Theology and the Idea of University

La teología y la idea de Universidad

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Resumen: El presente artículo analiza la genealogía de la universidad desde el punto de las tres notas que la definen: libertad, autonomía y universidad. A partir de este análisis muestra que la tendencia de universalidad procede de la teología, mientras que la tradición de autonomía posee un origen relativamente secular. De esta manera se pone de relieve que la teología no es solamente un tema que ha de tenerse en cuenta en las controversias universitarias, sino que afecta a la naturaleza misma de la universidad: al abordar la crisis de la teología en la universidad, podemos estar abordando la cuestión de la crisis actual de la universidad como tal.

Palabras clave: Teología, Universidad, Fe y razón, Ciencia.

Abstract: This article analyses the genealogy of the university from the perspective of its three defining characteristics: freedom, self-government and universality. The Author suggest that the universalising tendency of university is theologically derived, while the tradition of autonomy is of relatively secular origin. Hence, in addressing the question of the current crisis of theology within the university, we may be addressing the question of the current crisis of the university as such.

Keywords: Theology, University, Faith and Reason, Science.

I

What is a university? A University is usually taken to be an institution of higher education which pursues free inquiry. But to what degree has the very nature of inquiry within a university been predetermined by its constitution and organisation? Is entirely open investigation of truth possible, or must a university have taken certain overarching decisions about truth already, in order to be able to organise itself?

A university is also viewed as an independent corporation. But, by which law must it have been licensed and on what grounds? And who governs a university: the teachers, the students, the managers, the trustees, the state government? Is not every university also an instrument of political power that requires the deployment of certain bodies of knowledge that serve the interests of governmental «administration»? And how can that be compatible with untrammelled investigation and research?

Yet again, a university is taken to mean an academy of learning that pursues all disciplines and seeks to relate them to each other in a dialectical and even, aspirationally, an encyclopaedic manner. But what counts as a discipline and how many subjects should be studied by any one individual and in what order? To decide on these questions would seem to be to have already decided much about the nature of possible knowledge and so about accessible truth.

A university then, has been typically considered to be first free, secondly self-governing, and thirdly universal. How, in that context, should we understand the place of theology within the university? Is such study compatible with its freedom, autonomy and universality? Many people would today argue that it is not: that theological dogmatism inhibits free enquiry; that being beholden to the Church is an affront to university self-government, much as the power of the Pope was once an affront to English kings; and that theology as particular to Christianity inhibits the universal and objective study of religion.

Others, however, in the wake of John Henry Newman in his *The Idea of a University*, would argue just the opposite: that the discourse of faith holds open intellectual possibilities; that the university as free association or guild is a product of Christendom and that a university cannot be universal if it excludes the knowledge of God from its purview[1].

[1] Newman, J. H., *The Idea of a University*, New Haven CT: Yale UP, 1996.

On either side of the debate, however, there is generally a shared assumption that these three defining characteristics of a university belong naturally together. However, while that is not entirely untrue, it may also not be altogether the case. Specifically, there can be a certain tension between the corporate independence of a university on the one hand and the scope of its enquiries on the other. This same tension may also involve a split between independent freedom within a narrow range and a greater freedom of scope under more constrained overall jurisdiction. I shall explain what I mean shortly.

As has already been said, the co-belonging of freedom, autonomy, and universality may usually be taken to be a secular triad, but for a minority report, like that of Newman, it is regarded as a Christian or even a Catholic Christian one. However, the tension between autonomy and scope, and the suggested divide of liberty, may also point us towards a more confused lineage: in some ways secularising, in other ways theological. What I want to suggest in this lecture is that the universalising tendency is theologically derived, while the tradition of autonomy is of relatively secular origin, with the question of free enquiry split between the two.

The implication of this argument is that a university has always been a site of contestation because of its mixed origins, and that any assessment of the place of theology within the university has to take account of this circumstance. A further implication is that this particular topic is not just one question that might be asked about the nature of a university. On the contrary, I shall argue that the question of theology and the university is, as Newman thought, commensurate with the entire scope of «the idea of a university». Hence in addressing the question of the current crisis of theology within the university, we may be addressing the question of the current crisis of the university as such.

II

The simplest way of making good these claims is to offer a brief genealogy of the university as a uniquely western institution. Here what stands out most clearly is that the university was not, from the outset, defined in terms of the three characteristics which are today broadly assumed. To the contrary, it was initially defined sheerly in terms of its autonomy: the relevant meaning of *universitas* as the *universitas magistrorum et scholarum* was the

coming together of all teachers and students in an independent guild-formation [2].

