

THEOLOGY IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE

Church, Academy, and Nation

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Chapter One

Theology's Babylonian Captivity in the Modern University

I Should “Theology” and “Religious Studies” Be Terminated?

Since this book is concerned with the health of theology and the Church's engagement with cultures, it might seem rather odd to begin with a question that intimates the termination of theology within the university, the very place that is central to the future of Anglo-American theology. But as the Israelites found out, living in Babylon can have the effect of purifying the faith as well as destroying it. In what follows I shall be suggesting that theology's location within the modern western secular liberal university is not unlike the Israelite captivity within Babylon. Theology, properly understood, cannot be taught and practiced within the modern university. This is not a view shared by all Christians, but is held by a number of post-liberal theologians and philosophers, such as Stanley Hauerwas, John Milbank, and Alasdair MacIntyre.¹

One way of noticing this Babylonian captivity is in the arguments that are conducted in the modern university about the role of theology. The view

¹ See Stanley Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today*, The Labyrinth Press, Durham, North Carolina, 1988, esp. the two chapters, “Truth and Honor” and “How the Universities Contribute to the Corruption of Youth”; “On Witnessing our Story: Christian Education in Liberal Societies” in eds. Stanley Hauerwas and John H. Westerhoff, *Schooling Christians: “Holy Experiments” in American Education*, W. B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1992, pp. 214–36; John Milbank, “The Conflict of the Faculties: Theology and the Economy of the Sciences” in eds. Mark Thiessen Nation and Samuel Wells, *Faith and Fortitude: In Conversation with the Theological Ethics of Stanley Hauerwas*, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 2000, pp. 39–58; Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, Duckworth, London, 1985 (2nd edn.), *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, Duckworth, London, 1988, and *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, Duckworth, London, 1990.

expressed by some scientific atheists (Richard Dawkins, for example) is that theology has no place in the modern university. It is a vestige of a religious world and society which has long since crumbled and been discredited. It is a disservice to a modern research university to include such a subject in the curriculum.² A similar voice is heard from some who teach in departments of religious studies. Donald Wiebe, for example, argues that a scientific, objective, rational study of "religion," without any privilege being granted to any one religion, is the only intellectually respectable practice in the modern university.³ Dawkins and Wiebe have one presupposition in common, which I shall be calling into question: that there is such a thing as neutral objectivity in any mode of research, either science, Dawkins's own area, or religious studies, Wiebe's specialism. However, in another sense I agree with Dawkins's and Wiebe's conclusions, but for very different reasons. What are these reasons? In the next section of this chapter I want to look at the process of secularization, as it has affected both the university and the discipline of theology. Secularization is a much debated topic, and I use the word to connote two specific historical processes.⁴ The foundation of the universities took place in a universe with a sacred canopy, whereby people understood their practices to relate to an organic and cosmic pattern participating in the nature of reality. This reality was divinely created for the good of men and women, for the flourishing of human society, and for participation in truth and love. The modern university, with some exceptions, in contrast, develops its programs and practices without any reference to a sacred canopy. Often finance is the chief criterion, without any organic vision of the relation of the different disciplines, without any shared values regarding the good of men and women, or concerning what truth might possibly be. Augustine, well before the universities were founded, carried out a scathing critique of pagan institutions of learning: their main purpose being vanity in so far as they served purely to gain better employment, and self-promotion.⁵

² Richard Dawkins, Professor of the Public Understanding of Sciences at the University of Oxford, contributes to popular discussion on the matter in English newspapers. For one example, among many other debates and discussions, see *The Daily Telegraph*, March 16, 2002.

³ See Donald Wiebe, *The Politics of Religious Studies: The Continuing Conflict with Theology in the Academy*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1999.

⁴ Most helpful on the secularization debate and its impact on theology are Kieran Flanagan, *The Enchantment of Sociology: A Study of Theology and Culture*, Macmillan, London, 1996, pp. 52–99; Peter Berger, *The Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation*, Collins, London, 1980; and ed. Steve Bruce, *Religion and Modernisation: Sociologists and Historians Debate the Secularisation Thesis*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1992.

⁵ Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Maria Boulding OSB, New York City Press, New York, 1997, 4.1.1, 4.2.1, 4.16.30 and more trenchantly, *Teaching Christianity*, trans. Edmund Hill OP, New York City Press, New York, 1996, 2.26.40, 2.13.20, 2.61.

This removal of the sacred canopy in institutional terms is one definition of secularism and it is one reason why I believe Dawkins and Wiebe are correct. The attendant sense denotes the way in which the process of secularization both creates and is created by various intellectual presuppositions embedded in our intellectual institutions. Of course, institutions do not have ideas, people do. But, through their organization and processes, institutions always reflect ideas about the good, the true, and the worthwhile. By briefly examining the secularizing of the university and the discipline called theology, I hope at least to indicate why Dawkins is correct: theology cannot flourish in the modern university. However, I think Dawkins is also wrong for two reasons. The modern university, like modern secular societies in England and the United States, has a strong commitment to liberal pluralism: cultural, intellectual, and religious diversity. In principle, it should be committed to facilitating real diversity, as opposed to Dawkins's impulse to be rid of it. Further, if theology can argue that it is a real intellectual discipline and requires a different sort of university for its health, and, if it were healthy, would be a contributor to the common good, then in principle, liberals should be willing to entertain funding this alternative university for the common good, and the flourishing of real pluralism. In chapter three I shall be pursuing this argument in some depth, facing a number of serious objections to such a "sectarian" proposal, not least the question of funding, and the problem of the authority under which such a university is finally accountable. In much of this I draw on the experience of Roman Catholic universities in the United States. Every country is different and internally diverse.⁶ However, because I happen to be a Roman Catholic Christian, I

⁶ I deal only with universities in England, as the university system in Scotland and Wales has originated and evolved in differing circumstances. Furthermore, the Colleges of Higher Education have a different history from that of the universities, even though both are part of "higher education." Because of this, I exclude them from consideration, despite their now forming the "new universities." See "Religious Studies in the Universities," covering England (Adrian Cunningham), Scotland (Andrew F. Walls), Wales (Cyril Williams), and the Open University (Terence Thomas), in ed. Ursula King, *Turning Points in Religious Studies*, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1990, pp. 21–67. Ireland is also excluded from this study although it presents a most interesting contrast. The university has developed very differently in Europe and North America. See on this: ed. Sheldon Rothblatt, *The European and American University Since 1800: Historical and Sociological Essays*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993; and for the period before that: ed. James M. Kittelson, *Rebirth, Reform, and Resilience: Universities in Transition, 1300–1700*, Ohio State University Press, Columbus, 1984; and the two-volume work edited by Hilde de Ridder-Symoens, *Universities in Early Modern Europe, 1500–1800*, vol. 1, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992, and vol. 2, 1996. Antonio García y García traces the history of the faculty of theology during this period in volume 1. The practice of theology in the developing world is contextually so different that I do not attempt to engage with this important field.

have focussed more on Catholic universities. This is not intended as an ecumenical gesture, and I do believe that in England there is more chance of a Christian university than a Catholic university, but it is necessary to work out ideas and practice with some sensible focus. I very much hope that Christians of all denominations can find something in this exploration and bring their rich heritage to bear on the question and further the discussion.

But what of Wiebe's proposals? At least, unlike Dawkins, he wishes to retain the place of religion in the university. In the third section of this chapter, I shall be arguing that his type of position is called into question because of its methodological assumptions, shared by Dawkins: that a neutral, objective, rational study is the only method permissible in the university. In fact, I would wish to go further and argue that the discipline of "religious studies," as conceived by some of its major theoreticians, is intellectually flawed, such that it, not theology, has a contestable place in the modern research university. I want to argue that the legitimate place for the study of religions is within a theological religious studies, such that world religions are part of a theological curriculum. As it exists under Wiebe's model, it is a secular study of religions, privileging secularism, over against the objects of study. Wiebe's desire to escape from ideology is utterly ideological. I should make it very clear that I am not contesting religious studies' role in the modern university; rather, I contest some forms of it, regarding their self-description.

Two further clarifications before proceeding with my argument. In this first chapter I shall be making apparently sweeping comments about the modern university. I beg the reader's patience, as in chapter two I attempt to check these comments against empirical studies of universities in the United States and England. For certain readers, it may be worth reading chapter two first if they are unconvinced that there is a problem with the health of theology. Such a reader might say two things: there are Christian universities in the United States, so what is all the fuss about? They may add: Christians, like yourself, argue that it is impossible to do in the modern university precisely what you are doing. Does that not show that the modern university encourages pluralism far more than is admitted in the arguments of this book? To the first question, I respond in chapter two that American Christian research universities have already lost their salt, or are in the process of doing so. They retain their Christian character primarily by having a Mass on holy days, having well-resourced chaplaincies, and being actively involved in social work to the poor and less privileged. These features are very important, and I think they are a vital element of a Christian university, but they are not enough to constitute a Christian university. Many secular universities might boast all three of these features. Further, the deeper question is, how

does the Mass, or prayer meeting, affect the curriculum, the interrelationship of the disciplines, or the research methodologies utilized not only in theology but other disciplines? Very few universities, hardly any among those studied, can answer these questions in any form of thick description. I argue, with a number of significant American scholars, that Christian universities are dying or dead in the United States. The second question is admittedly uncomfortable. Yes, I write this book with research leave from my own secular liberal university, Bristol, and my colleagues generously tolerate my writing suggesting that our department be closed down. I also enjoy good rigorous conversation with colleagues within the university who come at issues from very different angles. I am not arguing that the modern liberal university be closed, but rather that alternative universities be encouraged alongside it, to facilitate long-term serious intellectual pluralism. Such universities can train new generations in alternative intellectual traditions of theory and practice, rather than perpetuating a single non-sacred intellectual canopy. Currently there is a worrying (although predictable) homogeneity, and a real commitment to pluralism is better served by training those who are different (from the secularist) to develop their traditions rigorously. This issue will be dealt with both at the end of this chapter and in the first section of chapter three.

II On (Not) Doing Theology in the Modern University

Let me now turn to plotting the narrative of theology in its pre-university days and then from the thirteenth century, its university career, which has lasted until today. Theology became deeply transformed from the fourteenth century on, with particular seismic movements in the Reformation of the sixteenth century and the Renaissance, and the earthquake of the seventeenth century with the rise of the new natural sciences. The nineteenth century was the decisive turning point, although the seeds for that moment had been planted much earlier, with the new Enlightenment research university founded in Berlin. Theology lived under a very dark cloud.

