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**RAP, RFL AND ROL**  
**LANGUAGE AND RELIGION IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

**Brian Bocking**

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**Author's note (August 2006)**

This essay was a contribution to a collection of essays by former students in honour of Ninian Smart. It was written during 1991/1992 when I worked in the Department of the Study of Religions at Bath College of Higher Education (now Bath Spa University), UK; hence my remarks about the impending (1992) reforms which gave many polytechnics the name of university.

I have taken the opportunity of this eprint edition to correct the following *errata* in the notes:

note 4. 'connected only' has been corrected to 'connected not only'

note 23 'Alan Graphard' has been corrected to 'Allan Grapard'

In note 28, Fred Hoyle is associated with the 'Big Bang' theory mainly because he opposed it.

# **RAP, RFL AND ROL**

## **LANGUAGE AND RELIGION IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

**Brian Bocking**

Hello!...is a reprehensible way in which to begin an academic paper, which shows that language has an ethical dimension. Languages help to construct and control social meaning and they also have a strong ritual dimension, exemplified in greetings. The material forms of language; letters, characters, runes, and the words they represent, used in poetry, prose and even ordinary conversation, are heavy with multivalent symbolism. Languages maintain doctrines in their dictionaries (which never quite keep up with the real thing) and are generously endowed with mythic truths (British English is better than American English; Japanese is unique) retold down the generations. Finally, languages have an experiential dimension; even without glossolalia the same person may move, sound and even think differently by speaking different tongues. One may even be inspired to say something.

This paper pursues one aspect of the analogy between religion and language) The analogy between religion and language has been discussed elsewhere but not, so far as I know, specifically in relation to the teaching of religions and the teaching of languages in Higher Education. <sup>2</sup> I am interested in the analogy between teaching religions and teaching languages for at least three reasons.

Firstly, there is, after all these years, still unclarity in the public and indeed academic mind about the difference between Religious Studies and Theology ( ‘if you don’t know the difference, you’re a theologian’ can only be used sparingly),<sup>3</sup> and language teaching may provide an accessible model for an explanation to non-specialists of what is going on in Religious Studies. After all, not everybody realises they have a worldview, but most people will accept that their language is one of many languages.<sup>4</sup>

Secondly, I am involved professionally both in Religious Studies and, to a lesser extent, in aspects of the teaching of languages (English and Japanese) in cross-cultural contexts. Some of the pedagogical issues seem to be common to language teaching and Religious Studies teaching, and there are ways of thinking about the teaching of language which could arguably be of use to lecturers in Religious Studies.

Thirdly, I am lucky enough to have a job teaching Religious Studies in a College of Higher Education, a type of degree-awarding institution which has traditionally belonged in the second or even third rank of Higher Education institutions in the UK. Higher Education in the UK constitutes a kind of caste, or more accurately class, system<sup>5</sup> and as I write, this system is (in law at least) about to be dismantled by the abolition of the ‘binary line’ between universities, who are the ‘brahmins’ of the system, and the rest of us, mainly polytechnics and colleges of HE. We lesser classes are currently involved in a rapid process of academic Sanskritization (e.g. changing the names of polytechnics to university) in the tenuous expectation that the coming ‘classless society’<sup>6</sup> will make us all brahmins, rather than all sudras. Having spent some years previously as a university lecturer, coursing in the effortless superiority of brahmanical status<sup>7</sup> I am reasonably familiar with the mores of both sides of the binary line. The main difference, apart from the level of funding, is that teaching is taken seriously in the colleges and polytechnics. In the universities<sup>8</sup> teaching is conceived of, if it is thought about at all, on the ‘trickle down’ model; something more or less incidental to one’s real work of research.<sup>9</sup> Teaching is viewed as a process occurring naturally as a kind of overflow from the acquisition of knowledge. As for learning, like the plants in the Lotus Sutra’s parable of the rain cloud, students automatically benefit according to their aptitude.

In the colleges and polytechnics, on the other hand, teaching and learning have long been recognised as human rather than hydraulic activities, quite separate from research. Teaching and learning, it is believed, can be done badly or well, and their quality can be assessed.<sup>10</sup> Since thinking about teaching and learning is a largely non-brahmanical occupation, I had some difficulty adjusting when I first arrived at the college (I was nonplussed when a colleague suggested to me that I should get to know my first year students), but I am now persuaded that there are good and bad methods of teaching, that teaching and learning can be improved (and worsened) in ways which are in principle measurable, that only the very brightest students can avoid being disadvantaged by bad or indifferent teaching methods, and that one of the main responsibilities of an academic in Higher Education is therefore to be aware of what teaching and learning involves and to teach, and ensure that his or her students learn, effectively. As the binary line disappears, classes become larger and Higher Education expands in real terms, it is very likely that a concern with teaching (linked to quality ratings, performance indicators and so forth) will spread throughout the HE system. In the next few years, reflection on how to teach religions effectively will be higher on the academic

agenda than it has been in the past.

