Religion and the Media in GCSE and A-Level Syllabuses:
A Regrettable Gap and Proposals to Fill It.

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Abstract

Existing GCSE and A Level syllabuses include modules on religion and the media, but these have not been widely or well studied for a variety of reasons. The modules may be considered difficult to teach well and teachers have few good resources to use in comparison with more popular topics such as medical or environmental ethics. The newly launched specifications for RS GCSE and A-Level examinations have eliminated, almost entirely, any study of religion and the media. The absence of this theme is troubling. There is a strong case to be made that critical appreciation of the ways media depicts religion is especially important for forming responsible, educated citizens in modern Britain, many of whom will not participate directly in religious communities but will see much depiction of such communities and their ideologies in the media. We propose key principles and questions that might help equip teachers to tackle critically and intelligently issues about religion in the media as they arise. We illustrate this approach by considering media responses to the Charlie Hebdo attacks in Paris.

Keywords

1. Current Provision and Interest in the Topic of Religion and the Media

In the current GCSE and A-level syllabuses most major examination boards include some topics that deal with aspects of religion and the media, whether this be in terms of freedom of speech and censorship, religious imagery in film, the depiction of religion and religious figures on television, or the value of media engagement with religion. The Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations (OCR) GCSE syllabus and the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) A-level syllabus, for example, include the option to study a discrete module in this area. However, examiners' reports suggest that these topics have not been widely studied and, where they are studied, are not done well. In the case of the OCR GCSE module, 'Religion and the Media' is offered as a section for examination alongside sections on 'War, Peace and Justice' and 'Religion and Equality'. On this paper students can choose to answer two of the three sections. Examiners' reports indicate that the Religion and the Media section is the least popular and tends to produce the weakest answers. For example, the January 2013 report notes that:

> the great majority of candidates attempted sections A [War, Peace and Justice] and B [Religion and Equality]. On the whole, section C [Religion and the Media] tended to produce the weakest responses, with quite generalised answers which made limited use of religious knowledge and teachings. (OCR 2013, 4)

Some students may choose not to answer this section because they feel less confident with the questions, whilst others will not have been taught the section at all, suggesting, perhaps, that their teachers either feel less confident with the issues and material or decide for other reasons it is a less attractive option to study. More recent reports have noted some improvement in the way students are attempting to answer the 'Religion and the Media' questions but still indicate that this is not a popular choice. Reports often include comments such as '[T]his question [from the Religion and the Media section] was the least well answered on the paper' (OCR 2015a, 16) and lament the lack of exposure to 'a variety of views and examples in their

lessons beyond the Simpsons' (OCR 2010, 15). Answers given are said to be often vague and lacking in religious content.

By comparison, the AQA A-Level Module on Religion, Art and the Media is offered as an alternative to The History of Christianity on the AS Level Unit E question paper and the Unit 3C A Level question paper and, as such, is a consistently more popular choice than the History option. The number of students taking this module, however, is small in comparison with modules on Philosophy or Ethics. In June 2015 243 students took the AS Level Unit E paper compared to over 7,000 taking the Ethics Unit A paper, and only 60 students took the A Level Unit 3C question paper. It should be noted that these figures do not distinguish between students who answered the Religion, Art and Media questions as opposed to the History questions but they do indicate that the number of students taking this module is very low and has decreased year on year.[2] However, despite this comparatively small cohort, students still do not perform well in the examination. Examiners' reports make repeated reference to the vagueness of students' answers. For example, the January 2012 report indicates that '[T]here were many very general answers [that]… failed to address the question set' (AQA 2012, 4). Similarly, the January 2013 report notes that 'students lacked sufficient breadth or depth in their knowledge and failed to demonstrate their ability to focus upon the demands of the question' (AQA 2013, 5).

2. The Shape of the New Specifications

The newly launched specifications for RS GCSE and A-Levels require the design of new programmes of study, and these will be crucial for shaping the way students engage with issues about religions and their place in contemporary societies. Within the new specification, students at GCSE will be required to study two religions, and at both GCSE and A-level there

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[2] These figures were supplied directly to the authors by the research team at AQA.

is greater emphasis upon studying contemporary religions – their beliefs, practices, sources of authority, and forms of expression (DfE 2015a; DfE 2015b). It will therefore no longer be possible to take an A-level based entirely on Philosophy and Ethics, the most popular areas of current study,[3] although these topics can still occupy up to 66% of an A-level programme (DfE 2015c, 29). These changes are to be welcomed, since they make the study of religion more clear and central to the subject (and may, thereby, help students appreciate when making university choices that the subject they have been studying is Religion—including Philosophy of Religion and Ethics—and not Philosophy itself).

