the PRS-LTSN are all experienced teachers and researchers in their respective disciplines. The Director is George Macdonald Ross, whose own speciality is Philosophy. Hugh Pyper, Senior Lecturer in Biblical Studies at the University of Leeds, is directly responsible for Theology and Religious Studies. The Associate Director at Lampeter, Dr Bill Campbell, is another Biblical scholar and a Reader in the Department there. He is a specialist in Pauline Studies, with a long experience of teaching and administration in a variety of institutions. The office team, based at Leeds, are also academics — coincidentally, all with a background in Buddhist studies. Simon Smith manages the Centre, Nik Jewell is responsible for the IT aspects of the work, and David Mossley is the information officer. A number of other colleagues work with the Centre: full details can be found on the web site.

Every department in Britain has been asked to nominate a contact person to act as a channel of information between PRS-LTSN and departmental staff and students. Events to discuss topics of interest or to share good practice are organised by both the Leeds and Lampeter sites, but institutions and practitioners around the country are also encouraged to run regional events that can be sponsored by PRS-LTSN. One particular target audience is the new teacher — either just appointed or the postgraduate who is being inducted into leading seminars. There is no membership fee for participation in the PRS-LTSN's activities, and we welcome wide (including international) participation.

The Subject Centre's Activities

The purpose of the Subject Centre is to promote and communicate good practice in subject specific teaching activities. This raises an interesting debate about what are subject-specific rather than generic learning and teaching issues. We have identified a number of areas that, though not unique to teaching theology and religious studies, are more prominent here than in other subjects. How do we teach with respect and with academic integrity in a context where people may have deep personal commitments to a particular faith community? On the other hand, how do we rekindle interest in a subject to which some students may feel they already have the answers, or with which they have no wish to engage? How do we enable students to come to grips with ancient texts that demand close reading and a breadth of background?

These questions raise issues of assessment. The old joke has it that a teacher of theology will not know how successful she has been until the Last Judgment. That raises the question of how we assess a student's academic ability rather than faith commitment. What are the particular skills and knowledge base to be assessed, and how can this best be done? It is not the business of the PRS-LTSN to pronounce authoritatively on such matters to the community of scholars, but rather to act as broker for the discussions that are already going on.

Part of that role is to make the results of scholarly discussion of these matters available to our clientele. Once we began looking, it became clear that the amount of published writing available on the pedagogy of theology and religious studies at the university level is quite small, and specifically British reflection even more so. What material does exist is not always very accessible nor widely distributed. The LTSN is concerned to make such materials more available and to provide critical guidelines for its assessment.

The web site now contains a substantial number of reviews of the literature, providing a quick way to locate and evaluate information. We expect the digest of already existing materials to be fully comprehensive by the end of the summer. At the same time, through commissioned articles or as an outcome of conferences and consultations, a new body of material is being generated and disseminated. We have produced a number of original documents to pump-prime discussion and further research within the subject communities, and more are in the pipeline. We are eager to encourage teachers to record and reflect on their practice for the benefit of their colleagues, and are hoping to be able to offer small grants for such work. Contributions may range from descriptions of successful class sessions to philosophical pieces raising general questions.

One of our central aims is to foster and develop a scholarship of teaching. British academics, in particular, are under pressure to publish material that will be counted towards the national Research Assessment Exercise, which affects departmental funding. This could reinforce a long-standing feeling that reflection and writing on teaching is not "proper" research. Wisely, however, the Research Assessors are happy to encourage such publications. The opportunity exists for an academically respectable discussion to develop.

As part of this, we can serve as information brokers. The LTSN does not exist to be a centre of expertise on every aspect of teaching, but it can act as a repository for information, and as a clearinghouse. If you have a question about any aspect of teaching, we will try to put you in touch with other people dealing with the same issues, or point you toward relevant literature. This service is primarily designed for the British environment, but all are welcome to make use of it.

Teaching Theology and Religious Studies in Britain

The articles in this issue of *Spotlight on Teaching* describe in more detail aspects of teaching theology and religious studies in modern Britain. At present, we have links to 47 institutions offering degrees in some aspect of theology and religious studies.

Departments vary widely in their size, specialities, and course structures, but there has been an increasing trend towards the combination of theology and religious studies. Leeds has taught a degree under that title for over thirty years. Partly, this reflects pressure from students but it also reflects developments in the understanding of education in the field. Put positively, it means that students are required to combine both the study of religions as human and social phenomena with some attempt to inhabit imaginatively the worldview, inner life, and intellectual development of at least one tradition. For historical reasons, this tradition has tended to be Christianity.

Most departments attempt to combine lectures with small group teaching, but most are also in a situation where the ratio of students to staff is increasing, making small group teaching more difficult to sustain. At the same time, the amount of money allocated per student by the funding bodies has steadily decreased. The use of innovative self-directed teaching strategies may help. There is a place for the Internet and e-learning, although at times the pressure to take these cost-effective and timesaving routes needs to be resisted. There is a great deal that can be learned from discussions about the different strategies departments have adopted to optimise the use of their resources, and the points at which educational provision risks being damaged.

In most British universities, students already know the subject in which they wish to major when they apply. Increasing numbers of part-time students are coming into the system, however. The recent introduction of student tuition fees and other economic factors have inevitably had an effect on recruitment for subjects that do not have a clear vocational relevance. This, too, has accelerated the need for university teachers to consider the relevance of what they teach, and how to argue the case for its value.

A recent initiative that has sharpened awareness of such comparative discussions is the so-called "Benchmarking" document by a team of subject specialists under the auspices of the Quality Assurance Agency. It sets out a broad description of the current provision of theology and religious studies in British institutions and gives indicative markers of the kinds of skills and knowledge that students should acquire during their degrees. The benchmark document is deliberately inclusive, so as to reflect the diversity of provision. It could provide a very useful checklist for theological and religious studies educators who maybe designing or assessing courses well beyond Britain. It is available on the Web at *http://www.qaa.ac.uk /crntwork/benchmark /theology/pdf*. We at the LTSN hope to provide a forum for discussing translation of the benchmark standards into classroom practice in specific situations and subject areas.

There is a great deal of good and exciting teaching going on in Britain, in an ever-changing social and educational environment. PRS-LTSN seeks to provide a place where views can be exchanged, experiences shared, and common problems faced. The following articles will, we hope, help both to fill out the picture of the teaching of theology and religious studies in Britain, and raise points of comparison with the situation in the US. To comment, or for inclusion in discussion groups, e-mail *enquiries@prs-ltsn.leeds.ac.uk*.

Teaching Systematic Theology in Britain Today

David Fergusson, University of Edinburgh

David Fergusson is Professor of Divinity in the Faculty of Divinity, University of Edinburgh. He reflects on the changing face of theological teaching from one of Britain's oldest and most prestigious centres of theological education.

THE PRESENCE OF THEOLOGY as a subject of study in UK universities still owes something to the history of our institutions since the middle ages. As the "queen of the sciences," theology was once regarded as the crowning discipline in universities like Edinburgh, which were founded inter alia as centres of education for priests and ministers. This ethos continues to be apparent, at least residually, in the presence of some canon professorships in England open only to academics who are also clergy of the Church of England. In Scotland, the national Presbyterian Church does not have its own seminary and continues to maintain a partnership with the divinity faculties of St Andrews, Glasgow, Aberdeen, and Edinburgh universities.