### **RAP, RFL & ROL**

Though this title of this paper seems meaningless, most native speakers of English will probably get the genuflection to ‘Shake, rattle and roll.’<sup>11</sup> A rapid lexical analysis of RAP, RFL and ROL might therefore suggest:

RAP-Rap music?; shake (as above); possibly RAT (for ex  
Lancastrians)?<sup>12</sup> ..

RFL-Riff; skiffle; rattle (as above)

ROL-(rock and) roll, Roland Barthes?; Roland RAT?

But structuralists impatient with lexis will have langue broken parole and noted that of these three sets of three-letter acronyms, two begin with R and two end in L, yielding, *evidemment*

Religion	A	P
Religion	F	Language
Religion	O	Language

Substituting ‘English’ for ‘Religion’ we get, of course:

EAP  
EFL  
EOL

of which EFL and EAP are well-known acronyms in English-language teaching. EFL is ‘English as a Foreign Language’ while EAP means ‘English for Academic Purposes’. EOL is invented for this paper and Means ‘English as Own Language’ or just ‘English’ as in ‘English Department’

Hence RAP, RFL and ROL. RAP is ‘Religion for Academic Purposes’, RFL ‘Religion as a Foreign Language’ and ROL ‘Religion as Own Language.’ What these might mean will be discussed more fully below. Perhaps RFL should really be RFR ‘Religion as a Foreign Religion’ and ROL should be ROR ‘Religion as Own Religion,’ but in distinguishing different types of teaching of religion (theology, phenomenology, etc.), it seems quite helpful to think of the religion taught in Religious Studies departments as akin to

languages if for no more than the reasons outlined by Eric Sharpe)<sup>13</sup> If 'Religion as a Foreign Language' grates, then a hybrid term such as 'Ranguage' could replace '(religion as) language' in what follows.<sup>14</sup>

### **Unpacking EFL**

Applying the notions of RAP, RFL and ROL to religions teaching, and drawing out the implications requires that we look in more detail at the various sub-types of English (or any other language) teaching. Subdivisions within this field<sup>15</sup> are made according to (1) the type of student, (2) the background knowledge expected of the student, (3) the type of English taught and (4) the level of knowledge and expertise required of the teacher. The principal forms of English teaching discussed below are EOL (English as Own Language),<sup>16</sup> EFL (English as a Foreign Language), ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) and EAP (English for Academic Purposes). In each case, the analogy with religions teaching is sketched out.

### **EOL and ROL**

EOL (English as one's Own Language) is taught to native-speaker students who may be at the outset and remain at the completion of their studies quite unconscious of the relativistic nature of their language. The student of EOL should be already completely fluent in English and capable of handling complex and abstract ideas, to the extent of creating new ones. Indeed, the student is required to participate in the tradition of English, to accept and reject, to take sides. EOL embraces every aspect of the world of English from basic grammar to classic literature, and will include critical, dramatic and creative work, and even some foreign literature in translation) EOL embraces the highest forms of 'real' English; examples of the language stretched to its legitimate creative limits. The EOL teacher has to be expert in his or her area of specialisation, as well as having a good general knowledge within the subject. Though English may not be the teacher's first language and a knowledge of other languages will help avoid parochialism, an EOL teacher is not required to know other languages in order to teach successfully in the EOL context.

Pursuing the analogy with EOL, ROL (Religion as Own Language) is the study of a tradition in which the student is already immersed, to the point that s/he is fluent and participant in its various dimensions, probably unaware of its relativistic nature and having, initially, a limited knowledge of the full range of its complexities and possibilities.

ROL embraces every aspect of the religion in question including on occasion 'other religions' where these are seen to contribute to an enhanced appreciation of ROL. The student of ROL is expected to be critical as well as descriptive, and to contribute creatively to the tradition through participation in its practical and intellectual endeavours. The lecturer in ROL has to be expert in his or her area of specialisation, as well as having a good general knowledge within the subject. Though ROL may not be the teacher's 'native' religion and a knowledge of other traditions will help avoid parochialism,<sup>18</sup> a ROL teacher does not (at present) have to know other religions in order to succeed in the ROL context.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, the range of creativity in ROL will be limited by canons of acceptability developed within the religion in question; those who begin to speak, as it were, a foreign religious language will not be allowed to take part.