The precondition of the latter was in fact particularity and sense of difference, *not* comprehensiveness and openness. Thus the very first university, that of Bologna, founded in late 1088, was shaped by law students representing the interests of emerging nations, cities, and localities as against those of either the Church or the Empire [3]. It is valid to describe this as a secularising move, albeit with a triple proviso. From the outset Canon law was studied alongside civil and in the latter case the corpus of Roman law which they studied had already been given a specifically Christian imprint by Justinian. Moreover, the very habit of making free associations was something ultimately nurtured within that initial and novel international free association which was the Church itself. These qualifications should remind us that a «secularising» move is not necessarily an anti-theological one, since theology itself may insist upon the unhampered exercise of natural liberty in certain domains.

Independence then was born of a particular interest being fought for. Certainly Bologna counted as a *studium generale* because it combined the study of the arts – that is to say of the trivium of grammar, rhetoric and logic plus the quadrivium of arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy – with the study of one of the sciences of the three «higher faculties» – law. However, the purpose of all this was by no means to achieve a universal theoretical scope, but rather to ensure the production of a body of literate, numerate and legally competent civil lawyers. The two other «higher» sciences, namely, medicine and theology, were specifically not studied at this institution. And inquiry into jurisprudence was «free» simply in the sense of relatively free from the pressures exerted by canon lawyers or lawyers working in the interests of the empire, which eventually set up a university of its own in Naples in 1224.

This pattern proved for a considerable time to be a normative one, especially in the south of Europe. Universities tended to specialise in law or medicine and but rarely in theology – indeed only in the case of the northern universities of Paris, Oxford and Cambridge. If it is certainly the case that the

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[2] For the *universitas/societas* distinction see OAKESHOTT, M., «On the Character of a Modern European State», in *On Human Conduct*, Oxford: OUP, 1975, 185-326.

[3] For the history of the Medieval University see RASHDALL, H., *The Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages* [1895], Oxford: OUP, 1987; RIDDER-SYMOENS, H. (ed.), *History of University in Europe, Vol. I, Universities in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge: CUP, 1992; VERGER, J., *Les Universités au Moyen-Âge*, Paris: PUF, 2013.

independent study of law and medicine helped to shape a relatively secular culture, then this was often only by virtue of a narrowing. As with Marsiglio of Padua and Machiavelli, a conception of civic rule in more this-worldly, legal, power-orientated, and contractual terms rather than theological and teleological ones. Or as with the influence on medicine of Avicenna whose philosophy had in certain ways pre-adumbrated a Cartesian dualism, an increasing focus on the anatomy of the dead and not living body[4].

Significantly, Marsiglio had been trained in medicine rather than law, and, in anticipation of Hobbes, his naturalism concerning the political body is linked to his Avicennian naturalism concerning the human physical body[5]. If, eventually, contractualism infected anthropology as such, and an exclusively anatomical perspective natural philosophy as such, then one could say that these are two instances of an apparent broadening that is really the sucking back of a wide scope into a confinement of vision, specific to one area and to a desire to secrete the interests of that area from other concerns – the political from the ethical and theological, the medical from the living, the psychic and social.

By comparison with the Italian institutions, the northern universities were less autonomous. The guild in Paris was of masters, not students, and they were under the patronage of the Church. At Oxford and Cambridge an equivalent patronage was offered by the English crown. Moreover, the public prestige and guarantee of the worth of a degree was not achieved through autonomy, but rather, initially, by papal conferral of a licence to teach anywhere based upon the award of a degree, the *ius ubique docendi*, first to the university of Toulouse, and later to that of Paris. This new mobility of learning was also backed up by Papal grants of a right to hold benefices elsewhere while continuing to teach at a *studium generale*. If Oxford resisted this sort of transferability and alternation of residence, then it was only able to do so in terms of the counter-prestige granted by its monarchic protectors.

Oxford and Paris then, were less independent than the Italian institutions and yet their scope of learning was far greater, and it was these institutions that became the most paradigmatic for higher education in the future. Why should that have been the case? Well both the Church and the English Crown

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[4] See Kornu, K., *The Logic of Anatomy: Dissective Rationality and the Difference of Incarnation*, Nottingham Doctoral thesis, 2017, available on line.

[5] Marsiglio of Padua, *Defensor Pacis*, trans. Alan Gewirth, New York: Harper and Row, 1967.

– perhaps because of its peculiarly theocratic leanings [6] – promoted the study of theology. This was certainly for pragmatic reasons, but the practical concerns of the clerical profession extended far more widely than those of law and medicine – to history, to cosmology, and psychology, as well as to words, numbers, and laws. The tripartition of the higher faculties coincides with one between the city, the body, and the soul. However, the theological science of the soul is also the science of the cosmos and of the heavenly city. Theology is in the end about the entire «divine governance» and so is more than a specialism since it has implications for all other matters, including those of the body and the earthly city [7].

