

# Introduction

## Theology and the Modern University

During the final stages of the Terror in Paris in September 1793, the National Convention abolished all the universities and colleges of *ancien régime* France. By doing so, the Convention was beginning a process that would directly or indirectly revolutionize the university as a European institution and the practice of theology as a university discipline. The French universities, some of the oldest and most venerable on the continent, had been the training grounds for those defending the religious and political orthodoxies of the eighteenth century and even the fall of Robespierre could not alter the secularist Republic's underlying conviction that the university "had no more place in the new age than monasteries, serfdom or slavery."<sup>1</sup> Those who were planning the new terrain of higher education in France admired theology as the 'queen of the sciences' as much as they had admired Marie Antoinette, and by the time of Napoleon's concordat with Rome in 1801, theology had been exiled from the new central institutions of higher education in France to seminaries.

This might have signalled the end of the university as a modern European institution. As we shall see, the survival and development

1. L. Brockliss, "The European University, 1789-1850" in *The History of the University of Oxford*, (8 vols., Oxford, 1988-2000), 6:93.

of the university was in many respects surprising and the inclusion of theology within the modern university perhaps even more so. The genealogy of the discipline has become of crucial significance in recent years, since, while theologians in the West today do not face the violent rejection that their forbears encountered in late eighteenth-century France, many will describe their continued presence in universities as being comparable to a Babylonian captivity. The Enlightenment university, it is claimed, has programmatically driven theology either to extinction or into the more secularly respectable – and less sectarian, it is assumed – study of religion. These anxieties over the pursuit of theology are framed by a wider confusion over the condition of the humanities in the university, and the very purpose of the modern university. The celebrated mid-twentieth century president of the University of California, Clark Kerr, famously described the university in 1963 as “a series of faculty entrepreneurs held together by a common grievance over parking” and his coinage of the term “multiversity” to describe the disparate aims of modern higher education in the West remains germane.<sup>2</sup>

Determining how theology has reached its current state in the Western university is a harder question to answer. It is persistently asked in contemporary theological circles, where the loss of territory within the university and the retreat of the churches from the academic sphere have been a cause of acute concern. Is it the result of the seemingly unstoppable process of secularization? Was theology ruined by its own methodological collusion with the social sciences? Or is theology’s decline just one aspect of the technologically driven collapse of the humanities within our universities? All these answers

2. Clark Kerr, *The Uses of a University* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 15. See also Stefan Collini, *What Are Universities For?* (London: Penguin, 2012); M. Nussbaum, *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

have been offered, and yet within each response there is a lack of historical context that should be worrying to scholars who are otherwise so sensitive to such detail. This book seeks to begin the work of providing that historical definition to theology's contemporary predicament. As the first book to provide an account of theology's modern institutional origins in an English university, it will, it is hoped, underline the phrase oft-repeated by Karl Barth, '*Latet periculum in generalibus*'.<sup>3</sup>

This is not a work of historical theology, but an account of how theology was practised in an English institution that was converted from an ecclesiastical seminary on the Thames into a globally influential research university – open to all denominations and none – by the beginning of the twentieth century. As we shall see, it is not a purely local account; despite their isolationist tendencies, even Oxford and Cambridge could not fail to be envious of the fruits of research emanating from German universities during the nineteenth century or be affected by the changing fortunes of France and the United States. Nonetheless, the effects of continental developments and, in particular, the influence of the University of Berlin, can be overstated for contemporary thinking about how theology has come to be practised in the European university. Theologians at Oxford and Cambridge came to model an idiosyncratic paradigm of theological practice in the way they negotiated relationships between the churches and university, between theology and the study of religion, and between 'scientific' theology and ministerial training.

What follows are two assertions. Firstly, although Berlin – and particularly Schleiermacher's importance to its foundation – is undeniably influential for the making of modern theology, it is suggested that certain readings of Humboldt's masterly creation have

3. "Danger lies in generalizations."

come to dominate, sometimes unhelpfully, the historiography of modern theology. The second assertion challenges the first by suggesting that the English university has, largely through its reaction to continental political developments, evolved with significant differences from continental, Scottish, and North American institutions. By analysing theology's place within the University of Oxford during a period of extensive reform, this development of this distinctive paradigm is introduced as an alternative way of thinking about theology's institutional development since the Enlightenment.