The four aspects that I shall focus on are as follows. First, I will show how the discipline of theology becomes separated from the practices that are required for its undertaking: prayer, sacraments, and virtue. Second, in rough tandem, but not with exact parallels, I will trace how university theology became prised from ecclesial life so that it now often succumbed to alien philosophies, methodologies, and models for its very life-blood, a blood that would subsequently infect Church life. Admittedly, this has

happened throughout the history of the Church. Third, I will focus on theology's role as queen of the sciences. It provided patterns for the unity of the disciplines and argued that the *telos* of all knowledge was the glorification of God. I shall chart the massive eclipse of this role so that theology now struggles to retain a place in the modern research university. Fourth, and due to the above pressures, I will (in the next section) see how this history eventually led to the Oedipal configuration between theology and religious studies, so that the latter claimed Enlightenment privileges and sought to exclude theology from the university.

The parameters of this survey require emphasis. The history of theological education is complex and vast and all I can do is provide snapshots, making observations and illustrating an argument.⁷ Further, I only draw from the Latin tradition—and the rich history of the eastern churches cannot be examined at all, and nor can the wider tradition of the universities within the Muslim, Buddhist, and Hindu contexts.⁸

The history of institutional theology is tied to the patronage of the Church. However, “theology” had pre-Christian roots in Greek culture. The Greek word *θεολογία* (the “science of God,” or “words about God”) is found in both Plato (427–347 BC) and Aristotle (384–322 BC) pertaining to gods or eternal principles. Plato, in the *Republic* (379A), gives an ordered account of the gods, and in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (XI, 1, 1025 a. 19; 1026 a 19–22), he explains the principle of the cosmos's existence in terms of an unmoved mover. Christians would rework these accounts, sometimes not successfully. The role of the unifying power of the gods in relation to other disciplines (curriculum structure) and the role of knowledge was also subject to intense debate in Greek culture. These issues would also be

⁷ I am indebted to: Aidan Nichols, *The Shape of Catholic Theology*, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1991; R. Latourelle, *Theology: Science of Salvation*, trans. Sr. Mary Dominic, St. Paul's, Slough, 1969 [1968]; G. VanAckeren, “Theology” in the *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, vol. 14; P. De Letter, “Theology, History of” in the *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, vol. 14; Yves Congar, *A History of Theology*, trans. Hunter Gutherie, Doubleday, Garden City, New York, 1968; David Kelsey, *Between Athens and Berlin: The Theological Education Debate*, W. B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1993; and Arthur F. Holmes, *Building the Christian Academy*, W. B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2001.

⁸ For instance, Muslim universities started with the University of Cairo in 970 and were also established with theology as the organizing subject (with the important exceptions of Ma'mūn in Baghdad and the Fātimids in Cairo). See F. E. Peters, *Aristotle and the Arabs: The Aristotelian Tradition in Islam*, New York University Press, New York, 1968. The positive role of Islam in the development of the western university cannot be underestimated. But the question is relevant in contemporary western society. For example, Peter Steinfeld reports briefly on the existence of Jewish, Muslim, and Buddhist forms of higher education in the United States, in *A People Adrift*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 2003, p. 145.

central concerns for the Christian tradition. Positions repeated to the present day are often to be found in Greek culture. Hence, Gorgias' emphasis on rhetoric and speech being all-important, or Protagoras' argument that man is the measure of all, or Socrates' scathing criticism of the Sophists' relativism and his concerns for virtue and truth, or Plato's emphasis on learning as wisdom, necessary for a just society and a just ruler, or Isocrates' "humanism," or Aristotle's "liberal" (*eleutheros*) education, indicating its necessity for "freemen," not slaves. Hence, the question of education for utility, aestheticism, liberalism, its own sake, the good of society, and truth (all in different hues) was thoroughly debated.⁹

The earliest Christian theologians were the New Testament writers, not conducting their work from any institutions of learning but from communities of practice, with varying educational backgrounds. In the patristic period (first to eighth century), the nearest thing to the university was the Nestorians in the Persian city of Nisibis in the fifth century, forming an institute of learning, teaching, and research, that is reputed to have inspired Cassiodorus' monastic school at Vivarium.¹⁰ In this period, three strands emerge regarding the relation of theology to other disciplines. The first stresses that all truth and salvation is to be found in the Bible, therefore pagan knowledge is fundamentally useless. What has Jerusalem to do with Athens? This view is often associated with Tertullian (c.160–225), although in his writings he is far more nuanced.¹¹ The second, containing rich internal diversity, sees the Greek philosophical heritage as *preparatio* (preparation) and *paidagogos* (an education finally aiming at Christ). Origen (c.185–254) uses the metaphor of the ransack of the Egyptians for the future of Israel, so that all learning could in principle be turned to the service of God.¹² Earlier, Justin Martyr (c.100–165) had understood the seed of the logos as explaining such knowledge, after abandoning the position that the Greeks had read Moses or met some of the Old Testament prophets. The later giants Augustine, less so, and Aquinas, more so, belong to this strand. The third strand, at least in the eyes of the first and second, adopted Greek philosophy uncritically, so that it shaped the Christian message, rather than the Christian message critically employing conceptualities and categories from the Greeks and thereby transforming them. This led to heresy. Origen

⁹ See Henri Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity*, Sheed & Ward, New York, 1956, and Werner Jaeger, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*, trans. Gilbert Highet, 3 vols., Oxford University Press, New York, 1944.

¹⁰ See George Every, *Early Eastern Christianity*, SCM, London, 1980, pp. 77–9.

¹¹ For Tertullian and the Fathers, see Henri de Lubac, *The Church: Paradox and Mystery*, trans. James R. Dunne, Alba House, Staten Island, New York, 1969 [1967], ch. 4.

¹² Origen, *Commentarium in Joannem*, I. 24; II. 34.

was considered guilty of this, as was Arius, and in Aquinas's time, the Latin Averroësists and indeed Aquinas himself. After surveying the patristic period, Aidan Nichols writes that "in the ancient Church there were almost no theological academies dedicated to the systematic study of the subject."¹³ Clearly, this does not mean that theology was in any way stifled; indeed, the opposite is true.

Augustine's (354–430) complex dialectical position would be a major shaper of the educational tradition.¹⁴ On the one hand, he despised much of his own classical education, arguing that the academies led to self-glorification and self-advancement, and pagan knowledge itself was untruth.¹⁵ On the other, he was to embark on an unfinished project to show how all of the seven liberal arts were important in exemplifying eternal archetypes in the mind of God. He only partly completed his study *On Music*. His *On Christian Doctrine* exemplified the usefulness of liberal arts in the reading of scripture, thereby turning all knowledge toward praise of God, a theme that would be central to Christian visions of knowledge. Augustine would be claimed by strands one and two, perhaps most powerfully by Aquinas in his synthesis of Augustine with Aristotle. The Emperor Justinian's closure of all pagan institutions in 529 "cleared" the field for Christian institutions of learning, and from the eighth century on, monasteries, convents, and cathedrals were to be the site of this new knowledge.

The Carolingian Renaissance, in the reign of Charlemagne (768–814), with brilliant educational advisors like Alcuin and Theodulf of Orléans, saw the emergence of education within monastic or convent settings, and also in the cities, under the wing of the cathedrals. Charlemagne's Palace School was probably the first school to give a classical education to significant numbers of laity, and involved the seven liberal arts, the learning of psalms, chanting, and grammar. These schools represented the first major institutional move that would later, in part, transmute into the university, widening the curriculum, but losing the monastic context. This new site of production had a number of strengths and weaknesses. Its greatest strength was the unity of theology with prayer and practice. While some monastic theologians were little interested in life outside the monastery or in the

¹³ Nichols, *Shape*, p. 282.

¹⁴ See the very nuanced accounts of Kevin L. Hughes, "The 'Arts Reputed Liberal': Augustine on the Perils of Liberal Education" in eds. Kim Paffenroth and Kevin L. Hughes, *Augustine and Liberal Education*, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2000, pp. 95–110; and Fredrick van Fleteren, "St. Augustine, Neoplatonism, and the Liberal Arts: The Background to *De doctrina christiana*" in eds. Duane W. H. Arnold and Pamela Bright, "*De doctrina christiana*": A Classic of Western Culture, Notre Dame University, Notre Dame, Indiana, 1995, pp. 14–24.

¹⁵ *Confessions* 4.1.1; 4.2.1.

liberal arts of the classical world, most of its best theologians, such as Aelred, William of Auberive, and Geoffrey of Auxerre, utilized the disciplines and traditions of the pagan world, while Christianizing them through this process (strand two above). A second strength was that the monastic site of theology allowed a limited theological education to women in some of the convents and schools, whereas the creation of the university excluded women from the institutions of theological learning.¹⁶ It was in a cathedral school that Abelard taught Heloise. It has been noted that the convents were a “refuge for female intellectuals, as the monastery was for the male. Although the majority of nuns were at best literate, most of the learned women of the Middle Ages—the literary, artistic, scientific, and philosophical stars were nuns.”¹⁷ Such stars, bringing together many branches of learning in theological wisdom, were women such as Roswitha of Gandersheim, Hildegard of Bingen, and Herrad of Landsberg. Of course, whether women were admitted to the sacred discipline or not, it was still a clerical monopoly. The canonical definition of “clerical” in 1231 excluded women from being considered clerics, as they had been up until then, and further, only permitted masters and students of the universities to be clerics. A third strength, according to Jean Leclercq, was that the monastic setting allowed theologians to discern more quickly the abuses in the employment of dialectics in *university* theological reflection, an employment that was considered a hallmark of university scholasticism.¹⁸ Leclercq goes so far as to say that scholastic university theology, being wedded to the form of disputation and dialectics, eventually “lost contact with the life of prayer.”¹⁹ This loss would eventually lead to the slow divorce between “knowledge and love, science and contemplation, intellectual life and spiritual life” and it would then become necessary to construct categories of mystical and spiritual theology, the worse for their separation from dogmatic theology.²⁰ While there was admittedly what Grabmann has called “hyperdialectic” in university scholasticism, it would be wrong to characterize scholasticism in such

¹⁶ On the contribution of women to theology in this period, see Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion*, Zone Books, New York, 1992.

¹⁷ Frances Gies and Joseph Gies, *Women in the Middle Ages*, Thomas Y. Crowell, New York, 1978, p. 65.

¹⁸ See Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture*, trans. Catherine Misrahi, Fordham University Press, Fordham, New York, 1960 [1957], esp., pp. 189–231, 202, for a masterly overview of the background to the medieval monastic context of the study of theology.