Whether ROL is simply Theology, Buddhology etc. or develops into ROL 'in the wider context of Religious Studies'<sup>20</sup> will depend on (a) the variety of phenomena acknowledged to be part of the 'religion' in question (does Islamic ROL embrace both Shi'a and Sunni; does Buddhist ROL deal with Theravada and SokaGakkai?), (b) the degree to which the study is evaluative (theology) rather than descriptive (religious studies) and (c) the extent to which students realise that their ROL is another's RFL.

### **EFL and RFL**

EFL (English as a Foreign Language) is typically taught to younger students from a non-English speaking culture. ('Schoolboy French' for example is FFL, as taught in the UK.) EFL students are assumed to be literate and familiar with grammatical structures etc. in their own language, since EFL is not taught before the native tongue. The English taught in EFL may be 'real' English but more often than not it is textbook English, much of it taught through the student's first language, like any other subject. EFL in Japanese schools and universities, for example, turns out students with a good passive knowledge of formal English grammar but little ability to communicate actively. The aim of EFL in some countries is still to pass exams (predominantly written exams) rather than to speak or write creatively in real English. The teacher, who is likely to be a non-native speaker of English, should in theory have excellent English but the education system may allow him or her to get away with much less. Native-speaker assistants may be used, but they usually have to teach to the textbooks.<sup>21</sup> Significantly, untrained fluent or native-speakers of English may find a less than enthusiastic

welcome in EFL classes because they probably know more about English as she is really spoke than the teacher does, and an irruption of real, vernacular language in a group weaned on textbook EFL can undermine the status of a less than confident teacher. This has become a problem in Japan, where children returning from a period abroad with their families find that the communicative English they know is not the textbook and examination English they need to learn in order to get into university.<sup>22</sup>

The RFL (Religion as a Foreign Language) analogy is not hard to make. RFL is an unfamiliar religion taught principally from textbooks, using interpretive categories drawn from the students' and teacher's shared native religious categories and 'vocabulary' consisting mainly of equivalents from ROL, which may distort the religion being studied.<sup>23</sup> Students' understanding of RFL is assessed mainly through written assignments, in which a student can excel without encountering any real examples of the religion. The RFL lecturer should in theory be completely fluent, steeped in the 'Ranguage' s/he is teaching, but the education system often allows a lecturer to get away with much less. The presence in the classroom of 'native speakers' of the religion, either as students or as invited 'representatives' of the faith can easily pose a threat because what they testify to is authoritative and yet often sufficiently different from the textbook version to confuse students and undermine the position of the teacher, so their input to the course is often carefully managed.

### **ESOL and ReSOL**

ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) usually refers to English taught, this time in an English speaking country, to people such as refugees or immigrants who urgently need to acquire the target language for daily life. The 'student' may be rather unlike the typical EFL student in having a limited level of literacy or grammatical knowledge in his or her existing language(s). Indeed, the ESOL learner may be quite unused to the formal study of a language in its cultural context, encountering many terms and concepts which are completely alien, either because there are no equivalents in the language(s) already spoken, or those equivalents, if they exist are not understood by the student.

The type of English taught in ESOL must be real, local English (however 'nonstandard' the local variant happens to be) to facilitate shopping, getting a job, dealing with bureaucracy, etc. The teacher of ESOL needs to have native-speaker proficiency in all aspects of the local form of English,

otherwise s/he will hardly be able to help' students with official documents, electricity bills, letters, jokes, advertisements, nuance, non-verbal communication (e.g. body language) and slang. If the tutor can explain these things partly in the student's own language, so much the better, so the ideal teacher, arguably, is the one who has himself or herself gone through ESOL (this applies to any form of EFL) and reached native speaker (and thence trained teacher) level in the target language.<sup>24</sup> ESOL has the modest but clear aim of enabling the student to survive in the local culture. With success in ESOL and sufficient aptitude and motivation the ESOL learner can move eventually, perhaps via more structured EFL within the host culture,<sup>25</sup> to EOL, working for school and post-school qualifications in English of the kind taken by native speakers.