### From Paris to Berlin: the Origins of the Research University

The decisions adopted in France during the Revolution were so significant for the history of the modern European university since the institutional models that were established in their place in the Republic were soon being exported across Europe by the French bayonet. In place of these formidable ecclesiastical foundations, the Thermidorean administration founded a series of specialist *écoles*, set alongside the research-directed *académies*, that would offer a more focussed professional education to students in contrast to the old universities' diet of classics and theology. Although several of Europe's 'enlightened despots' had attempted to reform the curricula and administration of their universities in the face of declining matriculations and mismanagement, it was the advance of Napoleon's troops that ultimately provoked the greatest changes to the operations of Europe's oldest universities.<sup>4</sup> His protégé monarchs shut such prestigious institutions as Louvain, Wittenberg, and Halle (the last

4. It should be noted, however, that the success of such initiatives was limited due to conservative religious forces within the universities. One exception was Joseph II of Austria who successfully rationalized the number of universities, made German rather than Latin the official language, and compelled the universities to admit Jews and Protestants. (L. Brockliss, *ibid.*, 89)

having only been established in 1694) and even where the university survived, such as in Bologna, Padua, and Pavia (which came under the control of Napoleon's stepson Eugène de Beauharnais), the faculties were reconfigured with theology excised. In the few institutions where the old higher faculties did survive, such as at Turin, the funds available were so reduced by the Napoleonic war machine that the university was effectively crippled.<sup>5</sup>

This assault on Europe's universities and their theological faculties was not simply the result of Jacobin anti-clericalism. At the heart of these changes was a desire to introduce Enlightenment methodologies to higher education. Influential French thinkers such as Charles de Talleyrand and Nicolas de Condorcet perceived the pursuit of truth not as the reverential reception of dogma and the defence of orthodoxy but the hard labour of inductive study, and universities – if they were to survive at all – ought to exist for the expansion of human understanding. They should not perpetuate and defend aristocratic and ecclesiastical interests. From as early as the end of the seventeenth century, extra-mural academies had been founded to foster research in the natural sciences and natural philosophy and the Revolution only confirmed a well-established instinct that it would be these academies, rather than the inherited universities, that would become the primary seats of higher learning in enlightened Europe.<sup>6</sup>

How then did the university survive as an influential institution of modern Europe? It can be attributed only indirectly to the French. After Napoleon defeated the Prussians in the battles of Jena-Auerstedt

5. D. Outram, "Military Empire, Political Collaboration, and Cultural Consensus: The Université Imperiale Reappraised: The Case of the University of Turin", *History of Universities* vii (1998), 287-303.

6. M. Purver, *The Royal Society: Concept and Creation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1967); J.E. McClellan, *Science Reorganized: Scientific Societies in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

in October 1806, with territory ceded west of the Elba to the French, the future seemed bleak for German scholars. Theodor Schmalz, a professor of jurisprudence from the suppressed university in Halle, approached Friedrich Wilhelm III with a plea endorsed by other members of his university for a new location for studying and teaching. In response to their plea, the king is reported to have said to Schmalz, “That is right, that is commendable. What the state has lost in physical strength it must replace with intellectual strength.”<sup>7</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm seems to have recognized immediately that a new university could restore national pride in the face of defeat and be a means for the Prussian civil service to realize their progressive social vision.<sup>8</sup>

In 1808, with the Francophiles in the Prussian government diminishing in influence, the senior civil servant Wilhelm von Humboldt followed the jurist Karl Friedrich Beyme as the minister responsible for public education and culture in the Prussian Ministry of the Interior. In this role he enthusiastically assumed the task of founding a new university in Berlin, drawing upon the *Bildungstheorie* emerging from post-Kantian idealism. This was a vision of education that saw every member of the university as a participant in a unified theory of knowledge, termed *Wissenschaft*. For a subject to be *wissenschaftlich* required that it be philosophically coherent both internally and in relation to other disciplines, and that both professor and student were committed to working for

7. Rudolf Köpfe, *Die Gründung der königlichen Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität zu Berlin* (Berlin: Gustav Schade, 1860), 37; quoted in E. Lawler, “Neohumanistic-Idealistic Concepts of a University: Schelling, Steffens, Fichte, Schleiermacher and von Humboldt”, in *Friedrich Schleiermacher and the Founding of the University of Berlin: The Study of Religion as a Scientific Discipline*, ed. H. Richardson (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1991), 2.