However, with the focus of the syllabus on the features of a specific religion—'the systematic study of one religion' (DfE 2015b, 4)—and the requirement for students to know the key elements of a religion's beliefs, practices, and so on, there is a risk that there will be little focus on such important broader issues as the place of religion in society, the interactions between religious groups and between religious and secular ideologies. There are, nonetheless, some indications in both GCSE and A-level specifications that such themes must at least be included. Among those listed for consideration in the GCSE Part Two on 'Religious, philosophical and ethical studies in the modern world' are 'religion, peace and conflict'—including 'terrorism', and 'the role of religion and belief in 21st century conflict and peace making'—and 'religion, human rights and social justice', which includes 'issues of equality and freedom of religion or belief' (DfE 2015a, 8). In the A-level specification, the systematic study of religion includes 'the challenges of secularisation' and themes 'related to the relationship between religion and society', such as religious freedom and tolerance (DfE 2015b, 4).

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[3] Horrell and Davis (2014, 74) note that 'in the summer of 2011, nearly 12 times as many A Level students sat ethics units as did biblical studies. In the case of GCSE students for the same period, the figure rises to nearly 14 times as many.'

It is striking, however, that issues concerning the depiction of religion in the media are nowhere mentioned in these Department for Education (DfE) specifications. Furthermore, analysis of the draft specification documents produced by the examination boards AQA, Edexcel, OCR, and the Welsh Joint Education Committee (WJEC) reveals that only the WJEC GCSE specification mentions the word 'media' (WJEC 2015a, 10). It does so when asking students to consider issues surrounding freedom of speech. At A Level, WJEC again includes one instance of the word 'media' in its option to study Islam. Here students must consider '[T]he influence of the media on western perceptions of Islam' (WJEC 2015b, 13). The OCR A-Level specification also includes one instance of the word 'media' when it outlines how ethics should be applied to sex and sexuality in the twenty-first century: the influence of social media on behaviour must be considered (OCR 2015b, 12). It is clear, then, that the absence of religion and the media in the government guidelines has had significant influence on the way in which examination boards have interpreted this guidance. Since a crowded and assessment-focused curriculum leaves no room for tackling topics outside the specified syllabus, these new guidelines effectively ensure that critical consideration of the relationship between religion and the media has been removed from the students' education. In the following section, we outline briefly reasons why this is a highly regrettable move.

3.   The Need for Critical Appreciation of Media Depictions of Religion and Society

The absence of any mention of the media in the new government specifications seems to us a significant and troubling one: it is clear that most people's impressions about religions, religious groups, their ideologies and activities, are formed by what they learn from the media. This is especially so in a relatively secularized society such as Britain. As Grace Davie comments in her recently published *Religion in Britain*, 'in a nation which is increasingly illiterate regarding religion (including Christianity), the media become a correspondingly

important source of information about religious issues' (Davie 2015, 65). Davie views this situation with concern, lamenting the extent to which some media portrayals of religion can be simplistic and misleading.[4] The ability to engage with such media material from a critical and informed perspective is vital if prejudice and uninformed bigotry are not to be reinforced, especially in a time of high tension between religious and secular worldviews, exemplified in (often media-fuelled) concerns about 'Islamification' and the rise of radical Islamist ideologies.

The subject of religion and the media also gives Religious Studies as a subject the opportunity to connect with students' day-to-day experiences and interests through film, drama, television, social media, and so on, and thus to motivate their engagement with the subject. Furthermore, given the often simplistic and misleading depictions of religions in the media, there is a clear case for the need to develop students' religious literacy—that is, for students, whether they are religious or not, to be equipped to understand and negotiate the religions and religious identities they will encounter in the contemporary world, not least in Britain.[5] The need for this kind of literacy is increasingly recognised in many areas of business, politics, police, healthcare, armed forces etc. as well as in education. For example, the Faiths and Civil Society Unit at Goldsmiths College and the Cambridge Coexist Programme support the Religious Literacy Leadership in Higher Education programme which seeks to 'assist Higher Education leaders to develop outlooks and strategies that engage positively with faith, promoting universities as places that can lead and shape informed responses to faith in wider society' (Coexist 2015). Recognising that the public has a limited religious vocabulary, this programme offers resources to improve such literacy in the HE context. This collaborative partnership has also done similar work on improving religious literacy for the Equality and Human Rights Commission and the Government Equalities Office. The relevance and

