

# Theology, piety and prayer: on the study of theology

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## SUMMARY

Over recent years there has been a sustained reaction to the Enlightenment notion that things can be known in detachment (though one can question the impact that this recognition yet has had on academic study in general). This reaction and the notion it is challenging are, of course, of particular relevance to the study of theology: if God, in particular, cannot be known in detachment, what might this imply for the shape and nature of a theological course and for its participants? This is an uncomfortable question both for theological faculties within universities and for seminaries, training men and women for Christian ministry. For the former there remains pressure to

conform to the (now challenged) assumptions of detachment that characterise academia. Since most seminaries and Bible schools in the UK are either part of universities or receive validation from universities there is similar pressure, despite the expectation for faith commitment, to conform to this assumption of academic detachment. In seminaries this conformity demonstrates itself in the continuing disjunction between academic study and prayer. This disjunction would have been unthinkable throughout the major part of Christian history. But how now can this be remedied; how might a theological course be shaped by the Church's pattern of prayer and worship?

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## ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Über die letzten Jahre hinweg hat es eine nachhaltige Reaktion auf die Idee der Aufklärung gegeben, dass sich alles aus der Distanz heraus erforschen lässt (obgleich man die Wirkung infrage stellen kann, die diese Anerkennung bereits auf die akademische Welt im allgemeinen gehabt hat). Diese Reaktion und die Idee, die sie kritisiert, betreffen natürlich besonders den Bereich der Theologie: Wenn insbesondere Gott sich nicht aus der Distanz heraus erkennen lässt, welche Auswirkung hat dies auf Form und Art einer theologischen Ausbildung und auf ihre Hörer? Dies ist eine unbequeme Frage sowohl für die theologischen Fakultäten an den Universitäten als auch für die theologischen Seminare, die Frauen und Männer für den christlichen Dienst ausbilden. Was

die ersteren angeht, so bleibt der Druck, mit der (nun kritisierten) Theorie der Distanz konform zu gehen, welche die akademische Welt charakterisiert. Da die meisten Seminare [im englischsprachigen Raum, Anm. d. Übers.] entweder Teil der Universitäten sind oder von diesen anerkannt sind, besteht trotz der erwarteten Glaubenshingabe ein ähnlicher Druck, sich der Hypothese der akademischen Distanz zu beugen. An den Seminaren zeigt sich diese Anpassung in der fortwährenden Diskrepanz zwischen akademischem Studium und Gebet. Diese Unstimmigkeit wäre für den größten Teil christlicher Geschichte undenkbar gewesen, doch wie kann man da nun Abhilfe schaffen? Wie kann eine theologische Vorlesung anhand der kirchlichen Vorbilder von Gebet und Anbetung gestaltet werden?

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## RÉSUMÉ

Une réaction s'est fait jour, ces dernières décennies, à l'idée héritée du siècle des lumières selon laquelle on peut accéder à la connaissance d'une manière réellement indépendante (on peut cependant se demander légitimement si cette réaction a eu un réel impact sur les travaux académiques en général). La mise en cause

de cette idée a des incidences en particulier pour les études théologiques : si Dieu ne peut pas être connu de manière réellement indépendante, quelles implications devrait-on en tirer pour la forme et la nature d'un enseignement théologique et pour sa réception par les étudiants ? C'est là une question dérangeante pour les facultés de théologie rattachées à une université et pour celles qui forment des hommes et des femmes en vue



du ministère. Comme bien des facultés de théologie font partie ou reçoivent leur accréditation d'universités séculières, et en dépit du fait qu'on attend d'elles une adhésion à la foi chrétienne, ces facultés subissent des pressions pour qu'elles se conforment à l'idéal (désormais contesté) de la neutralité qui est censé régir les études académiques. Cette conformité se manifeste par

le divorce entre études académiques et vie de prière. Cette dissociation aurait été impensable au cours de la plus grande partie de l'histoire de l'Église. Comment peut-on maintenant y remédier ? Comment faire pour que l'enseignement théologique soit de nouveau au service de l'Église et façonné par le culte et la vie de prière qu'elle rend à son Seigneur ?