What is more, the lineage of the most important university, that of Paris, from previous «universities» is after all not so clear. It was unusual in having developed from three cathedral schools: the Palatine, that of Notre Dame, and that of St. Genevieve [8]. Yet it might be more accurate to say that Paris was different and became exemplary because it *was* an expanded cathedral school. In other words, the modern notion of the university as both universal and discursive or argumentative may (contrary to etymological indication) derive rather more from the idea of the cathedral school than from that of the University. It can be added here that while such a lineage does not apparently exist in the case of Oxford, it may apply in the case of Cambridge, since Peterhouse, the first college, seems to have been a cathedral school of Ely (even though «the University» was a separate foundation) [9].

But how can one really argue this? Cathedral schools were also founded, after the Gregorian reforms, for practical, professional reasons. Clergy were to be more schooled in the arts, though also in theology. The ambience of the cathedral school was different to that of the University in that it was a successor to the ancient philosophical academy where learning was linked to the formation of the soul through spiritual exercises and through participation in the liturgy. The practices of *lectio* and *manuductio* in relation to the Bible also meant that humanistic learning was not all on the side of the pagan legacy [10].

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[6] See KANTOROWICZ, E., *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology*, Princeton NJ: Princeton UP, 2016.

[7] See THOMAS AQUINAS, *ST*, I, qq. 103-119, «Treatise on the Divine Government».

[8] FERRUOLO, S., *The Origins of the University: Schools of Paris and Their Critics, 1100-1215*, Stanford CA: Stanford UP, 1985.

[9] LEEDHAM-GREEN, E., *A Concise History of the University of Cambridge*, Cambridge: CUP, 1996.

[10] See JAEGER, C. S., *The Envy of Angels: Cathedral Schools and Social Ideals in Medieval Europe 950-1260*, Philadelphia PN: Pennsylvania UP, 1994.

In this way the Biblically humanistic legacy of Augustine and Bede, which antedated the more specific promotion of the *trivium* and the *quadrivium* – and extended variously to matters of music, chronology, geography and ancient literature – were perpetuated. Yet *because* and not in spite of this more religious context, the scope of learning in the cathedral schools became encyclopaedic. Moreover, the debatability of knowledge also arose in this context, through the application of the arts of the *trivium* to apparent contradictions – *sic et non* – in the scriptures and in the writings of the Fathers[11].

Hence the specifically *scholastic* aspects of medieval university learning derived in the first place, as the word would suggest, from the *schools*. To some degree the later «Renaissance» Humanist reaction against mere logicism was an attempt to reinfuse the arts with earlier literary, historical and Christian concerns, in order to ensure that lay education was not just barrenly technical[12]. One could almost say that they were trying to make good the gradual loss of the original cathedral close context.

It can be added here as an aside that while there is little to no evidence of any influence of the Islamic *madrasa* on the Christian university, for the *madrasa* was not an independent corporation, being controlled by its donors, and largely pursuing sacred not secular studies, that nevertheless one might say that the cathedral school was somewhat *more* like the *madrasa* than was the university[13]. It therefore becomes of inter-religious significance that I am arguing that the modern university derives as much from the cathedral school as from the medieval university, so called.

The «school» aspect of the University was also much reinforced by the arrival of the orders of friars (much inflected by Muslim learning) who ran their own *studia* within its corporate bounds: this tended to reconnect dialectical *questio* with Biblical *lectio* and with prayer, liturgy and contemplation[14]. In addition, it can be pointed out that the university did not at first displace the school: in Germany especially this was not the case, and it was cathedral

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[11] See ROSEMANN, Ph., *The Story of a Great Medieval Book: Peter Lombard's Sentences*, Peterborough ON: Broadview, 2007.

[12] See MCLUHAN, M., *The Classical Trivium*, Corte Madera CA: Gingko Press, 2006.

[13] MAKDISI, G., «Madrasa and University in the Middle Ages», in *Studia Islamica* 32 (1970) 255-264; RÜEGG, W., «Foreword: The University as a European Institution», in RIDDER-SYMOENS, H. (ed.), *History of University in Europe, Vol. I, Universities in the Middle Ages*, xix-xxi.

[14] See, for example, FRIEDMAN, R. L., *Intellectual Traditions at the Medieval University: The Use of Philosophical Psychology in Trinitarian Theology Among the Franciscans and Dominicans*, 2 vols., Leiden: EJ Brill, 2012-2013.

schools at Cologne and elsewhere, allied to Dominican *studia*, that helped shape the innovative intellects of Albertus Magnus, Dietrich of Freiburg, and Meister Eckhart.

Yet most decisive of all with respect to the question of «universal» learning was the pursuit of philosophy. If, by this, one means metaphysics and natural philosophy, then this was not at first covered by either the lower or the higher faculties. To begin with it was only pursued within the shelter of theology in terms of an ultimately personal-practical interest in one's final natural ends as a human being. Indeed one could claim that philosophy was at first more independently studied within the *madrasa*, in those cases where an initially exclusively religious curriculum was expanded – because theology and philosophy remained less integrated within Islamic culture.