¹⁹ Leclercq, *Theology and Prayer*, St. Meinrad Seminary, Indiana, 1962, p. 13.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

manner, as we shall see shortly.²¹ However, Leclercq's point is still pertinent to my argument, rather because of the *telos* of the institutional setting, than of any inherent quality of scholasticism or dialectics, a point that Leclercq admits elsewhere.²²

The twelfth century saw theology slowly moving out of the monastery and cathedral school into the university. By the thirteenth century, the University of Paris was ecclesiastically established, with what is often called the Magna Carta of the university, Gregory XI's bull *Parens Scientiarum* (1231). Soon the new *studium generales* took root across Europe. The curriculum at the University of Paris was very significant, both in its vision of the relation of the disciplines, with theology as queen of the sciences, and in its actual failure to provide the unity of knowledge. The division of the faculties in the University of Paris generated complex cross-currents. The faculties were structured into the "inferior": arts (made up of the *trivium*, where three roads meet, grammar, rhetoric, and logic; and the *quadrivium*, made up of arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy), followed by the "superior": canon law, medicine, and theology. The benefit of such division was the assumption that all the disciplines were founded on a common unifying principle: that creation was from God, ordered, for the good of man, and to be used as such. Each discipline's methods and objects of study were carefully defined and developed. All the disciplines were subject to theological unification, and sometimes, theological correction. The latter was not always fruitful, and sometimes misused.

However, in the division of faculties lay also the seeds of the fragmentation of knowledge. Prudence Allen argues that the University of Paris's experiment would lead to a disastrous outcome, despite its own intentions. She argues that the fragmentation of the disciplines actually resulted from the poor implementation of a rich vision of an organic whole. In the practices of the University of Paris the parts were not held together. The four faculties of arts, theology, medicine, and law were designed to operate in harmony, in the service of God, the Church, and civic society. All students would start with the seven liberal arts and then proceed to an equivalent postgraduate study in theology, medicine, and law (divided into civil and canon law), with students often studying in faculties other than their own. Hence, the key role of philosophy (embedded in the arts) was central to the training and development in the three other faculties. However, Allen argues that

²¹ Grabmann, *The Spirit of the Scholastic Method*, 1911, pp. 98–100, cited in Leclercq, *Theology and Prayer*, p. 202.

²² Leclercq, *Love of Learning*, pp. 212, 218.

once the institutional separation of branches of knowledge was made, a slow but steady rupture in the unity of knowledge began to occur. Controversial questions began to bring the different faculties into conflict with one another. Ultimately, university education became more and more fragmented until philosophy became cut off from theology, medicine, or law.²³

Theology became detached from the other faculties, thereby instigating the currents that led to the modern university. The circumstances that brought about these effects are complex. For example, the fact that revelation was the proper object of theology led to laws in the 1270s, prohibiting philosophers from discussing God. A law, it should be added, passed by the Faculty of Arts.²⁴ The same happened with medicine, with a law prohibiting clerics from studying medicine, based on the distinction between the soul (the province of theology) and the body (the province of medicine). Clerics, it was argued, should not be led away from their proper area of concern. The same happened with civil law and theology. Allen concludes:

This process of fragmentation has continued to the present time. Universities now consist of a plethora of disciplines all vying for the central place in the determination of truth. Aristotle had correctly argued for the need to make significant distinctions in the search for truth. However, the institutionalization of Aristotle turned these distinctions into rigidly defined areas of knowledge that made a unified approach to the person nearly impossible. The shadow of the institutionalization of Aristotle haunts the corridors of the contemporary academic world like a ghost from the thirteenth-century University of Paris.²⁵

This fragmentation of the person, and of the spheres of human and divine reality, was to remain embedded in the institutions that transmitted knowledge, with some exceptions. This *telos* would evolve, with the addition of new factors, into the Enlightenment university.

A second development in the university was the development and flowering of Scholasticism. Scholasticism can be traced back to Augustine, who stressed the need of dialectics in studying Christian doctrine. It ran through some of the "Schools" and received important formulation from Anselm (c.1033–1109), who inspired the *Sentences*, the first really systematic arrangement of theological questions, citing biblical and patristic authorities

²³ Prudence Allen RSM, *The Concept of Woman: The Aristotelian Revolution 750 BC–AD 1250*, Eden Press, Quebec, 1985, p. 417.

²⁴ See John F. Wippel, "The Condemnation of 1270 and 1277 at Paris," *The Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 7, 1977, pp. 169–201.

²⁵ Allen, *The Concept of Woman*, p. 419.

(*auctoritas*) on a question, followed by rational disputation (*ratio*) to settle conflicts and create harmonization. Abelard (1079–1142) refined the *quaestio*, *interrogatio*, and *disputatio* methods and Albert the Great and his pupil Thomas Aquinas (c.1225–74) probably represent the high point of Scholasticism. Scholasticism is important in my narrative for two reasons. First, dialectics becomes firmly established as part of Christian education, giving an important role to *ratio*, thereby providing a bridge between all forms of knowledge and learning and Christian revelation. This was embodied in Aquinas's great synthesis of the Aristotelian and Augustinian traditions in Thomism, providing an important role for philosophy, adequately Christianized, to expound doctrine. It also allowed Aquinas to relate the different disciplines and show the role of the virtues (both intellectual and moral) in education.²⁶ It also showed in practice how all knowledge can be integrated, critically, into the Christian vision. Aristotle, Islamic appropriations of Aristotle, and Greek philosophy are all brought to the aid of Christian theology in Aquinas. My own book flows out of this tradition.

Second, Aquinas offers an alternative to Nominalism, although historically Nominalism was very influential. Many argue that Nominalism sowed the seeds of secularism and atheism. Ockham's (c.1285–1347) version of Nominalism (rather than Roscellinus's) asserts that no universal can actually be found in reality, but only in the human mind. This would mean that God could not be conceptually understood, and was solely a reality based on revelation. But this sundering of reason, reality, and deity would eventually lead to fideism and its opposite, atheism. The role of Nominalism, as Francis Martin points out, is of course key to the transmission of the idea of a secular universe, with Duns Scotus's attempt to show that being was univocal, a property shared by both God and the creature. The consequence of this was that being could eventually be explained without recourse to God and seen as entirely autonomous.²⁷ Milbank sees Scotus as central to the *telos* of modernity.²⁸ In contrast, Milbank extols Aquinas's analogical understanding of

²⁶ See *Summa contra Gentiles*, Bk II, chs 2–4; *Summa Theologiae*, I–1, q. 1; a. 1–10, q. 57.

²⁷ Francis Martin, *The Feminist Question: Feminist Theology in the Light of Christian Tradition*, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1994, pp. 49–52.

²⁸ See John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1990, pp. 302–6, and Gillian Rose, *Dialectics of Nihilism: Post-Structuralism and Law*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1984, pp. 104–7. However, note the important reading of Scotus by Richard Cross, "Where Angels Fear to Tread: Duns Scotus and Radical Orthodoxy," *Antonianum*, 76, 2001, pp. 7–41, who rightly questions Scotus's attributed role. Hans Urs von Balthasar also positions Ockham as key to the fragmentation of the disciplines and the internal implosion of theology, which now could only be "practical" and "fideistic" as it is removed from all other forms of knowledge. See *The Glory of the Lord: The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age*, vol. V, trans. Oliver Davies et al., Ignatius Press, San Francisco, California, 1991 [1965], pp. 9–47, esp. pp. 19–21.

being, a strategy that allows for the radical difference between God and creation, and at the same time, the participation of creation with God. However, this Thomist line with which I agree (and there are of course many Thomisms²⁹) is contested, as is the question as to whether Ockham, rather than Scotus, is really the villain. It is unnecessary to settle these questions here, except to point out that Scholasticism is often falsely associated with hyper-dialectic and rationalism, when in fact its best representatives mark a brilliant Christian integration of the role of reason in relation to revelation. Leclercq's emphasis on disputation alone in his criticism of Scholasticism conceals the critical-confessional enterprise of Thomism.³⁰ Of course, there were problems with Scholasticism in its emphasis on logic and dialectics, rather than languages and literature, on reason rather than metaphor and poetry, the emphasis favoured in the Renaissance, and by Reformers like Luther.

Nevertheless, despite a very complex reality, at the beginnings of the European university, *both* those who taught and those who learnt in the university believed their task was in service to God, Church, and society.³¹ Despite all these swirling cross-currents set in motion with the creation of the university, there are three important positive elements that followed from thirteenth-century Paris. First, the university would be a place of considered disputation, a location for rational argument, embedded within a tradition, to flourish and develop in engagement with rival traditions. A distorted fragment of this tradition is developed in the modern secular university, a place of rational discussion, without adequate attention to tradition-specific forms of enquiry or the *telos* of *ratio*. I will develop this point below. Second, even though university theology was the preserve of male clerics, the location of theology in the university meant that eventually in the Enlightenment university, lay theological education could develop, which would also be gender-inclusive. Third, theology was given a prime place in harmonizing and integrating the other three faculties of arts, medicine, and law. At least the vision of a proper relation between the disciplines

²⁹ See Fergus Kerr, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism*, Blackwell, Oxford, 2002.

³⁰ See MacIntyre's insistence that Thomism was both confessional and dialectical, in *Three Rival Versions*, p. 201. Colin Gunton misreads Aquinas in *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993, pp. 138–42; and for a persuasive defense, see Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, pp. 380–438.

³¹ See Hastings Rashdall, *The Universities in the Middle Ages*, 3 vols., new edn., Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1963, esp. vol. 1, ch. 5. See also Stephen C. Ferruolo, *The Origins of the University*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 1985, and for the parallel origins in the UK, see Alan B. Cobban, *The Medieval English Universities: Oxford and Cambridge to c.1500*, Scolar Press, Aldershot, 1988, esp. pp. 209–38.

had become institutionally embedded. However, as Allen, Martin, and Leclercq have argued, a price was to be paid on all three fronts: theology became disassociated from prayer and contemplation, it was eventually possible to do theology without any Christian commitment, and the establishment of the Aristotelian divisions provided the possibility for the modern fragmentation of the disciplines.

The Reformation was to shake the structures of university theology in limited ways. First, theology faculties and universities were now divided along Protestant and Catholic lines. Hence, ancient universities such as Oxford and Cambridge, from their Catholic foundations, came explicitly to exclude Roman Catholics, just as Catholic institutions excluded Protestants. When such exclusions were eventually repealed at Oxford and Cambridge in the nineteenth century, with exceptions for the Faculties of Divinity, they reflected the structural implementation of secularism, not an ecumenical renewal with an open Christian university. There were both advantages and problems with this Reformation divide. One such advantage, noted by MacIntyre, is that such exclusions “provided some of the necessary preconditions for the Thomistic revival and thereby for the reappropriation of Aquinas’s dialectical enterprise.”³² These exclusions allowed for the flowerings of the distinct Protestant and Roman Catholic theological traditions, even if the Calvinists remained essentially scholastic following Calvin’s own Catholic tradition. It was Luther who was to steer the Reformation into a very different mold, with Catholicism initially reacting defensively, and only in the modern period taking on and developing some of Luther’s positive themes (theology as salvation, theology of the cross), while robustly rejecting the anti-metaphysical tradition generated from Luther.³³ If these denominational universities contained mixed blessings, they both began to have something in common, which brings me to the second point.