By comparison with the past, however, the present may appear to reflect loss, decline, and fragmentation. There are few theologians willing to assert before colleagues in other disciplines that theirs is "the queen of the sciences." The fading significance of our national churches, together with the lack of public interest, particularly amongst the young, signals a marginalisation of confessional theology. The philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre has even remarked that theology is at its lowest ebb since about the tenth century. In Scotland, fewer than 10% of all divinity undergraduates are ordinands for the church. Most systematic theologians, moreover, now find themselves as part of academic departments that include a wide range of subject areas and approaches.

Yet not all the indicators of change should be presented negatively. With the enhanced academic profile of Bible colleges, the advent of distance learning programmes, and the appearance of theology degrees in some of the new universities in Britain, there are actually more students taking theology courses than ever before. The growth in higher education has been matched generally by an expansion in theology and religious studies. One particularly notable change has been in the gender balance of students. Once dominated by male students, many with a vocation to ministry, most departments in Britain now have a large majority of female students.

This has also coincided with a renewed confidence amongst practitioners of theology. The nervous and defensive strategies employed in the mid-twentieth century to counter logical positivism have been abandoned in favour of greater inter-disciplinary collaboration and a return to the study of Christian doctrine. This has been facilitated by the realisation that secular patterns of thought face formidable difficulties, and also by a new curiosity about theology amongst exponents of other disciplines such as philosophy, the health sciences and physics.

All this has influenced the teaching of systematic theology in its British setting. The demand for courses remains, but participants increasingly come from varied disciplinary backgrounds. Joint honours degrees involving theology are more common than in the past, and many students pursuing a BA degree will take the occasional course in theology. The audience the contemporary teacher of the discipline now faces presents a challenge very different to that of twenty years ago. A rudimentary knowledge of the Bible can no longer be assumed, far less an awareness of some of the key episodes and figures in Christian history. A passionate interest in the filioque controversy, the Pelagian dispute, reformation controversies about the sacraments, and competing views of the work of Christ cannot be guaranteed. Strenuous work in analytic philosophy of religion may also be less appealing for today's student constituency.

All this, however, does not betoken a lack of ability or concern with theological matters. When related to spiritual practice, ethics, pastoral care, art, literature, science, and the other world religions, Christian theology continues to excite student attention. This may be perceived as providing part of the opportunity for modern systematic theology to reconnect with spirituality, aesthetics, and other academic disciplines. The typical syllabus today is more interactive, comparative, and cross-disciplinary in its scope. Within this environment, the Templeton Foundation, for example, has been successful in its pump-priming of courses in theology and science across the country, while several centres also reveal a burgeoning interest in the relationship of theology to the arts.

In his recent work on models of theological education, David Kelsey distinguishes the two dominant paradigms inherited from classical Greece and modern Berlin that have informed recent approaches.[1] The former viewed the study of theology in the context of personal formation. It was a type of paideia in which the participant was shaped by the object of study. This model was appropriated by the church in its catechetical schools. Here, theology was transformative. The study of texts and traditions could not be undertaken except by reference to their contribution to the spiritual, moral, and intellectual welfare of the person. In an effort to defend the academic integrity of theology in the post-Enlightenment period, the model of theology as directed toward professional training replaced that of paideia. It took its place alongside other modern disciplines and was characterised by the same scholarly rigour, objectivity, research excellence, and

Teaching South Asian Religions in Britain

Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad, The University of Lancaster

The long colonial engagement of Britain with the countries of South Asia, together with the presence of many immigrants from those countries in Britain, raises particular questions regarding teaching the religions of the area in British universities. In the following article, Dr Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad, who lectures on the topic at The University of Lancaster, offers a personal perspective on these issues.

IT IS A TRUISM — but a profound one — that history and its consequences massively influence the teaching of South Asian religions in Britain. To start with, "South Asian Studies" as an academic field - that strange American child of Cold War ideology and liberal academia — does not exist in Britain. The term "South Asian religions" is used here to talk commonly of the religions found in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal. (Some have taken to talking about this demarcation through reference to the political association called South Asian Association of Regional Cupertino (SAARC), of which Bhutan and the Maldives are also members.) This is to speak not only of Hindu and other "Indic" religions - Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, as well as Dalit and "tribal" religions — but also of sub-continental Islam, Zoarastrianism, and Indian Christianity.

Centuries-long political engagement with the Indian empire (now South Asia) gave an immediacy and clarity of interest to the British study of religion different from the purely intellectual empire-building of German Indology and the idiosyncratic enthusiasms of 19th and early 20th century American interest in India. The teaching of South Asian religions in Britain is not, in some ways, very different from in the US. In the main, however, I want to focus on the ways those religions are taught in Britain against the context of British history and society. It is here that the contrast with the US will be most apparent.

The present context arises from a shift of the study of Asian religions from Oriental studies into religious studies. When religious studies emerged as a university discipline, Britain was still wrestling with the demands of a post-imperial paradigm. Conventional notions of British/Western objectivity, (with its consequent objectification of native Others), were being interrogated by liberal, egalitarian, and ostensibly less hegemonic approaches, themselves politically informed by the shift from Empire to Commonwealth. We cannot, however, isolate this line of intellectual and attitudinal development from a significant demographic consequence of the post-imperial dispensation, namely, the rise of immigration into Britain from the countries of the sub-continent. The study of South Asian religions in Britain has been formed over the past four decades by the combination of late modern British intellectual values and the cultural dynamics of contemporary British society.

This brief history should be kept in mind when looking at the plurality of approaches to the study of South Asian religions in Britain today. Naturally, there can be no simple taxonomy of discrete approaches, easily identifiable and self-evident in syllabi, readings, or course descriptions. Rather, there are different impulses, compulsions, and concerns in the teaching of these religions, which are set out below.

Classical Indology: Although straitened financial and institutional circumstances mean that ever fewer research students are able to commit themselves to a deeply linguistic/philological training in the study of these religions, the old tradition of approaching ancient and classical religion through original texts still persists. This focuses on the teaching — where there are takers — of Sanskrit and other languages. While ideally providing students with a fundamental prerequisite for scholarly study, it must be recognised that classical Indology still carries with it associations of conventional Orientalism, disputed though this may be.

Very occasionally, language-based courses are available at the undergraduate level as well, but not in Theology/Religious Studies departments. The pressure on language-based approaches is obvious. As in the US, only rich and large departments or programs are able offer them. Arabic and Persian, in the case of Islam, are slightly different, and relate to issues of ethnicity and multiculturalism.

The study of World Religions: As I argue throughout this essay, the peculiarity of the British connection with South Asia has tremendous influence on the teaching of South Asian religions. The abstract notion of religious studies as an ideally de-centred approach to (semi-constructed) cultural "blocks" does indeed exist in Britain. But perhaps because British intellectual horizons are still cluttered with the specificities of painful historical gement, there is less ease with the theoretical coherence of a notion of "world religions." Although the pragmatic need for an introductory survey is increasingly recognised, it is rare to find a course in which a single lecturer ranges over several religions.