Nevertheless, as recent researches in France by Alain de Libera and his pupils like Claude Lafleur have shown, something more like the Islamic situation started to intrude in the Latin west from the early thirteenth century onwards [15]. With the new acquaintanceship with Aristotelian texts, the study of metaphysics, physics, and ethics was cautiously added to the trivium's study of grammar, logic, and rhetoric and the quadrivium's study of arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music and thereby a certain momentous conflation of the physical with the mathematical started to arise. Well before the growth of so-called Latin Averroism, there was also a Latin Avicennianism for which a neoplatonised Aristotle suggested to some Arts professors the possibility of a specifically philosophical beatitude. A certain initial reluctance to follow the Arabs in ranging poetics under logic seems to have been linked to a fear that this might imply, as commonly for the Arabic philosophers, that the imagistic language of religion was merely a kind of philosophy for the masses. Eventually this fear had something to do with the emergence of the condemnations of 1270-1277, which regarded with suspicion not only any tendencies towards an autonomy of philosophy, but even the Albertine traditions which ranged philosophical beatitude lower than the theological, or identified the two, as with Meister Eckhart [16].

It is important though to see that the perceived threat of a more autonomous philosophy was not the threat of a more secular approach to learning. It

[15] LaFleur, C., *Quatre Introductions à la Philosophie au XIIIe siècle*, Montreal-Paris: Institute d'Études Médiévales-J. Vrin, 1988; LaFleur, C. and Carrier, J., *L'Enseignement de la philosophie au XIIIe siècle*, Quebec: Brepols, 1997.

[16] De Libera, A., *Métaphysique et noétique: Albert le Grand*, Paris: J. Vrin, 2005.

was not even, at least *at first* true, as Pierre Hadot has claimed, that theology appropriated the claim of ancient philosophy to be also a spiritual discipline, a matter of self-cultivation, thereby leaving a residue of a more arid, detached rationalistic philosophy[17]. For to begin with in the thirteenth century, the challenge was rather from an alternative rational but also spiritual path, even – well before the Renaissance – from a recrudescence of paganism.

The irony is that it was exactly the attempt to head off this challenge which much more generated the «secular», disinterested philosophy that we know today.

The Franciscan theologian Duns Scotus, developing Avicenna and in continuity as well as disagreement with Henry of Ghent, started to render metaphysics as more unambiguously about Being rather than aporetically about both God and Being. In consequence he situated God within the field of a univocal being in such a way as eventually, for his successors, to make the rational study of God a philosophical specialism, a «natural theology» or «special metaphysics» within the field of general metaphysics or ontology[18]. For Aquinas, by contrast, the theologian had studied the whole of physics and metaphysics and understood the latter as obscurely gesturing towards God as the principle of its subject matter of *ens commune*, but nonetheless as finally lying outside it in the domain of revealed *sacra doctrina*. This had the capacity to revise all metaphysical conclusions – as, for example, when Aquinas clearly adumbrates a Trinitarian ontology in *Summa Contra Gentiles* 4.11 and in the *Compendium Theologiae*[19].

Already with Scotus, metaphysics was becoming proto-epistemological, since the structures of reality were now defined «transcendentally» in terms of the conceivable, and of the strict application of the principle of non-contradiction. The same approach, taken further by the Terminists like Ockham, tended then to exclude the reality of universals, of real relationality, and of participative analogy. This was not, contra Marilyn McCord Adams *et al* the displacement of metaphysics by logic, but it *was* the production of a more narrowly logically-determined metaphysics, no longer engaged with Platonic *eros* or Aristotelian existential wonder.

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[17] Boulnois, O., *Métaphysiques rebelles: Genèse et structures d'une scince au Moyen Âge*, Paris: PUF, 2013, 21-62.

[18] Boulnois, O., *Métaphysiques rebelles...*, cit., 381-410.

[19] See Milbank, J., «Manifestation and Procedure: Trinitarian Metaphysics after Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas», in Salvioli, M., OP (ed.), *Tomismo Creativo: Letture Contemporanee del* Doctor Communis, Bologna: Edizioni Studio Domenicano, 2015, 41-117.

In this sense it was supposed to be a colder discipline more strictly subordinate to a theology to whom all engaged warmth was now confined. Yet ironically, just such a metaphysics removed the conceptually realist language for construing the doctrines of the Trinity, Incarnation, eucharist and the synergic operation of grace. In consequence the warmth was leached from theology also, in favour of the predominance of the will and of submission to the will – sheer will, or indeed sheer force, being the residue that a reduction of judgement to objective logic tends to leave behind, all the way from Ockham to Hobbes[20].

