

**Stephen Toulmin. 1990. Theology in the Context of the University. *Theological Education*, 26 (2) Spring 1990: 51-65. Reprinted with permission as a stimulus for discussion at the *Ted W. Ward Consultation*, November 2000.**

The question “What place does Theology have in universities today?” can be addressed from two different directions. On the one hand, we can treat it as an *institutional* question: “What are the relations between university departments or schools of Theology, and the other schools or departments alongside which they work? Has Theology, for instance, a place in undergraduate colleges of Arts and Sciences?” In many North American universities, the subject is taught on the undergraduate level, in most cases only as an elective subject, and usually under a pseudonym like “Religious Studies”; at Northwestern, for example, the College of Arts and Sciences has a department of History and Literature of Religion. Alternatively, is the proper location of Departments of Theology in the graduate school? To the extent that philosophical theology, comparative religion and the like provide fields for original research on an advanced level, they have a place in graduate training. Or is the central place of theology a professional one, associated with the training of priests and ministers? In that case, the subject would preeminently be taught as Law and Medicine are taught, within the framework of a professional school.

Questions about the academic locus of Theology may also have an *intellectual* sense. Instead of asking about the administration or organization of university institutions, we can ask about the standing of theology, as a field for research and debate alongside—even overlapping—the fields of philosophy, anthropology, biology or whatever. How far can theology look other contemporary disciplines in the eye? How do its central intellectual concerns compare and/or connect with those of more established disciplines in the academic world, in either the sciences or the humanities? About this, the spectrum of possible views ranges from a grandiose extreme, of seeing theology as a foundational discipline, in which all other subjects should be, grounded, to the more cynical extreme, of seeing theology as a “pseudo subject” or “non subject”, and theological doctrines as disguised matters of personal preference.

At first sight, these institutional and intellectual aspects are quite distinct, and even separate. Yet that appearance is misleading. The task of deciding whether an organizational niche exists in universities for the study of theology—and, if so, what—can hardly be tackled, without at the same time addressing the question of the intellectual standing of the subject. To the extent that we regard theology as that body of doctrines (or “dogmas”) that are the intellectual foundation and/or justification for a particular kind of religious life and practice, we make the subject a *theoretical* field of study, which is seen as conceptually prior to, and more basic than, pastoral theology, for the same reasons that biology is conceptually prior to, and more basic than, medicine. Conversely, to the extent that we treat theology, first and foremost, as a *practical* (though not exclusively *pastoral*) discipline, we make it harder to separate the intellectual critique of doctrines from issues of liturgy or stewardship, counselling or homiletics. That being so, attitudes to the *bona fides* and seriousness of theological concepts and issues are discussed alongside, and in conjunction with, administrative issues. Those to whom the life and practice of religion are the context for all truly theological issues will be readier to choose a “professional school” model of organization; those to whom doctrine\* is “foundational” will give theology a narrower and more “academic” niche in university organization.

These generalizations may be, either, a commentary on the present state of affairs, or else a wider, historical commentary on the changing patterns of academic organizations to be found in different cultures and historical periods. Looking at the varied academic roles that theology has played at different times and places is a useful prelude to restating the issues confronting North American theological schools at present. Let me begin with an historical overview, and defer the more practical questions for theologians in the context of different kinds of colleges and universities. Focussing first on matters of history, we may set up some broad temporal subdivisions, marking periods during which such matters were dealt with differently.

Either way we slice it—institutionally or intellectually, we should notice some striking historical transitions. In the first centuries A.D., both the intellectual and the institutional standing of Christianity were transformed by its “establishment” in the Eastern Roman Empire, thanks to the alliance of the Patriarch Athanasius and the Emperor Constantine, and the doctrinal decisions of the Council of Nicaea. Thirteen centuries later, there was an equal discontinuity after the Protestant Reformation and the Council of Trent. Institutionally and intellectually, theology thus had a very different place in European universities from 1150 to 1550 from what it had in the 300 years from the 1650s to the 1950s. And, if there is a special uncertainty about its place today, that is because in our own generation we have seen many of the seventeenth century’s innovations being once again called in question.