Liberal South Asian studies: I use this term to capture a popular generic approach to undergraduate teaching of Hinduism or Islam in particular, although I would hesitate to call it an articulated pedagogical method. An attempt is made, when surveying various aspects of the religion concerned, to situate the apparently

A British Higher Education Perspective on Widening Access to Religious Studies through the Application of Internet Resources

Gary Bunt, Lampeter University

The Internet has revolutionised communication between students and academics around the world, but this has been a mixed blessing. The sources students find for their work are of very varied quality, and a British lecturer may discover that students are handing in suspiciously well written and knowledgeable essays with American spelling. In this paper, Gary Bunt, LTSN Project Officer at Lampeter and Lecturer in Islamic Studies in Lampeter's Theology and Religious Studies Department, discusses some of these opportunities and problems, and the ways in which the LTSN and other bodies are trying to help teachers keep on top of this rapidly changing scene.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES practitioners in Britain, as in the US, will be familiar with the growing trend toward URLs (Uniform Resource Locators, or Web addresses) appearing in essays as students integrate Internet resources into their work. A batch of essays may range from densely hand written "traditional" scripts with no reference to the Internet, to word-processed essays containing substantial material drawn from Web sites. These Web sources may augment or supersede conventional textual resources as research for essays transforms from library and book-based work to the "cut-and-paste" world of the Web.

Questions are often raised as to whether an essay that demonstrates skill in using search engines is academically as respectable as an essay of comparable content utilising traditional sources. The assumption that the more conventional essay is somehow worthier may not be valid. Books are expensive, and many students have limited resources. Students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds may make greater use of Web resources as a means of researching specific types of essays. University libraries may themselves have limited religious studies holdings, with key texts being available only via restricted access. The Internet, even when it does not provide key texts online, can offer a range of specialist materials that are easy to locate and are inexpensive or free to use.[1] Such resources, when appropriately applied, offer new dimensions in the study of religion that can only improve a student's learning experience.[2]

Cost is particularly relevant for those students using free Internet access via their academic institutions. The Internet is a means of widening access and academic participation in higher education, especially for students with limited financial resources.[3] A student may be stimulated, through reading religious studies related material online, to study a particular subject in more depth or to search out a printed resource. Such access is particularly important for the growing number of part-time students in access courses, further education, or higher education, where local resources are inadequate to study a religious studies subject in depth. The Internet can also open up religious studies resources for people with physical impairments that act as barriers to learning.[4]

Training and guidance for students employing computer-mediated materials is essential. Comparative textual resources are particularly important in order to highlight translations, commentaries, and nuances of detail.[5] Simply providing a student with a long list of subject-related URLs without explanation of their relevance is not constructive. It may be useful to integrate Web research into teaching by examining, within a lecture room discussion, the relevance (or lack thereof) of certain sites. This gives training in key learning skills. Institutional support, technical infrastructures, and training can assist in developing this aspect of pedagogy.

Not all religious studies students necessarily want to employ the Internet as a resource for their studies, and in some cases a "backlash" against the medium has been noted. The majority of entrants coming from high school directly to religious studies undergraduate courses in Britain will have some familiarity with the Internet, however, whilst mature entrants can gain training in the medium if they attend the Access courses offered by various colleges. The widespread availability of the Internet in public libraries, further education institutions, and even Internet cafés indicates a likelihood of Internet awareness among all students. Higher education institutions also offer training in the technical aspects of using the Web.

A balance must be drawn between what is lost and what is gained through reading hypertext. Many Internet users simply print out any material they need. This may be practical for individual pages, but becomes less realistic with Scriptures and primary texts in religious studies. Some religious studies courses lend themselves more to the medium than do others. The study of contemporary religious movements or world religions, for instance, have a wealth of constantly updated material available online.

There is a danger that students may become overly reliant on hypertext, ignoring other key subject sources. This can have a negative impact when traditional academic skills are completely subsumed by technology. Patterns of student work can be influenced by the Internet, given the distractions available online and the illusion that simply surfing and searching for material on a subject is the equivalent of writing an essay! Poor management of research time and Internet fatigue can lead to missed essay deadlines. External and internal factors, including computer breakdowns, viruses, and network problems also influence the patterns of work and the reliability of the Internet as a research tool.

Online documents are not read in the same way as conventional printed sources. A text may be searched for key terms, and other material ignored. A page may link in unconventional ways to other sections of the same site or to external sites. These transitions can be confusing, especially when little information is given as to the linked page's origins. The quality of a hypertext may differ from a printed source that has been proofread and validated by academic referees. Mistakes occur in typing, and these are not always picked up before a site goes online. The variation in commentaries and motivations for putting a site online need to be considered when evaluating resources.[6]

Consideration needs to be given to the quality of external resources available for students online. Lecturers may find that their role increasingly includes being a guide to academically credible religious studies Internet resources. Through its involvement with the Virtual Training Suite project funded by Britain's Resource Development network, PRS-LTSN has developed resources for theology and religious studies lecturers and students designed to guide them through the Internet maze whilst learning about approaches toward hypertext sources. This is not simply another compendium of links, but provides training for lecturers and students in the opportunities and pitfalls of Internet use. It includes interactive material, with quizzes and self-help sections.[7] There is potential to build courses — especially at access and introductory levels — around analysis, discussion, and evaluation of religious studies related Web materials. This can develop transferable skills of student critical thinking, which can in turn be applied in other academic areas.[8]

Drawing on shared experience, lecturers can present lists of "approved" online resources. This is a particularly important issue in the fields of theology and religious studies, where numerous polemical and propagandist religious Web sites are made available as "official" resources, often with sophisticated presentation and considerable funding. With critical appraisal, such sites can provide an excellent means of discovering and analysing the diverse views of those who adhere to or oppose a particular religion. Issues of representation can be addressed as well, since most worldviews have some form of presence on the World Wide Web.[9]

If students are not equipped to analyse or deconstruct religion on the Internet, however, the quality of their work may suffer accordingly. Some religious groups with an online presence have focused on student readers as a means of recruitment and propaganda, leading to ideological "cyberwars" that can spill over into a class setting. Such distractions can damage a class and distract students and staff from academic work. The writer has received anecdotal evidence from British academics that sites presenting polemical views against a particular faith perspective have, in their view, negatively influenced the academic environment.

The Internet seems to have great advantages not only in terms of diversity, but also in terms of currency. The Internet can offer regularly updated resources, including information that previously may have taken a long time to filter into the academic arena. On the other hand, the danger of information overload must be considered for students as well as lecturers. Sites can change regularly, requiring lecturers to monitor any key subject sites closely. URLs can also vanish without a trace! In extreme circumstances, hacking can also alter a site's appearance and content. I had the unfortunate experience of recommending a URL on an online course listing for Islamic Studies, unaware that the URL's contents had been hacked and replaced with pornographic content. Keeping up with such developments can dramatically increase an academic's workload.

For the reasons outlined above, the Web may be considered by some as an "un-academic" resource. It must to be recognised, however, that use of the medium is increasing. New means of access are opening up (e.g., WAP Phones, PlayStations, and digital television), which may also lead to increased application of the Internet.[10] If lecturers wish to deny the application and validity of the Internet as a resource for their students, how do institutions guarantee equivalent quality resource availability? This has serious financial implications. If socially disadvantaged students are utilising the Web as a primary source out of necessity, then denial of its relevance could be seen as inhibiting access to higher education.