More generally, if theoretical issues became more questionable in the Middle Ages, then this was not the result of any sort of new commitment to a detached «free inquiry», but rather as a result of the tension between the more static and cosmic vision of the ancient Greeks on the one hand and the more temporal and narrative vision of the Hebrews on the other. In different ways both Avicenna within Islam and Aquinas within Christianity distinguished the existential from the essential under the impulse of this clash and sought to integrate the two[21].

Later, in the Latin West, as I have already implied, this creative distinction became too much like a sterile divorce. An arguably excessive and actually unbiblical extraction of revealed contingencies from any cosmological context, and of literal from symbolic word, led in the later thirteenth and fourteeenth centuries to the formation of a metaphysic but questionably more congruent with the Biblical vision. It is arguable that this development also had a practical and institutional aspect. For it was encouraged by the Franciscans rather than the Dominicans, who tended more than the black friars to distinguish their monkish, monastic, contemplative aspect from their practical, preaching vocation. In ironic consequence of this nod to the monastery, their more practically-orientated theological studies (originally alien to the Franciscan trajectory), somewhat drained of contemplative reference, became in consequence more exclusively technical. They tended to lose sight of *lectio* and to become remorselessly subject to abstrusely logical and relentlessly rationalistic considerations[22].

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[20] See Pfau, Th., *Minding the Modern: Human Agency, Intellectual Traditions and Responsible Knowledge*, Notre Dame IN: Notre Dame UP, 2015.

[21] Gilson, E., *L'Ìtre et L'Essence*, Paris: Vrin, 1972, 81-144.

[22] See Tugwell, S. (ed.), «Introduction» to *Early Dominicans: Selected Writings*, New York: Paulist Press, 2002, 1-47; Milbank, J., «The Franciscan Conundrum», in *Communio*, Fall 2015: *Poverty and Kenosis*, 466-492.

The resulting «terminist» (univocalist, nominalist, and voluntarist) metaphysic, because of its very desire to stress the contingency and discontinuity of divine grace with nature, started to set free the natural from the supernatural and so to shape for the first time a realm of secular autonomy.

It also compounded the Aristotelian division of physics from metaphysics which was originally refused by neoplatonism which regarded everything beneath the level of the One, even intelligence, as involving transitive kinetic motion, and not just intransitive action. For this reason thought was conceived by Plotinus as a more unimpeded motion[23], and there is a sense in which the whole of Platonic thought is a «physics» – thus Eriugena could include even God within his *divisio naturae*. For even the One was regarded, in contrast to Aristotle's «unmoved mover», as being as much beyond rest as beyond motion (since both are mere qualitative states of things and the One is not in any condition other than its own) and therefore as a kind of hyperbolic motion as much as a hyperbolic *stasis*[24]. All this meant that Neoplatonism did not, like Aristotle, conceive of a non-moving and so non-physical dimension of metaphysical ontological constancy within finitude, even if it recognised some relative fixity of substance and properties.

Although nominalism questioned the naturalness of this fixity, it compounded and intensified the Aristotelian tendency (arguably somewhat qualified by Aquinas)[25] to isolate motion from ontology, or physics from metaphysics. A finite world that «transcendentally» and so metaphysically consists of arbitrary and fluctuating motion, freely determined by God, was one that could begin to be seen as most fundamentally governed by purely mechanistic dynamics. Such motions reveal the decrees of the divine will, but nothing of the divine nature, thereby finally sundering the Neoplatonic (and even to a degree Aristotelian) symbolic link between motion and eternity that Albert and Aquinas had retained. This sundering was widely regarded as the purging of a pagan residue.

So one can say that this more radical secularisation was paradoxically the achievement of a theology trying to ward off a more philosophical mode of contemplation, and a religiously-slanted pagan philosophy, rather than to integrate it. As so often in Christian history, a fear of a wider spirituality and of

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[23] PLOTINUS, *Enneads*, III, 6.50-745; VI, 3.27-28; VI. 9, 35.10-20.
[24] PLOTINUS, *Enneads*, VI, 9, 3, 40-55.
[25] MILBANK, J., «Manifestation and Procedure»..., cit.

the religious other can generate a devil's alliance of a narrow and exclusive monotheism with an otherwise pervasive rationalism. Indeed one can argue that it required the largely Franciscan-nurtured nominalist theology to render respectable Marsiglio's secular jurisprudence, and that the increasing independence of medicine from theology, as of the body from the soul, was already in part a derivative of Avicenna's intendedly Islamic metaphysics with again a curiously secularising upshot.