8. *Wissenschaftlich* is usually translated, unsatisfactorily, into English as ‘scientific’. See Matthew Levinger, “The Prussia Reform Movement and the Rise of Enlightened Nationalism” in P.G. Dwyer, *The Rise of Prussia 1700-1830* (London: Longman, 2000), 259-77; Thomas Albert Howard, *Protestant Theology and the Making of the Modern German University* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 150ff.

the systematic unity of knowledge which was ultimately deemed possible by the transcendental principles of idealism.<sup>9</sup> Drawing upon the writings of J. G. Fichte, Friedrich W.J. Schelling, Heinrich Steffens, and Friedrich Schleiermacher, Humboldt created an institution in a matter of months that would come to be admired across the world by the end of the century, both for its wealth of research and as a model of higher education that other nationalist governments eagerly desired to emulate. Contrary to expectations at the beginning of the nineteenth century, by its end it was the reconceived idea of the university mastered at Berlin, rather than the French *école*, that was internationally more influential.

Berlin's foundation and success was also an important new context for theological life. For, while rejecting the ecclesiastical foundations of the medieval university, the University of Berlin still invited the scholar to raise his eyes to a lofty ideal: the unity of all knowledge, discerned through universally rational frames of reference. It has remained a matter of interest and historical significance, therefore, that theology was included in the foundation of the new university. In the context of widespread revolt against what was perceived as obscurantist confessionalism across Europe, how did there emerge a new theological faculty in an institution that was so imbued with the principles of the Enlightenment? Although one might have assumed the zealous bureaucratization of Prussian education and religion in the early nineteenth century to have happily coincided at Berlin, the reason for theology's survival as a university discipline on the continent is more complicated. As will now be shown, it was as much the result of outstanding persuasive arguments as it was pragmatic necessity.

9. J.G. Fichte, "Deduced Scheme for an Academy to be Established in Berlin (1807)", tr. G.H. Turnbull, in Turnbull, *The Educational Theory of J.G. Fichte: A Critical Account, Together with Translations* (Liverpool: University of Liverpool, 1926), 170-265

### Schleiermacher and the Making of Modern Theology

Theology's surprising inclusion at Berlin has been widely attributed to the brilliance of Friedrich Schleiermacher in an unsolicited paper he sent to von Humboldt in 1808 regarding the foundation of a new university, *Occasional Thoughts about Universities in the German Sense*. Fichte had argued against ecclesiastical involvement in the new institution, following Kant's strictures in *The Conflict of the Faculties* that the university must stand only under the jurisdiction of reason, rather than the government or the church. "A school", Fichte wrote, "of the scientific use of reason presupposes that whatever is given to it may be understood and penetrated down to its ultimate ground; accordingly, something which proscribes the use of reason and puts itself forward *a priori* as an unfathomable mystery, is in the nature of the case excluded from such a school."<sup>10</sup> According to Fichte, as theology's content was delivered by special revelation and contained within certain sacred books, it was evidently incompatible with the *wissenschaftlichen* criteria of study at Berlin. Along with medicine and jurisprudence, he considered it a largely practical science and what little of theology that could reasonably be considered 'scientific' ought to be apportioned to the departments of history, philosophy, and philology.

It was this second reproach to theology's place in Berlin that Schleiermacher specially attacked in his *Brief Outline on the Study of Theology* and in his own paper on the foundation of the new university, *Occasional Thoughts*. In the latter document, in particular, Schleiermacher articulated a broader account of *Wissenschaft* than Fichte. To hold a belief in the transcendental condition of the unity of all knowledge required more than just the bare logical principles

10. J.G. Fichte, "Deduced Scheme", 198.



of rational coherence; for him a “strictly empiricist approach would reduce the person, the state, and science to mechanisms”<sup>11</sup>. Rather, the scholar and the university must adopt a *Weltanschauung* – a comprehensive perspective that included the aesthetic and the moral alongside the purely noetic. Therefore, Schleiermacher suggested, the philosophical faculty was rightly the first faculty, as it nourished this “science of the whole”.

Within this richer vision of human reasoning, however, Schleiermacher averred that religion had its own position as a tradition that contributed to the overall, rationally meaningful, exploration of human understanding. Even when, as he accepted, theology was included as one of the *Spezialschulen* that had been included because – like the faculties of law and medicine – it met social demands, this did not diminish the possibility of its inclusion in the university. While theology operated as a “conceptual skill governed by practical aims”, *positive Wissenschaft*, the new German university existed to unite both research and teaching, including teaching for the public professions.<sup>12</sup> To place such a premium upon the practical was particularly relevant for theology because, for Schleiermacher, theological language “functions as part of the web of relations constituting the community of which it is a part”, and the university ought to exist for both the descriptive in human reasoning as well as the explanatory.<sup>13</sup> In the end, von Humboldt included theology in his plans for the university, accepting that the university must also exist for practical ends in the grand enterprise of *Wissenschaft*. Even if it was the considerable cultural influence of the Protestant church in early nineteenth-century Prussia rather than theology’s *wissenschaftlichen* components that ultimately affected

11. Lawler, *ibid.*, 27.

12. Hans Frei, *Types of Christian Theology* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 114.

13. Frei, *ibid.*, 115.

Humboldt's decision, the inclusion of theology at Berlin as it opened its doors to students on 6 October 1810 seems to have been secured, in large part, through the influence of Schleiermacher.