A more serious issue arises over the use students make of work downloaded from the Internet. John Slater, chairman of the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) is responsible for oversight of Web related resources in British education. He notes:

> "The problem is that there is a blossoming business in Web sites offering students essays on all sorts of things... I want to stress I am not saying plagiarism has increased — it's that the opportunities for plagiarism have increased."[11]

Several companies, located primarily in the United States, offer essays in religious studies. The influence of American scholarship on British students using such resources is an interesting phenomenon, especially when little effort is made to transform American English into British English! The essays are written by postgraduates and other academics, and are "graded" according to the quality of content. This ensures that a C-average student does not arouse suspicion by submitting A+-grade essays drawn from the Internet. The availability of subject specific commentaries and other free materials — which can be cut, pasted, and adjusted by students into "original" work — also needs to be considered. One popular company, Cyber Essays, has a "Religion" category that is subdivided into thirteen categories, ranging from "Religions of the World" to "Superstition and Cults."[12] The former category contains 78 pages, each with descriptions of at least eight essays. The latter category contains six pages of titles. Essays can be paid for by credit card, and the company also offers a customized essay service. I cannot vouch for the quality of the essays contained in the service, but the range of titles is certainly comprehensive. The issue of

The mutual influence of Religious Education in schools and Religious Studies/Theology in Universities in the English context [1]

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A MAJOR DIFFERENCE between teaching religious studies and theology in universities in the UK and in the US is that in the UK, students will have had the opportunity to study religion throughout their earlier education. In the UK, schools that are wholly state-funded (which the vast majority of pupils attend) provide non-confessional religious education. Almost 90% of school children are exposed, from the ages of five to sixteen or eighteen, to a religious education that is open and multifaith. National law stipulates that syllabi "should reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian, whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain."[2] In England, religious education syllabi for schools are organised at a county level by local government, but the majority follow national guidelines.[3] These state that there are to be two sides to religious education in schools: "learning about" and "learning from" the religious traditions. The latter means that pupils are to have the opportunity to explore their own ideas about the kind of ultimate questions with which religions deal.

Religious education in schools in the UK is an academic rather than religious pursuit, with the educational aim of learning about and understanding religions rather than nurturing faith in a particular religion. It is thus a good preparation for the academic study of religion in universities. This is still quite an unusual approach for national education policies to take. The majority of nations in the world either omit religious education altogether from the curricula of state-funded schools (as in the US, Russia, or France), or include religious education of a confessional nature, either in the tradition of the individual family or that perceived to be the shared heritage of the country. Within the national standard, there are differences between the educational systems in England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. For the sake of brevity, this article focuses on the English experience.

The religions included in school syllabi are the six most strongly represented in the population: Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism and Sikhism. There have been recent debates about the inclusion of Paganism[4] (neo-Paganism) as a rapidly growing spiritual identity,as well as Humanism.[5] (People with no religious belief make up at least 30% of the population, although not many of these are Humanists in the specific sense.) There is scope within many local syllabi for including locally important minorities such as Jains or Bahais. Even though the study of Humanism is rarely specified, the fact that teachers take account of and explore students' own beliefs means that non-religious life stances are, in practice, included.

Phenomenological approach

Since the publication of the influential *Working Paper 36*[6] thirty years ago, the approach to religious education in state-funded schools has been heavily influenced by a phenomenological approach to the study of religion. A crucial figure in the popularity of this approach in both universities and schools is the late Ninian Smart. Smart saw involvement with what happens in schools as very much the concern of a university professor. As applied to religious education in schools, the phenomenological approach does not imply the philosophy of Husserl or the theory of Eliade, but simply an attempt to look at the full range of religions in as open a way as possible, putting aside prejudice and preconception and attempting to empathise with and understand the believer's point of view. Although in the intervening decades this approach has been both criticised and supplemented, it still lies at the heart of the basic approach to religions in state schools. Teachers, who were delighted that they were no longer expected to promote religious belief amongst their reluctant pupils and that they could include a range of worldviews in their curricula, warmly welcomed it at its inception.

The main ways in which the phenomenological approach to religious education in schools has been supplemented over the last thirty years can be characterised as existential, experiential, ethnographic and philosophical.

Existential approach

"Existential" refers to the contention that, for religious education to be effective, it must have a connection with the students' own interests, concerns, and developmental needs. This approach is currently reflected in the Children and Worldviews Project of Erricker et. al., and in the work of Michael Grimmitt.[7] It is reflected in the attainment targets of many religious education syllabi. For example, the syllabus current in my local area, *Awareness, Mystery and Value,*[8] requires pupils to learn from religion and human experience, as well as learn about Religion. This means that by the end of their school education, students should have the ability to:

" a) reflect on aspects of human nature, identity, personality, and experience, especially in the light of one's own beliefs and experience;

b) identify and respond to questions about the nature and purpose of life on earth;

c) give an informed and considered response to religious and moral issues;

d) identify, name; describe; and give accounts (of religions) in order to build a coherent picture of religious beliefs about the spiritual dimension of life;

e) explain similarities and differences between and within religious practices and lifestyles;

f) explain the meaning of religious language, story, and symbolism"[9]

This is much more than simply knowing "the facts" about a range of religious traditions — a common misinterpretation by teachers of the aims of the phenomenological approach!

Experiential Approach

"Experiential" refers to two things. First, students gain first hand experience of religious communities by going out and visiting them on their own ground. (Visits to places of worship are a common feature of religious education programmes). Second, an experiential approach encourages insight into the religious experience of others as well as exploration of students' own spirituality. This is mostly a matter of teaching and learning strategies, such as including space for reflective exercises like meditation and guided fantasy. David Hay and John Hammond are among those who have developed this methodology for schools.[10]

Ethnographic Approach

"Ethnographic" refers to the work of Robert Jackson and others who stress the need for students to engage with religion as it is lived in all its diversity and fuzziness.[11] Thus, many recent books for schools are based on introducing the student in the class to real children and young people in religious traditions.

Philosophical Approach

"Philosophical" refers to the opportunity for students to discuss the challenging questions that religions raise, as well as the opportunity to explore their own views and to criticise those of the religious heritage presented to them. In this connection, Andrew Wright[12] talks of "religious literacy," and religious education that is challenging and disturbing rather than an uncritical description of other peoples' practices.

If carried out effectively, religious education on the above model is an excellent preparation for a degree in religious studies. Since the law requires that local syllabi

reflect the fact that Christianity is the majority tradition, it is also good preparation for a degree in Christian theology. At the end of a student's school career in England, there are national examination options at 16 (General Certificate of Secondary Education) and 18 (Advanced Level), organised by examination boards rather than the local government. These include papers in Christian theology and Biblical studies, as well as major world religions and philosophy of religion. These will only be taken by a minority of pupils (GCSE by about 17%; A level by about 3%).[13] A recent success story is the introduction of a short course, equivalent to half a GCSE, which gives credit for a subject that has to be studied anyway, exam or no exam, and which tends to focus on religious, philosophical, and moral issues relevant to students' interests. These papers were taken by 22% of school pupils last year, making a total of 39% of 16 year olds taking a public examination in religious education.

Because of the inclusion of religious education in the school curriculum, the vast majority of students entering English universities have already studied religions.[14] Thus, university teachers have a responsibility to acknowledge and build upon students' previous learning. The body responsible for inspecting schools, OFSTED, has found that although things have been improving in recent years,[15] in practice religious education in schools is nevertheless relatively neglected in terms of time given, resources provided, specialist teachers, (i.e., those with a degree in theology/religious studies), and standards reached. Only a minority of pupils choose to take public examinations in the subject. Although there is great potential in school religious education, in practice, university tutors may find that their students do not arrive with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that a reading of school syllabi might lead them to expect.