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In April of 2005 I was in Dublin attending a conference of the Society for the Study of Theology: the theme of the conference was 'Thinking through faith: the places of reason in theology'. Following the usual pattern of these occasions, the Wednesday evening was given over to a plenary session, involving the key speakers and some of the conference organisers, addressing the question of the current state of theology. Contributions were invited from the body of the conference – and there were many – but despite my best efforts to be noticed by the person chairing the meeting, I failed to make my point. I have rarely been so frustrated – there have been many occasions, of course, when I have failed to make a contribution (and in many such cases maybe it was just as well) but my frustration on this occasion went far deeper than the self-obsessed desire to make a point. The assumption of every speaker in that debate was that the question concerning the state of theology related exclusively to the university and that theology's health or otherwise was synonymous with its place and prominence in this academic context; there was no reference to seminaries or even to the Church; theology was presumed to be the prerogative of professional academics.

I have been raging about this ever since. In the first place, and merely personally, I teach in a Protestant seminary, having spent almost half of my life since ordination in pastoral charge within the local church. Despite a couple of offers, I have never taught academic theology in a university. But personal hubris aside, the simple historical fact remains that for just about the greater part of its history Christian theology was not taught at all in universities for the simple reason that there were none. Despite papal endorsement,<sup>1</sup> the founding of cathedral 'schools' distinct from the monasteries, together with the subsequent founding of the universities was resisted by some as indicative of an inappropriate and regrettable separation of theological study from the disciplines of devotional

life. Such objections were, of course, mitigated by the unquestioned dominance of the Church within both the schools and the universities: theology truly was perceived as the 'Queen of the Sciences' and all learning was conducted within a dogmatic, and often oppressive, context.<sup>2</sup> Even within these early years of their development some would argue that the rise of scholasticism quite quickly strained the bond between study and liturgy, issuing in devotional aridity if not doctrinal error,<sup>3</sup> but the persisting dominance of clerical authority remained largely unquestioned.

For the previous millennium, for the West as much as the East, theological study had almost exclusively been the prerogative of the monasteries. The standard pattern of *lectio, quaestio, expositio, disputatio* militated against any separation of academic study, liturgical devotion and spiritual discipline – indeed, any distinction between these elements of the spiritual life would have proved incomprehensible to the fathers of both Western and Eastern traditions; to grow in understanding was to progress in the virtues, was to devote oneself to prayer; the study of theology was academic in the sense of being rigorous but could not conceivably be academic in any detached sense of the word.

This integrated, devotional and liturgical pattern of the study of theology continued through the Reformation and in some senses was reinforced since, though the Magisterial authority of the Church was at least qualified, the perceived sterility of later scholasticism was largely repudiated. (While subsequent Calvinism would quickly introduce its own version of scholasticism, within British Puritanism, at least, theology remained pastorally related.)

However, it is here that the seeds of secularism and detachment begin to spring to life. The Reformation in Europe was a political and secular movement as much as a doctrinal and religious movement – or, at least, it offered pretext



for the exploitation of the latter by the former – throwing off the shackles of ecclesial dogma and political dominance. Moreover (as I have argued at some length elsewhere), ‘there is nothing like having the Bible at one’s disposal to promote the assumption that the Bible is at one’s disposal; to foster the assumption that the Bible is accessible to unmediated scrutiny’.<sup>4</sup> The Reformers’ manifesto of *sola Scriptura* (rendered all the more potent by the recent invention of the printing press), their emphasis upon the perspicuity and accessibility of Scripture, and their profound word-centeredness promoted a context in which individualism and detached rationalism could flourish. And as Reformation gave way to Enlightenment, with the latter’s more radical rejection of any form of dogmatic authority, so assumptions of pure objectivity and individual detachment came to dominate. Indeed, one can argue that objectivity and detachment became the new dogmas. To question them, while no longer issuing in public burning, may well lead to academic marginalisation.