### *Wissenschaft* and the Science of Religion

The position for theology that was secured – theology as both *wissenschaftlich* and oriented towards practical aims – has, however, been perceived by subsequent generations as less than satisfactory for either the academy or the church. In particular, the “relativizing consequences of historical ways of thinking” that dominated the academic culture of Berlin presented a challenge to the privileged position of Christian theology in the university.<sup>14</sup> As Johannes Zachhuber has shown in his study of theology as *Wissenschaft*, while Schleiermacher wrote in *The Christian Faith* that the “utter novelty of a historical movement, which cannot be deduced from previous events, is the only reasonable meaning the word ‘revelation’ could possibly have”, this at once exposed theology to the iconoclastic forces of modern historical study.<sup>15</sup> Christianity's intrinsically historical character may seem self-evident to theologians today, but the relocation of theology's primary residence from the philosophical to the historical sphere in the nineteenth-century university was foundationally destabilizing in ways that Schleiermacher could not have anticipated.

Theology's vulnerability to the historicist techniques became particularly apparent as the century progressed. As Zachhuber has demonstrated with admirable detail, alternative visions of theology as *Wissenschaft* become more prominent as the historicist-idealist mode of theology embodied in the work of Ferdinand Christian

14. T.A. Howard, *ibid.*, 379.

15. Johannes Zachhuber, *Theology as Science in Nineteenth Century Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 16.

Baur gave way to the thoroughgoing ‘presuppositionless’ historicist theology of the Ritschlian school from 1850 onwards. Alongside changing understandings of what constituted *Wissenschaft*, Thomas Albert Howard has indicated how the study of religion in the second half of the century also dramatically shifted the nature of theology’s position in the university. Although the *Religionswissenschaft* was poorly represented in the German theological faculties, the new availability of Eastern texts, the development of philological study, and German colonial expansion all contributed to an enthusiasm for what was becoming known as the ‘History of Religions’ (*Religionsgeschichte*). Friedrich Max Müller who, though German by birth, spent the vast majority of his scholarly life in Oxford as Taylorian Professor of Modern Languages, has been seen as the founder of this new ‘science of religion’; his 1873 *Introduction to the Science of Religion* is considered a founding document of the discipline.<sup>16</sup> University chairs and lectureships were established in the subject across Europe, America, and even Japan in the thirty years after its publication, in addition to those that were already established in the ‘history of religion’ at Basle, Lausanne, and Geneva. Unusually, however, the German theological faculties resisted their establishment as confessional departments of theology: a fact that increasingly became a cause for criticism.

In the same year as Friedrich Max Müller published his *Introduction*, two German scholars published damning critiques of the condition of German university theology. Paul Lagarde, a nationalist philologist and Old Testament scholar at the University of Göttingen, published his essay *On the Relationship of the German State to Theology, the Church, and Religion*, arguing that the theological faculty was, as a

16. *Introduction to the Science of Religion* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1873), cf. T.A. Howard, *ibid.*, 382–33.

semi-confessional body, in need of replacement with a department of the comparative study of religion in order to avoid the confusion of *Wissenschaft* with ecclesiastical influence.<sup>17</sup> Believing Christianity as expressed in the Protestant churches to be redundant, he believed that a more truly scientific account of religion would help nurture his nationalist vision for a new Germanic religion.

Also in 1873, the Basle church historian Franz Overbeck published his own criticism of contemporary academic theology, *Über die Christlichkeit unserer heutigen Theologie*. Emerging from the same publisher as that of his housemate and friend Friedrich Nietzsche, Overbeck opined that the desire to make theology scientific had been inimical to Christianity's eschatological character. This was a religion, he argued, that in its essence denied the powers of this world, including those of learning, and Overbeck was confident in his assertion that "the antagonism between faith and knowledge is one that is permanent and thoroughly irreconcilable".<sup>18</sup>

The work of the faculties to analyse Christianity scientifically in its various parts had, Overbeck claimed, categorically misunderstood its radical centre. Friedrich Nietzsche advanced the same conclusion in his consideration of the dominance of historicism in German culture, and the "annihilating" judgment of "historical justice". "A religion," Nietzsche wrote,

which is intended to be transformed into historical knowledge under the hegemony of pure historical justice, a religion which is intended to be understood through and through as an object of science and learning, will when this process is at the end also be found to have been destroyed...The reason is that historical verification always brings

17. P. Lagarde, *Über das Verhältnis des deutschen Staates zu Theologie, Kirche und Religion* (Göttingen: Dieterich, 1873).