Turning from schools to university level education, there is in the UK some tension between theology and religious studies. The latter is a relatively new discipline that is still in places struggling against the hegemony of traditional Christian theology. It is religious studies — non-confessional in nature and, broadly speaking, phenomenological and ethnographic — that is more aligned in both approach and content to the religious education of the local county syllabi. Theology or Biblical studies is appropriate preparation for some of the public examinations or for religious education as it is taught in some Church aided schools and some independent schools. I have also argued[16] that theology, especially if it is widened to include more than Christian theology, (following Ninian Smart's suggestion of "theologies in the plural"[17]), reflects the side of religious education in schools where students explore their own beliefs and values, and are provided with opportunities for personal spiritual development. Neither of these tend to be explicitly addressed in purely religious studies degrees.

In the same article, I argue that the three disciplines of religious studies, theology, and religious education have much to learn from each other. University religious studies has established a thoroughly academic (scientific?) approach to the study of religions and has passed its phenomenological and ethnographic approaches on to school religious education. The specialist study possible in university research can provide schools with up to date subject knowledge and the latest theories. One recent university debate of great use to schools is the

strange and exotic features of that religion in the unquestioned "Western" mental maps of British students. Usually implicitly, but often explicitly, ethnographic details are put in a conceptual context that promotes critical appraisal of the assumptions of folk Westernism. (By "folk Westernism" I mean an unexamined ideology that takes as normal and normative certain behaviours, values, and interpretive paradigms derived from conventional characterisations of an imagined "'Western society.'") Thus, gender, social status, and the significance of religion in ordinary life are filtered — and in seminar discussions, articulated — through unexamined, selective, and ahistorial ideas about the students' liberal Western society. The skill of concerned lecturers consists in gently drawing out these assumptions. Students embark on the study of a tradition with some initial sense of direction, but eventually grow accustomed to looking at that tradition in a situated and nuanced way. Less skilful lecturers can easily reinforce facile prejudices in their students if they never manage to identify and foreground assumptions about a common Western norm in the interpretation of other traditions.

Subaltern studies: Especially evident in religious studies teaching informed by political and literary critical studies of the postcolonial kind, this represents an astringent and pointed response to both the obvious prejudices of sub-imperial conservatism and the gentle ambiguities of post-1960s liberalism. Although famous as a research area, subaltern approaches are also making their way into teaching — even into the teaching of religions. There is a ground-up effort to understand a non-western cultural situation through the agency of the actors in it, rather than in terms of the imperial concerns of the West. This attitude has encouraged the use of micro-studies of religious communities in South Asia as part of more general courses/modules.

Engaged radicalism: As reflexive awareness of the academic researcher's hegemonic-parasitic relationship with cultural realities becomes heightened, the problems and tensions within those realities seem to demand an existential response on the part of the researcher. An ethical transformation of that relationship is, in turn, reflected in teaching. Increasingly, lecturers with ethnographic knowledge seek to convey the transformative potential of their teaching to students. Sparking enthusiasm is not only a pedagogic aim,

but also a moral goal. Especially in the matter of gender and caste/class, teaching South Asian religions has become partly a matter of drawing students into issues of inequality, power, violence, exploitation, and predation. Similarly, complex and contradictory concerns over the political violence in the Punjab in the 1980s and 1990s were evident in the growth and teaching of Sikhism. (This was not the case in religious studies as such, but in political and sociological contexts like "Punjab Studies.")

The multicultural nature of British society (if not of British religious studies students) lends immediacy to this approach, for there is a continued sense of engagement with the countries from which Britain has gained its multicultural nature.

Multiculturalism: The impact of multiculturalist attitudes on the teaching of South Asian religions is significant. Compared to the general and conceptual debates in the US, multiculturalism in Britain is relatively more demographically focused and in, consequence, socially clarified. Although it sometimes brings in issues of European identity, multiculturalism normally means recognising immigrant populations from major portions of former non-dominion empire: the Caribbean and South Asia. This recognition came to be called (in the late 1970s, of course — shades of another sort of empire) "the empire strikes back." In the 1980s and 1990s, South Asians (called "Asians" in Britain) saw their shifting position in British society gradually having an impact on the teaching of their religions in Britain. Whether socio-economically impoverished or eminently successful, South Asians have become a stable part of society. This has contributed to burgeoning debates over "Britishness" and identity. In religious studies, it has led to an appraisal of South Asian religions as, in effect, religions of Britain.

In the next section, I will pursue the most striking disciplinary consequence of this development, but here I want to point out the impact it has had on teaching South Asian religions in general. While the subcontinent must continue to be the focus of courses on Hinduism, etc. as such, it has increasingly become the practice to give an ethnographic immediacy to such studies by introducing data from British Asian communities. It is now quite common for introductory books to contain photographs and narratives from British Hindu, Muslim, or Sikh sources as

representative of the religions "back home." This has undoubted pedagogic value, but raises interesting questions about immigrant identities, authenticity, and diasporic culture.

The immediacy of which I speak here is not because of reflexivity but familiarity. That is to say, reference to British Asian communities in religious studies is not about enabling students from those communities to think through their lives, but rather to help native white students to anchor the distant and the strange with something possibly encountered within their extended milieu. This is not because of a lack of concern amongst teachers; it is because few students of Asian origin take religious studies. I will deal with this situation when dealing with the issue of etic/emic teaching.

Ethnic, community and diasporic studies: The situating of South Asian religions in Britain has led to a convergence of interest between those interested primarily in British society and those interested in South Asian religions. While the former are important to doing British sociology and so on, the latter are of relevance here. Increasingly, religions as they are found in Britain are autonomous foci of study. It is now possible to study Hinduism or Islam in Britain by themselves. Such studies do not always require the engagement of students with the textual and historical sources of the traditions, although it is difficult to see how this might be intellectually sustainable. When properly related to the larger phenomena of those religions, attention to their British manifestations is a welcome addition to their study.

Etic and emic teaching: Finally, I turn to the greatest source of uncertainty over the future teaching of South Asian religions. While the presence of these religions in Britain has certainly lent immediacy to teaching them in the universities, that immediacy is not due to reflexivity. That is, it is not through being taught to members of those religious traditions themselves.

The dominant explanation for this situation with regard to Islam is that Islamic communities take teaching to be a highly committed undertaking; there is no secularized distance between existential and intellectual engagement, as with a good deal of (Western) Christianity in Britain. Although it is certainly not unknown to find Muslims teachings Islam in universities, it is also notable that several are Western converts. I suspect that the gap between the teaching of Islam as faith and as social scientific study is as marked here as

in the US. It cannot be determined exactly to what extent this affects different attitudes to Islam, but the fact is that there are contradictory impulses in the teaching and learning.pdf of Islam. One seeks to work as closely as is possible to the lives of Muslims, continuing the multicultural impulse delineated above. The other accepts a certain ineradicable alienness to the non-existential study of Islam. Apart from exceptional cases, it seems unlikely that there will be any substantial overlap between teaching Islam within the community and as a subject of Religious Studies.

Hinduism has not been as subject to course-work deconstruction in Britain as in the US. The definitional challenges of Hinduism nevertheless certainly are accepted as absolutely vital to teaching it properly. Until comparatively recently, however, the much-debated plurality of Hinduism, together with other factors, meant that there was hardly any structured internal — emic — teaching. It appeared that the formal teaching of a religion was a Western academic affair, different from the transmission of tradition(s) in the community. There may be unified courses on Hinduism, but that unity is purely a bureaucratic compulsion. The plurality of Hinduism precludes any common existential teaching of it. Such teaching can only be of specific and historically real traditions. Academic consensus has been threatened by the development of an essentialist trend within Hindu groups. This is partly a matter of the exportation of political concerns from India, but partly it is a matter of a search for less debatable, more assertible identities in an ideologically uncertain world. Whatever the reasons, there is now opening up a distance between the teaching of Hinduism in the academy and the propagation of a somewhat etiolated, if psychologically appealing, notion of Hinduism amongst Hindus.