### **ReSOL**

ReSOL, the religious equivalent of ESOL has a modest aim too, though it might exceed the capabilities of many qualified RFL teachers, namely to enable the student who finds him or herself in a foreign religious context,<sup>26</sup> to survive in these new conditions. The ReSOL student is one who is surrounded by a new religion, which therefore presents itself in its local, authentic and idiosyncratic form. The ReSOL teacher does not assume that the student already has the categories or vocabulary to comprehend a new religious context in depth, and so concentrates on knowledge which is immediately useful to the student; how seriously the local people take religion; what to expect in religious meetings and festivals; when these take place and who can attend; what to do and what to avoid doing, and who is who in the local religious community. The ReSOL student in Kyushu for example needs to know that the Heart Sutra is a popular dharani, not that it is part of the Prajnaparamita literature; at a Japanese Buddhist funeral, it is essential to know how much cash to give the bereaved family and in which envelope, and what to do with the incense, not what Buddhist beliefs may be about life after death. Implicit aspects of religion do need to be studied, but only, at this stage, insofar as they affect one's daily life. A new arrival in Japan needs to know that formal behaviour, gift-giving and proper respect for age and rank are important in Japanese society and to appreciate and emulate examples of these in practice. S/he does not need to know all about Confucianism.

The teacher of ReSOL needs an intimate knowledge of the religion as it is really practised, in order to provide the student with the knowledge and skills necessary to integrate with the local community and deal with culture shock.



Unlike RFL, there are no examinations designed to gauge the ReSOL student's passive knowledge of abstract religious concepts; success in daily interactions with members of an unfamiliar religion is a far more useful, effective and appropriate test of the student's ability and understanding.

### **EAP and RAP**

EAP (English for Academic Purposes) incorporates both EFL and ESOL but at a higher level. The student of EAP, typically a foreign student competing in an English-language academic environment, not only must perform successfully in his or her area of academic specialisation but also definitely needs to be able to handle the target language in all its richness-to become fully part of a different linguistic culture. The EAP student must already be close to native speaker level in English when s/he starts EAP and needs the educational background and the academic potential, even if as yet lacking the experience, to manipulate complex ideas in the target language. The type of English taught to this student is academic English - the distinctive English of academic books, lectures and articles, which is itself a subdivision of EOL taught to native-speaker higher education students (through essays, examinations, lectures and reading) in the course of their degree programme. English at this level - which is challenging for native speakers because it follows complex and somewhat arbitrary rules of correctness, such as traditions of referencing-is acquired by initiation into the linguistic (and other) norms of a particular academic community. The EAP teacher must of course be able to operate at native speaker level in ordinary and academic English, but s/he should also be able to understand enough of the subject which the EAP student is studying to assist with preparation for academic assignments, seminar papers and examinations.

The role of the EAP lecturer in helping a student to understand a text or write an essay, and the role of the 'content' lecturer (for example, the lecturer teaching Religious Studies) are not easily distinguished, because problems of understanding in EAP normally have both a linguistic and a conceptual angle, the latter a problem shared by both native-speaker and foreign students. It is one thing for a foreign student to learn what the terms 'suffering' and 'unease' mean in ordinary English (the linguistic level); quite another to understand what 'suffering' or 'unease' might mean when the lecturer has used these English terms within a cobweb of qualifications to help explain dukkha in Theravada Buddhism.<sup>27</sup> Because of the blurring of boundaries between words and meanings, the kind of help provided by the EAP lecturer

to the EAP student is often precisely the kind of help required by the native-speaker student in the learning process. Skills required here include working out how to appropriate and express new ideas accurately, how to evaluate claims, how to structure an argument, how to sift the essential from the peripheral, how to disagree with a lecturer or a fellow student in a seminar, how to discuss rationally, how to know when to speak and when not to speak, how to start and finish an essay, and so on.

## **RAP**

RAP (Religion for Academic Purposes) is the academic study of religion - it describes what we are teaching our students, and what students are learning, in departments of Religious Studies. The student of RAP, in order to perform successfully in the study of a particular religion or worldview has to be able to handle that religion in all its richness-to become fully conversant with a different religious culture. Of course, this cannot all be achieved at undergraduate level but RAP can take a student some of the way there. The question is, what types of learning constitute good RAP?

RAP, at the lowest level, can be very little different from basic RFL - a predigested version of religion taught from textbooks, with little exposure of students (or teacher) to the real thing. Pursuing the analogy between RAP and EAP suggests that on its own a book-based RFL-style approach to religious studies is inadequate for students in Higher Education. We cannot claim to have taught students religious studies if they have acquired a passive knowledge of religious theories, concepts and categories but have not in the process been exposed to real religions, and learned actively to communicate with and relate to religious people from a variety of traditions as part of their studies. Can we assume that students who enter our courses already have this type of knowledge? If not, should we be teaching our students ReSOL?