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[4] See also the presentation on this subject by Michael Wakelin, which elaborates a similar perspective, available at http://humanities.exeter.ac.uk/theology/teachers/religioninthemedia/ (last accessed 3 May 2016).
[5] For a critical discussion of the 'religious literacy' approach to teaching RS, see Jackson 2004, 75-86.

importance of such work is clear, and it offers one kind of vision of the role of RS in schools. Importantly, it does not presume or aim at positive appreciation of religion, still less any kind of religious affiliation or faith, but simply at informed understanding of the realities and dynamics of contemporary religions and the perspectives and convictions of their adherents.

We argue, though, that such literacy—or, perhaps better, 'critical literacy', since it must be critically probing as well as sympathetically informed—is also needed in relation to the secular ideologies and identities with which religions are so often seen as in conflict, not least in the media. In the next section we offer some theoretical foundations for a critical approach to these issues, and present some principles that could underpin pedagogical practice in relation to this topic. This is followed by a specific case-study to illustrate the approach.

4. Principles for Probing Media Depictions: Religion and Secular Society in Conflict

One of the reasons religion and the media may seem a daunting and difficult subject to teach is that the most pertinent and important material is constantly shifting. Unlike some other areas of study, where the same well-worn perspectives can do service year after year — the ethical theories of utilitarianism and deontology, for example—changing topics, social contexts, and public perceptions mean that studies of the media need to engage with current issues in a specific and focused way (and as we have noted above, examiners' reports make reference to the weakness of student answers in this regard). For example, in the late 1970s and early 80s students might have discussed the reactions to a controversial and potentially 'blasphemous' film such as *The Life of Brian* (1979). One might still valuably study the changing attitudes to such a film, but perceptions of the film today, even among members of the religious groups who once objected strongly to it, are very different than they were in the late 1970s. Members of Monty Python have themselves now acknowledged their position within the cultural establishment, and the film's intended promotion of individual liberty over adherence to

religious authority is hardly subversive in 2015 (see Tollerton 2015). The era of Mary Whitehouse and The Festival of Light battling the social liberalism of the 1960-70s is not the era in which today's students are living.

What is required, we would suggest, is a set of core questions that can be brought to the critical analysis of a range of media interactions with religious subject matter, together with continually updated resources (though if the core questions are clearly articulated, it becomes much easier for teachers themselves to select fresh examples to analyse as new media stories emerge). Below we offer brief outlines of a theoretical perspective and set of core questions, followed by a brief case-study examining media coverage of the shootings that took place at the Paris offices of *Charlie Hebdo* magazine. By doing so, we hope to highlight the way our theoretical perspective and core questions might shape analysis, and also to demonstrate the importance of enabling students critically to navigate media materials.[6]

Our first theoretical principle is that *religions should not be studied in isolation from their wider social contexts*. That may sound obvious, but as we have noted above there is at least the risk that this embeddedness of religion in society—with all the tensions and conflicts it brings about—may be neglected in the new specifications. It is important not least because the formulation and expression of religious ideas comes about in dialogue with and reaction to broader social circumstances. Religious and secular ideas, we might say, are co-produced. For example, the Christian fundamentalist doctrine of biblical inerrancy arose in the nineteenth century at the same time as the rise of modern evolutionary science; both perspectives, in a sense, are products of the same specific sociohistorical context (see Woodbridge, Noll and Hatch 1979)

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[6] A more detailed guide to such analysis, suitable for use in the classroom, can be found at http://humanities.exeter.ac.uk/theology/teachers/religioninthemedia/ (last accessed 3 May 2016).

Our second theoretical principle is that *wider societies should also be studied from a 'religious' perspective, asking about such things as what is held to be sacred, what is worshipped, and so on.* The key implication of this essentially Durkheimian perspective is that, rather than regard specific religions as isolatable foci for study, there should also be critical appreciation of the ways in which wider societies will—whether deliberately and explicitly or not—promote and protect certain values and practices as of ultimate, effectively sacred, value (see further Giddens 1993, 465-66; Lynch 2012). It would be foolish to expect, say, 'consumer capitalism' or 'the nation state' to appear among the 'religions' to be studied in a RS syllabus, rather than in a Politics or Economics course. But it would not be foolish at all to attempt to probe whether the implicit commitment to these ways of life entails that certain practices and values are held to be effectively sacred, in ways that may be deemed to require assent and conformity above any specifically religious values and commitments or, indeed, in a complex conflation of religious, political, and nationalistic themes (the British National Anthem is an interesting place to start). While Christianity, capitalism, and the nation-state, in one sense, belong to different categories, in another sense theologians are right to depict them as offering competing narratives, which give different kinds of structure and meaning to human lives and call for various kinds of (competing) allegiance (see, e.g., Milbank 1990; Hauerwas 1999).

