

When I finally admitted to myself that I was an agnostic, I had already been teaching New Testament and the history of early Christianity for ten years or so, first at Rutgers in the mid 1980s and then at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill starting in 1988. It comes as a surprise to some people when I tell them that my decision to leave the Christian faith made absolutely no difference at all, of any kind, in either what I taught or how I taught it. I think people find that very strange indeed because they have a rather serious misconception about what it means to teach religious studies in a secular research university.

Many people imagine that teaching religious studies is simply different from teaching anything else. I think in part that is because they really haven't given it much thought. Religion, in this common view, is different from other fields of study and inquiry. Political science, or history, or literature, or anthropology, or classics, or even philosophy - any of the other topics that in one way or another are related to the reality and effects of religion in the world - all these are imagined somehow has objective realms of study. You study \*about\* other cultures, or historical events, or political movements, or philosophical traditions.

But religion, in this view, is different. Isn't it? Isn't religion ...

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