In the end, the primary reason for the distance that exists in Britain between the teaching of South Asian religions and South Asians themselves is that South Asians have rarely been students of religious studies. For reasons that lie beyond the purview of this essay, they either do not come into the ambit of tertiary education, or go into professional fields like medicine, accounting, finance, and pharmacology. It is only very recently, especially in London, that third-generation British Asians are beginning to take religious studies. Their novel engagement with their traditions may open up new directions of pedagogy.

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disinterested pursuit of the truth. Engaged in professional formation, moreover, theology could command a place in the modern academy alongside medicine, law, and education.

As a rough generalisation, one might describe the modern study of theology as offering a blend of these contrasting approaches, albeit a blend that is sometimes the source of unease and lack of clarity. An emphasis upon the practical dimensions of theological study — ethics, pastoral care, spirituality, and missiology — is combined with traditional emphases upon philosophical, historical, and linguistic skills for the pursuit of theological study. Almost all British theologians continue to relate to the churches and to regard their work as making a constructive contribution to their community of faith. Most would eschew any disjunction between "insider" and "outsider" approaches. Both narrow

confessionalism and dispassionate neutrality are highly problematic if adjudged to be the only acceptable form of engagement with the subject matter. At the very least, today's student will be encouraged to develop a greater sensitivity to, and understanding and tolerance of, theological positions.

To suggest a uniform paradigm, however, would distort the sheer variety of approaches, methods, and foci of theological study currently available. In part, these are determined by different institutional settings and the diverse manner in which departments, schools, and faculties are configured. "Theology and Religious Studies" is now the standard designator for departments, the unit of research assessment, and the teaching quality review panel. The recent "benchmarking" statement eschews any essentialist definition of theology as it is taught today. Instead, it describes the wide range of approaches, methods, and loci of study in theology and religious studies, recognising none as

normative but all as valid.[2]

In a recent survey of British theology, David Ford has commented upon the wisdom model that is widely practised throughout the country. He contrasts this with German and American models. Following Rowan Williams, he perceives the marks of this style of theology as celebratory (evoking a fullness of vision), communicative (persuading and commending), and critical (drawing upon philosophical and other methodological tools).[3] These three marks entail a commitment to systematising than to ongoing conversation and constructive theological input in contemporary discourse. Less apparent is the desire to produce a complete "system" of Christian thought in relation to Scripture and other fields of knowledge. Attempts on the European continent and in the US to produce systematic theologies have found, perhaps regrettably, few counterparts on the British scene. This may owe something to

the more diffuse context in which the subject is now taught.

While this thesis cannot be pressed too far without imposing a false uniformity, it does indicate a highly influential approach within recent British theology. It can be portrayed as combining aspects of the two models of teaching theology described by Kelsey, while also retrieving the traditional responsibilities of systematic theology, particularly attention to the history of doctrinal theology, philosophical awareness, and apologetic engagement with contemporary culture.

[1] *Understanding God: What's Theological about a Theological School*, (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992).

[2] *http://www.qaa.ac.uk/crntwork/benchmark /theology.pdf*

[3] David Ford, "Theological Wisdom, British Style," *Christian Century*, April 5, 2000, p. 390.

Teaching Biblical Studies to Non-Traditional Students in British Higher education

Bill Campbell, Lampeter University

The face of theological and religious studies education in Britain is changing rapidly. In this final article, Bill Campbell, Associate Director of the PRS-LTSN in Lampeter and editor of The Journal of Beliefs and Values, gives a personal account of one experienced teacher's adaptation to the new circumstances he has faced.

THE HIGHER EDUCATION landscape in Britain has changed enormously in the last few decades. Previously, the average undergraduate class had a large majority of students who had very recently or immediately graduated from school — leaving examinations to enter university or college. Gradually, access to higher education has been widened to include entrants with non-traditional qualifications, enabling mature and retired people to enter the system more easily. In recent years, colleges and universities with courses leading to teaching qualifications for state (i.e. public) schools have attracted many more women. The outcome for higher education is a huge increase in part-time and distance-learning students. This represents a great opportunity for religious studies, and these are issues of particular importance to the PRS-LTSN.

Another major change in the student population has been the increasing ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity, especially in inner-city areas. It is no longer wise for a lecturer to assume knowledge of the background or family circumstances of a student group. This enormous diversity includes Muslims and Hindus from various parts of the world and divergent strands of faith as well as diverse Christian, post-Christian, and humanist or atheistic students.

I have found that the only expectation I can have of my students is that they be committed to the study of religion, whether or not they might ever wish to practice it. It is an interesting experience to teach Christianity to people of several religions within the same student group. This experience has taught me that it simply is not wise to expect knowledge to be generally shared across the group. Our student groups are now much more diverse in terms of age, culture, and religion.

I have taught Biblical studies for many years to students in university and church

related colleges in various parts of the UK and in a diversity of degree programs. I have gradually developed pedagogical techniques to assist delivery of courses. More recently, I have had the opportunity to teach non-traditional students in Open and Distance Learning modes (ODL). This has meant a considerable rethinking and modification of both my approach and the subject content. I have developed a case study involving the teaching of a module on Paul's letters over a period of twenty weeks. To enable comparison and contrast, I taught the same module concurrently to two very different groups. The first was a normal undergraduate group taught twice each week whilst the other comprised only mature and part-time students taught once per week at a site far distant from the university campus. The following pedagogical reflections originate from my previous experience of teaching, as modified by specific considerations arising from the needs of mature/non-traditional ODL students.

Presuppositions and Starting Point

Presuppositions about our Students and How to Teach Them

In teaching a "normal" undergraduate class in Britain, one used to be able to assume a certain basic knowledge and skill level, despite the variety of examination boards mediating the transition from school to university. But with non-traditional mature students, where does one start? Should one proceed from the general to the particular, or vice versa?

My decision is normally to start with the particular, providing minimal background information of the first century Hellenistic world whilst concentrating on introduction to biblical texts. Sociologically, Paul may be a first century man, but it is his distinctiveness that distinguishes him religiously. It is on this that I choose to concentrate. Of course, one must study Paul in his historical, geographical and cultural context; otherwise we would be looking at religion in a vacuum, as if spirituality were entirely independent of earthly realities such as religious community, traditions, and political setting. Even in a short course or module, however, it would amount to failure in teaching religion or theology if we succeed only in giving students a good grounding in Hellenism alongside a poor understanding of Paul's letters. The pattern of teaching biblical studies in the UK has broadened considerably in the last 30 years, sociologically, historically, and in interfaith. While insights from areas such as these may be useful to our discipline, as teachers of biblical studies we are not teaching sociology or even ancient history.

The Presuppositions of the Students

Good pedagogy begins where the students are. This means taking account of their presuppositions. Biblical studies, even in a (so-called) post-Christian British context, encounters inherited attitudes towards the Bible. In the case of some mature students with a life-long commitment to the

church, the Bible is not just another textbook but a resource for spiritual nourishment, a guide to ultimate values, and perhaps even the very words of God. Other mature students may not share this perspective because they are not Christian. Even if they are, students may have a negative reaction to Paul's letters because they regard him as authoritarian. Students with feminist awareness may tend to identify Paul with patriarchal oppression, and Jewish students may regard him as an apostate from Judaism.

