

The Post-Secular Religious Discipline: A Sacred Field of Study

Intro:

Throughout history, English and American literature continually returns to and reminisces upon the original and changing nature of religious beliefs and spirituality as a source of comfort as well as questioning. This phenomenon is comfortably discussed in the safe secular space of Literature yet lacking in the syllabi of Religious Studies due to its interference with the secular divide of academic study from expressions of the sacred in culture. Although it is the case with all of the humanities, Religious Studies has been most sensitively secularized in order to achieve validation as a worthy academic discipline. For decades now, the academic domain has neglected religion as a domain for analysis except through an anthropological or historical narrative, especially in regard to religious texts. There is and has been a deep need to categorize and separate the realms and domains of intellectuality. This secularization has been thought of as a transition on par with the changing perspectives in society, as both moving towards the scientific and secular and away from the spiritual and sacred. With this segregation, however, there is an inherent neglect of the lived religious experience and understanding of the sacred, especially with regard to the way it is expressively manifesting in modern culture through artistic mediums.

Lit Review:

This issue was initially and perhaps still most notably addressed by Mircea Eliade's efforts to distinguish between the sacred and profane. Eliade is "today best known for his efforts to establish what at Chicago is called "history of religions" as an autonomous, academic

discipline, distinct from anthropological, psychological, or sociological studies of religion” (University of Alabama). From these efforts, the discipline was established to study “exclusively human phenomenon, via the methods of the social sciences and humanities” (University of Chicago). Furthermore, the discipline of Religious Studies at University of Chicago lists several subcategories, including philosophy of religion, ethics, theology, and “religion, literature and visual culture” (University of Chicago). This latter domain is most interesting as an example of a successful interdisciplinary approach, which “studies the interactions of the religions with cultural forms and practices, with particular reference to art. It pursues this study utilizing the tools of poetics, aesthetics, and theories of interpretation to understand both the ways that the religions harness the human imagination, and the ways that the human recourse to imaginative expression often – some would say always- engages religion” (University of Chicago). With this aim, students are introduced to a more comprehensive and modern perspective of religion as it is experienced and expressed. This perspective, however, is not universally accepted, as evident in many universities.

In his 1949 work, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, Eliade writes: “[A] religious phenomenon will only be recognized as such if it is grasped at its own level, that is to say, if it is studied *as something religious*” (Eliade xii). Furthermore, “To try to grasp the essence of such a phenomenon by mean of physiology, psychology, sociology, economics, linguistics, art or any other study is false; it misses the one unique and irreducible element in it--the element of the sacred” (Eliade xii). As Eliade explicates, it is essential to study religions for the unique way in that they are religious, which requires an acknowledgment and incorporation of the sacred, whatever form it may take. In this way, “Because religion is human it must for that very reason

be something social, something linguistic, something economic... it would be hopeless to try and explain religion in terms of any one of those basic functions which are really no more than another way of saying that man is" (Eliade xii). To further convey his message, Eliade uses the parallel that "It would be as futile as thinking you could explain [the novel] *Madame Bovary* by a list of social, economic, and political facts; however true, they do not affect it as a work of literature" (Eliade xii). In this illustration, his argument for the link between the study of religion and the practice or lived experience of religion is essential. There should not be a gaping disparity between the two, even though one privileges the insider perspective and the other is limited to an outsider perspective. Eliade is making the claim that the outsider perspective should not be privileged, in the sense that an anti-insider standard is established and the sacred element of religion is diminished to the anthropological "other" as foreign or against academia.

Eliade's attempted preservation of the sacred, however, has been featured as a bullet point of religious scholarship rather than the turning point for religious studies departments' pedagogical approach. Since Eliade, Charlotte Allen's "Is nothing sacred? Casting out the gods from religious studies" and June O'Connor's "Response: The Scholar of Religion as Public Intellectual: Expanding Critical Intelligence" have also voiced opinions in this debate. It is vitally important that religious studies preserve and respect the aspect of the sacred, as Allen points out that this is the not only the key differentiating factor for religion amongst other "social" studies but also the primary purpose for religion in much of public use. Although Allen argues for saving the sacred in the study of religions, this preservation is not to be taken to the detriment of critical analyses. The relative viewpoints of O'Connor and Allen can be mediated in

order to achieve a well-balanced middle ground between exploring and analyzing elements of the sacred in the department of Religious Studies.