When it comes to the specific task of analyzing media depictions of religion, or of events with religious significance, certain questions may focus a critical analysis. First, there is the need to approach the media material using a kind of critical discourse analysis which asks such questions as:

- Where does this material come from?
- Who created this material, and why?[7]

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[7] For further classroom resources on using such critical discourse analysis, based on a presentation by Professor Kim Knott, see http://humanities.exeter.ac.uk/theology/teachers/religioninthemedia/ (last accessed 6 May 2016)

Moving to more specific analysis of the values and meanings that are constructed and promoted in media coverage of religion, we may ask:

- How do different media reports reflect particular *interpretations* of events with religious significance and what meanings are constructed in these depictions?
- How does media coverage reveal competing value systems and convictions concerning what is sacred?

5. Media Depictions of the *Charlie Hebdo* Attack

To illustrate what this kind of analysis might look like in practice, we offer a brief case-study which looks at eight January 2015 lead editorials responding to the *Charlie Hebdo* attack, using the two specific questions set out immediately above to organise critical engagement.

- How do different media reports reflect particular *interpretations* of events with religious significance and what meanings are constructed in these depictions?

At first glance the eight editorials (taken from the *Daily Express, Daily Mail, Financial Times, The Guardian, The Independent, The Sun, The Telegraph* and *The Times*) appear to offer very similar narratives presented in a consistent tone. The attackers are universally condemned and there is total consent regarding *Charlie Hebdo*'s right to publish satirical images of Muhammad. Each editorial expressed these sentiments not in dry, analytical terms, but with frequent recourse to emotionally laden language: there was 'profound revulsion' (*Financial Times*, Editorial 2015a) and 'horrific … profound shock' (*Daily Mail,* Comment 2015b*)* at a 'chilling attack' (*Daily Express,* Comment 2015a), in which the 'delusional' (*The Times,* Editorial 2015e) and 'sickest mind' saw journalists 'lie slaughtered' (*The Sun,* Editorial 2015d) and respondents 'horrified, confused and at loss' (*The Independent,* Editorial 2015c). *The Guardian* even commented that the event was 'beyond words. The adjectives are simply not there' (Editorial 2015b). But just as the popular cry of 'Je Suis Charlie' was open-ended enough to include a wide variety of socio-political views (an ingredient no doubt vital to its memetic success), so too were the eight newspaper editors able to articulate quite distinct views of the event's meaning while sharing broadly similar slogans to describe it. The table below

highlights a few of the interpretative variations that emerge when the editorials are read alongside one another.

[*INSERT TABLE HERE*]

It is worth providing some brief commentary on these variations. The first point to highlight concerns the nature of the attackers. There is a notable disjunction between those editorials that emphasise the carefully calculated nature of the shootings (*Daily Express, Financial Times, The Guardian* and *The Telegraph*) and those which describe the killers as somehow pre-modern (*Daily Mail, The Independent* and *The Sun*). While technically the two are not mutually exclusive it is noticeable that, in practice, the killings were described as *either* chillingly well-organised *or* 'medieval' in their religious extremism (*Daily Mail,* Comment 2015b). 'The cry of "death to the blasphemers"', remarked *The Independent* (Editorial 2015e), 'has no place the modern world', echoing a sentiment forcefully articulated in *The Sun*:

> They are savages from another time... throwbacks from the Middle Ages, toting AK47s. Cherished modern concepts we take for granted — democracy, equality, law, free speech and satire — are to them alien, unholy and detestable. They live by an outdated code that allows the execution of non-believers — which they carry out with relish. They cannot be understood. Only condemned, protected against and fought (Editorial 2015d).

Inherent to such assessment was that 'we' (i.e. the West) are modern, while religiously-motivated extremism and notions of blasphemy belong to the past (Lyons 2015, 48). Modernity, in other words, was implied to belong to the secular, or at least religiously moderate.

