

***Religionsgeschichtliche Schule, Religionswissenschaft, Piano, Oboe
and Bourbon***

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I am something of an interloper in this collection of learned discourses about the intricacies of Gnosticism in the Mediterranean of Late Antiquity, although my own scholarly work in the dualist systems of Sāṃkhya and Yoga in the classical Sanskrit philosophy of India makes me something of a fellow traveler with the Gnostics of the world. After all, to paraphrase a line of the great American poet, something there is that doesn't love a dualist!

In any case, Birger A. Pearson and I were colleagues together for over quarter of a century (approximately 1970 through 1995) in the Department of Religious Studies of the University of California, Santa Barbara. We had something to do, perhaps even a good deal to do, with shaping the long-term trajectory of graduate study in the academic study of religion at Santa Barbara, and I want to comment on Birger's important contribution to this effort.

Bob Michaelsen was the first chair of religious studies at UCSB and established the undergraduate program and the incipient graduate program. I was the second chair (1971 through 1976), and Birger was the third chair (1977 through 1981). The main tasks during our years as chairs was to put into place a full graduate faculty to support graduate work in religious studies and to fashion a

programmatic curriculum for rigorous graduate training appropriate for the modern secular state university.

Both Birger and I were products of traditional seminary-based graduate education (Birger via Harvard Divinity School and me via Union Theological Seminary in New York City and Columbia University). We were both persuaded that while our training had been excellent in the best traditions of first-rate Protestant graduate education, fundamental changes had to occur in re-visioning the academic study of religion in an institution such as the University of California. The academic study of religion, at least in our shop, had to be cross-cultural and interdisciplinary both in theory and in method and without a confessional orientation.

In many ways it was easier for me to re-vision my own training, since I had specialized in South Asian traditions (Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, South Asian Islamic traditions and the manner in which these traditions later developed in the Indo-Tibetan region, Southeast Asia and finally into China, Korea and Japan). It was relatively easy for me to develop a South Asian emphasis with work in Classical Sanskrit and other appropriate South Asian languages, and to encourage colleagues in related areas to develop parallel work in East Asian traditions with requisite work in Chinese and Japanese.

For Birger the task was more demanding, since obviously traditional biblical studies had to be recast in the multireligious and secular environment of the public university. From the very beginning of our collegial work together at UCSB, however, Birger always saw his work in the larger framework of Christian origins, Mediterranean religious traditions, Classics, Coptic studies, the Nag Hammadi texts, Gnostic studies, the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* methodologies from the nineteenth and early twentieth century traditions of biblical studies, and, finally, of course, the *Religionswissenschaft* orientation of contemporary history of religions, together with requisite work in Greek, Latin, and, of course, Coptic. In addition, Birger also developed work in an area of his own personal interest, namely, Nordic religions.

Over the years other areas were also developed on the graduate level, for example, the social scientific study of religion, religion in America, Native American religious traditions, and Islamic religious traditions. Throughout the graduate curriculum, however, there has always been a distinctive focus on serious language training both in classical textual languages and in modern scholarly languages (French, German, Japanese, and so forth) together with a strong focus on history and historiography, not so much in the Eliadean motif-research sense but more in the older *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* sense of deep immersion in specific religious traditions. In this regard, the graduate

program in religious studies at Santa Barbara has become a model for the academic study of religion throughout the United States, and outside the US as well, and, as mentioned at the outset, I say all of this to highlight an aspect of Birger's career that may not be as well known as his work with the Nag Hammadi materials and Gnosticism, namely, his significant role in helping to shape the contours of graduate training in religious studies in the modern secular university.

Of course, our time together for a quarter of a century in Santa Barbara was not entirely given over to *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* matters and the profundities of *Religionswissenschaft*. Birger is an accomplished pianist and organist, and I am, to put the matter in the best possible light, an aspiring, amateur oboist. Be that as it may, we did get together regularly over the years, usually once a week to explore the mysteries of classical music. In the early years, we did reasonably well with Handel, Telemann, Mozart, Bach, et al. The usual routine was to play for about an hour, sometimes an hour and a half, and then kick back with a few bourbon and waters. As the years progressed, alas, the routine gradually changed to less Handel, Telemann and Bach, and more and more to bourbon and water.

Let me just say in conclusion that it has been an honor for me to have Birger A. Pearson as a close friend and learned colleague for most of my career, and I

extend my warm best wishes to him on this occasion of the publication of this

Festschrift in his honor.