Within this issue, there is not only a desire to separate the secular and religious, but also all of the disciplines themselves within secular academics. Even more so than the delineation between the religious and secular, this debate has been relatively quiet within academia since *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society* by Herman Bavinck. For Bavinck, the distinction between religious studies, theology, philosophy and literary studies is very stringent: “For the purposes of this essay, it is important to trace how and to what degree this religious studies approach has thrust aside theology in the state universities of our country” (Bavinck 53). He admits, however, that “On the other hand, the objections against a department of religious studies are certainly not considered minor. If religious studies are to have a real object for examination, then the existence and knowability of God must be assumed. Whoever completely denies God’s existence and revelation can discern in religion only a pathological phenomenon of the human spirit” (Bavinck 54). He claims that this study belongs to the literary department as it “researches a special and distinct subject: human beings as spiritual, rational beings. All its disciplines concentrate on our spiritual nature and focus on its disclosure and phenomena. The complete, rich psychic life of humanity—intellectual, ethical, aesthetic—is researched and studied. And therefore the literary department is the most natural place for the study of human religious life” (Bavinck 55). Bavinck’s proposed separations are naïve and a hindrance to the comprehension of humanities subject matter, as so much of the content is inter or cross-disciplinary in nature. By dividing aspects of academic study too rigorously, one risks the disintegration of an overall awareness and comprehension.

In this regard, Bavinck is overzealously dividing the disciplines to the detriment of departmental depth. Rather than exporting all personal religious aspects to English Literature, Religious Studies should embrace the human experience or “lived” religion as an intersection for discussing aspects of the sacred in all forms of text in both a historical and phenomenological light. Bavinck continues his dissection by arguing that “the disciplines in the literary department consist of three groups: philological, historical, and philosophical. The history of religions belongs to the middle group”, as well as stating that “the philosophy of religion also belongs in the literary department” (Bavinck 56, 57). In response to his critique, it is pertinent to note that literary studies may of course address various forms of literature, but that does not entail the end of any analyses of religion, whether it be historical, philosophical, etc., in the department of Religious Studies. Bavinck is so eager to allow philosophy to span across other departments as well as break Literary Studies down categorically, yet denies both of these privileges to Religious Studies. He argues that “philosophy is a universal discipline that considers everything in its purview. It contemplates the idea of the true, the good, and the beautiful. It tries to discover the deepest reflections about history, nature, justice, morality, art. Since philosophy considers all these areas, why could and should it not also consider religion and contemplate this crucial phenomenon in the life of the human soul and what significance it has for all of human life?” (Bavinck 57). Here, again, Bavinck is unfairly limiting Religious Studies by assuming it to be a monolithic or narrow discipline. Religion is just as universal and interdisciplinary in its influence as philosophy; for many even, philosophy and religion are not so easily distinguishable, especially in Eastern traditions. Bavinck is dogmatically using Western language to distinguish explicit disciplines, whereas it would be more appropriate to embrace

and encourage a less stringent divide. Religious Studies should be expanded, at an interdisciplinary rate, to incorporate the pluralistic practice of spirituality and beliefs as they are expressed culturally rather than exporting any semblance of sacrality to other more established “secular” fields.

The Post-secular Era:

Debate on this issue has only recently reemerged since Bavinck. Rather than export vernacular religious accounts to Literary Studies, Robert Detweiler makes an opposing case for the inclusion of “literary” accounts of religion into the field of Religious Studies in *Breaking The Fall: Religious Readings of Contemporary Fiction*. He argues that modern literary criticism neglects the religious lens as a tool for analyzing and interpreting texts. In this argument, “He applies the latest critical treatments to the study of religious themes in various works, including works by Margaret Atwood, Jorge Luis Borges, Annie Dillard, Franz Kafka, Milan Kundera, Walker Percy, and John Updike” (Google Books). His work provides the necessary evidence for presence of religion within literature and the follow-up claim that the academy is hesitant to address any “lived” or modern cultural experiences as religious.