ReSOL alone is inadequate as a model for religious studies in H.E., because the knowledge acquired is relatively local and superficial in character. Nevertheless, I believe that good RAP must involve - a considerable amount of ReSOL-type teaching. This means, in the context of a degree course, maximising opportunities to bring students into contact with real religious people, preferably in their own context rather than as visitors in the lecture room. Increasingly these days, students come to us with a background in phenomenological Religious Studies acquired at school or elsewhere, but this is still not true of the majority and it is not a requirement for entry to our course, so many of our students are, in Religious Studies terms, remarkably

similar to immigrants recently arrived from a foreign country, some of them ill-equipped for an encounter with the basic categories, the 'grammar' of religion, let alone the sophisticated transreligiosity of an H.E. course. We cannot presume that students have in their own vocabulary or experience the terms, concepts structures and categories of ROL which form the starting-point of Religious Studies<sup>28</sup> (in fact, we cannot presume they have had exposure to religion at all).

Students need to experience religions at first hand as part of RAP otherwise they can go through a degree course without having any real idea of what the material they are studying refers to. We cannot deliver the numinous experiences that students sometimes expect from courses tantalizingly labelled 'mysticism' (though academic institutions are quite good for *rites de passage*) but we should ensure that students who are studying religion x have a chance if at all possible to experience an instance of religion x being practised in its social context. This cannot be done effectively through videos (useful resource though they are for basic RFL) because there are important differences between passively watching TV in the familiar surroundings of a lecture theatre, and being part of a live event.

The most obvious difference, apart from the fact that a film is in the end just a visual textbook, is that religious events occupy all six senses whereas TV affects only a bit of one's mind, eye and ear, while body, taste, touch, smell and peripheral awareness of eye, ear and mind remain safely in the classroom-this point applies equally in the case of visits by guest speakers. Protestant and Orthodox churches smell different (and often run at different temperatures). Sikh gurdwaras taste different from Theravada monasteries (rather Langar than Sangha from this point of view, if I can be allowed a value-judgement) and smells, tastes and other physical sensations, as well as atmosphere, impromptu individual encounters and miscellaneous vignettes from even the brief visits make an impression on the mind, banish stereotypes and later on evoke associations in a way that books and films on their own simply cannot do. Moreover, students who visit religions *in situ* get over their natural apprehension about stepping for the first time over the threshold of a Protestant church, Synagogue or Mosque, or sitting in on an ISKCON puja. A student who graduates from a RAP course without having learned how to behave confidently in a variety of different religious contexts cannot claim to have a rounded education in Religious Studies, just as the languages student cannot claim to have a rounded knowledge of the language if s/he cannot handle a real life situation.

It seems to me a lacuna in religious studies teaching if courses do not require their students to experience different religions at first hand as part of RAP. Some of my teachers at Lancaster got ReSOL courtesy of HM Forces, or by working abroad, or by functioning within their own religion (perfecting their ROL, perhaps) but none of this was a prescribed part of my undergraduate experience.<sup>29</sup> It was when I worked as an Open University tutor some six years after graduating that I first encountered an H.E. course where visits to religious communities were built into the student's experience, and this is when I overcame most of my apprehensions about walking into the private worlds of 'other' religious communities. This was not the first time I walked a few steps in the proverbial moccasins for I had done this many times in essays, but it was the first time I realised the moccasins actually did belong to someone else as real as me.

I now accept that 'experiential'<sup>30</sup> elements of this kind - which are a compulsory part of the course at Bath<sup>31</sup> - constitute knowledge which (a) is essential to an understanding of religion and (b) cannot be gained in any other way. I do not overrate this kind of activity - it is fraught with well-known difficulties of the 'reflexive effect' kind,<sup>32</sup> especially when communities are much-visited by groups of students. Moreover, one cannot visit the past, only the present (but even this is worth discovering experientially). I do believe that such elements are necessary, conform to the logic of RAP and are extremely beneficial to both students and staff.

### **Suffix**

The kind of teaching of religion desirable in HE is 'good RAP,' within which I would include generous helpings of RFL and ReSOL. RAP implies that the academic study of religion is undertaken at an intellectual level appropriate to HE. The result of good RAP should be that students leave the course (whether a year 1 option or the whole undergraduate programme) with the knowledge and the confidence to relate well to people of different religions and worldviews, as well as with a sound grasp of descriptive and theoretical aspects of the subject. While the analogy between religion teaching and language teaching should not be pushed too far, it may help us to think beyond matters of content to the kinds of teaching and learning we should aim for in a Religious Studies programme in Higher Education.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In this paper, which is about the analogy between the teaching of languages and the teaching of religions rather than the analogy between languages and religions, 'language' means not just script, vocabulary and grammar but language in all its aspects; teaching/ learning a language in this sense means eliciting/acquiring fluency not only in speaking and writing, but in integral non-verbal aspects of the linguistic culture in question, such as body language, politeness levels, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Mark Juergensmeyer refers to the notion of religion as 'a kind of language through which meaningful events and perceptions are communicated' (noting the discussion of this analogy by Frits Staal, George Lindbeck and James Barr), and poses the central dilemma of seeing religion as analogous to language. 'Does religion point beyond its contextual framework and its religious language to a special, indeed ultimate, aspect of reality, or is it simply a particular way of thinking and talking about the everyday world?' See Juergensmeyer, M, *Radhasoami Reality*, Princeton, 1991, p 10. An analogy between the study of religion and the study of language is drawn by Eric Sharpe in *Understanding Religion*, Duckworth, 1983, pp x-xi, to make the point that for the student of religion, religions, like languages, are not 'true' or 'false' but simply function in the world.