Nichols writes that “perhaps the most lasting result of the period from 1500 to 1700 was the rise of theological specialization.”³⁴ This was a result of many factors: rapidly expanding knowledge through the age of discovery (by Europeans) of new worlds, the emergence of the natural sciences, the rise of Humanism, and eventually, with the emergence of the middle classes in the nineteenth century, the growth of professionalism within the universities.³⁵

³² MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions*, p. 224.

³³ The Lutheran tradition is well served and rehabilitated in the excellent work of Gerhard Ebeling, *The Study of Theology*, trans. Duane A. Priebe, Collins, London, 1979 [1975].

³⁴ Nichols, *Shape*, p. 318.

³⁵ This latter is perceptively traced in American culture by Burton J. Bledstein, *The Culture of Professionalism: The Middle Class and the Development of Higher Education in America*, W. W. Norton, New York, 1976.

But specialisms would have a huge effect on the internal disintegration of theology, as of other disciplines that were undergoing rapid internal diversification. For example, the sixteenth century sees, for the first time, distinct treatises on moral theology written mainly by Jesuits for priests. In themselves, they represent remarkable achievements, but their form dictated a focus on morals divorced from grace and dogmatics. In Thomas's *Summa Theologiae*, morals and grace were dealt with together. The result of such specialism is that morality would eventually be given the aura of autonomy, separate from grace and God, a move that was consolidated through the Enlightenment. Of course no Jesuit author would have intended such a trajectory, but the institutional settings could easily work against individual intentions.

The earthquake of the seventeenth century with the development of the natural sciences cannot be underestimated, although the hostility between religion and science is often overestimated. I will return to this theme in chapter six, but for the moment it is worth noting three important effects of the growing dominance of science on the development of theology. First, as Michael Buckley has argued, theologians too often tried to defend theology from scientific criticism on scientific grounds or in purely philosophical terms, rather than Christological or experiential grounds.³⁶ This eventually assimilated theology to science, and in this process, theology lost sight of its different method and object: "Theology gives way to Cartesianism, which gives way to Newtonian mechanics. The great argument, the only evidence for theism, is design, and experimental physics reveals that design."³⁷ This is a version of what I called the third strand. The roots of atheism were partly planted by theologians, who failed to be theological enough. Second, this assimilation also ran in tandem with the mathematization of the disciplines, whereby subjects strove to be "scientific" (in a natural scientific sense), eventually finding institutionalization in the University of Berlin, the model of the Enlightenment research university. Third, this process across the disciplines, and within theology itself, led to the phenomena whereby the New Testament would become subject to positivist sciences, initially historical-critical methods. This, when employed as the major hermeneutical tool, would further erode the recovery of theology's unique object of study: God, as revealed in history. Nicholas Lash discussing both Buckley's thesis and Hans Frei, writes that in the seventeenth-century context

³⁶ Michael J. Buckley, *At the Origins of Modern Atheism*, Yale University Press, New Haven, Connecticut, 1987, pp. 65–6 makes clear how theologians like Lessius and Mersenne rebutted atheism as if it were a "philosophic stance towards life" rather than a "rejection of Jesus Christ as the supreme presence of god [sic] in history."

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

we are evidently already in the presence of what Hans Frei called the “great reversal,” that shift in interpretative strategy as a result of which theological interpretation became “a matter of fitting the biblical story into another world” (namely, the world now taken to be constituted by those ranges of experience deemed open to any human being) “rather than incorporating that world into the biblical story.” In the self-assured world of modernity, people seek to make sense of the Scriptures, instead of hoping, with the aid of Scripture, to make some sense of themselves.³⁸

Hans Frei sees the “great reversal” which shifted theology out of its ecclesial context embedded in the design of the University of Berlin at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Berlin was designed to reflect the “research university” along the lines of the Enlightenment vision of education.³⁹ In this respect, it intentionally defined itself against the earlier model of *paideia* which had characterized ecclesial forms of education (and dominant forms of pre-Christian Greek education) and instead emphasized a critical, orderly, and disciplined science of research. That is, no texts or ways of reading them were to be seen as authoritative because of spiritual authority or traditions deeming them so. Rather, all texts were to be critically scrutinized, using methods that were accessible to all rational men, and methods that could allow the repetition of tests to authenticate and establish results. In this sense, theology, whose authority rested on revelation, was an obvious problem for the University of Berlin and there was considerable controversy about its inclusion in the new research university.

It was only through the genius of Schleiermacher (1768–1834) that theology made it into the university, but on the easily corrosive grounds that it was important for professional training, rather than arguing its status as a “science,” let alone queen of the sciences.⁴⁰ In this sense Schleiermacher conceded the most important point. He argued that just as medicine and law

³⁸ Nicholas Lash, *The Beginning and End of “Religion,”* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996, pp. 147–8. He cites Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics*, Yale University Press, New Haven, Connecticut, 1974, p. 130 (citations), and see also pp. 51, 325.

³⁹ For the situation of the German universities at the time, see Daniel Fallon, *The German University*, Colorado University Press, Boulder, 1980.

⁴⁰ In 1808 Schleiermacher published (the untranslated) *Thoughts on German Universities from a German Point of View* and in 1810, *Brief Outline on the Study of Theology*, trans. Terrence N. Tice, John Knox Press, Richmond, Virginia, 1966 [1811]. For the historical context, see Martin Redeker, *Schleiermacher: Life and Thought*, trans. John Wellauer, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1973 [1968], III. 2 and IV. B. See also Hans Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, Yale University Press, New Haven, Connecticut, 1992, where he carefully charts aspects of the debate generated by Schleiermacher's proposals in “Appendix A: Theology in the University,” pp. 95–132.

were included in the university, the historical and philosophical study of theology was also justified, for these disciplines provided the materials for a theological training that was required for ministers of the Church. However, there were strong criticisms of theology from the very disciplines to which it sought to ally itself: history and philosophy. Kant, like Fichte after him, could only tolerate theology as the practical working out of the truths available in philosophy via universal reason in a transcendental mode (Kant), or in an idealist philosophy (Fichte).⁴¹ Later philosophies would replicate this pattern: Marxism, feminism, postmodernism. Likewise, positivist history demanded theology be reined in by its methods and findings (Harnack and Strauss) and to this would be added postmodern reading strategies.⁴² It is not that theology cannot learn from these disciplines, but that it cannot be ruled and made to conform to them. Judging the dividing line is a complex matter. Nevertheless, the Enlightenment university began the process of translating theology into its own philosophical, natural scientific, or social analysis modalities. The Enlightenment *Wissenschaft* dictated to theology the preconditions and limits of its enquiry and also regulated its agenda. The question of the subservience of theology to secular disciplines would not be resolved formally, although the increasing secularity of the university institutionally favored one party over the other in subsequent debates.

The genealogical picture is extremely complicated, but there are two main points I wish to emphasize as an outcome of the above. First, the secularization of theology was a process that reached its culmination in the nineteenth century and we now live in the shadow of the "great reversal" embodied in the history of the Enlightenment, such that institutional university theology bears many of the marks of this secularized process. As we shall see in a later chapter, one such mark was the ascendance of alien methods and disciplines as the definitive interpreters of scripture, tradition, and authority. The ascendancy of historical positivism also explains the inevitable rise of the history of religions school, transferring its hermeneutical strategies designed for

⁴¹ See Kant, "The Conflict of the Faculties" in *Religion and Rational Theology*, trans. Allen W. Wood and George di Giovanni, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996, pp. 233–9.

⁴² See Stephen F. Fowl, "Introduction" in ed. Stephen F. Fowl, *The Theological Interpretation of Scripture*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1997, pp. xii–xxx with good reference to US scholarship in this field. See also the excellent overview of New Testament scholarship as falling into three camps: (1) historical critical (Philip Davies, Heikki Räisänen, Werner Jeanrond); (2) Christian theological (Peter Stuhlmacher, Brevard Childs, Francis Watson); and (3) postmodern (David Clines, Anthony Thiselton, Stephen Moore), with an argument similar to my own, regarding the shortcomings of the first and third: Markus Bockmuehl, "'To Be or Not to Be': The Possible Futures of New Testament Scholarship," *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 51, 1998, pp. 271–306. However, at the last moment Bockmuehl steps back from the implications of his argument, fearing sectarianism (p. 291).

reading ancient texts to interpret texts used in living traditions, such as the New Testament, but without reference to its traditional forms of exegesis like the multiple senses of scripture and the role of the Holy Spirit for proper exegesis. This was of course one of the major contentions between Karl Barth and Adolf Harnack.⁴³ Harnack's historical positivist reading of theology would eventually result in the emergence of "religious studies," as we shall see in the next section.

Second, while various intellectuals within the university have constantly alerted theologians to this situation, the significance of this crisis in requiring a new type of university has been less fully explored. This is in part due to very pragmatic pressures: university culture in England and the United States is in deep recession, with funding ever tighter and a market-led economy becoming pervasive, even in the Ivy League institutions; departments of theology being a major casualty, such that for theologians to argue for alternative universities might almost seem tragi-comic, or aptly, farce. Without minimizing these pressures, it must be said that one of the reasons for this crisis in funding and support of university education is precisely that large numbers of the general public and the intelligentsia schooled in such institutions can see very little use for the universities. Apart from professional training (law, medicine, engineering, and so on), and scientific research where results are tangible, produce revenue, and finance themselves, the Arts are seen increasingly as a luxury. In 2003 the Minister for Education in Tony Blair's British Labour government publicly said that the study of medieval texts was a luxury that could not be justified from public funding.⁴⁴ This is hardly surprising, for when the university becomes part of the instrumentalist culture of modernity and the fragmentation of the disciplines is so complete, their importance and interrelation are not even debated by the British government. Later, I shall turn to the major exploration of the question of the need for a post-liberal university, in the work of MacIntyre.

Hence, to draw this story to a provisional conclusion, we have seen how theology started as part of the ecclesial practice within small communities, then engaged with the great currents of Hellenistic philosophy, not from any organized institutional base, but in an *ad hoc* manner. Later, in the monasteries and cathedral schools it was wedded to prayer and the practice of contemplation and love, and later it became established as the "queen of the sciences" in thirteenth-century Paris, faith taking on a positive and constructive relation to reason and the other disciplines, even if this synthesis was not always achieved well and the university emphasis on dialectics

⁴³ See their exchanges in James M. Robinson, *The Beginnings of Dialectical Theology*, John Knox Press, Richmond, Virginia, 1968, pp. 165–87.