This neglect is commonly coined secularism, but has recently been replaced in the academy by a post-secular era in which religion reemerges within academia as useful theoretical lens. The rise of postsecularism can be described as the resurgence of religious beliefs in concordance with the continuation of cultural conceptions of religion. This movement rightly calls for a reevaluation of the nature of religious texts in academia, primarily in the Abrahamic religions. Post-secularism as it is described by Hungerford and Horton re-invites the

academic eye to the spiritual and sacred nature of religious text. Hungerford and Horton posit that there is a new academic recognition of a “post-secular” in which religion has topically and thematically re-emerged in literature. This admission rightly calls for a reshaping of Religious Studies as a field with interdisciplinary elements elevated beyond historical exegesis. Picking up from Hungerford and also Horton’s conclusion in “Rituals of the Ordinary: Marilynne Robinson’s Aesthetics of Belief and Finitude”, the discourse of religion and literature needs to be readdressed.

In light of their analysis, however, this “post-secular” is primarily an academic phenomenon that reveals how the field has been out of sync and out of date with modern culture. Khaled Furani’s “Is There a Postsecular?” comments on the way in which the secular exists as the binary opposition to religion; it can only be understood in this structure. Therefore, to say that there exists a secular requires the possible existence of the religious sphere as well. The secular is defined by its exclusion and its inclusion of the religious. We have often misunderstood and misapplied the term secular as a system external to religious, when in reality and in true application of its original denotation, secular operates in conjunction with understanding of how the religious operates in society. Furani supports the post-secular “notion of co-existence” proffered by De Vries and Sullivan because “They invoke the authority of the German sociologist Hans Jonas' critical assessment of Habermas notion of postsecular society to define postsecular as a category functioning as a "topical indicator of a problem" (Furani 7). With this claim, “They argue that the postsecular does not signify an increased meaningfulness of religion but rather a revised public and governmental secularism in understanding itself and its religious other” (Furani 7). Their distinction between the understood impetus for the “postsecular” era is

the key to their binary theory. In this way, the term “postsecular” should not be taken to mean a rampant revival of religious beliefs in the social and cultural lives of people, but rather, it’s coinage denotes the shift in perspective within institutions regarding the enduring presence of religion in culture.

Furani explicates, “The postsecular constitutes a condition of reflecting on the phenomenon of religion's persistence. While it does not imply increased religiosity, this condition does involve a transformation in the state's "secularist self-understanding" (Furani 7). Furthermore, in concordance with De Vries and Sullivan, "The post-secular condition ... consists precisely in acknowledging the 'living-on' of religion beyond its prematurely announced or celebrated deaths" (De Vries and Sullivan 2006: 7). In this formulation, post-secular acknowledges that religion persists alongside the profane, the political, and the worldly” (Furani 7). The necessary component of the sacred within religion makes it possible for a secular sphere to be established, but with its establishment, secularism neglects its counterpart to the detriment of a holistic awareness, especially in the field of religious studies.

The privileging of secular values in academia has become so standardized that re-introducing the sacrality of religion raises many red flags. Furani argues against these concerns, however, stating, “For although secularism appears hegemonic today, with a waning credibility at that, we should not forget the secular's signaling a frailty of presence in the world without which the religious would have no presence, just as resources cannot exist without sources or metaphysics without physics” (Furani 17). To have a secular society does not mean that the society is not religious, merely that there is a delineated separation within society for the way that the secular and religious roles function. Thus, “the secular signals the frailty within finite

existence as the condition of possibility for the religious” (Furani 17). In this way, the apparent hegemony of secularization should not result in resistance to the religious, but actually reinforces the critical existence of that which is religious.

To this extent, Furani makes an argument regarding the applicability of the prefix “post”, such that “If a prefix to secular is found necessary, it might be more productive to speak of intra-secularity rather than postsecularity, since post contributes to a proliferation of individual assertions about knowledge and perpetuates an impasse with oneself and with one’s tradition of intellectual labor” (Furani 17). His proposition in favor of an “intra” rather than “post” prefix may well just be semantics at this point, whereas the actual problematic phenomenon of misunderstanding secularity is what needs to be addressed. The conceptualization of the secular as outside or external to the religious is the interesting area of discussion more so than how that conceptualization was erroneously arrived at. Why is it that the secular as an excluder of religion is the comfortable arena?