<sup>3</sup> Ninian Smart's views on the nature of Religious Studies and the role it should have in Higher Education are well known, if not always well understood, and are set out in, for example, papers collected in Part III of *Concept and Empathy*. My own department at Bath has been developed along these lines, and like many others I owe a debt of gratitude to Ninian Smart for his vision and inspiration. On the confusion between Theology and Religious Studies Smart writes: ...many of the British public are used to Sunday School and think that this is essentially what we do in religious studies at the tertiary level of education...People, too, are quite unused to the idea of teaching about religions in a relatively dispassionate way. They think that teaching religion is really a matter of preaching. Of course, the public are right in a way: a lot of *theology* is tertiary Sunday School.' (Ninian Smart, 'Religious Studies in the United Kingdom,' in *Religion*, vol 18, 1988, p 8).

<sup>4</sup> This is important, since academics in Religious Studies have to explain to (i.e. teach) their peers, masters and students what the subject is about, often in order to secure support. This recalls (if I have understood it correctly) the

‘Metareligionswissenschaft’ (M-R) outlined by Z. Poniatowski at the XIIIth IAHR Congress at the University of Lancaster, 1975. ‘Science (of Religions) does not exist in a social vacuum. It is connected\_not only with the situation in philosophy or theology but also with manifold extra-scientific factors, e.g. with the consumers of our production. Therefore in the orbit of M-R must come also religiological ‘politology.’ (Abstracted in Pye M & McKenzie, P, *History of Religions, Proceedings of the Thirteenth Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions, Lancaster 1975*, Leicester Studies in Religion II, University of Leicester, 1980.

<sup>5</sup> This is not a very sound analogy, but I have found it helpful in understanding how university and non-university institutions of HE in the UK relate to each other. There are basically two classes in HE, universities and the rest. Others below these are FE and schools. See next note.

<sup>6</sup> UK Prime Minister John Major (fl 1990-) held up the vision of a ‘classless society’ for Britain.

<sup>7</sup> Lest this be misunderstood as fact rather than irony, my experience at Stirling University was of hard and rewarding work in a Lancaster style department, chaired in an exemplary fashion by Glyn Richards through one of the most difficult periods for Religious Studies in the UK.

<sup>8</sup> This no doubt unjust generalisation is aimed not at individuals within the universities, many of whom are excellent teachers, but at the institutional ethos of the universities.

<sup>9</sup> The ‘trickle down’ theory of wealth favoured by freemarketeers claims that wealth, if acquired in sufficient measure, will trickle down to the poorer sections of society, automatically improving their lot, so there is no need for planned distribution of wealth. Pratyekabuddhas take note.

<sup>10</sup> No-one knows how to make objective measurements of quality in HE teaching, but there are undoubtedly ways of identifying better or worse teaching, for example by observing classes. The word quality is currently being written with a capital letter ‘Quality’ in official documents to show how significant it is going to be once its meaning is determined. Emphasis on the teaching function in colleges and polytechnics has of course meant negligible public funding support for research in this sector of HE. To take an optimistic

view, dissolving the binary line could be an opportunity to get the balance right. However, the government's motive is not to distribute research funding more equitably, but to get more students into HE at less cost.

<sup>11</sup> 'Shake, Rattle and Roll' was hit by Bill Haley in the UK as early as 1954. I am indebted to Andrew Rawlinson for this information.

<sup>12</sup> RAT was (and perhaps still is) a Lancaster course called 'Religious and Atheistic Thought in the West.'

<sup>13</sup> See note 2 above.

<sup>14</sup> But 'Religion as a Foreign Ranguage' might have limited usefulness in the international vocabulary of Religious Studies because 'r' and 'l', are indistinguishable in some languages. Hence the Japanese question: Is it or' as in 'elephant' or 'l' as in 'trunk'?

<sup>15</sup> The field as a whole is often called Applied Linguistics. I am not EFL-trained so the following explanation of types of English teaching is my best attempt as an outsider to understand how the terminology is applied.