⁴⁴ See *The Guardian*, Monday, May 12, 2003.

sometimes lost its ecclesial moorings. The Reformation saw denominational flowerings, although perpetuating the scandal of disunity among Christians. However, in an increasingly secularized culture, theology was finally symbolically toppled at the University of Berlin, so that it would, if fortunate, eventually be part of the liberal arts, not a faculty on its own, and then be eclipsed by religious studies. In brief: from Queen of the Sciences to the laughing stock of the Arts Faculty.⁴⁵

In relation to my four concerns, I hope to have traced the historical context for the following. First, the way in which the discipline of theology became separated from the practices that are required for its proper undertaking: prayer, sacraments, and virtue. It would be correct to say that the epistemological precondition for theology was the community of the Church and the Spirit.⁴⁶ Second, the way university theology became assimilated to alien methodologies, philosophies, and sciences, so that the very intellectuals who might safeguard the Church from de-Christianization often accelerated the process. Rather than “incorporating the world into the biblical story,” theology became more and more a “matter of fitting the biblical story into another world” (which was constructed by secular modernity and “policed” by its rules and methodology).⁴⁷ Third, the way in which theology and philosophy’s mediating role to discern the *telos* and unity of the different disciplines has almost totally disappeared, so that fragmentation, competitive professionalism, and utilitarianism in the universities have no check. Fourth, this scenario would not only relegate theology to the margins, but also threaten its very existence with the Enlightenment discipline of “religious studies.”

Many readers will of course breathe a sigh of relief at these changes, and I do not want to turn the clock back—for that is in one sense impossible.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ See the English Catholic novelist, David Lodge, *Paradise News*, Secker & Warburg, London, 1991.

⁴⁶ See Aidan Nichols OP, “The Habit of Theology, and How to Acquire It,” *The Downside Review*, 105, 1987, pp. 247–59; and the aptly entitled, *Instruction on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian*, CTS/Veritas, London/Dublin, 1990, issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. I shall return to this latter document in the next chapter.

⁴⁷ See Frei, *Eclipse*, p. 130; and John Milbank’s critical reconstruction of this process in *Theology and Social Theory*, esp. Part II: “Theology and Positivism,” pp. 51–143, which accounts for my reference to “policing.”

⁴⁸ See Dorothy L. Sayers, “The Lost Tools of Learning,” *National Review*, January 19, 1979, pp. 90–9, who wants to go “back to the Middle Ages,” for we must distinguish, “Does ‘go back’ mean a retrogression in time, or the revision of an error? The first is clearly impossible *per se*; the second is a thing which wise men do every day” (p. 93). Sayers’s argument is persuasive except that she minimizes the many good things that modernity has introduced into education (including opportunities for women, like herself), and oddly abandons theology’s synthesizing role at the end of the trivium for no apparent reason (see p. 99).

Instead, I only want to suggest that what masquerades as theology cannot intellectually and historically meet the description. What now exists is simply a study of texts that are concerned with religious matters. Strictly speaking, one cannot claim that theology departments are there to help teach people to theologize better and become virtuous. What is denied to theology departments is allowed to many others. History departments can claim to produce good historians, and English departments will often actively encourage “creative writing” within the academic curriculum. However, it is difficult to find a theology prospectus in England that claims to produce “good theologians.”

III On the Secular Respectability of Doing Religious Studies

In England, as in the United States and Europe, a number of factors are worth noting in tracing the production of religious studies as both bed-fellow and successor to theology in the 1960s. In what follows I will refer to England to avoid generalizations. My contention is that religious studies in England adapted secular methodologies (positivist history and neutral enquiry) as key to the study of religion, contesting that it, not theology, was the proper subject to be embedded in the emerging modern university. Clearly, while the contexts are very different, some of the points here will be applicable more widely. The Oedipal configuration of “bed-fellow” and “successor” is not random, for religious studies explicitly claims to cohabit the academic territory with theology, but if taken seriously, implicitly seeks its destruction for it must rightly claim Christianity as its object of investigation, in the same manner as it claims Buddhism or Islam as its objects. Hence, at best, religious studies subconsciously desires to seize and control the academic territory regarding the “divine” from theology. As a prominent religious studies supporter notes: the “theological establishment is therefore, a problem in that it is a kind of conceptual albatross around the neck of religious studies.”⁴⁹ The albatross became extinct! Despite this claim, it would be intriguing to know what would change in the practice

⁴⁹ Ninian Smart, “Religious Studies in the United Kingdom,” *Religion*, 18, 1988, p. 8. For a more militant North American version of Smart, see Donald Wiebe, *The Politics of Religious Studies*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1999. Wiebe considers Smart to be a collaborator with theology in suggesting empathy is compatible with objectivity (p. 66), and likewise criticizes the American Academy of Religion (p. 248). Wiebe, like Smart, also exalts science, neutrality, and objectivity. See Kieran Flanagan’s powerful critique of “Religious Studies” in “Theological Pluralism: A Sociological Critique” in ed. Ian Hamnett, *Religious Pluralism and Unbelief: Studies*

and curriculum in theology departments were they to metamorphose overnight to religious studies departments. I suspect very little.

The increasing secularity of theology in the 1960s, both institutionally and methodologically, produced a situation where many felt that what actually existed in the practice of theology was the study of religion. Historical accidents meant that the religion so selected was Christianity. In the context of England's multi-religious nature, its colonial conquests, and the growth of Indology, many argued that religions other than Christianity should be taught. If the study of religion was an academic specialty, it seemed right and obvious that to limit the menu to Christianity was parochial, to say the least. This trajectory was predictable in the Enlightenment's resistance to the particularity of Christian revelation. By this, I do not mean that the proper study of theology can be done in isolation from engagement with world religions, nor that other religions should not mount analogous arguments to the ones here presented. I am simply outlining the manner in which modernity came to homogenize the university. Furthermore, students in the period of the introduction of religious studies to the universities, in the late 1960s, were increasingly from secularized backgrounds. The attraction of Buddhism and Hinduism to these consumers, aligned with the Romantic European idealization of these traditions, meant that the market was right for religious studies.⁵⁰

The final factor worth mentioning, and perhaps the most significant in the English context, was the introduction of an allegedly scientific, objective, and academic method appropriate to the study of religion: phenomenology. It is no accident that the main supporter of such a method in this country was also the founder of the first Department of Religious Studies in England, at

Critical and Comparative, Routledge, London, 1990, pp. 81–113, esp. pp. 88–90. While few today follow Smart, his influence is deeply imprinted upon the academy; and universities, like the Church, take time to shift.

⁵⁰ For the appropriation of the “east” by the “west,” see, for example, Raymond Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1984; Wilhelm Halbfass, *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding*, State University of New York, Albany, New York, 1988; Paul Hacker, “Aspects of Neo-Hinduism as Contrasted with Surviving Traditional Hinduism” in ed. Lambert Schmithausen: *Paul Hacker: Kleine Schriften*, Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden, 1978, pp. 580–608. For the domestication of these differing construals of power (for that is what Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam are, like Christianity) within the (colonial) western academy, see Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, Maryland, 1989; and Timothy Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000, esp. chs. 6–10. Fitzgerald's critical analysis is helpful in showing how religions are cultural construals of power, but he brazenly caricatures theology as a “misleading obsession with superhuman beings and related notions that cluster around ‘religion’” (p. 224). He is of course right in terms of modernity's shaping of theology.

Lancaster in 1967, and the author of the albatross statement quoted above. While Lancaster was the first department with this name, the study of “comparative religion” goes back to 1904, when Manchester University had the first Department of Comparative Religion, chaired by the Pali scholar, T. W. Rhys Davids. Nevertheless, Ninian Smart’s *The Phenomenon of Religion* (1973) is central for understanding the Oedipal relations between theology and religious studies.⁵¹ It is important to note that the understanding of the “phenomenological” method and approaches to “religious studies” are increasingly multifarious, and have a history going back to 1873, when the founding father of comparative religions, Friedrich Max Müller, published his famous study, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*. Eric Sharpe calls this the “foundation document of comparative religion.”⁵² Sharpe’s study is one of the best in charting the emergence of religious studies, both in the UK and also worldwide. A constellation of titles describes this general approach: comparative religion, history of religions, religious studies. The first fell from grace due to its evolutionary associations; the second, based on the German *Religionsgeschichte*, is still found in Germany, Sweden, and Finland.⁵³ Note too, the term religious studies in its phenomenological sense has an entirely different genealogy in Europe to that in the UK.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Macmillan, London, 1973, and his *The Science of Religion and the Sociology of Knowledge*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1973, pp. 158ff. It would be churlish to question Smart’s outstanding contribution academically and institutionally. I use him purely as a symbol in what follows. See also Wiebe’s assessment of the US and Canada, in *The Politics of Religious Studies*. For a criticism based on avoiding Christianity’s political influence, rather than exalting objectivity in the academy, see David A. Hollinger, “Enough Already: Universities Do Not Need More Christianity” in ed. Andreas Sterk, *Religion, Scholarship, and Higher Education: Perspectives, Models, and Future Prospects*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, 2002, pp. 40–50.

⁵² Eric J. Sharpe, *Comparative Religion: A History*, 2nd edn., Duckworth, London, 1986 [1975], p. 35. See also Walter H. Capps, *Religious Studies: The Making of a Discipline*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1995.

⁵³ See Sharpe, *Comparative Religion*, pp. xii–xiv, 294–319: “From Comparative Religion to Religious Studies.”

⁵⁴ See Smart’s characterization of the differences between himself and Husserl in *The Science of Religion*, pp. 49ff. See, also for example, the survey in ed. Michael Pye, *Marburg Revisited: Institutions and Strategies in the Study of Religion*, Diagonal Verlag, Marburg, 1989. This volume neglects developments in gender studies in religion. See the entry on “Phenomenology of Religion” for a good overview by Douglas Allen, in eds. M. Eliade et al., *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Macmillan, London, 1987, vol. 11, pp. 272–85. The theological study of religions that I am proposing needs to be worked out in closer engagement with differing approaches such as feminism, structuralism, psychoanalysis, materialism, constructivism, and so on. Clearly, one cannot essentialize “Religious Studies.” However, what is common to the differing types (history of religions, comparative religion, religious studies) is the basic presupposition that the discipline can be conducted and practiced by Christian and non-Christian alike. Theology, properly speaking, cannot.

In explicit contrast to the memory of the dead mother (theology), whose distorted image masqueraded in the universities, the emerging prince of the religious academy proposed a method that definitely and distinctively should not and could not involve faith as its starting point. Faith as a starting point was both unscientific and unscholarly, according to the canons then acceptable to the secular academy and the cultured despisers of Christianity. Hence, the phenomenological method started with *epochē* or bracketing. *Epochē* meant the suspension of one's own beliefs, attitudes, and values, in order to avoid contaminating objective description with personal prejudice such as one's own personal religious commitment. It was allegedly only in this fashion that the enquirer could really attain the object of enquiry and understand it correctly, be it Hinduism, Buddhism, or Christianity.