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In the pre-Reformation period, from Hildebrand to Erasmus, there was a standard pattern in European universities, by which Divinity stood among the customary “faculties” of the University alongside Medicine and Jurisprudence. Philosophy embraced the fundamental arts and sciences that formed the *trivium* and *quadrivium* of general education; but these were seen as preparation for professional training in the three parallel professions of Law, Physick and the Church. (That division of learning is embodied architecturally in the Old Schools at the University of Oxford, where the entrance to each traditional “school” stands on one or another of the interior walls of the Quadrangle.)

Institutionally, from the twelfth to the sixteenth century, the theological learning required for entry into the Church thus existed alongside and on the same footing as the medical and legal learning required for entry into the other two chief professions. So conceived, theology was a *practical* discipline; its content was independent of (and in many ways antedated) the theoretical arts and sciences. Since the universities of Europe were initially “schools” for training lawyers, doctors and priests, they were the repositories for the best scholarship in Theology, as well as in Law and Physick, but were not yet committed to the intellectual primacy of a “systematic” theology—as a foundational theory—distinct and separate from practical or pastoral theology. Rather, the more that the medieval schools, following Thomas Aquinas, organized different fields of study along lines derived from Aristotle, the more committed they became to interpreting practical disciplines as fields for *phronesis* (or “prudence”) rather than for the *episteme* (or “theoretical grasp”) of astronomy and geometry. To this day, indeed, the most serious misreadings of Aquinas come from seeing him—as a philosophical theologian—as committed to a theoretical, rather than pastoral view of the subject; whereas he was, in actual fact, as much a master of the rhetoric of Cicero and Quintilian as he was of the logical analyses of the Platonists.

Up to the time of the Council of Trent, then, intellectual debates in the Universities in the middle ages and the renaissance were conducted against the background of a general cultural consensus. The intellectual culture of Western Europe embodied a shared understanding of Christian belief, a liturgy which was largely taken over from traditional Judaism, and a repertory of theological concepts many of which could be discussed on an equal basis with Islamic scholars, too. When Aquinas writes of the central concepts of moral and general theology as accessible to thinkers from any creed or culture—via the *ratio naturalis*—this is not some kind of European parochialism, still less cultural imperialism. It reflects the fact that, for medieval scholars, preChristian and nonChristian writers, such as Aristotle and Cicero, made fundamental contributions to ethics, politics and theology, which were incorporable into Christian doctrine with rational confidence.

After the late sixteenth century, this changed. The politico-theological confrontation between Counter Reformation Catholics and dogmatic Protestants broke down the earlier theological consensus. No longer could one maintain the scholarly agreement between theologians from different religious communities that maintained the rational confidence of previous centuries. With the mid seventeenth century, questions of *doctrine*, which were earlier open to intellectual speculation and debate, were transformed into matters of *dogma*, to be settled authoritatively by Church authority, and ceased to be open to questioning or speculation. (Thus, the intellectually imaginative tradition of *Summas* gave way to the magisterial production of pedestrian *Manuals*.) Meanwhile, in the Universities, the rise of philosophical rationalism after Rene Descartes offered an alternative but quite separate path to Philosophy, which now—only now—set aside its Aristotelian heritage of rhetoric and practical philosophy and committed itself to logicoanalytical methods modelled on those of geometry.

The resulting “New Philosophy” defined the intellectual background against which arose systems of political ideas, from Thomas Hobbes and John Locke to Jean Jacques Rousseau and Thomas Jefferson, which were later appealed to, in both the French Republic and the United States of America, as justifying a separation of Church and State. So from the late eighteenth century on, educated Europeans and North Americans found it impossible to treat Theology as on a par with the secular disciplines of Law and Medicine. On their view of religion, there could be no effective consensus in theology as there still was in jurisprudence and medicine. After 1800, these differences became even more marked. The increasing confidence of the physical sciences seemed to undermine the claims of theology ever more radically; and in the early twentieth century this process culminated in the emergence of a secular positivism, many of whose proponents used the very word “theological” as a synonym for “empty” or “meaningless.”