The prefix “post” seems to be a good fit in relation to the attitude of removing the stigma of the presence of religion interior to secular arenas. It signifies a cultural shift in attitude, or perhaps more appropriately, an academic shift in the perspective of a culture with unchangingly persistent presences of religion. The rise or new acceptance of discourse regarding the elements of the religious in academic domains, such as literature, certainly does reveal an overturning of the tradition of intellectual labor as secular in the sense that it functions exclusive from religion. Although individuals, culturally speaking, may have always participated in and formed these religiously natured assertions about knowledge, the academic sphere has denied them scholarly attention. Therefore, his article serves to further prove the

inadequate presence of the religious or at least the recognition of that presence within the secular; this is a central issue for addressing the interdisciplinary discourse on religion and literature via what constitutes a religious text. Within this discourse is the primary theme of the binary of sacred and profane, such that the sacred is just that which is “set apart” and the importance of the sacred is that it creates community around it (i.e. the church as the body of Christ). Therefore, to study religion, which is a community based around a sacred, we must also study the sacred. In this way, we must have a post-secular religious studies, looking through the secular to examine what the sacred is and means and how literature is a type of religious text in the way that it expresses either a practice or lived religious experience.

Theory:

This can be remedied by the inclusion of religiously themed and narrated literature into the academic study of religion, as evidence of the modern religious culture and lived religious experience. This approach invokes Paul Tillich’s *Theology of Culture*. Most of Tillich’s writings “try to define the way in which Christianity is related to secular culture. Using some of these writings, the present volume attempts to show the religious dimension in many special spheres of man’s cultural activity” (Tillich v). Tillich believes that “Religion opens up the depth of man’s spiritual life which is usually covered by the dust of our daily life and the noise of our secular work. It gives us the experience of the Holy, of something which is untouchable, awe-inspiring, an ultimate meaning, the source of ultimate courage. This is the glory of what we call religion” (Tillich 9). Additionally, his argument, “To the degree in which this is realized the conflicts between the religious and the secular are overcome, and religion has rediscovered its true

place in man's spiritual life, namely, in its depth, out of which it gives substance, ultimate meaning, judgment, and creative courage to all functions of the human spirit" (Tillich 9). Tillich bridges the gap between Furani's theoretical lens and Hungerford's use of the post-secular with literature in regards to its place within the academic study of religion via his claim that "Essentially the religious and the secular are not separated realms. Rather they are within each other" (Tillich 41).

He further argues, "But this is not the way things actually are. In actuality, the secular element tends to make itself independent and to establish a realm of its own. And in opposition to this, the religious element tends to establish itself also as a special realm" (Tillich 41-42). This distinction between religious and secular is one of the major binaries that needs to be reevaluated. In this binary, culture serves as a mediating gray area, often neglected; "The third consequence following from the existential concept of religion refers to the relation of religion and culture. Religion as ultimate concern is the meaning-giving substance of culture, and culture is the totality of forms in which the basic concern of religion expresses itself. In abbreviation: religion is the substance of culture, culture is the form of religion. Such a consideration definitely prevents the establishment of a dualism of religion and culture. Every religious act, not only in organized religion, but also in the most intimate movement of the soul, is culturally formed" (Tillich 42).

Tillich further argues that language is the basic cultural creation, yet "there is no cultural creation without an ultimate concern expressed in it" (Tillich 42). He claims that "This is true of the theoretical functions of man's spiritual life, e.g. artistic intuition and cognitive reception of reality, and it is true of the practical functions of man's spiritual life, e.g. personal and social

transformation of reality. In each of these functions in the whole of man's cultural creativity, an ultimate concern is present. Its immediate expression is the style of a culture. He who can read the style of a culture can discover its ultimate concern, its religious substance" (Tillich 42-43). Although Tillich predates Furani, his theories are nevertheless applicable, as even he notes the tendency towards paradigm shifts, such that "Our present culture must be described in terms of one predominant movement and an increasingly powerful protest against this movement. The spirit of the predominant movement is the spirit of industrial society" (Tillich 43). For Tillich, the rise of industrial society was the equivalent to the modern movement towards secularization.