<sup>16</sup> EOL, as mentioned above, is an acronym devised for this paper. These days English quite often adopts a multicultural focus, but this makes EOL traditionalists nervous (I use 'traditionalist' here, borrowing one of Towler's five types of British religiosity, for a type of person who thinks of English Studies as a sacred institution to be cherished and handed down unchanged to the next generation - see R Towler, *The Need for Certainty*, 1984). In principle, whatever is studied in EOL can be, and is, successfully studied by speakers of English as a second or other language, but the 'translinguistic' perspective is missing for native speakers of English who study only their own linguistic tradition; the analogy with religion, obviously, is with those who teach or study only the tradition they have grown up in, without having developed a comparative or transreligious perspective.

<sup>17</sup> EOL can become Religious Studies in a literary sort of way, but it is usually not. A school friend of mine went to Cambridge to study EOL while I ventured north to Lancaster to avoid ROL. While I learned about the origins of Theosophy, he understood 'Madame Blavatsky' to be a name invented by Louis MacNiece to rhyme with 'taxi' (which incidentally it doesn't, at least to my untutored ear). This is methodological authorism.

<sup>18</sup> Parochialism is embedded in worldviews, which are not so easily rearranged. When a proposal was mooted to make Spanish an official language in California, a radio interviewer elicited from a local resident the opinion that ‘if English was good enough for Jesus Christ, it’s good enough for the people of Southern California.’ Leaving aside the hermeneutical challenge implied by this statement (*vox populi, vox dei?*), we can recognise a parallel attitude in the theological establishment’s attitude to cross-cultural and transreligious comparative studies. As Ninian Smart noted in 1986 in a characteristically trenchant survey of Religious Studies in the UK, ‘the theological establishment is therefore a problem in that it is a kind of conceptual albatross around the neck of Religious Studies.’ Almost as Ninian Smart’s article appeared, an influential CNAAC committee top-heavy with establishment theologians was circulating a questionnaire to colleges and polytechnics on ‘Theology and Religious Studies’ in which numerous detailed questions were asked about the subdivisions of our department’s supposed teaching in Christian ethics, church history, pastoral theology, and so on. We were invited to tick one (*sic*) box if we taught any ‘world religions’ (in a short list which did not include Christianity!). It was impossible to project our multireligious undergraduate programme onto this distorting map. Like Lancaster in the late 60s, we are recruiting increasing numbers of interesting and interested students who want to study religion, not theology, but the establishment view still seems to be ‘if British academic theology was good enough for Jesus Christ ...’

<sup>19</sup> There are degrees of success. I agree with Ninian Smart that the study of Christianity (in its Western form the dominant ROL model in the UK) ‘is much more fruitful and appealing in the wider context of Religious Studies’ - ‘Religious Studies in the United Kingdom,’ in *Religion*, vol 18, 1988, p 2.

<sup>20</sup> See previous note.

<sup>21</sup> The best EFL achieves far more than this, of course, but usually by becoming more like advanced ESOL or EAP (for which, see below). EFL in Eastern Europe appears to have overcome many of the problems of EFL found in Japan (or some foreign language teaching in the UK, for that matter). Bulgaria, for example, has whole schools in which from age 15 English or another foreign language is the medium of instruction in all subjects, from history to science. Pupils there can acquire a remarkably high level of communicative competence despite, until very recently, having little or no



access to the ‘real’ English-speaking world - but this is in fact EAP, not EFL. (Religious Studies did not fare so well as languages under Communism, because there was a lot of MOL (Marxism as Own Language) but no RFL to parallel the EFL. However, things are now looking up).

<sup>22</sup> This problem is not confined to English teaching, or to Japan. A colleague involved in language examining told me of a case of a school student who had been marked down for using a complex French expression acquired in France, on the grounds that ‘she isn’t supposed to know that yet’.