As the 1980s come to an end, the striking feature for our purposes is a new ability to challenge the whole development of modern theology and philosophy, from late seventeenth century rationalism to early twentieth century positivism. Like Ludwig Wittgenstein and Martin Heidegger (as Richard Rorty reminds us) John Dewey has critically questioned the intellectual heritage of philosophical rationalism, and opened a road by which we can move back toward both a more *practical* vision of Philosophy, and a more *pastoral* program for Theology. The sense of stratospheric despair that many readers carry away from the absolute idealism of F. H. Bradley and the systematic theology of Karl Barth has turned out, on this view, to be only a natural sense of loss, in reaction to this recognition that the more grandiose theoretical ambitions of the seventeenth century were misconceived in the first place. If the critical position of these major philosophers is well founded, it opens up the chance for theological issues (at any rate, theological issues of certain kinds) moving closer to the center of the

academic debate within the universities of the future.

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Throughout the three centuries beginning with the end of the Thirty Years War in 1648, accordingly, the academic culture of the European and North American university took for granted a *secular* ideal of learning derived finally from the theologically neutral rationalism of Descartes\* *Discourse on Method*. Viewed against this background, theological issues were increasingly seen as divisive and particularistic: rooted in matters over which the Church disagreed, rather than on any shared consensus—let alone on a *ratio naturalis*. Unless the death of Cartesianism declared by many leading philosophers during the last fifty or sixty years proves (in Mark Twain's phrase) greatly exaggerated, this fact will thus have potentially major implications for theology, also. It undermines the whole “foundationalist” program—which required philosophy to build up a decontextualized and neutral framework of *logic and theory*—in favor of a research program concentrated on matters of *narrative and practice*. If the varied academic disciplines in the contemporary university share any common grounding, therefore, it can no longer be found, either in the selfevident—”clear and distinct”—ideas of Cartesian rationalism, or in the more modest, but still *a priori* assumptions of Lockean empiricism. Instead, that grounding can be brought to light, only by constructing the overall narrative of conceptual history (what some German philosophers today call *Begriffsgeschichte*) from which their common experiential origins can be discovered.

The intellectual situation in theology can be compared with that in ethics, where Alasdair MacIntyre's arguments—notably, in *After Virtue*—have put the historically developing traditions of moral thought back in the center of the picture. It is no accident that MacIntyre and I should be moving in parallel directions. When we first met back in the 1950s, we compared the courses we were currently teaching, on the philosophy of religion and the philosophy of science, respectively; and the contents of the two courses proved to be the same. Both of us saw the same central issues as forming the intellectual warp on which the fabric of Western thought had been woven, whether the ideas in question were labelled as “scientific” or “religious”; and the level of generality and depth at which these issues arose made it hard to classify them as being “philosophical” rather than “theological” or *vice versa*.

Both our courses were organized around the historical evolution of these historically crucial issues. Nor were they confined to the ways in which such issues arise in the Christian world: they also extended back to classical, preChristian Greece, and across the line dividing Judaism from Christianity. Above all, we concentrated on giving a satisfactory account of the different *phases* in the history of Western philosophy: Classical and Patristic (Hellenistic) thought, a medieval period which revived classical ideas, the early modern period of the Renaissance and Scientific Revolution, and the 200 years of mature natural science and post Kantian (“critical”) philosophy. Only with this basic narrative of Western cultural history in mind could one give a proper account of the central issues that have arisen—and still arise—in either science or religion. That same narrative is still (in my view) the groundwork of liberal learning and, in its reconstruction, theology can contribute much material, both in parallel with and overlapping the results obtained in other academic fields.