Additionally, theology and philosophy can share the same object of study without sharing the same obligation to authority, such that philosophy may study the sacred without accepting revelation, or any expression or experience of the sacred, as authoritative. In this way, Religious Studies is a secular discipline with heightened awareness of the religious, meaning that the sacred is an object of study but nevertheless requires a critical eye for analysis. Tillich argues, "Education is supposed to actualize his potentialities, generally and individually. The aim of the educational process is the humanistic personality in whom as many potentialities as possible are developed, among them being technical skills and the religious function" (Tillich 147). The humanistic perspective is essential for this field of study, but this does not extend to the detriment of technical analyses. Tillich further posits, "One can distinguish three educational aims, the technical education, the humanistic education, the inducting education. Modern liberal education combines elements of technical with elements of humanistic education"

(Tillich 146). With Religious Studies, the goal is to facilitate and enhance understanding, such that students may then be able to make more coherent conclusions.

All fields need to grow along with society and industry, but religion's special link with culture must be taken even more seriously such that Religious Studies departments do not deny the ever-changing nature of such study. Furthermore,

“There is no sacred language which has fallen from a supernatural heaven and been put between the covers of a book. But there is human language, based on man's encounter with reality, changing through the millennia, used for the needs of daily life, for expression and communication, for literature and poetry, and used also for the expression and communication of our ultimate concern” (Tillich 47).

The hermeneutic of religious language is in “the power of what it expresses, the ultimate of being and meaning. The expression of it can be narrative (mythological, legendary, historical), or it can be prophetic, poetic, liturgical” (Tillich 47). Tillich understands that it is not the physical Bible that constitutes its sacrality, but rather the hermeneutic of its religious language; “It becomes holy for those to whom it expresses their ultimate concern from generation to generation. But there is no holy language in itself, as translation, retranslations and revision show” (Tillich 48). In this light, many texts besides sanctioned doctrine may proffer a religious hermeneutic, especially as culture calls for more modern religious narratives. Tillich writes, “The form of religion is culture. This is especially obvious in the language used by religion” (Tillich 47). In this regard, “every language, including that of the Bible, is the result of innumerable acts of cultural creativity... Language is the expression of man's freedom from the given situation and its concrete demands” (Tillich 47). Since language is the medium for expressing and engaging with ideas of the sacred, it is essential to recognize the various forms that language takes outside of historical doctrine.

Drucilla Cornell's *At The Heart of Freedom* furthers the idea that religion is not a historically static discipline:

“Religions are no more static than are cultures, and all the great religions throughout the world are now being challenged on their views of sexuality. These challengers argue for their own interpretations of sacred texts. Moreover, nothing in the demand for political, moral, and psychic space takes away the respect for religion. Instead, what these demands do is undermine the right of some members of a religion to use brute force to ensure the dominance of their particular interpretations” (Cornell 166).

In concordance with Cornell, Emile Durkheim's definition of religion in “The Elementary Forms of Religious Life” aids my argument for a re-evaluation of religious studies:

“Thus we arrive at the following definition: *A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them.* The second element which thus finds a place in our definition is no less essential than the first; for by showing that the idea of religion is inseparable from that of the Church, it makes it clear that religion should be an eminently collective thing” (Durkheim 106)

Both of these definitions proffer that studying religion means studying all aspects of religion, beliefs and practices as they are represented traditionally and lived culturally. Berger furthers this inclusive notion of religion in *The Sacred Canopy*; “Religion is the audacious attempt to conceive of the entire universe as being humanely significant” (Berger 28). He also contributes to this acknowledgment of the overlap between religious and secular in culture: “Theodicy

directly affects the individual in his concrete life in society.... permits the individual to integrate the anomic experiences of his biography into the socially established nomos and its subjective correlate in his own consciousness" (Berger 58). In this light, literature is a primary mode of working out one's conceptions, especially in regard to the timeless and important issues of religion.