18. Franz Overbeck, *Über die Christlichkeit unserer heutigen Theologie*, reprint of 2nd edn. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1981), 22; quoted in Howard, *Protestant Theology*, 389.

to light so much that is false, crude, inhuman, absurd, violent, that the mood of pious illusion in which alone anything that wants to live can live necessarily crumbles away.<sup>19</sup>

The confidence of the theologians in the work of history to reach pure knowledge about Christianity was, for Nietzsche as much as Overbeck, a misunderstanding of the power and nature of religion, which was closer to art than science. Life that is “dominated” by science, he wrote, “is not of much value because it is far less *living* and guarantees far less life for the future than did a former life dominated not by knowledge but by instinct and powerful illusions.”<sup>20</sup>

Thomas Albert Howard has shown how the impact of Lagarde, Overbeck, Nietzsche and the growing methodological influence of the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule*, largely based around the University of Göttingen, all signalled a fracturing of Schleiermacher’s settlement for the German theological faculty and his own concept of *Wissenschaft* in the final decades of the nineteenth century. Despite Adolf von Harnack’s impressive defence of the twofold character of theology in the university in his rectorial address to the University of Berlin in 1901, ‘The Task of the Theological Faculties and the General History of Religion’, Albert Schweitzer’s *Quest for the Historical Jesus* (1906), and the turmoil that engulfed Europe in 1914 onwards cast doubt on Harnack’s refinement of the Protestant religion through critical-historical study.<sup>21</sup>

The most influential post-war critique of university theology, however, came from the young Swiss pastor of Safenwil, Karl Barth.

19. Friedrich Nietzsche, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life” in *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 95–97. This ‘meditation’ was published on 22 February 1874. See also his first meditation on “David Strauss, the Confessor and the Writer”, published 8 August 1873.

20. Friedrich Nietzsche, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life”, 97.

21. Adolf von Harnack, *Die Aufgabe der theologischen Fakultäten und die allgemeine Religionsgeschichte* (Giessen, 1901). Later reprinted in Harnack’s *Reden und Aufsätze*, 2. Auflage, Band 2, (Giessen 1906), 159–187.

He had come to believe that academic theology was failing to meet the demands of his parishioners and had been appalled by the support of German university theologians for the Kaiser's war aims as signatories to the 'Manifesto of the Ninety-Three' in 1914. Barth had been as a student one of the leading defenders of Harnack, but war and his parochial work compelled Barth to think more deeply about the nature and position of theology in the university.

In his 1922 lecture, "The Word of God and the Task of Theology", Barth asserted that theology had failed to act as the "signal of distress" (*Notzeichen*) within the university:

...the existence of theology in the academy...is justified and established, as is the existence of the Church in society, out of a notion that is not its own. It is paradoxically but inevitably true that theology has *no* right to exist in the academy the way other sciences do. It is a completely unnecessary duplication of a few disciplines that belong to other faculties. A *theological* faculty has a reason to be in the academy only when it is charged with the task of expressing that which the others dare not say under the circumstances, or say it in a way that is not heard, or when it at least signals that such things *must* be said.<sup>22</sup>

Existing "beyond the bounds of scientific possibilities", the dialectical revolutionaries believed that the historicism of German liberal theology had not, as Harnack believed, grasped the kernel of Christianity, but rather merely reflected the *opinio communis* of the academic guild, confusing the object of religion with the object of theology: namely, God.<sup>23</sup> "We ought to speak of God", Barth insisted, and "To speak of God in all seriousness would mean to speak on the grounds of revelation and faith."<sup>24</sup>

22. Karl Barth, *The Word of God and Theology* (London: Continuum, 2011), 181.

23. For more on the incongruity between Barth's and Harnack's theological methodology, see their correspondence from 1923, an English translation of which can be found in H. Martin Rumscheidt, *Revelation and Theology: An Analysis of the Barth-Harnack Correspondence of 1923* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972); cf. T.A. Howard, *ibid.*, 413-14.