### Objectivity?

While the place of theology within the university was not immediately under threat, it was inevitably dethroned by the new sciences. More subtly (and here we arrive at the point of this paper and the admittedly cavalier preceding overview) its nature and manner were inevitably shaped by this context of objective detachment. That which the Early and Medieval Church would have viewed as vice was now embraced as virtue. Both the reading of Scripture and the study of the lives of the saints were filtered through the historical sciences and critical theory; the study of God gave way to the study of the phenomenon of religion; the mere notion of a doctrinally rooted ethic was forgotten; the academic study of theology was severed from worship, prayer and practical holiness. No longer was belief the prerequisite for understanding; belief came to be perceived as an obstacle to understanding, an obstacle of prior prejudice to be marginalised for the sake of critical rigour. Inevitably too this came to be reflected in theology’s place within the curriculum: where theology has not given way entirely to religious studies it has been linked within the Humanities (rather, of course, than within the Sciences) with Philosophy, with Literature, with Antiquities, with Psychology and even (God help us) with European History and Culture.<sup>5</sup>

One outcome of this detached approach to theology in a university context has been a widening of the gap between the academy and the Church. The manner in which theology is studied renders it of little if any pastoral, spiritual or practical pertinence to most ordinary Christians. As the language of theology becomes ever more esoteric and its manner ever more detached, so it loses the attention of the Church which, ironically, remains its proper context and which it is called to serve. More than once I have sat listening (or perhaps even speaking) in a seminar, gazing out of the window and wondering, not unlike the young Karl Barth,<sup>6</sup> why any ‘ordinary’ person should want to listen to this pretentious nonsense, let alone benefit from it.

Seminaries – or, at least, Protestant seminaries – and Bible Colleges have not been immune from the outcomes of this context and culture of detachment. This is not least because, in most cases, seminaries generally function with some form of affiliation to a university that enables the awarding of a validated degree. I doubt that any seminary fails to organise its life around some structured form of worship or liturgy but too often a chasm is discernable between the Chapel and the lecture room. The teaching of ethics in most Protestant seminaries is largely distinct from the teaching of doctrine and the mere fact that theological courses include distinct modules on ethics, on liturgy, on spirituality, is indicative of a loss of integration that again would be incomprehensible to our more distant spiritual forebears.

But a post-modern context changes all this does it not? The humble and long overdue recognition that all knowledge implies a knowing subject over against (or even displacing) an object known exposes detached objectivity as delusory. Moreover, the recognition that no individual knower can possibly exist in isolation but that we are all shaped by context, community and tradition delivers us from radical solipsism. All knowledge is shaped by community traditions of knowing and, accordingly, the Church, as such a community tradition, yet has a valid place in the life of the university as one tradition of knowing amongst others. Forgive me for seeming less than enthusiastic in response to such optimism about post-modernism.

In the first place, I don’t notice any thawing of the hostility to theology’s place in the modern university – nor should this be surprising in a manifestly secular or post-Christian society driven by utilitarian expediences: as long as there remains some remnant of State funding for Higher Edu-



cation why should we expect (or even desire) a secular State financially to underwrite a minority interest with apparently marginal practical outcomes?

In the second place, the much trumpeted death of modernism seems rather over-stated: post-modernism may be more accurately defined as late modernism; as the prefix suggests, it only exists in relation to the suppositions it seeks to supersede. Consequently, it is dependent on the continuance of those suppositions for its own reactionary coherence; it is parasitical rather than truly innovative. And the suppositions of modernism remain very much alive, most obviously in the anti-religious rhetoric of such as Richard Dawkins, but similarly – and not a little ironically – in many university theological departments and Church seminaries, whether liberal or conservative: the assumption of detached access to objective truth persists in surprising places.<sup>7</sup>

### Theology and prayer

This brings me to my chief point: if theology is to claim a valid place within the contemporary university it can do so only by becoming again true to itself, to its proper context, manner, commitment and assumptions. The study of theology, whether in the university or the seminary, has been intimidated, dominated and shaped by an academic culture of detachment. That culture can be (and has been) challenged more generally, but for theology to conform to this delusory supposition is for theology to deny its own identity as the study of God – and God, by definition, cannot be known in detachment; as Nicholas Healy has recently commented:

[Systematic theology] is not a liberal arts discipline, and cannot be performed in the university if that means it must conform to the university's humanistic agenda and methodologies.<sup>8</sup>

I want to engage briefly with two recent works on the place of theology within the university and more generally in public life. The first, by Gavin D'Costa, begins with a far fuller account of the development of the university, establishing the similar conclusion that '[t]heology, properly understood, cannot be taught and practiced within the modern university',<sup>9</sup> that, in the course of the development of the modern university, '... the discipline of theology became separated from the practices that are required for its proper undertaking: prayer, sacra-

ments, and virtue'.<sup>10</sup> D'Costa is far more optimistic than I could be concerning the possibilities for a truly catholic university, even within nations such as Great Britain and the United States that are committed to toleration and religious pluralism.<sup>11</sup> But he insists that, if theology is to be taught and studied even in this committed and catholic context, theologians must first 'learn to pray'.<sup>12</sup> This may seem a quite minimalistic requirement for the renewal of theology, but D'Costa understands prayer as a cultivated habit of love: '... theology, if it is to be done with full intellectual rigor, cannot be done outside the context of a love affair with God and God's community, the Church'.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, he sees prayer to be a means through which the student of theology can come to indwell the living traditions and practices of the Church:

... prayer facilitates a complex cohabitation and participation with a 'living tradition' of saints, sinners, fasts and feast days, dogmas and doctrines, the repressed and the explicit emblems of what communing with God might mean. Praying the *Office* illustrates the praying theologian's necessary (critical) dependence on this complex living tradition and its detailed descriptive character.<sup>14</sup>

An indwelling of a tradition, a participation in practices, overtly offends the culture of detachment promoted by modernity and assumed to be properly scientific, but D'Costa repudiates the pretence of detachment:

I argue that such criticisms are misplaced and even self-deluding. Since all enquiry and methods of enquiry are tradition-specific, all forms of education are sectarian in certain ways. There is no high ground in this debate, only differing forms of sectarianism, be they liberal, religious, feminist, psychoanalyst, and so on. But there is an advantage to Catholic sectarianism: its conviction... that reason has a rightful autonomy.<sup>15</sup>

### Hauerwas

This refutation of the delusion of detachment in favour of a properly participatory form of enquiry is echoed in Stanley Hauerwas' more recent work.<sup>16</sup> As one expects with Hauerwas, the book is a collection of essays on the theme but the common thread is that the university – not to mention human society more broadly – needs the presence of theological study within this academic context if the university (and society in general) is to be



challenged and possibly rescued with respect to an arid and hopeless utilitarianism that is incapable of relating or responding to those deeper questions of the significance of human life that should be the university's proper concern. The university needs the discipline of theology to remind it that education, whether acknowledged or not, properly is moral formation:<sup>17</sup>

Christians should know what their universities are for. They are to shape people in the love of God.<sup>18</sup>

But the argument here, as previously, requires that theology be true to itself, that it is other than this self-destructive culture of utility and detachment, if it is to expose the futility and delusory nature of this currently common academic context. In this respect, and reminiscent of an earlier and more personal essay on laying bricks,<sup>19</sup> Hauerwas includes a chapter entitled 'Carving Stone or Learning to Speak Christian':<sup>20</sup> the study of theology, as integral to Christian discipleship, is an apprenticeship and, as such, cannot possibly be attempted in detachment. It demands an induction, not just into appropriate disciplines and practices, but also into a distinctive language, a distinctive way of speaking. You cannot possibly learn to carve stone or lay bricks without submitting to the process of induction.

A recent edition of the *International Journal of Systematic Theology* carries four articles on the nature and practice of systematic theology:<sup>21</sup> each of the articles is helpful and, given the differing contexts and commitments of their authors, they are surprisingly complementary. Yet not even Nicholas Healy's excellent piece that roots the practice of theology in the Church has much to say concerning prayer, the disciplines of discipleship or the shaping of the virtues.<sup>22</sup> A culture of detachment presently seems to overshadow and qualify even our best theological endeavours; whatever we say concerning what ought to be, of how the study of theology ought to be pursued, it remains idealistic, removed from the reality, and that often within the Protestant seminary as much as in the secular university.