Since this discussion is primarily theoretical, it is appropriate to borrow from the debate between Pierre Bourdieu and Bradford Verter as epitomized in "Spiritual Capital: Theorizing Religion with Bourdieu against Bourdieu.": "Regarding fields, Bourdieu... notes that fields tend toward greater or lesser autonomy, and observes that stratification within restricted fields is relatively independent of political, economic, or social considerations. But this perspective obscures the degree to which fields overlap, not just in terms of their members, but also in terms of their content" (Verter 163-164). Verter's claim is essential, arguing,

"The effect of other fields on religion may be particularly high because religious authority is so diffuse... But the field of religion is distinct in this regard. The value of spiritual capital is determined not just by professionals but also by the laity, and this fact undermines the autonomy of the religious field. Spiritual capital may be valid currency in fields other than religion, and laypeople may exercise spiritual power by virtue of the material or symbolic capital they have accumulated in another field" (Verter 164).

This discussion supports my explication of the "religious" as something that cannot be addressed solely as an academic phenomenon, but must include the real practice and lived (vernacular?) experience of religion in society, whether in the church or common culture. To take this theory discussion directly into the academic field of Religion, Russel McCutcheon's

argument in "A default of critical intelligence? The scholar of religion as public intellectual" that the religious scholar should not be a caretaker of ideologies but rather a critic is my segue. I expound this argument to say that the scholar of religious studies cannot take on the role of critic unless these religions are preserved and their respective histories are first taught. However, this preservation and respect for the sacred does not eliminate the opportunity or the necessary presence of critical evaluation in this field. It seems that the variety of approaches to religious studies should only enrich and give depth to this important academic domain, not muddle its purpose or create conflict.

Methodology:

My methodology is rooted in a process of denotation, working within binaries to show the issue of attaining categorical concepts. The main parts of my paper focus on explicating the gap between religious and secular. My call for a post-secular academic study that breaks this binary between cultural theology and academic religion begins with the denotation of "secular" as inherent to the realm of the religious. Next, I address the multifaceted definition of religion, necessarily including various understandings of religious as an experience and practice, primarily by defining religion as "a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things" by drawing from Durkheim. In this section, I narrow my focus to that which I consider religious to be those texts that express or interact with ideas of what it means to hold religious beliefs, especially in the way that beliefs foster religious experience and practice representationally in literature.

The importance of this narrowing serves the connection between religion and culture,

where culture is the space in which one can practice and experience their religious beliefs in a more personal fashion. For literature, this means that the presence and influence of religious beliefs in a work is the key to its inclusion to the field. This means the work may not always be sacred or completely religious in itself, but rather reveals an experience or perspective of a sacred that illuminates the presence of theology in culture as interacting with and pushing against an outsider's academic understanding of Religion. A call for a study of the religious, which is inherently culturally infused, rather than religion, which is often reduced to a historical genealogy of power structures is a central theme in this analysis. This call is rooted in the need to pay the necessary attention and respect to religious sacrality, not just limit ourselves to a secular study of patterns and origins; the role religion plays in actual culture is important and should not be ignored.

In general, it is necessary to emphasize the importance of the binary theme to reveal their inherent overlap: sacred/profane; secular/religious; religion/culture. In this way, I thus argue that there is a space between these binaries, not a line, and in that space is the valuable interest of study. For example, with the binary of sacred and profane, the sacred is just that which is "set apart" and the importance of the sacred is that it creates community around it (i.e. the church as the body of Christ). Therefore, to study religion, which is a community based around a sacred, we must also study the sacred; we must have a post-secular religious studies, looking through the secular to examine what the sacred is and means and how literature is a type of religious text in the form of practicing and/or living out religious thoughts and experiences. The ultimate goal of this project is to address the question: what does/should a post-secular study of religion look like? By deconstructing the denotational categorization

within academic disciplines, I attempt to reveal the way in which such an approach to Religious Studies as a field is limiting. This analysis seeks more specifically to explicate the rise of the post-secular in the academy as a sufficient cause for an introduction of the constructive relationship between culturally attuned English literature and canonical religious text as sacred or lived experiences of a sacred, both of which are worthy of academic attention in the field of Religious Studies.

Conclusion:

This topic of scholarship proffers the mutual influence of religion and literature as a necessary addition to the field of religious studies as well as this post-secularist perspective as a sufficient cause for reintroducing the nature of the spiritual and sacred to the study of these culturally religious texts. This argument serves to preserve the discipline of Religious Studies as an influential yet distinct field from the other arts and humanities, especially English Literature, by demonstrating the prevalence and uniqueness of the presence of religion in written texts, extending beyond the Bible and other accounts historically noted religious. The induction of those deeply religious yet designated literary writers, such as described by Detweiler, into the discussion of religious studies, rather than only secular literary study, maintains the relevance of religion in academia. This distinction expands and elevates Religious Studies to its proper place in academia as a field examining that which is truly religious in nature, rather than that which has been frozen historically in the biblical canon.