My response to these presuppositions is to insist on *an historical approach to biblical texts*. I start by asking the students to read a particular letter, noting and perhaps even underlining in the text those verses that refer to identifiable historical places, people, and actions. This exercise attempts to subvert a purely spiritual or theological approach to the text, encouraging critical analysis rather than merely devotion or cynicism arising from inherited assumptions.

"Starting where the students are," in the case of mature students, also means taking into account their previous experience. Even though all human experience in relation to any world religion can be a useful communication bridge, this must be related specifically to the biblical text. Otherwise, one finds the class taken up with long and irrelevant accounts of personal narrative. Personal experience of religion is valuable and has its legitimate role, but it must not prevent a real encounter with the text being studied. The intention in stressing the historical approach is also to point the students toward a literary approach, seeing the letters as narrative, and studying the interaction of the characters within the narrative. More mature students have an advantage here: their varied experience gives them a broader basis for comparison, and an understanding of human relations and emotions.

Course Construction

In the presentation of any course, a basic decision is whether *quantity or quality* of teaching content is the more important. Too much detail early in the course is counter-productive, especially where the module content is completely new; some students unfortunately think they must remember every detail and then "can't see the wood for the trees." The intention in this module was to give a brief but sufficient introduction to the main issues involved in the study of Paul's letters as Biblical texts. I decided to limit myself to one topic per week, thus dividing the module into 20 constituent parts. This meant that some topics could not be included. I had to think very carefully about my criteria for inclusion or exclusion.

The basis for my selection was that the texts not be studied merely because they are central and significant for Christianity, but also because they have the potential to introduce a methodology of studying other texts that we did not have time to consider in this module. Thus the emphasis was on quality of work done rather than on quantity. Philemon, despite its brevity, can prove to be an excellent introduction to Paul's letters, demonstrating many of the qualities of the longer letters.

In order to assist students towards independent study, I provided summaries of the lectures, and a listing of the relevant Biblical texts. Wherever possible, I limited these summaries to 500-750 words, with an absolute maximum of 1000 words. The purpose was to provide students with a summary of the main issues substantive enough to introduce them to the topics, but not so detailed as to be too complex. For greater depth of understanding, a very

precise but limited reading list was included at the end of each lecture summary.

Surprisingly, despite innumerable scholarly works on Paul, I found none that really suited the type of student and form of teaching I wanted to adopt. Some students come from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds and many also do not have easy access to good library facilities. I came to realize that one easy way to provide appropriate materials was for me to summarize relevant sections or chapters of books that I knew the students could easily understand and use. I also provided access to articles of my own — in electronic form as well as in hard copy — for which I had distribution permission.

Sequence of Lecture Topics

In view of the fact that students and I met only once a week, the sequence of lecture topics was crucial. If I introduced a particular topic early in the course, I would have had to give a certain amount of explanation that would have been unnecessary had lectures on other related topics already been given. The sequence of presented material also has another significance. To some extent, it determines the model of Paul that one wishes to present (community founder, pastor, charismatic, teacher, theologian, etc.).

Early in the course, therefore, I gave an overview of what we can with reasonable certainty know of Paul's life and activity in the general context of contemporary events in the first century Hellenistic world. This had the effect of stressing historicity, of depicting Paul as a founder of communities, and thus of emphasizing what he did rather than what he taught. It also had the effect of contextualizing Paul's teaching in real life social situations rather than in an historical vacuum.

Gaining an Understanding of the Content

Once provided with some introductory skills and a minimal historical framework, students were ready to study the text in accordance with perspectives already acquired. They now needed to investigate in more detail why a particular text was first created, and for what purpose. In the Paul's case, it is possible to discover from his letters from where they were sent, the reasons for sending, and even, to some extent, the nature of the audience for whom they were intended. Recommended reading at this point included standard Biblical commentaries with a good historical introduction, so that students were made aware of the interaction between the occasion of the document and its content.

Two major issues arise here. First, a general presupposition amongst students of Christian cultural background is that they tend to regard Paul's statements as theological rather than historical. Second, partly resulting from the first issue, his statements are seen to be of universal application rather than relating to particular communities and contexts. It is important to stress this particularity when people of other faiths are participating in order to make clear that, when Paul offers criticisms, he is addressing his own converts and not adherents of other religions.

By considering Paul's statements in context, students can discover that what he says, to a particular community at a particular moment in its history. This can be

CUSH, from p.5

deconstruction of the whole notion of world religions. There is a recognition that the term "religion" is itself a mere construct, a useful tool, but not to be taken as reality. At the school level, this helps guard against the tendency to see religions as monolithic, unchanging, and clearly distinguished from each other. University theology can prevent school religious education from being a tourist guide through other people's beliefs and customs. Instead, it can provide in-depth knowledge of the Christian tradition and challenge students to engage with critical questions of truth while exploring their personal stances on the issues with which religions deal.

Does school religious education have anything to offer university religious studies and theology? Religious education is often ahead of its university equivalent at the level of praxis. In their daily work, schoolteachers and teacher educators come face to face with students from many or no faiths. They quickly realise that the versions of the traditions practised by students and their families may differ greatly from the textbook versions. The borders between traditions can be very blurred. Teachers are also made acutely aware that in order to attract interest, their subject must have some personal relevance and social engagement. Some of the university debates about the deconstruction of religions and the need for academic religious studies to be socially engaged have been anticipated in the school classroom.

On a practical level, those with a background in religious education, as well as religious studies and theology, may be able to offer theology and religious studies at the university level the benefit of their experience in the following areas of learning and teaching:

a) designing a curriculum that is attractive to students and relevant to the needs of society;

b) utilising a range of teaching strategies, including visual material such as art and artefacts, ICT: engaging all the senses;

c) experiencing religious communities directly, through visits and placements: opportunities for experiential and affective as well as cognitive learning;

d) using a range of assessment methods rather than just essays and examinations;

e) having a clear idea of the aims and objectives of programs and expected learning outcomes at different levels;

f) being clear about the key transferable skills that the subjects can offer.

In England, standards in religious education in schools appear to be improving, and increasing numbers of school students are taking public examinations in the subject. This should be good news for universities in two ways: it is likely to increase the number of students wanting to continue their studies at the university level, and it maintains a major source of employment for the graduates of those university courses.

The late Professor Ninian Smart had a revolutionary impact on religious studies in universities and in schools in the UK. He also taught both in the UK and the US. I leave the final word to him:

"When I started in the university business there was a lot of snobbery, as though dons should not involve themselves with popularization, still less with secondary and primary teaching, or with other branches of higher education. The Shap Working Party [a body set up by Smart et al in 1969 to encourage the inclusion of world religions in education] set its face resolutely against this from the very beginning: all branches of education would be drawn together in a communal enterprise... What is the use of talking about problems in education unless you do something? And of what use is talking about education at all unless you see it as a whole?" [18]

Resources

[1] Although the general approach to religious education in schools is very similar in Scotland and Wales, legislation and organization is under separate arrangements too complex to go into here.

[2] Education Reform Act 1988 (8.3), repeated in Education Act 1996 (376.2)

[3] Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority (now Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. Model Syllabi for Religious Education (London: SCAA/ QCA, 1994) and Religious education: non-statutory guidance (London: QCA, 2000). Both are available online from http://www.qca.org.uk.

[4] Cush, D. "Paganism in the Classroom," British Journal of Religious Education 19.2 (1996).