Another significant variation concerns the comments on the broader Muslim community. The editorials differ in the extent to which they emphasise either the unrepresentative nature of the attackers (*Daily Mail, The Guardian* and *The Independent*) or the need for Muslims to do more to root out extremism (*The Sun*, *The Times*). The distinction is significant: the former effectively absolves the wider Muslim community of guilt, while the

latter places it under collective suspicion. A passage in *The Times'* 9 January editorial is especially stark:

> France's Muslim Council urged imams to condemn all violence "in the strongest possible way". Mosques, for the most part, observed a minute's silence that brought even the Paris Metro to a standstill. Muslim children held up placards bearing the by now familiar slogan, "not in my name". Words have meaning, yet they are also cheap. Seen in a global context, Wednesday's attack was merely the latest in an appalling litany, and moderate Islam needs to do more to stop it (Editorial 2015e).

Here even Muslim condemnations of the attack are declared 'cheap' and insubstantial in comparison to the actions demanded of the community.

Thirdly, the editorials also reflect on possible changes in non-Muslim society. A key distinction between the newspapers is whether they voice a fear of rising Islamophobia (*Financial Times, The Guardian, The Independent* and *The Telegraph*) or express support for robust British anti-terror legislation (*Daily Express*, *The Sun*). There is something of a broadsheet versus tabloid distinction here. Again, it is not absolutely necessary for the two positions to be at odds with one another, but the fact that there was no overlap between their occurrences indicates differing social emphases: one reflects anxiety about the mistreatment of a religious minority, while the other is concerned to protect the majority from extremist elements within the Muslim community.

A final difference that emerged from reading the editorials together was the manner in which, while unequivocally condemning the Paris shootings, some publications (*Daily Mail*, *Financial Times* and *The Telegraph*) offered (sometimes quite subtle) attempts to distance themselves from *Charlie Hebdo*'s satirical treatment of religion. Consider, for example, the *Daily Mail*'s comment that:

> [O]n any other day, the Mail would feel only distaste for a French magazine with a history of sniggering at faiths held sacred by billions worldwide. But today, freedom lovers everywhere, whatever their religion, should proclaim the slogan of solidarity with the murdered staff of Charlie Hebdo: "Je suis Charlie!" (Comment 2015b)

This passage manages to communicate effusive solidarity and, at the same time, provide effective assurance that such sentiment is only temporary. When normal service resumes, we are told, *Charlie Hebdo*'s abrasive style will once again be frowned upon.

Looking at these editorials as a whole, it is clear that any claim to 'objective' commentary is illusory. As an event, the *Charlie Hebdo* shootings did not simply erupt into current affairs with a complete set of meanings neatly provided. Rather, as the above discussion has shown, beyond obvious denunciations of the killers and solidarity with the victims, its implications were very much open to interpretation among media outlets. These media interpretations reflect quite distinct underlying outlooks regarding religious minorities, religiously-motivated violence, blasphemy, and the role of the state. In a democracy that requires its citizens to weigh up such matters with care, there is an overwhelming case for training students to critically navigate media depictions of religious affairs. As we noted above, this is especially crucial in a context where media depictions form many citizens' views of religions. It is vital that students are able to identify and assess these interpretations both because of the extent to which exposure to such media meaning-making is virtually unavoidable, but also because it is a discourse so readily open to emotive rhetoric.

But examining the way in which these eight newspapers responded to an act of religiously-charged terrorism also highlights the relevance of our second specific question that may be posed to students as a way of framing critical assessment of media sources:

• How does media coverage reveal competing value systems and convictions concerning what is sacred?

Underlying media coverage of religion will often be rival value systems and, intertwined with them, varying perceptions of what is sacred. In the *Charlie Hebdo* editorials one relevant value system is that of the attackers, while the other relates to the editorial writers themselves (it is not insignificant that these so clearly fall into 'them' and 'us'). For reasons we will briefly

14

outline here, attempting to identify such dynamics is a valuable exercise for developing a critically self-aware citizenry.

In the case-study at hand, one half of this equation is comparatively easy to discern. For the most part the editorials note that the attackers were motivated by anger at *Charlie Hebdo*'s transgressive depictions of Muhammad. Some publications (especially *The Sun* and *Daily Express*) are rather more vague on this point than others, but in one way or another readers would very likely have gained at least a cursory depiction of the killers' motivations.