McCutcheon's argument that the religious scholar should not be a caretaker of ideologies but rather a critic is a point that I can both agree and disagree with. Indeed, religious

studies should be more interactive and thought-provoking as a study than what simply preserving the histories of religion allows, but the scholar of religious studies cannot take on the role of critic unless these religions are preserved and their respective histories are first taught. In this way, McCutcheon is too quick to pit the two modes of religious study against each other. Rather, these two seemingly opposing approaches should be paired together, just as they would with many other academic studies. For example, in English Literature, the narratives and histories of these works are preserved and taught in the classroom, through required survey courses, such that after the students have developed a comprehensive understanding of the workings, they can then take on the role of the critical scholar by analyzing these texts more deeply through their own voice in courses that appeal to them individually.

In this way, O'Connor offers the most reasonable and well-rounded proposal for the approach to religious studies. It is vitally important that religious studies preserve and respect the aspect of the sacred, as Allen points out that this is not only the key differentiating factor for religion amongst other "social" studies but also the primary purpose for religion in much of public use. However, this preservation and respect for the sacred does not eliminate the opportunity or the necessary presence of critical evaluation in this field. It seems that the variety of approaches to religious studies should only enrich and give depth to this important academic domain, not muddle its purpose or create conflict. It is concerning that so many religious departments have suffered from these issues, but the bigger concern is that this has become an issue at all. The discomfort that so often accompanies the topic of religion in academia is troublesome, and the lack of status that so many religion departments face in

universities is surely a sign that academia is losing sight of the value of education and knowledge in fields such as these that are so central to culture, and have been since the beginning, yet are now considered unworthy of funding in contrast to more productive STEM fields. This push towards a singular mode of study is certainly reductionist, and at the cost of cultural understanding and awareness.

As Hungerford and Furani show, the post-secular era in academia is upon us. Furthering their theories, Tillich proffers the melding of sacred and profane spheres as well, in a practical sense. Religious Studies, philosophy and Literary Studies may share some of the same objects of study, as well as theology even, but that does not mean that they are all bound by the same authoritative standards for accepting and evaluating truth. Rather than delineating strict boundaries for the subjects of departments, it is more important to understand the goal of the discipline. In the case of Religious Studies, there is a humanities goal, such that an enhanced understanding and awareness of the pluralism of religious beliefs, practices and experiences is essential. To this point, studying religion should be more than a history, anthropology, or literary analysis; It is the window through which we glean understanding of others' experiences and interactions with a sacred. This study calls for a necessary attention and respect to religious sacrality; in order to surpass a very narrow knowledge of patterns and origins, the role religion plays in culture and the methods in which the religious manifests culturally should not be ignored. These elements of the sacred, whether they are found in doctrine, nature or personal narratives, shed light on the signifying factor of Religion as an object of study.

In this way, studying the sacred aspect of religion illuminates ignorance about religious beliefs that cultivate negative stereotypes, profiling, etc., such as threatening prejudiced

sentiments. Thus, the “religious” must be understood as something that cannot be addressed solely as an academic phenomenon, but must include the real practice and lived experience of religion in society, whether in the church or common culture. With this in mind, however, it is pertinent to remember that elements of the sacred are only authoritative within the insider religious perspective. Thus, religious studies as an academic discipline, although seeking to understand the insider perspective, is nonetheless an outside critique with the necessary tools to analyze appropriately. Nonetheless, fields such as religious studies promote cross-cultural curiosity and understanding by stripping away ignorance of the vast plurality of religion's purpose and function in various cultures and times, including the present, and this end cannot be justly met if there wholly lacks a presence of the sacred and truth statements in the study of religion.

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Insider/outside Christianity – more so than “Religious Studies” as a whole
How does this get played out in a university

Sacred/profane works especially for Christianity as well

Who owns religious studies – departmental – theology, literature, etc.

Even with Buddhism – the sutras are not the context for practicing Buddhists, lit. more so