<sup>23</sup> Good RFL starts where the student is, so ‘native’ categories have to be used at least initially. Sooner or later, the student has to move to categories of thought which are appropriate to the religion studied. Scholarly debate in Religious Studies is often about the degree to which RFL ought to be emancipated from ‘native’ categories. Thus Allan Grapard, in ‘Rule-Governed Activity versus Rule-Creating Activity,’ in *Religion*, vol. 21, pp 207-211, writes: ‘[Frits] Staal’s main emphasis in this part of the book [*Rules Without Meaning*] is that Western scholars have created Asian religions by attempting to locate them in the context of founders, sacred scriptures, and meanings, but that, should you go to Asia, you would find something else: namely ritual practices independent from all those categories... This is partly right: you will indeed find lots of people...who chant the Heart Sutra while being utterly unaware of the meaning of the text: they treat it as a *dharani*, and will not understand why you would want to discuss with them Nagarjuna’s emptiness or his tetralemma. It is also true that many of the debates that really counted historically... were matters of doctrine that only flimsily hid what was really at stake, namely the right to perform ritual for the deceased members of the leading families of Japan. However, some room must be left for those battles that were, in fact, doctrinal, for a history of ideas that takes into account epistemological configurations, and for sectarianism. . .’ (p 211). The debate here is partly about anthropological ‘snapshot’ versus diachronic views of religious systems, but also about conceptual chauvinism, which is inescapably present (perhaps a necessary evil) in textbook-based Religious Studies. See also Nathan Katz, ‘Scholarly Approaches to Buddhism-A Political Analysis,’ in *The Eastern Buddhist*, vol. XV, No 1, Spring 1982.

<sup>24</sup> This does not mean, of course, that non-native speaker teachers who have come through the ESOL route themselves are automatically better than native speaker teachers of ESOL; ultimately, it is fluency in the target language and

teaching ability that count.

<sup>25</sup> EFL within an English-speaking environment, such as a good language school in the UK or USA, makes possible real-life, project-based EFL (involving, for example, surveys or collaborative ventures in the local community) through which students can acquire excellent communicative skills, activating their previously ‘passive’ knowledge of English. Modern languages courses in HE typically involve this kind of immersion experience through a period of study abroad in the country of the target language. I will argue below that this kind of learning should be recognised as important in the study of religions too.

<sup>26</sup> Those planning to live or do business overseas need ReSOL before they go, or as soon as possible after their arrival. To my knowledge there is no recent survey of the incidence of business briefings on religion but this seems to be an area of growing importance. In HE, undergraduate students need ReSOL at some point before graduating because these days they will inevitably follow careers in a multireligious (even if not multicultural) environment.

<sup>27</sup> In this respect, the difference between the native and non-native speaking student is often just one of degree; content lecturers have to explain vocabulary as well as concepts to native-speaker audiences who are themselves acquiring EAP through the painful process of essay writing and seminar presentations, etc. In fact the foreign student, once a term is understood at the linguistic level, may have less difficulty than the ‘home’ student in understanding (but probably more difficulty in discussing) concepts which originate outside the ‘home’ culture.

<sup>28</sup> ‘Crudely, is Genesis playing in the same league as Fred Hoyle’ is a question put by Ninian Smart in ‘The Principles and Meaning of the Study of Religion,’ in *Concept & Empathy*, p.201. This now needs some ReSOL explaining to students who know very well who Phil Collins is, are less sure about Fred Hoyle and know nothing about the Hebrew Bible (*C&E*, p.201). I tried out the Genesis/Fred Hoyle question at random on two British undergraduate RS students who hazarded ‘it must be something to do with music’. ReSOL support therefore follows: Phil Collins, brother of Joan, is the drummer in the rock band Genesis. Fred Hoyle is the astronomer associated with the ‘Big bang’ theory of the genesis of the universe. Genesis is the first book of the Hebrew Bible (or the Old Testament) and contains the biblical creation stories. RAP can now follow, focusing on the issue of interpreting

mythic language.

<sup>29</sup> This is not a criticism; that was then and this is now. The Lancaster course was more than I could have hoped for and the opportunities for such experiences to be part of a Religious Studies course were very much more limited in 1970 than they are today. My point is that the logic of RAP requires such ‘ReSOL’ experience at some point.

<sup>30</sup> By ‘experiential’ is emphatically not meant quasi-mystical exercises such as ‘centring’ which I interpret as an attempt to re-theologise religious studies (and particularly school religious education).

<sup>31</sup> First year students undertake group visits to religious communities and places of worship; these usually include Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, Moslem, Jewish and Christian venues. All second year students (about 50 at the time of writing) spend a week individually as participant observers placed in religious communities throughout Britain. These range from Tibetan monasteries to silent Christian orders and Islamic schools, etc.-in fact any kind of community with an explicit or implicit religious dimension. Seminars are held after the placements, so that the students share insights and debate issues of common interest, and a written assignment is submitted linked to the placement. There is an opportunity for students to take a ‘Long Placement’ (about 10 weeks) in a religious community as one of their final year options.

<sup>32</sup>The ‘reflexive effect’ occurs when scholars of religion belong to the traditions they are studying and act as representatives of their tradition. See Ninian Smart’s *The Science of Religion and the Sociology of Knowledge*, pp 4-6, 40-41. Another version is when religious people adopt an account of their religion generated by outsiders in order to feed it back to the visitor (or researcher) - as politeness demands.

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