### Not from a tree

Luke's Gospel tells the story of a tax-collector named Zacchaeus who 'wanted to see who Jesus was'<sup>23</sup> and who, being vertically challenged (not to say immensely unpoplar), ran ahead and climbed

a tree in order to observe Jesus – presumably, from a safe distance. Jesus simply will not permit such detached encounter. Karl Barth, particularly in the Prolegomena to his *Church Dogmatics*, identifies scientific method as a proper response to a subject.<sup>24</sup> Theology is the study of God – it is not the study of the phenomenon of human religion (which, though a valid study in its own right, also surely cannot be truly studied in detachment) – and theology, as the study of God, most certainly cannot be undertaken in detachment. Yet one might never suspect this from a cursory review of most theological courses, from the separation of worship and prayer from academic study, from the division between doctrine and ethics, from historical and literary readings of Scripture that make no allusion to its sacramental nature as a means of grace, or even (and perhaps most fundamentally) from an analysis of admissions and appointments criteria.

Reference to admissions and appointments criteria inevitably raises the question of discriminatory and exclusive practices. Am I really suggesting, as Augustine's aphorism would indicate,<sup>25</sup> that only those who believe can participate in the process of understanding? I think I am so suggesting but must raise the corresponding question of how readily a Geography department would admit a student or tutor who maintained that the earth was flat or was supported on the backs of an infinity of turtles,<sup>26</sup> or how readily a History department would admit someone who held recent romantic novels to be valid source documents for previous centuries, or of how readily a Chemistry or Bio-chemistry department would admit (or continue the candidacy) of someone who consistently refused to comply with strict laboratory practices of sterilisation and protective clothing.

It is perhaps this last example that raises the most pertinent parallel: belief can often be tenuous and divine encounter can neither be manipulated nor guaranteed; the best that we ourselves can achieve by way of the nurturing of belief or the expectation of divine encounter is to participate in those rites and practices that are coherent with that belief, that nurture and encourage that belief, and that offer prospect and sacramental promise of divine encounter. One simply cannot study Chemistry without participating in the rites and disciplines of the laboratory. One simply cannot study Christian theology (or Islam, Buddhism or Hinduism for that matter) without participating in the liturgical rites and spiritual disciplines of religious piety. We



come to know by participating – we cannot truly know in detachment.

And since we cannot know in detachment, since all knowledge is participatory, since all education implies a submission to the rites and disciplines of a particular subject (of a particular ‘discipline’) and since this is most overtly true of the study of theology (or at least this has been the case for the majority of the Church’s history), is it not extraordinary that theology can now be studied with virtually no integration of doctrine and ethics, outside a context of liturgical worship and prayer, and with no requirement whatsoever with respect to spiritual discipline? And if this generally is the case in university departments, I have regretfully to admit that the matter is not that more encouraging in theological seminaries and Bible Schools.

### Liturgy

A more authentic, integrated and historically coherent approach to the study of theology would have to begin by establishing an all pervading context of liturgical worship and prayer. All study, all ‘sub-disciplines’ must cohere with this doxological context and be shaped by it. Being a Baptist, my continual reference to the liturgical may seem surprising – Baptists aren’t noted for their commitment to structured patterns of worship and prayer; Charles Spurgeon thoroughly scorned them. I can only personally confess that I have come to believe that the life of most Baptist and ‘free’ churches is inestimably impoverished by the lack of the rhythm that a structured pattern of prayer and worship facilitates. Such a pattern connects the worship and prayer of any local church with the worship and prayer of the Church catholic in its connectedness and continuity. And theological education is necessarily communal. A daily, weekly, monthly, termly and annual worshipful and prayerful context is simply unsustainable without some formal (albeit flexible) pattern and rhythm of reflection. And this rhythm of readings, prayers, canticles and reflection, progressing through the seasons of the Christian year and thereby enabling an indwelling of the narratives of the gospel, surely could provide a framework for the study of Scripture, for the study of the development and coherence of doctrine, for a study of the Christian virtues identified in the true humanity of Jesus Christ, and (with respect to seminary formation) for an exploration of the patterns, responsibilities and manner of Christian ministry. The overarching and underlying doxo-

logical and liturgical framework would give an integrated coherence and character to the whole.<sup>27</sup>