III

From this brief archaeological foray, it is possible to suggest that theology has indeed been historically both the originator and the guardian of features of the university which we claim to value: its universality, its interdisciplinarity and its relative freedom from all forms of state control, under the protection of the Church – for it is important to remember that even the students of Bologna were ultimately operating in the interest of, and so were ultimately licensed by, minority political forces.

Of course to be unbound by the state is in this case to be somewhat bound by another external body, the Church, but perhaps the lesson that is that it is naïve to think that social freedom is ever anything other than political, corporate, specific, and relative. To be socially free is to be free from someone because ultimately pledged to another, as current British universities are discovering all too well.

Such a conclusion only escapes the toils of pure relativism in three ways. First one may claim to escape it if, as purportedly in the case of the Church, the ultimate political interests of one's ultimate master or rather mistress are less temporary, of larger scope, more open to questioning in her own terms, and less readily defined than those of another. Secondly if, for that mistress, the issue of ultimate truth is at stake, such that what is being proposed is an ineluctable free compelling of knowledge by that truth itself. Thirdly, if the truth and the laws proclaimed by this mistress are in the widest degree speculative and also in the end a matter of faith, then free university inquiry is held open both in terms of the greatest possible scope and the greatest possible integration of knowledge.

Hence (to use Luigi Giusanni's term) the *proposal* made by theology may seem to be the most outrageous and the most uncertainly founded, but it is precisely that proposal which keeps alive the claim to a truly universal un-

derstanding and truly unified body of knowledge[26]. For if human knowledge can indeed reach as far as God, and if, in history, God has reached down to us, then clearly, as Newman argued, university teaching cannot ignore these realities and if it does, then it is in effect setting up an anti-university based open the effective denial of these realities and so foreclosing the possibility of any really open debate, or any genuinely universal understanding.

Therefore one might say that to found a university is to have faith that there might one day be something like a *universitas* of indeed universal scope, and that one requires the elaboration of theology if we are in any degree to fulfil that faith. Without this faith it is perhaps inevitable that a university will sink to being a mere congeries of professional specialisations. For in the absence of theology the interest in theory and truth for its own sake will tend to lapse in favour of the pursuit of mere process, and with that lapse universities will also lose their critical edge.

For a time, starting in the nineteenth century, as Newman noted from within that period, surrogates for theology proclaimed speculations still less well-founded, because they sought, in alternatively mechanistic and vitalistic ways, to reduce the reality of the human soul rather than, like theology, to try to explain how psychic and material realities can coexist in one cosmos. With the lapse of these endeavours after more neo-humanistic and then «post-modern» intervals we now have «neo-modern» piecemeal, but more drastically materialist anti-psychic reductionisms that try to block any path towards the university's own reflexivity or self-justification: namely, how is it that we are conscious creatures pursuing knowledge of the given world? For reductive answers can only explain away the very phenomenological terms in which that question is posed. In thus undercutting the human they finally undercut the university as originally an arts-curriculum based institution. A mathematicised and mechanised physics, once nurtured within the heart of the *quadrivium*, becomes the basic paradigm of all university studies, so subverting its original suspension between the various liberal arts and theology.

Insofar as the arts remain studied today, they are increasingly seen in terms of a branch of the entertainments industry – as producing a marketable commodity, rather than as training people in aesthetic and ethical discernment and civilised living. The Leavisite project of ethical formation through

[26] Giusanni, L., *The Risk of Education: Discovering Our Ultimate Destiny*, London: Crossroad, 2001.

literature is scarcely revivable in sheerly secular terms, since these now deny the reality of soul and spirit upon which every humanism depends, while the dominance of the scientific and research-based model of the university manifests itself in terms of the managerialist organisation of the entertainment-producing departments. If, as I initially suggested, the organisation of a university predetermines what can be studied there, then today, in European universities, it predetermines what can be studied as always certain techniques of power and control, of money-making and production of seductive spectacle. Where Newman complained that, without the wider wisdom of theology, political economy is able to proclaim unchallenged the half-truth that wealth tends to encourage virtue, then today the entire medium of the university is political-economic and the medium is most certainly the message.

This is the main lesson that most of our students will now learn from us. And not even pure scientific research can claim to be pursuing the love of truth for its own sake in any ethically valid manner. For *theoria*, the philosophical contemplation of truth, is only a valid end of human life if there is a saving truth to be contemplated – that is to say a truth of the cosmos or the transcendent that is also good and beautiful and can serve as an orientation for our practical existences. Otherwise, as St. Augustine taught, the pursuit of truth is mere curiosity, which is culpable, because the motivation for studying a grim and meaningless reality can only be prurience, or a desire to exhibit one's superiority, or else again a Faustian lust to use this knowledge to manipulate one's fellow human beings and other living creatures.