However, the very notion of different "religions," related to each other as species of a common genus, was itself a seventeenth-century invention, as Peter Harrison has so persuasively argued.⁵⁵ The construction of such a field ("religion") is a project that is partly located in the Enlightenment's refusal to acknowledge the particularity of Christian revelation. Consequently, there followed the creation of a single secular history whereby different religions were organized within the Enlightenment's own over-arching narrative, rather than taking seriously the different organizations of time, space, and history within the various religions. Such a taxonomy also failed to attend to the epistemological pre-requisites required for comprehension specified by some of the religions under examination.

John Milbank makes an interesting connection between the growth of comparative religion in the discipline of religious studies and the assumption that all religions are equal paths to the one divine. He suggests this connection because in the very creation of the field of "religion" there is an in-built assumption of different species of a common genus, and with this assumption, the idea that the common genus is our "own" religion of which others are various manifestations. Milbank writes:

The usual construals of religion as a genus, therefore, embody covert Christianizations, and in fact no attempt to define such a genus (or even, perhaps,

⁵⁵ Peter Harrison, *"Religion" and the Religions in the English Enlightenment*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990, and also Timothy Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, Macmillan, New York, 1962, pp. 15–30, also shows the modern construction of the notion of "religion." However, Smith perpetuates this reification of modernity in his problematic notion of "faith" as the common generic "essence" of each tradition. See my: "A Christian Reflection on Some Problems with Discerning 'God' in the World Religions," *Dialogue and Alliance*, 5, 1, 1991, pp. 4–17.

delineation of an analogical field of “family resemblances”) will succeed, because no proposed common features can be found, whether in terms of belief or practice (gods, the supernatural, worship, a sacred community, sacred/secular division, etc.) that are without exceptions. The most viable, because most general definitions (“What binds a society together,” and so forth) turn out to be so all-encompassing as to coincide with the definition of culture as such.⁵⁶

It is no mere coincidence that Smart's phenomenological methodology bears striking resemblance to Descartes's and Locke's stripping down process to get to the foundations of knowledge; nor is its similarity to Hume's empiricist positivism insignificant.⁵⁷ In one sense the new scientific methodology of religious studies that was emulated by theology in its attempt to remain within the academy, was clearly a child of the Enlightenment. Admittedly, there has been much debate about Smart's model by practitioners of religious studies in England, but the point I wish to make is this. While the methodology and subject matter of religious studies in its institutional setting were increasingly successful (there are now a number of Religious Studies departments, while prior to 1967 there were none in this country), intellectually the presuppositions of Smart's approach are deeply problematic. Its problematic nature lies in its Enlightenment marriage to objectivity and scientific neutrality. Hence, and I must make this clear, my argument is in no way directed against the study of Buddhism and Hinduism and other religious traditions in the academic curriculum (far from it), but rather against the assumptions about how such subjects are studied and how they are related to theology within the curriculum.

There are important objections against *epochē* as a method and consequently all that follows from it.⁵⁸ As mentioned above, the success of the phenomenological method was in part due to the social context which looked favorably upon such an enterprise. Such consensus, though certainly not unanimous, is coming to an end, and the episteme is shifting in our times, in a period that is often described as “postmodern.” The natural and

⁵⁶ John Milbank, “The End of Dialogue” in ed. Gavin D'Costa, *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered*, Orbis, New York, 1990, pp. 174–91: pp. 176–7. Milbank's point is precisely that of Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies*, that religion is power and cultural construction. Milbank, however, argues that theology has lost its sense that this is its proper concern.

⁵⁷ See Gavin Flood's brilliant criticisms of the Cartesian roots of phenomenism in religious studies: *Beyond Phenomenology: Rethinking the Study of Religion*, Cassell, London, 1999. Flood's own approach typifies the new diversity within the discipline. Smart is not unaware of the sort of objections Flood and I are advancing. See his *The Science of Religion*, p. 58.

⁵⁸ See António Barbosa da Silva, *The Phenomenology of Religion as a Philosophical Problem*, Gleerup, Lund, 1982.

social sciences have tended to move away from the positivist assumptions they shared at the turn of the century—and which were imitated by Smart's religious studies. Both the former disciplines have tended to eschew objectivity and neutrality, and increasingly acknowledge that the role of the investigator and his or her socio-political location is crucial to the production of knowledge.

For instance, Thomas Kuhn's notion of scientific paradigms is widely, though certainly not unanimously or uncritically, accepted in the natural sciences.⁵⁹ Kuhn challenged the idea of some kind of neutral objectivity whereby the scientist can make judgements from a universally acceptable neutral starting point as the Enlightenment episteme assumed. There would be few contemporary scientists who would deny that the language of investigation, the methods and controls of experimentation, and the very questions asked in scientific exploration, are profoundly shaped by the paradigm inhabited by the research scientist. And there is no scientist who is not operating within a paradigm. This insight need not lead to relativism (as some argue), for the very fact of paradigm shifts suggests that the quest for truth is still maintained, even with the recognition that all enquiry proceeds from a particular epistemological and ontological tradition. *Epochē*, in this view, is not only epistemologically impossible (for how could one suspend one's beliefs?), but actually undesirable, for it both masks the operative set of beliefs held by the investigator (thinking they are neutral), and obscures the forceful eviction of contenders for intellectually respectable methods of study (in my case, the dead mother—theology).

IV MacIntyre and the Criticisms of Liberalism and Postmodernism

Kuhn's point can be seen to have its counterpart in moral philosophy and the social sciences. For example, Alasdair MacIntyre has argued persuasively against the possibility of neutral enquiry or a universal rationality, and has tried to show the tradition-specific nature of all moral and philosophical intellectual enquiry. In his three major books, MacIntyre has confined himself to western Christian and secular culture and generally ignored the pressures exerted on western culture from other religions. This is hardly a

⁵⁹ Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd edn., Chicago University Press, Chicago, 1970. The more radical positions held by Paul Feyerabend (non-realist and relativist) and Mary Hesse (instrumentalist) are paralleled in theology by Don Cupitt and Richard Braithwaite respectively.

failing, given his mammoth achievement, but we should keep this in mind in what follows. MacIntyre's argument in his third main book *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (1990) is particularly germane to my own argument, but it needs to be placed in the context of the other two.

In *After Virtue* (1981) MacIntyre helps to highlight the problems and persuasiveness of modernity, or as he calls it, the Enlightenment project. MacIntyre argues that the Enlightenment project was doomed to failure. John Horton and Susan Mendus provide a lucid summary:

The Enlightenment project which has dominated philosophy during the past three hundred years promised a conception of rationality independent of historical and social context, and independent of any specific understanding of man's nature or purpose. But not only has that promise in fact been unfulfilled, the project is itself fundamentally flawed and the promise could never be fulfilled. In consequence, modern moral and political thought are in a state of disarray from which they can be rescued only if we revert to an Aristotelian paradigm, with its essential commitment to teleology, and construct an account of practical reason premised on that commitment.⁶⁰

The Enlightenment project, in so much as it has dominated philosophy and moral and political thought, has inevitably affected religious thought and the intellectual institutions in which they developed (the universities). John Milbank's work is a complement to MacIntyre's in charting the impact of modernity on Christian theology and practice in two particular ways. First, the Enlightenment trajectory in part accounts for the demise of trinitarian theology and Christian practice in rendering and reconstructing the world within the grand narratives of philosophy (Kant, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and eventually Marx and Hegel), sociology (Comte, Durkheim, Weber), and science (both the natural and social sciences). Within these narratives the world is best understood and analyzed without God, who is always positioned as moral authorizer, social cement, and expedient but ultimately redundant explanatory principle. Deism was the initial home for this vaporized God, but redundancy was inevitable. As noted earlier, Milbank sees nominalism as a major factor in this process, and, like MacIntyre, sees Aquinas as a major resource to counter modernity.

Second, the relationship between morality and deity underwent a radical shift. The Christian *telos* was ousted, in that universal reason and freedom became both the ethical means and ends. The Kantian move toward a uni-

⁶⁰ Eds. John Horton and Susan Mendus, *After MacIntyre: Critical Perspectives on the Work of Alasdair MacIntyre*, Polity Press, Oxford, 1994, p. 3.

versal ethics, which would be grounded in pure reason and fleshed out in practical reason, was inevitable. Kant could view the religions, with Christianity as the unsurpassable best, as more or less embodying the ethical universals he was able to arrive at through reason alone. This form of ethical thinking required an impartial state to arbitrate political, social, and ethical matters. Christianity would have to align itself with these ethical universals or lose social credibility and privilege, wherever it still had any. This narrative, by Milbank and MacIntyre, provides the canvas on which the brief history of theology I have been narrating can be painted. The emergence of modernity would not only erode Christianity intellectually, while admittedly providing the resources for many resurgences, it would shape the very intellectual institutions within which Christian theology might flourish.

After Virtue (1985) had many failings, the major one, in my opinion, being that its Aristotelianism required fuller explication and grounding in a community of practice (as opposed to an idealized past, based on heroic violence, as Milbank so pertinently points out), from which it might create an alternative society of virtue.⁶¹ This was slightly remedied in his second work, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (1988), but would have to await *Three Rival Versions* (1990) to be most fully explicated. *Whose Justice?* contains a defense by MacIntyre against the charge of relativism, a charge also aimed at Kuhn. MacIntyre tries instead to show that different positions might be able to engage in rational debate so that there may be a successful outcome. His example is the debate that takes place in thirteenth-century Paris between Aquinas and the Aristotelian and Augustinian traditions, with Thomism emerging the victor. Stanley Hauerwas and Charles Pinches summarize the argument succinctly:

Crucial to [MacIntyre's] position is the possibility that the Christian account of the virtues can be successfully grafted onto the Greek heritage. Hence, he attempts to demonstrate how Augustine was able to resolve antinomies intrinsic to and yet unresolvable within the Greek account of virtue, and how Aquinas, revising and extending Augustine's insights, did the same, producing the most satisfactory version of morality we have had so far.⁶²

⁶¹ See Stout's balanced and thoughtful critique of MacIntyre's earlier work, much of it rectified in MacIntyre's later work: Jeffrey Stout, *Ethics after Babel: The Languages of Morals and their Discontents*, James Clarke, Cambridge, 1988, pp. 191–220; and Milbank's charged differentiation between the Christian and antique *polis* (which was written before *Three Rival Versions*), *Theology and Social Theory*, pp. 326–76.

⁶² Stanley Hauerwas and Charles Pinches, *Christians Among the Virtues: Theological Conversations with Ancient and Modern Ethics*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, 1997, p. 62.