I am not for a moment suggesting any diminishing of proper academic rigour, I am rather insisting on the *context* in which this academic rigour should occur. Indeed, in some respects I am arguing for a greater rigour, a rigour of personal devotion, a rigour of liturgical worship discipline, a rigour of a hermeneutic of obedience,<sup>28</sup> a rigour of Christian character and formation, a rigour of spiritual discipline. And I am arguing, perhaps offensively, that without these doxological, spiritual and personal rigours, theology is not truly theology, Scripture is not truly read and heard, doctrine is not truly comprehended – or, as St Athanasius put it:

One cannot possibly understand the teaching of the saints unless one has a pure mind and is trying to imitate their life.<sup>29</sup>

When I was a student in the early 1970s the historical-critical method reigned supreme and preparation for Christian ministry was almost entirely academic in the ‘bookish’ sense of the word. I remain immensely grateful for the example of academic rigour and godly commitment set by my tutors, but there was little by way of practical training and less still by way of overt spiritual formation beyond morning and evening prayers (usually without any obvious pattern or structure). Spiritual direction was unheard of in my context then and would probably have been repudiated. The rise of courses in applied or practical theology has significantly affected patterns of ministerial formation; historical criticism, though far from dead, no longer passes unchallenged; most ordinands follow some form of placement based course; and a denominational list of required competencies necessitates and shapes patterns of practical training that were almost wholly absent forty years ago. But beyond more contemplative (though voluntary) annual retreats, the availability of spiritual direction and a somewhat more structured approach to Chapel worship and prayer, I am less than convinced that much is really attempted or achieved by way of spiritual formation. We use the right language and (as noted previously) we have a module on spirituality, we speak with students about their personal and spiritual development, but such features, I suspect, remain additions to the course rather than the context and all pervading focus for the course in the minds of most participants.



## University again

But at least within a seminary or Bible School context there is a discernable desire for change and a recognition that such change is appropriate and necessary. I am not competent to comment on either the desire or the recognition of appropriateness and necessity in universities, but it is this that is more central to my concerns in this paper. Though I remain passionate concerning Christian ministry and the appropriate manner in which men and women may be prepared for Christian ministry, the focus of this paper falls on the more fundamental question of the appropriate nature and definition of theology itself, on the incongruity of the study of theology ever being attempted in detachment, and therefore on the possibility or otherwise of theology being authentically studied within a university context that continues to favour detachment. As I have already admitted, I am not competent to answer this question – I am only competent to pose it; I am not competent to assess, for instance, whether a university course in theology could be structured around the liturgy of the Christian year; whether explorations in prayer or in any of the spiritual disciplines could comprise the core element in such a course; whether a focus on the virtues and on personal spiritual formation could similarly be integral; or whether (most fundamentally) the entire course could be conducted in a context of worship and prayer – whether, that is to say, theology in a university setting can truly be *fides quaerens intellectum*.

If theology cannot again truly be *fides quaerens intellectum*, it deserves to lose its place within the university and within the public square, not because it fails to conform to a liberal and utilitarian agenda but because it conforms all too thoroughly; because it has ceased to be truly Christian theology. With Stanley Hauerwas and Gavin D'Costa, of course, this is not the outcome I seek: I pray for and long for the renewal of theology within the university. And, with Hauerwas and D'Costa, I pray for and long for this renewal of theology precisely for the sake of the university and of society – not just as a refutation of a culture of detachment (which increasingly is under more general threat already) but also (and relatedly) as a refutation of the dominance of a utilitarianism that is destructive of education itself and of the flourishing of human society.