But pushing students to identify other elements of religious language in the editorials would open up another, quite different, dimension of perceived sacredness at play. At one point *The Sun* laments that for the attackers 'modern concepts we take for granted — democracy, equality, law, free speech and satire — are to them alien, unholy and detestable' (Editorial, 2015d). Turning its attention to the murdered journalists, *The Independent* remarks that 'it would not be an exaggeration to call them martyrs' (Editorial 2015c). Such language of 'holiness' and 'martyrdom' reflects the manner in which, for these editorial writers, the *Charlie Hebdo* shootings were not simply an act of deplorable violence, but a desecration of core values. This was 'an attack on the freedom of expression that is the pillar of any democratic society' (*Financial Times,* Editorial 2015a), 'targeted at one of the very foundations of the Western way of life' (*Daily Mail,* Comment 2015b), 'against our values of freedom and tolerance' (*Daily Express,* Comment 2015a). It is 'the principle of freedom of speech', wrote *The Independent* (Editorial 2015c), 'that underpins Western societies' and is, according to *The Sun* (Editorial 2015d), 'a crucial ingredient of modern civilisation'. It is no surprise, therefore, that a French writer who questions the unrestrained commitment to free speech has been accused of a kind of 'blasphemy' (see Chrisafis 2015). *The Times* (Editorial 2015e) suggested that because of this, *Charlie Hebdo* 'is known and lionised on every continent. Its cartoonists are heroes'. Emerging from such heavily rhetorical language is a sense that while the values

these writers appeal to (most notably freedom of expression) may be substantively secular in nature, they are protected and revered in quasi-religious ways. This case study thus illustrates the value and relevance of both of our core theoretical principles: that religions must not be studied in isolation from their wider social contexts and that these wider societies should also be analysed from a 'religious' perspective.

Gordon Lynch has observed that 'even if we accept that we live in more secular times than previous generations, we do not live in a de-sacralized age', and there is tangible pedagogical value in highlighting the manner in which media depictions of religious-infused events can end up sacralising 'secular' values (Lynch 2012, 3). This is because the sacralisation of 'democracy, equality, law, [and] free speech' (to borrow *The Sun*'s formulation) could, if unchecked, leave only empty mantras (think of Brian's audience unthinkingly chorusing that 'we are all individuals'). Responding to the *Charlie Hebdo* shootings specifically, Brenda Watson warns of a discourse that 'has allowed itself to be seduced by slogans which are damagingly under-determined' (2016, 157). Our case study thus illustrates the need for the kind of critical reflexivity that Robert Jackson has argued for as a key component of an interpretive approach to RS (see, e.g., Jackson 2004, 88-89), and emphasizes that such reflexivity needs also to encompass the quasi-religious values of students' civic and 'secular' contexts, as well as those of specifically religious traditions. Developing students as citizens means encouraging the skills to identify and critically assess all manner of value systems, *especially* including those which we may hope they ultimately adopt.

6. Conclusion

Our argument began with the observation that in the current GCSE and A-level syllabuses, religion and the media appears as a topic of study, though evidence suggests it is not widely taken or successfully negotiated. In the new specifications, it seems to have virtually disappeared. Given the influential role of the media in forming citizens' views of contemporary

religion, this is a highly regrettable situation. Religions should not be studied in isolation from their wider social contexts, and students should be trained to pose critical and probing questions about media depictions of religion and its relation to wider society. Furthermore, they should be encouraged to raise critical and reflective questions about the values of their wider society – values that often shape such media depictions of religion – especially insofar as these indicate what is held to be sacred and central to that society. In an initial attempt to address this need, we have set out a broad framework for tackling religion in society and a set of questions specifically designed for critically analyzing media presentations. We illustrated our approach through a study of editorials dealing with the *Charlie Hebdo* attack.

What such a case study hopefully demonstrates is the need to probe both the interpretative depictions of religion that such media reports contain and also the values that underpin the media analysis. As the language of these reports clearly demonstrates, it is not only adherents of particular religions that appeal to what is holy and sacred, or respond with horror to what is perceived as blasphemous. A responsible, self-critical study of religion in the contemporary world—not least in Britain—can hardly isolate the facets of belief and conviction among religious adherents from comparable facets held as fundamentally important to the wider 'secular' society. Moreover, responsible and relevant RS teaching will seek to equip students not just to be religiously literate—knowing, say, what Buddhists, Christians, or Muslims believe and do—but also to be critically literate about the values of their wider society, and the manner in such values intersect with media portrayals of religion.

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