Nor is the current shift in philosophical method, away from abstract theory and toward concrete narrative, all that recent: it is foreshadowed (e.g.) in R. G. Collingwood's discussion of absolute

presuppositions in his *Essay on Metaphysics* and *Idea of Nature*. As Collingwood saw matters, there is no way to give a formal, universal analysis of “causality,” for example, that is relevant to *all* stages in their historical development; rather the changing patterns of thought about “causality” need to be documented in historical terms, so as to bring to light the genealogical links among our varied “causal” concepts, and the pragmatic considerations that have led to their differentiation.

It is clear in retrospect, that Collingwood recognized some basic points that most professional historians of science did not yet understand. From the 1930s to the 1960s, research on the intellectual development of the natural sciences was mainly written by historians who were influenced, either by the antiphilosophical stance of George Sarton, or by the positivism of the contemporary philosophy of science, or by both. Even Jurgen Habermas\* argument connecting “knowledge” and “human interests” assumed that we can know, in universal terms, what legitimate “human interests” the sciences can serve; and *theological* interests were not included among them. Yet, if we look back from the present to the controversy between Leibniz and Newton to be seen in the Leibniz - Clarke correspondence, or at the widespread acceptance of Newtonian ideas between 1690 and 1750, it is clear that what was at stake for educated Europeans was as much the chance of reconstructing an intellectually defensible theodicy as it was anything in the bailiwick of twentieth century physical theory.

In pursuing this historical agenda, we should not ignore the varied strands of European thought, even within its underlying warp. Popular rhetoric today uses the catch phrase, “the JudeoChristian tradition”; but, for philosophical theologians as for historians of modern science, it is less urgent to underline the continuity of Judaism and Christianity than it is to study the ways in which, in patristic times, Christianity distinguished itself from the varied forms of Judaism, and established among later Christian thinkers a body of theological doctrines of which no exact counterpart exists in historic Judaism.

From the start, Christian pastoral teaching was *cosmopolitan* in its aims: its audience was “neither Jew nor Gentile, neither bond nor free.” If Judaism was the religion of a particular people and place, the claims of Christianity were directed at people in all lands, at all times from the days of Jesus on. These *universalistic* claims appealed to preexisting interests in the Hellenism of the Eastern Mediterranean, and the debate about the legitimation of Christian practice was thus in new intellectual directions. As a result, Christian Theology entered an ambiguous alliance with Greek philosophy, and ever since the ideas and doctrines of Christianity have been exposed to theoretical critique from philosophers *for internal reasons*: this has only occasionally been true of Judaism, in the case of a few thinkers like Maimonides, who imported issues of philosophical theory into the debate *from outside*.

This contrast between the modes of discussion typical of religious debate in the (practical) Jewish Rabbinical and (theoretical) Christian traditions came to a head most strikingly after the Reformation, notably with the theologico political confrontations provoked by the Council of Trent. Arguably, preReformation Christian theology shared much with medieval Rabbis; the case analyses undertaken by moral theologians within Christian ethics were basically similar to those used by Rabbis in framing their own *response* on the basis of the Torah. Even in Aquinas, there is much that is best understood by placing it back in the rhetorical, not the analytical tradition in philosophy.

After 1620, however, the loss of an earlier consensus about the basic world picture, the horrors of the Thirty Years War, and the failure of communication between Protestant and Catholic theologians, were an occasion to look for neutral, rational—or “logical”—methods of thought and analysis, open to reflective thinkers from any background. This was the source of philosophical rationalism; and, in the

renewal of European society and culture after 1648, the history of theology became tightly—if not fatally—bound up with the fate of that rationalism. In medieval Europe, there was room for many coexisting viewpoints or traditions of Christian thought and practice: from the seventeenth century, by contrast, the ruling ambition was to “prove” the central ideas and theses of theology “irrefutably.” Hence, the transformation of Catholic doctrine into dogma; hence, also, Leibniz’s appeal to the Principle Sufficient Reason as a criterion for establishing an unchallenged core of ecumenical beliefs.