Gavin D'Costa argues for a self-consciously sectarian Catholic university in the context of a toler-

ant and religiously plural society. I am not at all qualified to comment on the proposal (being neither Catholic nor a university lecturer). My scepticism relates rather to the genuinely liberality of liberalism, the genuinely tolerant plurality of professed pluralism and the dominance of a lingering culture of detachment. Certainly, with D'Costa and Hauerwas, I recognise that

... if Christians learn to take intellectually seriously the practices that should and do constitute the church, they may well find that how we think about economics, biology, or physics is different than how those subjects are now structured in the university.<sup>30</sup>

And in this respect, notwithstanding my admitted lack of qualification, I affirm the ideal which, I suspect, would amount to an effective renewal for the Church of a monastic context for all learning.<sup>31</sup> I am not suggesting that learning should be restricted to those who have made vows of chastity, poverty and obedience but I am suggesting that all learning, for those who are disciples of Christ, should occur in a disciplined context of worship, prayer and the formation of virtue. The pretence by Christians to learn other than in such a context, to learn in supposed detachment, is apostasy, is an active denial of the foundational essence of Christian faith.

Famously, John Calvin begins the final version of his *Institutes* with a discussion of the two parts of knowledge, the knowledge of God and the knowledge of ourselves, which, in actuality, form a single and indivisible knowledge since '... man never achieves a clear knowledge of himself unless he has first looked upon God's face...'.<sup>32</sup> But Calvin immediately clarifies that a true knowledge of God, upon which any authentic knowledge of ourselves rests, cannot possibly be a knowledge in detachment, a mere philosophical speculation, but must be personal and responsive:

... the knowledge of God, as I understand it, is that by which we not only conceive that there is a God but also grasp what befits us and is proper to his glory... Indeed, we shall not say that, properly speaking, God is known where there is no religion or piety.<sup>33</sup>

The reference is significant not just with respect to the nature of theology but also, by implication, to its place within the university and, consequently, to the nature of the university itself. As Hauerwas argues so passionately, the university must not be allowed to descend to mere training for a profes-



sion, to the merely utilitarian. Its proper nature and function is to encourage and to facilitate an understanding of ourselves and of the universe that we inhabit; its proper concerns must be ontological and teleological rather than merely functional and commercial. Within such a university, the place of theology ought to be assured since, as Calvin states earlier, 'the knowledge of ourselves not only arouses us to seek God, but also, as it were, leads us by the hand to find him'.<sup>34</sup> Calvin's doctrine of creation and of God's self-revelation within and through creation is robust (in deference to Barth I avoid referring to such as a 'general' revelation). Any diligent pondering of creation and of ourselves will lead us to a pondering of God – or rather, through any diligent pondering of creation and of ourselves we will be led by the Spirit to a pondering of God. But, as is clarified by the unfolding argument of the *Institutes*, any knowledge of God inherent in ourselves and in creation is distorted by our frailty and sin. We need God's revelation through history and through Scripture if we are ever rightly to comprehend that knowledge of God inherent in ourselves and in creation.<sup>35</sup> Without this true knowledge of God we will never truly know ourselves or begin to comprehend the universe we inhabit. To put the matter more directly, without the contribution of theology, the university will never fulfil its proper goals and nature, inevitably it will default to the utilitarian. But for theology to fulfil this task of calling the university to be truly itself, theology must be truly itself; must be contemplative rather than detached; must issue in piety rather than in shallow and pointless speculation. Only when theology is truly theology can the university be true to itself. Wherever and whenever a university seeks to be true to itself the place of theology within it is assured.