One might say that MacIntyre's intellectual search was driving him into Roman Catholic Thomism, as the only intelligible intellectual moral position on offer. This is confirmed in *Three Rival Versions*, which finally takes more seriously the socio-political context that nourishes such practices: the Church.

Three Rival Versions continues MacIntyre's project and his final chapter addresses the question of the university specifically. MacIntyre argues that western European society is confronted by three rival versions of moral enquiry, each with its own epistemological, ontological, ethical, and methodological assumptions. While they may seem incommensurable, MacIntyre also seeks to show that there may be the possibility of an historically narrated rational debate between them, so that one might emerge the superior.⁶³

What are the three rival versions? There is, of course, the Enlightenment project, which MacIntyre here calls the "Encyclopaedic," for he characterizes it in its embodiment in the ninth edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. The second tradition, which has always been on the horizon of MacIntyre's project, is that of the "Genealogical," or the postmodern, typified by Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*. The postmodern is parasitic upon the Enlightenment. To understand how, we must briefly return to MacIntyre's critique of Enlightenment morality. In the words of Kelvin Knight, MacIntyre argues that, despite all their important differences,

[what] united Hume, Kant and others in a single project was . . . their agreement that the prerequisite for Enlightenment was the rejection of their Aristotelian heritage. A central part of what they thereby rejected was a syllogistic way of justifying the rules of morality on the basis not only of an apprehension of "man-as-he-happens-to-be" but also of "human-nature-as-it-could-be-if-it-realised-its-*telos*." In so doing, claims MacIntyre, they [such Enlightenment thinkers] rejected the only way of coherently moving from an apprehension of what is to an apprehension of what ought to be. Only when approached as the only means by which to move from one's present self to one's *telos*, to one's true good in society with others, can it be concluded that the rules of morality are categorical. What followed from Enlightenment philosophers' rejection of teleology was their interminable disagreement about how the rules of morality might be justified, insoluble problems in the proposals of each being identified by others.⁶⁴

⁶³ *Three Rival Versions*, p. 5.

⁶⁴ Kelvin Knight, "Editor's Introduction," *The MacIntyre Reader*, Polity Press, Oxford, 1998, p. 8.

Eventually all that could be agreed was that people ought to be free to agree or disagree, and the birth of the modern nation state and liberal democracy was its social and political counterpart. However, with no common *telos*, even this minimal consensus would eventually come into question. Nietzsche was inevitable, given the unresolvable lacunae within the Enlightenment project that replaced the *telos* of the common good with the formal requirement of human freedom. Nietzsche saw that there could be no real foundation for ethics in this stance and consequently celebrated the will to power, which was always the repressed truth within the Enlightenment matrix. For MacIntyre's own argument to work, he develops a further critique of the postmodern or Nietzschean Genealogical "tradition" which focuses on its internal contradictions regarding the continuities of a narrative self.⁶⁵

The third position from which MacIntyre can reveal and narrate the shortcomings of the Encyclopaedic and Genealogical traditions is Thomism, mediated by Pope Leo XIII's *Aeterni Patris*. Finally, MacIntyre has found his flicker of light; the vague gesticulation at the end of *After Virtue* turns out not to be neo-Benedictine, but a neo-Thomism.⁶⁶ My own project can be thus located within this position identified by MacIntyre, although I am not a Thomist as such, but write out of a fluid and complex "tradition": Roman Catholicism.

In the final chapter, MacIntyre calls for a postliberal university. He notes three characteristics vital to the premodern university, essential to healthy intellectual enquiry. First, the emergence of agreement upon standards of rational justification through the work of enquiry itself, not only in the explicit discussion of the philosophers but also through the intellectual practice of professors of mathematics and history and law and theology.⁶⁷ MacIntyre recognizes that such agreements are never static, but some shared consensus is important. Second, were "enforced exclusions from the universities and colleges of points of view too much at odds with the consensus underpinning both enquiry and education."⁶⁸ Of course, this system led to losses, and even grave injustices. MacIntyre bemoans the systematic injustice spawned, most notably toward Jews. Nevertheless, such exclusion was also

⁶⁵ Admittedly, this criticism is only focussed upon Foucault and Deleuze, and de Man's unmasking, and cannot be said to be an exhaustive engagement with postmodern texts. Milbank, in this respect, is more thorough: *Theology and Social Theory*, pp. 278–326.

⁶⁶ His final plea was for a neo-Benedict who might construct "new forms of community within which the moral life could be sustained so that both morality and civility might survive the coming ages of barbarism and darkness." *After Virtue*, p. 263.

⁶⁷ *Three Rival Versions*, p. 223.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 223.

the precondition of great success in building traditions of enquiry, and as MacIntyre wryly notes, the natural sciences have always best succeeded with “quiet, informal, characteristically unstated policies of enforced exclusion, unacknowledged and unnoticed except by sociologists of science.”⁶⁹ Third, a counterpart to such exclusions was “the use of preferments and promotions to ensure that upholders of the consensus, including those who extended, corrected, and otherwise improved the standards of rational justification embodied in it, occupied the relevant professorial chairs.”⁷⁰ Again, he is fully aware of “error and abuse,” but notes that this sort of abuse is present in every system. MacIntyre concludes, repeating my earlier arguments:

For those who require sufficient resolution of fundamental disagreements in morals and theology in order that rational enquiry in those areas may proceed, the liberal university can provide no remedy. And by providing no remedy it has successfully excluded substantive moral and theological enquiry from its domain. . . . the dethronement of moral philosophy, like the dethronement of theology in an earlier period, would in any case have deprived the curriculum of any but pragmatic principles of ordering.⁷¹

In one sense moral philosophy had already lost the plot with the dethronement of theology, a point that takes MacIntyre some time (three volumes) to recognize, but the significance of this loss of ordering, vision, and orientation is all-important.⁷² It is precisely why there is no ability to argue for the “flourishing of the whole.”⁷³ It is also precisely why the Great Books curriculum, suggested by intellectuals who realize the depths of the catastrophe in the modern university, is ineffectual. Alan Bloom, for example, clearly sees the closing of the “American mind” and berates the universities in a manner not unlike MacIntyre.⁷⁴ However, his proposed study of great books, the great classics of western civilization from Homer, Plato, and Aristotle, through Augustine, Chaucer, Shakespeare, to Austen and Mark Twain, cannot really restore any cultural tradition, as it bypasses the double question: how are we to read these texts, and how is their eurocentricism to be justified? Paul Griffiths sums up many of these issues nicely:

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 225.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 224.

⁷¹ Ibid., pp. 226–7.

⁷² This lack of theological sensibility is raised in a balanced manner by David Fergusson, *Community, Liberalism and Christian Ethics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998, pp. 135–7.

⁷³ *Three Rival Versions*, p. 227.

⁷⁴ Alan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1987. William J. Bennet is another example.

Pedagogically, modernity is the cafeteria-style university catalog of courses from which consumers (provided they have paid their tuition fees) can choose what most pleases them; it is the row of paperback editions of sacred works from a dozen religious traditions jostling one another on the bookstore's shelves. Religious pedagogy, by contrast, is the single curriculum, identical for all, like that in place in Nālandā in India in the eighth century, or at Clairvaux in France in the twelfth; and it is a single set of sacred works that cannot be placed on a par with (much less on the same shelf as) others. Religious learning therefore requires explicit appeal to authority in ways that consumerist pedagogy does not. The former wants to make choices for its learners, while the latter wants to equip them to choose for themselves . . .⁷⁵

MacIntyre finally makes clear the implication of his proposals in seeing that real plurality, apparently sought after by liberal moderns, might best be promoted by “rival universities”:

each modelled on, but improving upon, its own best predecessors, the Thomist perhaps upon Paris in 1272, the genealogist upon Vincennes in 1968 [and one might add, the modern, upon Berlin in 1810]. And thus the wider society would be confronted with the claims of rival universities, each advancing its own enquiries in its own terms and each securing the type of agreement necessary to ensure the progress and flourishing of its enquiries by its own set of exclusions and prohibitions, formal and informal. But then also required [*sic*—according to whom?] would be a set of institutionalized forums in which the debate between rival types of enquiry was afforded rhetorical expression.⁷⁶

These conclusions and MacIntyre's reasons for arriving at them account for my extended attention to his work, both in my indebtedness and also in our different emphases. In chapters two and three, I try and deal more seriously than MacIntyre does with the objection of utopianism and sectarianism. He argues that these objections may be “best understood more as a symptom of the condition of those who level it than an indictment of the projects against which it is directed.”⁷⁷ While this may well be true, it is not an entirely adequate response.

There are two particular intersections between MacIntyre's and my own argument that I would like to highlight. First, religious studies, as I have been charting it above, is part of the Encyclopaedic tradition and is properly

⁷⁵ Paul J. Griffiths, *Religious Reading: The Place of Reading in the Practice of Religion*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999, p. 68.

⁷⁶ *Three Rival Versions*, p. 234, my additional brackets.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 235.

located within that mode of enquiry. In this sense its murderous Oedipal desire toward theology can now be located within a wider picture. Theology must rightly contest religious studies' autonomous existence and its claim to objective production; although any sensible theologian would also recognize that there are invaluable skills, tools, methods, and insights present within the phenomenological approach of Smart's religious studies. The only point I am contesting is Smart's epistemological claims for religious studies. It is not an objective and dispassionate methodology by which to approach "religions," but an historically and philosophically situated enterprise, just like theology. Second, MacIntyre's material account lacks attention to the intellectual traditions of enquiry within other religions. Rather than MacIntyre's isolation of three traditions of enquiry (liberal modernity, parasitic genealogical criticism, and neo-Thomism), each requiring their own institutions of learning as their conceptions of education vary so profoundly (even if genealogy can only exist parasitically on the other two and, in this sense, could not exist on its own), there are good reasons to consider further traditions for institutional developments within the formal, rather than material, terms of MacIntyre's discussion.

Indeed, a sympathetic Muslim critic of MacIntyre, Muhammad Legenhausen, has made this very point. He notes Islam's relationship to the Aristotelian tradition upon which MacIntyre is so dependent, and therefore criticizes MacIntyre's inexplicable omission of Islam in the debate. Furthermore, Legenhausen, writing in Iran, also suggests that Islam can account for the aporia within MacIntyre's argument in *After Virtue*, whereby MacIntyre's espousal of the necessity of small sectarian communities to counter barbarism, after the order of St. Benedict, fails entirely to engage with the problem of nation states that MacIntyre identifies as one of the roots of the malaise. Susan Mendus and John Horton make the same point: "Moreover, given the importance which MacIntyre attaches to the social embeddedness of thought and enquiry, his largely negative view of modernity continually threatens to undermine any attempt to root his positive proposals in the contemporary world of advanced industrial societies."⁷⁸

According to Legenhausen, Islam, on the other hand, is able to offer a theocratic solution, allegedly avoiding both "nationalism and liberalism," an alternative that is "not taken seriously by Western theorists."⁷⁹ Hence, Legenhausen takes up MacIntyre's critique of modernity, but points to the same

⁷⁸ Horton and Mendus, *After MacIntyre*, pp. 13–14.