24. K. Barth, *ibid.*, 185.

Barth's plain rejection of Schleiermacher's and Harnack's defence of university theology as 'scientific' was not merely an institutional complaint about the failure of theologians to speak prophetically in a crucial period of German history. Barth's post-war writings, and most famously the second edition of his *Epistle to the Romans* has been widely regarded as the beginning of a new movement in western theology that unequivocally rejected the Liberal Protestant pursuit of *wissenschaftliche Theologie* that had been pioneered at Berlin and across Germany.

### Berlin as a Post-Liberal Paradigm

Although a full treatment of dialectical theology's beginnings in the period following the First World War is not possible here, it is important to note that Karl Barth did not outwardly reject the institutional status quo – he would spend the rest of his working life in academic positions in Germany and Switzerland and argued strongly for the public character of theology and against its replacement with the study of religion in his writings. Nonetheless, Barth and his disciples argued that theology had conceded too much to the historical-critical method in its bid to be deemed *wissenschaftlich* and that theologians needed to attend less to ever more sophisticated philological, textual and historical techniques and draw nearer instead to the object of their discipline, namely God and the means by which he is known – the Word of God.

That critique of Liberal Protestant theology has, arguably, been so compelling to the theological community since the early twentieth century precisely because the model of the research university pioneered at Berlin has been so influential. By the end of the nineteenth century, few institutions across Europe or America could claim to have been untouched by Humboldt's creation, and advocacy

of the research university had become the hallmark of political liberalism by the middle of the century. Also, as Lawrence Brockliss has indicated, Germany's success in the natural and philosophical sciences in the first half of the nineteenth century also entailed that "no country in the culturally competitive age of nationalism could afford not to have a research-oriented university system" and such a system became only more desirable with the cultural, economic, and military success of Bismarck's Prussia.<sup>25</sup> By the eve of revolution in 1848, the university was no longer susceptible to dismissal as it had been after the French Revolution, and where the Humboldtian model was not in place, revolution or nationalist competition was hastening its incorporation into European educational systems.<sup>26</sup>

Germany's influence over the university and the practice of theology was also recognizable in American colleges and the new universities of the nineteenth century. As Elizabeth Clark has shown through her study of six American seminary professors in the early nineteenth century, Germany played "a double leading role, as tutor and villain".<sup>27</sup> The Berlin model found transatlantic admiration most famously in the foundation of John Hopkins University in 1876, but Germany's academic strength was recognized long beforehand, with nearly ten thousand Americans travelling to Germany between 1815 and 1914 to hear lectures from the leading professors of the day.<sup>28</sup> Their experience transformed their own ideas of university education in a nation that was dominated by a handful of private colleges for most of the nineteenth century, which were themselves based on the ideals of the collegiate English universities. By the end of the

25. L. Brockliss, "The European University 1789-1850", 6:115.

26. See Christophe Charle, "Patterns" in Walter Rüegg, ed., *A History of the University in Europe* (4 vols., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 3:33-75.

27. Elizabeth A. Clark, *Founding the Fathers: Early Church History and Protestant Professors in Nineteenth-Century America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 3.

28. George M. Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1994), 104-5.



nineteenth century, however, the transformation of those colleges into universities, the foundation of new institutions such as Cornell University in 1865 and the University of Chicago in 1890, and the ‘Germanization’ of such institutions as the University of Michigan, all signalled the transatlantic acceptance of Humboldt’s model.<sup>29</sup>

It is not surprising therefore that Humboldt’s model should, for so many contemporary theologians, have become paradigmatic for their understanding of theology’s genesis and development as a modern university discipline. Each generation of theologians since Berlin’s foundation seems to have grappled with the existence of the discipline in the context of the research university and Schleiermacher’s Berlin has invariably been employed as the interpretative key, usually unfavourably.

The Berlin paradigm has been especially significant for post-liberal considerations of the secular university as a context for the practice of theology, the most celebrated perhaps being some lectures delivered by the Yale theologian Hans Frei, included in his posthumously published *Types of Christian Theology* in 1992. In this dense exposition of Schleiermacher’s idea of the university, Frei explored the debates around Berlin’s foundations, the challenge of integrating theology with *Wissenschaftstheorie*, and how observing the behaviour of Christian theology in the university context can itself suggest a helpful typology for theology.<sup>30</sup> Despite Frei’s careful elucidation of Schleiermacher’s insistence that history and God could never be equated, the prominence that Berlin and its theological faculty gave

29. Cf. Richard J. Storr, *Harper’s University: A History of the University of Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966); Morris Bishop, *A History of Cornell* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1962). Henry Tappan, chancellor of the University of Michigan from 1852 to 1863, has been called “the John the Baptist” of the American university, heralding the arrival of the German model at Ann Arbor. (G.M. Marsden, *The Soul of the American University*, 103). He was eventually deposed by his own colleagues, in part because of his European proclivity for taking wine with meals and not objecting to students drinking beer (Marsden, 110).