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## Notes

- 1 '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).' Gavin D'Costa, *Theology in the Public Square: Church, Academy and Nation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005) 10.
- 2 For a general account of the Medieval Church and its theology see G. R. Evans (ed.), *The Medieval Theologians: An Introduction to Theology in the Medieval Period* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001).
- 3 See for instance Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).
- 4 John E. Colwell, *Promise and Presence* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2005) 95. See also J.E. Colwell, *Living the Christian Story* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2001).
- 5 For an account of the more recent development of the university see David Bebbington, 'The Secularization of British Universities since the Mid-Nineteenth Century' in G. Marsden and B.J. Longfield (eds.), *The Secularisation of the Academy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) 259-277.
- 6 R.W. Jenson, *God after God: the God of the Past and the God of the Future seen in the work of Karl Barth* (Indianapolis and New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969) 64; cf. Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His life from letters and autobiographical texts* (London: SCM, 1976) 63-64.
- 7 '... I think it is quite telling that departments of history and religious studies often are the last representatives of modernist presumptions about objectivity and rationality'. Stanley Hauerwas, *The State of the University: Academic Knowledges and the Knowledge of God* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007) 21; cf. John Milbank, 'The Conflict of the Faculties: Theology and the Economy of the Sciences' in Mark Thiessen Nation & Samuel Wells (eds.), *Faithfulness and Fortitude: In Conversation with the Theological Ethics of Stanley Hauerwas* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000) 39-57.
- 8 Nicholas M. Healy, 'What is Systematic Theology?' *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 11 (2009) 24-39, 35.
- 9 D'Costa, *Theology in the Public Square*, 1.
- 10 D'Costa, *Theology in the Public Square*, 19.
- 11 D'Costa, *Theology in the Public Square*, 92. For sustained proposals for such a Christian University see Michael L. Budde & John Wright (eds.), *Conflicting Allegiances: The Church-Based University in a Liberal Democratic Society* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2004).
- 12 D'Costa, *Theology in the Public Square*, 112.
- 13 D'Costa, *Theology in the Public Square*, 114.
- 14 D'Costa, *Theology in the Public Square*, 119.
- 15 D'Costa, *Theology in the Public Square*, 217.
- 16 Hauerwas, *State of the University*.
- 17 Hauerwas, *State of the University*, 46.
- 18 Hauerwas, *State of the University*, 91.
- 19 Stanley Hauerwas, *After Christendom? How the Church Is to Behave If Freedom, Justice, and a Christian Nation Are Bad Ideas* (Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1991) 101-111.
- 20 Hauerwas, *State of the University*, 108-121.
- 21 *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 11/1 (2009): Paul S. Fiddes, 'Concept, Image and Story in Systematic Theology' (3-23), Nicholas M. Healy, 'What is Systematic Theology?' (24-39), A.N. Williams, 'What is Systematic Theology?' (40-55), and



- John Webster, 'Principles of Systematic Theology' (56-71).
- 22 'The condition of the possibility of truthful systematic inquiry into the significance of the gospel of Jesus Christ is the faith of the church, its election and its indefectibility through grace. Without that ecclesial basis, theological inquiry becomes something other than Christian systematic theology. If systematic theology cannot be performed except on such grounds, it is difficult to see how it can function properly within the parameters of inquiry acceptable to the modern university.' Healy, 'What is Systematic Theology?' 37-38.
  - 23 *ezētei idein ton Iēsoun tis estin...* (Luke 19:3).
  - 24 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I/1 second edition, ed. G. W. Bromiley & T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975) 3ff.; cf. Thomas F. Torrance, *Theological Science* (Oxford: OUP, 1969).
  - 25 *crede, ut intelligas* ('believe, in order to understand') repeated by Anselm as *credo ut intelligam* ('I believe in order to understand').
  - 26 The story behind this saying is related in Robert Anton Wilson, *Prometheus Rising* (Phoenix: New Falcon, 1997) 25; Stephen Hawking also relates a similar story in his *A Brief History of Time* (London: Bantam, 1988).
  - 27 For a sketch of how a course in doctrine and ethics could be structured according to the liturgy of the Christian year see my *The Rhythm of Doctrine: a Liturgical Sketch of Christian Faith and Faithfulness* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007)
  - 28 For an account of this dynamic of reading and interpreting Scripture, common to many early Continental Anabaptists, see Stuart W. Murray, *Biblical Interpretation in the Anabaptist Tradition* (Waterloo, Ont: Pandora Press, 2000).
  - 29 Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* (London: Mowbray, 1953) § 57.
  - 30 Hauerwas, *State of the University*, 31.
  - 31 For a commendation of a monastic context for learning see Seejean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture*, trans. Catherine Misrahi (Fordham: Fordham University Press, New York, 1960).
  - 32 John Calvin, *Institutes*, I i 2.
  - 33 John Calvin, *Institutes*, I ii 1.
  - 34 John Calvin, *Institutes*, I i 1.
  - 35 John Calvin, *Institutes*, I iv-vi.

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