This conversion of theology from an adventurous speculative task, as in the *Summas*, into an authoritarian system of centrally validated teachings, as in the *Manuals*, has always appealed to the conservatives. (As Evelyn Waugh said in a letter to a friend, written from Jerusalem: “For me, of course, Christianity *begins with* the Counter Reformation.”) The change has also, less happily, tied theology’s destiny too closely to that of philosophical rationalism. All that is problematic in Descartes’ program for a “foundationalist” epistemology—notably, its exclusively *theoretical* aims—has thus become problematic for theology, in which the experiential roots of doctrine in human practice are obscured by an imperious demand for “proofs.” Almost alone, the Society of Friends has objected to this change, and given the doctrinal aspects of Christianity (*episteme/theoria*) second place to the demands of Christian life and practice (*phronesis/praxis*).

Subsequent challenges to Cartesianism, from Immanuel Kant in the late eighteenth century to Dewey or Rorty in our own day, have undermined the intellectual program of post Reformation theology, and the personal self confidence of theologians, alike. Schleiermacher’s hermeneutics was an intelligible extension of Kant’s critical program for philosophy; so the twentieth century theological debate has focussed overmuch on establishing the “very possibility” of a rationally defensible religious belief. (Recall Kant’s question, whether any rational enterprise is *uberhaupt moglich*—“possible in the first place” or “in principle.”) For those who are still mired in the Cartesian tradition, the seemingly “rational” status of the sciences makes religion problematic, not *vice versa*; and, as a result, Hans Kung lectures on “Science and the Problem of God”, not (as we might expect from a believer) on “God and the Problem of Science.”

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What, then, is new in our present situation? At its heart (I argue) is the return to a *practical* conception of theology, which had been central to historic Christianity, at least up to the time of the Council of Trent. From this point of view, theological issues cannot be defined in abstract, decontextualized terms; the issues of theology arise, and its concepts are meaningful, only when related to the “forms of religious life” within which they have a point, and which they presuppose. In this, of course, they are no different from the issues and concepts of mathematics and natural science, let alone in contrast to those ideas. As Wittgenstein used to insist, collectively intelligible concepts of any kind can acquire shared meanings, only to the extent that they are used, and understood, by people who operate within *Lebensformen*. or “forms of life”, which are themselves sufficiently shared; the word “innings” is understood by baseball cognoscenti in ways that are only marginally intelligible to fans and players of cricket, and *vice versa*. We can effectively understand the theological principles of Hassidic Judaism, Islamic Sufism or Quakerism, accordingly, only if we recognize how the practice of these varieties of Judaism, Islam and Christianity is distinctive; just as we can master the quantum mechanical idea of complementarity only by recognizing how, in actual practice, the physics of Werner Heisenberg

and Nils Bohr differs from all earlier physics.

So construed the term “theology” cannot be read as the name of a separate discipline, which exists alongside, and on a similar basis to, other academic disciplines. That would be to make it the product of some prior abstraction by which “theological” issues were *distinguished* and *separated* from those of systematic botany or French literature. Rather, issues of theology exist, and arise, *at the base* of all abstract academic disciplines equally. Just as problems in the physical theory of relativity can be discussed *philosophically*—note the adverbial form—so, too, problems in ecology and psychoanalysis can be discussed *theologically*: i.e., with an eye to their implications for religious life and experience.

This approach to contemporary theology dovetails nicely with some views that Richard Mouw cited from Martha Nussbaum: e.g., what she says about the importance of setting aside the rationalist commitment “to an ‘ascent’ from the perception of particulars to the intellectual grasp of universals” in favor of a commitment to “a respect for particularity and complexity.” Such a move away from the universal, and toward the particular, is what we can expect of any shift from an abstract and theoretical conception of theology— as one self contained academic discipline among others—to a deeper concern with concrete, specific details of human experience in the realm of the religious life.

This shift is no ground for “theoretical despair”: still less does it imply “nihilism.” Readers nostalgic for Cartesian foundationalism may greet its abandonment with a sense of loss, and rationalize it by talking of Absurdity. But rationalism relied from the start on a misconceived, quasi-Euclidean model of academic disciplines, and in setting it aside in the late twentieth century, we do not *lose* anything. Rather, we acknowledge that, in this respect, seventeenth century “foundationalism” (both philosophical and theological) led into a *cul de sac* from which we are lucky to escape.