30. Hans Frei, “Appendix A: Theology in the University” in *Types of Christian Theology*, 95-133.

to the study of the ‘scientific’ and historical data of the Christian tradition has been understood by several leading theologians, largely under the influence of Karl Barth, as methodologically suicidal.

Stanley Hauerwas, for example, in his collection of essays, *State of the University* (2007) invoked Frei to speak of theology’s compromised position in the contemporary secular university, arguing that his essay “is the necessary place anyone must begin who wishes to wrestle with the question of theological knowledge.”<sup>31</sup> Frei, Hauerwas wrote, describes the development of a university that is not only “religiously neutral” but also “prohibited any allegiance from inhibiting the free exercise of critical reason”. “Under such a regime”, Hauerwas claims, “theology could only be a university subject by being transformed into a historical discipline.”<sup>32</sup> Although Hauerwas clearly had a limited exposure to Howard’s important study of the German university (and so lacks some historical nuance around Berlin’s foundation), he is no less certain that “the attempt to make theology a subject among other subjects cannot help but make theology something it is not. Theology properly understood as knowledge of God means theology cannot be restricted to ‘one field.’”<sup>33</sup>

George Marsden, the American historian of Evangelicalism, similarly argued in his 1994 book, *The Soul of the American University*, that the triumph of Liberal Protestantism and the influence of the Humboldtian model in the universities of North America resulted in the elevation of non-sectarianism and methodological neutrality which, in turn, began to consider non-belief as the only acceptable academic perspective.<sup>34</sup> From an altogether different angle, the

31. Stanley Hauerwas, *The State of the University: Academic Knowledges and the Knowledge of God* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 4.

32. Stanley Hauerwas, *ibid.*

33. Stanley Hauerwas, *ibid.*, 6-7; cf. James Stoner, “Theology as Knowledge: A Symposium,” *First Things* 163 (May 2006): 24-6.

British theologian and leading figure in the ‘Radical Orthodoxy’ movement, John Milbank, has argued that the “free, rational inquiry” that was the hallmark of the Humboldtian ideal handed over “the whole realm of the substantive to the play of agnostic forces”:

Enlightenment, therefore, is bound to evolve into the postmodern mixture of the purest, most unbounded and therefore most rigorous logic, plus the most untrammelled sway of vanity and fashion. In many ways a “religious studies department” is well adapted to our era. But we should be warned: the point of fashion is to change, and religious constituencies may well yet further wither away, or more probably mutate and take their custom elsewhere, far away from the universities (or what future will remain of them).<sup>35</sup>

Milbank argues that the specialization of the Enlightenment university, unloosed from the ‘substantive’ (that is, theology), led inevitably to the ‘utter incoherence’ of the postmodern university. It is not surprising that Hauerwas sees the Catholic order of learning articulated by John Henry Newman in *The Idea of a University* (1873), offering a healthier mould for the university. If a university is less concerned with shaping character and one’s habits of mind than the pursuit of *Wissenschaft*, then that university will disintegrate. Newman asserted that “to withdraw Theology from the public schools is to impair the completeness and to invalidate the trustworthiness of all that is actually taught in them”: a suggestion that secularist admirers of his *Idea* tend to view as symptomatic of “its remoteness, its opacity, and, above all, its overriding dogmatic

34. George M. Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1994), 408–429.

35. John Milbank, ‘The Conflict of the Faculties: Theology and the Economy of the Sciences’ in *Faithfulness and Fortitude: In Conversation with the Theological Ethics of Stanley Hauerwas*, ed. M.T. Theissen and S. Wells (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 40. See also Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), which likewise complains that the idea of theology as ‘habitus’ has long since given way to a desire for technical skills of ministry and disciplinary fragmentation.

intent.”<sup>36</sup> For Newman, certainly, “admit a God, and you introduce among the subjects of your knowledge, a fact encompassing, closing in upon, absorbing, every other fact conceivable”: a theological worldview naturally places theology at the heart of the system of study, and as the ‘science of sciences’.<sup>37</sup>