[5] White, J. (1995) "The SCAA Model Syllabi: a Humanist Perspective," World Religions in Education and Rudge, L. (1998) "'I am nothing - does it matter?' :a critique of current educational policy and practice in England on behalf of the silent majority," British Journal of Religious Education 20.3

[6] Schools Council, Religious Education in Secondary Schools. (London: Evans, 1971).

[7] A useful summary of this and other recent research in religious education pedagogy can be found in Grimmitt, M. (ed.) Pedagogies of Religious Education: Case Studies in the Research and Development of Good Pedagogic Practice in Religious Education (McCrimmons, 2000).

[8] Somerset Education, Awareness, Mystery and Value: Somerset Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education (Somerset County Council, 1998). There is also a forthcoming article on the philosophy and practical aspects of putting this syllabus together: Cush, D. and Francis, D. "'Positive Pluralism' to Awareness, Mystery and Value: a Case Study in Religious Education Curriculum Development," British Journal of Religious Education. 24.1 (2001).

[9] Somerset (1998), p9.

[10] Hammond, J et. al., New Methods in RE Teaching: An Experiential Approach. (Harlow: Oliver and Boyd, 1998); see also Grimmitt (2000) above.

[11] Jackson, R. Religious Education, an Interpretive Approach (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1997) and see also Grimmitt (2000) above.

[12] Wright, A. Religious Education in the Secondary School: Prospects for Religious Literacy (London: Fulton, 1993); see also Grimmitt (2000) above.

[13] Figures refer to the year 1999/2000 and are deduced from statistics published by the Department for Education and Employment: www.dfee.gov.uk/statistics/.

[14] There is a parental legal right to withdraw children from the subject, but in practice very few people do.

[15] OFSTED reports can be found at: http://www.OFSTED.gov.uk.

[16] Cush, D. "Big Brother, Little Sister, and the Clerical Uncle: the relationship between Religious studies, Religious Education and Theology?" British Journal of Religious Education 21.3 (1999).

[17] Smart, N. "The Values of Religious studies," Journal of Beliefs and Values 16.2 (1995).

[18] Smart, N. Foreword to Erricker, C. (ed) (1993) Teaching World Religions (Oxford: Heinemann, 1993).

CAMPBELL, from p.7

aptly exemplified by noting that whilst in the letter to the Galatians Paul says that if they accept circumcision they will sever themselves off from Christ, in Romans he admits that circumcision indeed is of value for those who keep the law. Theology in fact emerges in the form of pastoral advice as Paul reacts to the needs of particular communities. These localized and particular statements do not allow generalization. Popular and traditional attempts to outline Paul's theology have tended to generalize across the particular letters by means of an artificial harmonization. (The presupposition here is that pure theology, being of an absolute quality rather than historically and contextually relative, can never be self-contradictory.)

A basic misunderstanding to avoid is the perception that Paul's statements are capable of universal application. Nineteenth century New Testament scholarship, influenced by Hegelian philosophy, was prone to contrast the universal with the particular — to the lasting detriment of the latter. This had the effect of devaluing Judaism because of its particularity. Incipient anti-Judaism was thus promoted in that Judaism was viewed as a primitive tribal religion and Christianity as the universal religion. Hegelian influence has in fact encouraged a dominant tendency to regard Paul's statements as of universal application, so that what he says in one letter must be in accordance with other statements elsewhere. Students must be alerted to the particularity of Paul's letters in order to subvert this tendency with its resultant anti-Judaism and parallel preference for absolute truth statements.

Desired Outcomes

The intention in the planning such a module was to introduce students to the study of Biblical texts in such a way as to encourage independent learning through the use of limited and relevant reading. It was also designed to avoid the promotion of simplistic stereotyping. If Christianity is taught in contrast to its Jewish origins, the result is an unwarranted sense of Christian superiority. The strategy employed in the teaching of this module was designed not only to avoid this negative outcome but to prepare students to be tolerant citizens of the multifaith and multicultural society that Britain is today. As a Biblical studies module, it sought to give a brief but basic introduction to a particular group of Biblical texts in such a way that what was learned has real validity, and does not have to be relearned when progress is made to greater depth of understanding.

The approach outlined above is very much my own, developed out of my own experience of teaching. I would very much appreciate the interaction of other colleagues who have developed different approaches or who are critical of my proposals. The Philosophical and Religious Studies Learning and Teaching Support Network exists to encourage such interaction.

BUNT, from p.4

commercial essays has been raised by religious studies lecturers in PRS-LTSN colloquia, together with the feasibility of introducing plagiarism detection software such as that produced by iParadigms.[13]

Questions that PRS-LTSN seeks to tackle in the future include whether Internet resources damage religious studies disciplines in Britain, and what coping mechanisms relating to pedagogy need to be implemented for the medium to be better accommodated within the academic framework. JISC has launched a series of projects and workshops in Britain to make staff aware of plagiarism issues and solutions.[14] Discussing the related experiences of colleagues in the United States on these issues would be a welcome development for PRS-LTSN.

Resources

[1] See: Gary Bunt, The Good Web Guide to World Religions, (London: Good Web Guide, 2001).

[2] For example, during the 2001 Kumbh Mela, a documentary Web site filmed pilgrims' experiences and presented daily diaries of activities. For students of Hinduism, this opens up this significant event, and facilitates a detailed study that could augment "traditional" materials. See Kumbh Mela — Channel Four Television, http://www.channel4.co.uk/kumbhmela.

[3] Private Internet access can be expensive in Britain, since it is charged per minute on a call-by-call basis. Internet access is generally free for students, via facilities located in higher educational institutions.

[4] These issues are discussed by the writer in the PRS-LTSN Web site: http://www.prs-ltsn.leeds.ac.uk.

[5] For examples of searchable TRS-related texts, see Bible Gateway: http://bible.gospelcom.net/ and the Qur'an Comparative Browser, http://goon.stg.brown.edu/quran_browser/

[6] This is discussed in Gary Bunt, Virtually Islamic: Computer-mediated Communication and Cyber Islamic Environments, (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2000), http://www.virtuallyislamic.com.

[7] See RDN Virtual Training Suite, PRS-LTSN, http://www.prs-ltsn.leeds.ac.uk/tutorials/index.html.

[8] The University of Wales, Lampeter, has run an undergraduate module on this subject.

[9] See, for example, the Religious Movements home page, http://www.religiousmovements.org for their A-Z listing of beliefs; and Sacred Texts, WEB: http://www.sacred-texts.com, for an extensive collection of online religious manuscripts.

[10] See Gary Bunt, "From Tomb Raider to Tome Reader: Computer-Mediated Learning, Mobile Learning, and Widening Access" in PRS, PRS-LTSN, http://www.prs-ltsn.leeds.ac.uk/access/discussions/tome_reader1.html.

[11] BBC News Online, "Anti-cheat software to hit UK students," 5 April, 2000 http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/education/newsid_702000/702953.stm

[12] Cyber Essays, http://www.essayfinder.com. Criticism of the quality of online essays can be found in the article "Download your workload" by Lisa Rivera, http://www.csuchico.edu/jour/cathytes/s99/term.html. Also see Theresa Gillis and Janeane Rockwell-Kincannon, "From Download your Workload to the Evil House of Cheat: Cybercheating, Plagiarism and Intellectual Property Theft", Online Northwest 2000, http://www.wou.edu/provost/library/staff/kincanon/ plagiarism/presentation_files/frame.htm.

[13] iParadigm, http://www.plagiarism.org/solution.html.

[14] JISC Electronic Plagiarism Detection, http://www.jisc.ac.uk/mle/plagiarism/.