The price that seventeenth century rationalists paid for Certainty was that they turned their backs on the “particularity and complexity” of human life, not just in the religious field but more generally. If a recognition of human finitude calls for a fresh modesty and humility from future theologians, they are not alone: to quote Richard Mouw again.

[If] we affectively appropriate these [Inovel] attitudes, we can display the kind of patience that is capable of tolerating complexities and living with seemingly unconnected particularities, without giving in to despair or cynicism.

Only one comment needs adding. By this step, we join hands with the humanists of the late Renaissance, from Erasmus up to Montaigne, all of whom understood the inevitability of complexity and uncertainty, and were not tempted into the “dead end” of rationalism.

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At this point, we can return to the institutional and organizational issues we began with. The administrative structure of the university today, at least in the United States, is a tribute to the enduring power of rationalism. Most departments are still organized and identified by a commitment to the interests of some individual discipline, conceived of as not merely *distinct*, but also separate, from other parallel disciplines; the central concern of academics is to explore the ramifications of those separate inherited disciplines. As we approach the year 2000, we increasingly recognize the *limitations* of that

conception. On more and more levels, any exclusive preoccupation with the ramifications of separate disciplines appears pointless and partial. In particular, if we explore the underlying presuppositions of different disciplines, and the assumptions involved in separating them, we are increasingly led into a *transdisciplinary* dialogue, of a kind to which theology has a distinctive contribution to make.

As I argued elsewhere the practical ideas embodied in the ecology *movement*—in contrast to the biological *science* of “ecology”—have an inescapably theological color and significance. In particular, decisions about “environmental impact” and the like involve judgments of relative priority in the overall scheme of things: weighing the interests of human beings against those of redwood trees, smallpox viruses, snail darters, and natural beauties. Many people—it is true—evaluate these choices in utilitarian terms, balancing their prospective benefits for present and future human beings. But such utilitarian calculations are inherently limited: it is no longer self-evident today that the aims and interests of human beings—whether now or in the remote future—can wholly outweigh those of the other creatures with which we share this planet.

As Christopher Stone argues, such vulnerable creatures as redwood trees can be said to have legitimate “interests” and deserve, in principle, to have “standing” in the judicial and political arenas. Human beings may feel sober confidence that their own affairs have a serious importance, from a cosmological viewpoint; but they are not entitled to assume that their own interests are of exclusive cosmological importance. So the challenge remains, of developing a theological point of view from which to view in proper proportion the relative significance of *human* concerns as compared with those of the rest of Nature. For those who speak of the natural world as God’s Creation, the theological status of these issues is clear enough; but, even for those people who do not explicitly attribute the Scheme of Things to its Divine Creator, these judgments have a kind of comprehensiveness that makes them nonetheless “theological.”

Secondly, enduring questions arise about the idea of Human Nature, and its implications for the social sciences. On this second level, it is sad—even embarrassing—to find theologians accepting the jargon and dicta of current sociology or anthropology as binding on their own discussions. For many of the methodological problems that afflict the human sciences today spring from their out-of-date commitment to the older rationalist picture of distinct and separable scientific disciplines. Far from current anthropology and sociology having an authority superior to that of theology, indeed, the human sciences themselves still have something to learn from reflecting on their own assumptions about the nature of human agency, and the responsibility of human beings for what they “make of themselves.”

For the purpose of practice, not least in pastoral counseling, the affective unity of the human personality (at least, in its unfragmented, nonschizophrenic state) is, surely, a primary datum: so understood, the social cultural and other characteristics of the human individual are so many abstract features, when considered in isolation from that unity. Rather than leave questions about “personality disorders” and their care to the discordant diversity of psychiatrists, psychoanalysts, cultural anthropologists and ethnomethodologists alone, the challenge arises of bringing older theological concepts to bear on the understanding of our current mental afflictions. Ideas like “grace,” “humility,” “conscience” and “wilful ignorance,” refer to *experiential* realities, on which the work of psychiatrists, cultural anthropologists and radical behaviorists may throw light, but can never displace.