The Baconian claim to pursue the useful is only legitimate if we can define proper ends for usage – which cannot be the single end of utility as such, else we are lost in the gulfs of tautology whose only real meaning will be the experimental control of some people by others. Nevertheless, the sense of wonder generally invoked for even atheist scientists by the study of the physical world and by new possible contrivances significantly qualifies this demonic temptation and ensures that they already participate, in some degree, in genuine *theoria*.

IV

Just how, though, did the research-based model of the University first arise? It is surely a more or less direct consequence of the enormous influence of Kantian philosophy, such that the single, thoroughly debatable meta-

physical position of the «critical philosophy» that might be validly taught within a university, pre-empts debate by being what the very structure of a modern university inevitably teaches [27].

That is to say, Kant taught that theoretical reason was unable to reach the truth of noumena, of things in themselves. He then vigorously proclaimed the freedom of the lower faculties of the arts, including a now autonomised philosophy, to teach just what they like, without censorship, concerning the mere phenomena. But such freedom is but the upshot of irrelevance, because the three higher and *practical* faculties of law, medicine and theology (whose very practicality now, for Kant, permits them to reach the otherwise concealed noumenal depths) were still bound in tight Prussian fashion by the interests of the state and of the Lutheran state-church. This model was imitated by both Schleiermacher and by Humboldt who eventually crafted the shape of the modern university institution. An infinite horizon of research now opens for the theoretical sciences, since they can never reach the fully real, nor are they any longer linked to or guided by our practical, psychic interests.

It is perhaps for this reason that we now see all secular disciplines as «methodologically atheist» even though for the Christian, as Newman argued, this means that all the truly crucial theoretical questions (which a *genuine* practical philosophy cannot ignore) about the mind, the body, nature, history, language, and even perhaps number, have to go unposed and unanswered.

Meanwhile, for all the greater freedom of the Anglo-Saxon recension of the Humboldt model, law and medicine have remained rigorously subordinate to the interests of the state and have suffered an increasing positivisation and materialisation in consequence. What is more, a technological paradigm that was originally, with Paracelsus, medical in origin (as Charles Webster has shown – even though the Baconian travesty of this undid a new psychic-bodily integration that was part of Paracelsus's spiritual pragmatism) [28] has spread to most of the sciences and then to the social sciences and now to the humanities. Thus today even the freedom of the theoretical adventure-playground is invaded by the Weberian severity of the bureaucratic obeisance that has been extracted from the higher faculties ever since the nineteenth century.

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[27] See Milbank, J., «The Conflict of the Faculties», in *The Future of Love: Essays in Political Theology*, London: SCM, 2009, 301-315.

[28] Webster, Ch., *From Paracelsus to Newton: Magic and the Making of Modern Science*, New York: Dover, 2005. Some post-Baconians, like Comenius, restored the spiritual dimension.

But what of the third higher faculty in modern times? What of the fate of theology? Ever since Schleiermacher and in despite of his best earlier Romantic insights, the discipline has been divided and so slowly destroyed by a division between objectified research-based interests in history and philology on the one hand, and sheerly professional interests in priestly or ministerial formation on the other. Just as it is not allowed that there might be a theological approach to history, or language or music or philosophy or even mathematics in general that could be determinative of those disciplines, so this perspective has been internalised, and now for the most part there cannot be a theological approach to the Bible or to Church history and so forth. Actual theology in the traditional sense of participation in the mind of God under the light of faith as well as reason is allowed few academic positions, while it is itself often crudely divided between a philosophy of religion supposedly approaching God in the basis of an objective reason and a dogmatic theology that is either meant to listen to the Biblical critics as if they were announcing foundational facts – or else to base itself upon probable evidences of revelation or else again, sheerly given words, fideistically assented to.

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What drops out here is the idea of faith as a complex fusion of evidence, reasoning, imaginative, and affective experience, and those several fine modern theologians who have restored this sort of multi-referential integrity have either been outside the university context or have had to struggle against it.

In this way, given the gradual decline in power of the churches, the theological death-knell in academia was sounded long ago. Research into the Bible and Church history can well be done elsewhere, as can, and more properly it will be argued, clerical formation. Nor will «religious studies» save theology, since this is not a real discipline but an alliance of disciplines under the focus on an area of study, which in academic terms is something of an anomaly. Not a unique one indeed, since one can have «maritime studies» and so forth, but all such subject areas are prey to capture in the future by more disciplinary defined departments – and this is already occurring. Thus history and the social sciences can readily claim to cover all the concerns placed under the religious studies heading.

It follows that the only defence theology is left with is attack and ultimate questioning. There is no point in trying to protect the place of theology in

the university as today most widely understood: the point is rather, as with Newman, to question these premises. It is counterwise to defend the grounding of the university not mainly or exclusively in research, but primarily in the arts (taken to include mathematics and a more philosophical rather than exclusively experimental approach to nature) and in a wide curriculum.