⁷⁹ Muhammad Legenhausen, extended book review of *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, *Al-Tawhid*, 14, 2, 1997, pp. 158–76: p. 169. See also H. H. Bilgrami and S. A. Ashraf, *The Concept of an Islamic University*, Hodder & Stoughton, The Islamic Academy, Cambridge, 1985, esp. pp. 16–39 for a helpful perspective on the matter. Islamic universities were important influences on the development of Christian universities, in part through their shared Aristotelian heritage.

weakness located by Horton and Mendus within MacIntyre's alternative, and at that point thereby commends Islam. In institutional terms, given MacIntyre's premises, this would amount to an argument for an Islamic university. Certainly the existence of such an entity within western Europe and the United States might better facilitate systematic theology's rigorous engagement with a living religious intellectual tradition other than Judeo-Christianity. It may also have many other important benefits and consequences. The Jewish community has already established higher educational institutions within western Europe, the USA, England, and of course, Israel. Whether and how these arguments and considerations should be related to the various religions and whether such institutions would even be desirable is a question that would have to be pursued by intellectuals within those communities. For example, it seems clear that Tibetan Buddhism presupposed a very precise epistemological and pedagogical set of assumptions in its construction of the four major Tibetan universities operating in Tibet—prior to the Chinese occupation.⁸⁰ In my own desire to see the true flourishing of pluralism, rather than domesticated plurality regulated by modernity, I can see many advantages in encouraging such alternative universities. However, I cannot go further with this suggestion here, as it would take me well beyond my remit.

Admittedly, the above discussion does not address the question of how religious studies would be taught within "sectarian" theology departments. I shall address this issue in chapter five below.

To return to my main argument, to show that the crisis in the liberal Enlightenment project runs across the disciplines, I want finally to turn to the social sciences and anthropology. Bernard McGrane has argued that anthropologists and ethnologists should eschew their desire for objectivity and neutrality, for it simply masks forms of ethnocentrism that can only be discerned properly when the location of the studying subject is taken into consideration. McGrane's survey of ethnographic work from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries is provocative and he argues that the construal of objects of study always takes place within a definite and specific horizon and in this sense is historically tradition-specific, and cannot assume a universal neutral platform for enquiry.⁸¹ While McGrane tends toward too neat a

⁸⁰ Anne Klein, *Knowledge and Liberation: Tibetan Buddhist Epistemology in Support of Transformative Religious Experience*, Snow Lion, New York, 1986, p. 49.

⁸¹ Bernard McGrane, *Beyond Anthropology: Society and the Other*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1989. Foucault is of course the inspiration behind McGrane's project and Edward Said's. See Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1978. See a fuller discussion of these writers in my "Trinitarian Difference and World Religions" in ed. Ursula King, *Faith and Praxis in a Postmodern Age*, Cassell, London, 1998, pp. 28–46.

schematized catalog, it is worth considering his findings. He begins at the Renaissance and argues that during that period, non-Christian western European cultures and religions were always:

interpreted on the horizon of Christianity. It was Christianity which fundamentally came between the European and the non-European other. Within the Christian conception of Otherness anthropology did not exist; there was, rather, demonology. It was in relation to the Fall and to the influence of Sin and Satan that the Other took on his historically specific meaning.⁸²

According to McGrane, after the Enlightenment, ignorance and error replaced sin. With the slow erosion of religious belief, there developed a “psychology of error and superstition, an ontology of ignorance, and an epistemology of all the forms of untruth and unenlightenment.”⁸³ Demonization was replaced by ignorance, by a lack of enlightenment. Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) emblematically reflects both these periods and anticipates the next in the representation of Friday: partly fallen, clearly ignorant, and definitely uncivilized. In the nineteenth century the influence of geology (George Lyell), evolutionary theory (Charles Darwin), and anthropology (Edward Tylor) provides the horizon of interpretation, so that the non-European Other is organized in terms of stages of development, “between the prehistorically fossilized ‘primitive’ and the evolutionary advancement of modern Western science and civilization.”⁸⁴ The evolutionary ladder of savage, primitive, civilized is established and different groups positioned along its rungs with the European at the top. Finally, when McGrane comes to the twentieth century, he fiercely contests the predominant episteme of cultural relativism in which difference is rendered as cultural difference alone, thereby masking the real challenge that the Other poses.

McGrane rehearses the arguments against such relativizers: their absolute claim that all is relative must itself be relative, and their hidden imperialism in assuming a non-relative vantage point from which to make this observation about all cultures.⁸⁵ McGrane argues that culture becomes the dominant

⁸² McGrane, *Beyond Anthropology*, p. ix. McGrane’s use of “his” ironically adds to the occlusion of the feminine Other.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. ix.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. x.

⁸⁵ See such arguments in their more developed forms: Hilary Putnam, *Reason: Truth and History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1981; Peter Berger, *A Rumour of Angels*, Penguin, London, 1970; and more recently Ernst Gellner, *Postmodernism: Reason and Religion*, Routledge, London, 1992. While these three make similar criticisms of relativism, they defend very different notions of rationality and tradition.

paradigm for interpreting the Other. Cultural relativity becomes the grand text into which difference is encoded; the non-European Other is seen as “fundamentally and merely, culturally different.”⁸⁶ Ironically, in this modernist mode of portrayal, difference is reduced to sameness and inoculated from any real interaction. So while in the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries there was a tendency to portray the Other in metonymic mode, a distorted mirror image of the European, in the twentieth century, the Other is simply a mirror of the European, homogenized by assimilation, culturally relative, made same, rendered safe, and thereby able to “achieve” the respect of secular liberalism.

The roll-call of figures to support my argument could be extended (to include Michel Foucault, Edward Said, Donald Davidson, and others) to show the crisis in liberal modernity's intellectual assumptions and the institutions that enshrine and perpetuate this tradition (especially the university and the nation state).⁸⁷ Of course, there are supporters of all positions lodged within the university. Nevertheless, notions of *epochē* and neutral objectivity have been radically questioned in just those citadels that the method of religious studies sought to emulate. In this respect, it is theology that can offer religious studies (of an admittedly different kind) a home and proper role within a postliberal Christian university.

The fact that these different disciplines can be called upon to support my case is not in itself a decisive argument, but part of a cumulative case against the epistemological basis of religious studies relying as it does on *epochē* and the subsequent belief in the objective production and examination of the subject of study.⁸⁸ Another argument that could be deployed which is not dissimilar to the above, but derives from a different provenance while contesting the same institutional territory, comes through the voice of the nearly

⁸⁶ McGrane, *Beyond Anthropology*, p. x.

⁸⁷ Against the relativist difficulties often imputed to the perspectivalism advanced here, see W. V. O. Quine, *Pursuit of Truth*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1990, pp. 37–59, and Donald Davidson, “On the Very Idea of a Conceptual System” in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1984, pp. 183–98.

⁸⁸ A similar assault has been made on religious studies and theology by feminist and liberation theologians. See, for example, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “Commitment and Critical Enquiry,” *Harvard Theological Review*, 82, 1, 1989, pp. 1–11; Jon Luis Segundo, “Capitalism Versus Socialism: Crux Theologica” in ed. Rosino Gibellini, *Frontiers of Liberation Theology in Latin America*, trans. John Drury, SCM, London, 1980 [1975], pp. 240–59. The concerns of liberation and feminism come together in María Clara Bingemer, “Women in the Future of the Theology of Liberation,” and Mercy Amba Oduyoye, “Reflections from a Third World Woman's Perspective: Women's Experience and Liberation Theologies”—both in ed. Ursula King, *Feminist Theology from the Third World: A Reader*, SPCK, London, 1994, pp. 308–17, and 23–34 respectively.

dead mother (theology). The theologian could rightly argue that the study of religions is only properly located within the horizons of Christian theology precisely because all creation was made for praise and worship of the triune God. This would also be the basis for arguing more widely for the transfiguration of different disciplines within a Christian university, a matter with which I shall deal later in the book.

For the moment, let me recall the second stage of my argument. Religious studies was born into English universities: partly because of the anachronism of theology being located within the secular academy; partly owing to the search for scientific and objective ways of carrying out research in religions to avoid theological sectarianism (but nevertheless creating another form); and to gain the approval of the secular academy (which has, in many other disciplines, moved on). Put together with part one of my argument, the cumulative case will require, if it is accepted, at least one of three possible responses, only the third of which I support. One would be to abolish both theology and religious studies departments altogether and integrate them into history, literature, politics, and so on. On secular grounds, this seems to be logical and possibly inevitable. Second, one could rename theology and religious studies as the historical critical study of religion and continue what went on previously. On secular grounds this option is attractive for two reasons. First, no hermeneutical privilege is given to any one religion in the study of "religions." Second, the world is full of religions and therefore justifies a field related to this social reality. Clearly, both these options are not attractive to theology as presented here. Or third, one might allow specific starting points to flourish, label them clearly, and allow them to interact. Within this third option, many different models are possible.⁸⁹ My own specific theological option would be to argue for a Roman Catholic university (in principle, the first step before being able even to argue for a Christian university) within a pluralist academy on the lines advanced by Alasdair MacIntyre.⁹⁰ This is not in any way supposed to privilege,

⁸⁹ See, for instance, Alan Wolfe, "The Potential for Pluralism: Religious Responses to the Triumph of Theory and Method in American Academic Culture" in ed. A. Sterk, *Religion, Scholarship, and Higher Education*, pp. 22–39. My own position actually embodies elements from all three of Wolfe's options, no single one of which I would identify with exclusivists. His options are rejectionism (returning "religious institutions to a position of instruction in the faith"—p. 31; a necessary part of the discipline); parallelism ("the existence of more than one kind of academic culture within an institution"—p. 32; or, as I would argue, within different institutions) and his own preferred pluralism or "opportunism," whereby institutions encourage the practice of differing approaches (p. 34). Wolfe gives no theological reasons for why this approach "ought" to be attractive to Christians, let alone others.

⁹⁰ Such "plurality" already exists in the USA, but the extent to which it represents real "plurality" is called into question in the next chapter.

ghettoize, or sanctify Roman Catholics, but to recognize that tradition-specific forms of enquiry should be facilitated on good intellectual grounds. However, before proceeding with the theoretical argument, it is time to turn to a brief historical inspection, to see if my thesis relates to US and English university institutions.