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Multiculturalism remains a highly debated topic in academic circles, but much of that debate ignores religion as an important feature of the world's cultures. However elusive and controversial the definition of multiculturalism, as a curricular matter, it involves at minimum the study of diverse cultures and their meaning in human history. Carol Geary Schneider, president of the Association of American Colleges and Universities, noted recently in *Diversity Digest* (5:2, 2001). that the academy is convinced, that citizens now need to acquire significant knowledge both of cultures other than their own and of disparate cultures' struggles for recognition and equity..." The academic study of religion is an integral part of such knowledge. My work assisting teachers in learning how to teach about religion in the schools has convinced me that the study of religion has much to contribute to the emphasis on multiculturalism throughout our educational system.

Over the last five years, I have worked with secondary school teachers in Southern California through the California 3Rs Project (Rights, Responsibilities, and Respect), a project helping teachers to teach about religion in a way that is constitutionally permissible and educationally sound. My role has been to offer workshops on teaching about American religious history, helping teachers to identify places in their established curricula where they can develop study units on religion. In the absence of inclination and space in most secondary programs to offer separate courses in religious studies, my goal has been to encourage teachers to pay attention to religion in American history.

In working with teachers, I have been concerned especially with noting the presence and influence of religion in America beyond the Puritan colonies, and the California missions, both of which seem to be stopping places, literally. For instance, to have teachers study the succession of the founders' religious liberty generation by the nineteenth century evangelical benevolence empire with its agencies and reforms would be a breakthrough; to have them explore the efforts of the U.S. Roman Catholic leadership to establish parochial schools in answer to Protestantism in public schools in the same period would be a major success. An examination of the forging of independent black churches as touchstones of identity and power for blacks in that period would be a further advance in learning. As we study the presence and participation of the many cultural groups in American history, so too must we study religious traditions in plural, including the world's religions that have "immigrated" to America.

The teachers I have worked with have been invariably bright, energetic, and committed to education, but few of them have had any formal exposure to the academic study of religion. Those who have responded to the state education standards mandating the study of religion can be considered as not only dedicated, but heroic. They operate under conditions of anxiety and are sometimes pressured by suspicion regarding religion from superintendents, principals, colleagues, parents, and students. They work in settings where religion is a highly charged subject even as it is largely absent as a curricular subject. Their classrooms reflect the great racial, ethnic, class, cultural, and religious diversity of Southern California, and indeed of the world. How can we professors of religious studies help to develop with secondary school teachers a multicultural curriculum, a curriculum as rich as the background of the students and teachers in the classroom?

Clearly, teachers need many resources to teach about religion. They need textbooks, such as the Oxford University Press series, *Religion in American Life*, to which our fellow professors have contributed. They need audiovisual materials, such as *On Common Ground: World Religions in America* (by Diana Eck and the Pluralism Project at Harvard), a series with tremendous multimedia capability for teaching and learning. Teachers need online news updates that reinforce the currency and liveliness of the world's religions. But I think the most urgent need among teachers is knowledge about how to approach the study of religion. The most important thing we can offer is exposure to the various methods of religious studies, articulation of the interdisciplinary nature of the field, and some understanding of the cautions and debates surrounding those methods, including the unsettled issue of what constitutes religion. Through pre-service education school courses, in-service training, and enrichment seminars, we can work with teachers to strengthen their expertise and their confidence in teaching religious studies. As they gain a better picture of the academic study of religion, they can begin to uncover the connections between history, culture, and religion in material that they already know. As we share with teachers our dilemmas in teaching difficult themes — religious conflict, for instance — they can learn from our approaches and gain confidence in doing the same.

Sharing our experience of studying religion as a complex topic can be highly valuable to teachers. I remember, for example, the first time I presented the late Ninian Smart's "dimensions of religion" to a group of teachers. They felt almost a sense of revelation concerning the multifaceted nature of religion as a topic for study, and felt released from dwelling on religion as only a "system of belief." Thinking about the dimensions of religion gave them a chance to occupy a space in which theological questions were decidedly part of a larger conception of religion. The teachers were free to explore religion as it lodges in culture, to explore religion as it does an extended dance with culture: the partners often not totally distinguishable, but the dance visible and compelling. Similarly, talking with teachers about religion as "omni-directional," within society, capable both of aligning with the status quo and moving with revolutionary movements, and occupying many sites in between, opens up a conception of religion that allows teachers to consider religion more comprehensively.

The diversity of human groups and their ways of creating and sustaining meaning have long been recognized by religious studies. Our field was born in the late nineteenth century, in the image of comparative religion. The striking primary claim of the early comparative religions approach was that religion was various, and deserved to be studied in its variety and complexity. However hegemonic and problematic the stance of the early comparative religions approach, the acknowledgment of the diversity of world religions and of their consequence was a major step toward what may be called a multicultural perspective.

As religious studies scholars, we have expertise that can be helpful to secondary school teachers addressing multiculturalism. Many of us entered the field precisely because of our fascination with the intersection of religion and culture, and with the varied nature of religion. We nurture in our classrooms a sensitivity toward and respect for various religious traditions, and an openness to the meaningfulness of religion to its adherents. In the century-long transition from a comparative religion perspective to a religious pluralism perspective, we have had to grapple with issues of neutrality, objectivity, cultural bias, and critical standards, among others. We have wrestled with the enigmatic issues of secularization and modernity, both of which are relevant to multiculturalism. As religious studies professors, we have had to study a topic whose actual definition eludes our agreement, and we have produced important knowledge under those conditions. Further, our experience as scholars who are sometimes marginalized in our own institutions because of our topic of study can help to advance an understanding of marginalization as it occurs in other contexts. This is a key issue for multiculturalism.

Religious studies scholars have experience in dealing with religion in its multiplicity, with multiple traditions, and multiple dimensions of traditions over time. We take seriously both the correspondence and distinctiveness of religious traditions around the world. In our efforts to

understand the intersections of culture and religion, past and present, we constantly reorient the field. We reinvigorate religious studies. We create new narratives about religion, and we raise new questions about narrative itself. In researching what we may call the religious imagination, we extend our own imaginativeness in remaking scholarship. It is this dynamism that informs our teaching and scholarship from which secondary teachers could benefit most. As new printed, audio, and visual resources develop, teachers will know how to find them. Teachers will know how to translate what they learn from those resources into age and grade-appropriate instruction. What they need most from religious studies professors is access to our experience in teaching about religion.

In order to map out the territory of religious studies for teachers, to point out the main roads and interesting side paths, the cliffs and canyons, the badlands and oases, we need to be in some regular contact with them. Others in this edition of *Spotlight* have addressed the issue of public service and public spiritedness. The fact remains that the coming together of religious studies scholars and secondary teachers will yield benefits for both, and for our entire educational system, especially as it comes to terms with multiculturalism. Programs like the 3Rs Project (Rights, Responsibilities, and Respect) have begun to bring the two groups together. But there is still room for individual initiative. As a religious studies scholar, you can reach out to teachers in your district to advance the academic study of religion in the schools, and thus to advance the field.