Above all we need to question the currently assumed separation of theology from philosophy which did not hold for the Fathers nor the Middle Age, even if its later period started to instigate it, as we have seen [29]. The upshot of this separation is that theologians, at least in their initial programme of study, tend to deal only with the philosophy of religion and not with philosophy as such, which is to say, with philosophy's most ultimate scope, which is metaphysics. But this restriction inevitably dooms theology to cultural and academic marginality, for it means that it is assumed to have nothing fundamental to say about how things are or about what it means to be able to say anything whatsoever. Instead, theology is seen as a regional discourse within the field of being, as both a set of debatable arguments as to the ultimate causes of finite being and a debatable claim to an event of revelation within the same field.

Both the centrality of the arts and the inseparability of theology and philosophy can be seen as expressions of a genuine Christian humanism, and so of the doctrine of the God made flesh. For it was the non-Marcionism of Christian orthodoxy (the acceptance that the Christian God was still the God of the Hebrew Scriptures even if this was now the «Old Testament») that made Christianity respect the law even though it cannot quite save us, and by analogy to respect pagan learning even though it does not reach to the beatific vision.

The same attitude must today lead Christians to respect the many members of other religions who now inhabit this continent and to welcome them to study alongside us in theological departments. This welcoming could give us the opportunity to shape a new sort of global *Literae Humaniores* that now may provide the very best sort of arts grounding to produce a well-read, civilised and reflective student.

Indeed it may well be that from Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism we might question one accidental form that our non-Marcionism has taken:

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[29] See LACOSTE, J.-Y., *From Theology to Theological Thinking*, trans. Chris Hackett, Chalottesville VA: Virginia UP, 2015; MILBANK, J., «Faith, Reason and Imagination», in *The Future of Love*, 316-334.

namely a tendency to sever theology from the more «elementary» arts and so to reserve the Bible for higher and clerical study. We need now rather to introduce the study of the Bible also at the lower arts foundational level, as the French are now considering doing in schools. This would then recover something of the pre *trivium/quadrivium* tradition of Augustine and Bede, but with a new extension to the laity, though not, it is to be hoped, with a Protestant disembedding from liturgy and tradition.

In this way we could start to overcome an unfortunate unlinking of our Hellenic from our Hebraic legacy which has sometimes led to the misunderstanding of both and to result, as we have seen in the case of nominalism-voluntarism, in a bizarre, supposedly «Hebraic» invention of a «Hellenic» secular autonomy, as if even Aristotle did not in fact worship the gods.

Theology should therefore shelter the development of the «theologies» of other religions, besides encouraging the study of the history of religions, first and foremost because this context cannot be avoided by the modern theologian.

Nevertheless, the prime meaning of theology as «Christian theology» should not be surrendered, because this is the extended name of the discipline that carries in the most universal and integrated way the central legacy of the West, which has to a unique degree envisioned the ultimate as transcendent life and Goodness, and sought to orientate also political life in terms of the soul's attunement by that good.

For the original character of Greek philosophy as a care of the self as well as a care of the truth has only been perpetuated in the west by Jewish, Islamic, and Christian philosophical or theological thinking. All three of these traditions have nobly sustained the dual legacy of Athens and Jerusalem. Yet it is the Christian legacy which initially and uniquely re-read the pagan humanities and encouraged a certain desacralisation of law and ordinary life. Not in such a way as altogether to detach them from orientation by grace, but both to avoid idolisation of the merely human and also to allow a free exploration of the natural that can itself give constantly new insights into the meaning of the supernatural. It is this «distinguishing to unite» (to use the phrase of Jacques Maritain)[30] that perhaps allows Christianity more readily to assess both what is valid and what is invalid in the enlightenment legacy that is its bastard offspring.

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[30] MARITAIN, J., *The Degrees of Knowledge, or Distinguish to Unite*, Notre Dame IN: Notre Dame UP, 1999.

The argument for theology in the University should therefore be also an argument for the legitimate consideration of theological perspectives throughout the secular university if it is to be genuinely plural, open, independent, and free. It is also an argument for the existence of specifically Christian universities: my own view is that we need a healthy diversity of both secular and faith-based higher educational academies if we are to keep genuine debate alive. But most of all it is an argument for recovering the true idea of a university if we are not further to acquiesce in our current occidental degeneration, our loss of any sense of where we come from, who we really are and where we strive to reach [31].

[31] In this respect the classic work of MASSIS, H., commissioned by Jacques Maritain in the Nineteen-Twenties, *L'Occident et son Destin*, Paris: Grasset, 1956, remains important, however sometimes dubious and debatable and over-linked to Charles Maurras. This is the later, expanded edition – the first edition appeared in English translation as *Defence of the West*, London: Harcourt and Brace, 1928, with an introduction by G. K. Chesterton.

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