If theologians take seriously the *integrating* issues which overlap the concerns of, for example, human scientists or environmentalists, they must be ready to sit down with colleagues from all relevant disciplines, with confidence that they can discuss such issues *as equals*. No discipline has a monopoly

on these issues: in the nature of the case, indeed, they do not belong to any *single* discipline. Rather, novel forums are needed, where people from different backgrounds can discuss “the best that has been thought and said” about these matters in *any* field.

One thing is true in the case both of cosmological questions about the Scheme of Things, and of confessional questions about Conscience, the unity of Personality, and human finitude; the central, distinctive concern of theology is precisely with the *interrelatedness* of things that, for 350 years, the Academy has preferred to keep *separate*. Those years, however, were dominated by a rationalism that we have now put behind us. Recent writers on moral practice are reviving older arguments about the Just War, or the ethics of Usury, for the light they throw on current questions about nuclear weapons and third world debt. In other parts of theology, too, our conceptual inheritance from earlier times—especially, before the fatal confrontation between radical Protestants and Counter Reformation Catholics—can still guide our understanding of the current problems of Humanity, both in the Orders of Society and Culture, and in the renewed engagement of Humanity with Nature.

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Let me end on a more idiosyncratic note, with a personal response to one of the issues raised at the New Harmony meeting. The light of our conceptual inheritance will remain available, only while its *content* is preserved and kept bright; and this has implications for *how* theology is taught in the contemporary university. Up to the seventeenth century (we saw) Divinity had a place in European universities alongside Law and Medicine: the central concepts of Divinity were taught alongside those of Physick and Jurisprudence. To this day, the crucial strength of Anglo-American law schools is, indeed, the straightforward and lucid exposition they provide of the central concepts of civil and criminal law, real property, tort and contract, commercial transactions and the rest. Only a sound and lucid introduction to those concepts puts us in a position to claim, either a proper grounding in Law, or the preparation needed for research in legal anthropology or the sociology of law.

I was therefore disturbed by what Ronald Thiemann said at New Harmony: viz., that the vigorous debates within the Harvard Law School about “critical legal theory” *and the like*, mean that the standard courses on (e.g.) tort and contract can no longer be taught in this straightforward and lucid manner, which—he implied—is now *out-of-date*. Rather (on his account) Law is now taught at Harvard as a branch of social science, in which the practice of law is always modulated by a sense of its social and cultural relativity. To put it more exactly: if I believed that Harvard no longer gives straightforward and lucid courses on the central ideas of Anglo-American legal concepts and practice, I *would be* disturbed. And I would also be worried if theologians took on trust Thiemann’s corollary: that the central ideas of theology, too, must now be taught with an eye to their social variability and cultural relativity.

If theology returns to a tradition of *practice* rather than of *theory*, we can take better heart. For what Aristotle says of Ethics is then true of theology too. We know for sure from practical experience—he says—that chicken is good to eat: only subsequently can we ask *why*, in point of theory—on what conditions and in what respects—this is the case. In the same way, without a sound grasp of the *practical* force of terms like “negligence” and “strict liability”, we cannot even *pose* the cross-cultural and cross-jurisdictional questions of the social sciences: e.g., “Why do English Courts not accept the notion of ‘strict liability\*?’” or “Why did the early medieval Teutonic tribes ignore issues of

knowledge and negligence in assessing damages for personal injury?”

Similarly, in theology: only a sound grasp of the traditional ideas of “grace” and “conscience” allows us to frame meaningful questions about the theological variations among the styles of religious life and practice in different societies and cultures. So, in this field, something of lasting value may be achieved, if cultural anthropologists pay as much attention to things a sound, historically informed teacher of systematic theology can explain, as is at present the case *vice versa*. The central place that theology has played in the history of Western philosophy and science makes a sound, historically informed account of the traditions of religious thought and practice in Western Europe and North America as central as ever to the mission of the university today.