Similar unease with the pervasiveness of ‘the Berlin effect’ for modern British theological life can be identified in the writings of the Aberdeen theologian John Webster, and, in particular, his inaugural lecture as the Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity in the University of Oxford in 2003, “Theological Theology”. The modern university, for Webster, keeps theology in exile, unable to attend to its true sources (the revelation of God) and methods (worship), and thus leaves the discipline fatally compromised by its obligations to the secular academy. In the modern *wissenschaftlichen* university, Webster claimed, “we tell ourselves we argue not *from* but *towards* authority, and so only as free enquirers.”<sup>38</sup> Whereas theologians in Britain, as elsewhere, have secured their place in the university by “conformity to an ideal of disengaged reason”,

the most fruitful contribution which theology can make to the wider world of learning is by demonstrating a stubborn yet cheerful insistence on what Barth called ‘the great epistemological caveat...[T]he way of thought [of theology]...is not secure except in the reality of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.’<sup>39</sup>

The belief that theology has been sullied by its collusion with the Berlin model, derived in large part from Barth and Frei, has thus evidently become a shibboleth of theological orthodoxy for many

36. J.H. Newman, *The Idea of a University Defined and Illustrated*, ed. I. Kerr (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976); Stefan Collini, *What are Universities for?*, 44.

37. J.H. Newman, *ibid.*, 38.

38. John Webster, “Theological Theology” in *Confessing God: Essays in Christian Dogmatics II* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2005), 16.

39. John Webster, *ibid.*, 27, quoting Karl Barth, *Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 98.

prominent Christian thinkers both in Britain and the United States. For such as these, Berlin and her imitators have discouraged theology from being theological enough, and both the university and those theological faculties will eventually disintegrate for the lack of “shared attention” to the source of all being, God.

### Rethinking Theology’s Institutional History

Berlin may yet have its defenders. Mike Higton in his recent book, *A Theology of Higher Education*, has recovered how *Wissenschaftsideologie* drew upon Judaeo-Christian theological concepts of sociality and freedom. Even in the writings of Fichte, Higton reminds us, the life of the *wissenschaftliche* ‘Socratic school’ was to be held together by love.<sup>40</sup> The dialectic that was the art of philosophical construction in the Romantic university was, Higton argues, the recovery of the ‘sociality of reason’ from the medieval tradition of the University of Paris. Even if that ‘sociality’ was divorced from any actual church, this was not without good reason. Kant’s *Conflict of the Faculties* was, Higton reminds us, written in the context of a police state in which the church acted as censor-in-chief. The University of Berlin, finding its guarantee of freedom in the enlightened state rather than the church, was thus a recovery of a Christian educational tradition: “in their advocacy of fully public conversation they saw themselves as raising that theological inheritance to a new level, freed from particularism and conflict.”<sup>41</sup> Although that investment of trust in the state proved to be deeply problematic in the long term for the German university, the founders of Berlin – and especially Schleiermacher – were nonetheless convinced that *Wissenschaft* was a moral pursuit, leading the state

40. Mike Higton, *A Theology of Higher Education* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 58.

41. Higton, *ibid.*, 65.

beyond its narrow interests. Upholding “good judgment, [it] is untainted by special interest, and gradually roots out petty passions and prejudices”.<sup>42</sup>

If that moral vision was blurred by an oppressive bureaucracy that scrutinized every aspect of the university’s life and led to the “proliferation and fragmentation of newly professional discrete disciplines...with carefully policed boundaries, and well-understood criteria for what counted as an acceptable contribution”, Higton does well to remind us of the very different intentions of Berlin’s theorists. These men had sought to build a university for the sake of the ‘church’ – “a re-thought Body of Christ, the community of free giving and receiving, of participation in and anticipation of the absolute or universal community of knowing” – in the stead of “the fractious and cacophonous ecclesiastical form in which that tradition came to them”.<sup>43</sup>

Even if Berlin cannot necessarily be reclaimed as an altogether nourishing model for theology in the university, Higton’s and Howard’s exploration of its origins and subsequent influence has highlighted the complex relationships that have existed between German theological faculties and the national church, the interests of the Prussian monarchy and an expanding bureaucratic state, and a wider society that was convulsed by revolution and war. Moreover, as both Zachhuber and Howard have stressed, by 1909, the character of *wissenschaftliche Theologie* in Berlin was theoretically and institutionally dissimilar to Schleiermacher’s faculty a century earlier, the result of, *inter alia*, changing emphases within German theology, colonialism, the intervening rise of the natural and physical sciences, and newly discrete disciplines in the humanities.<sup>44</sup>

42. F.D. Schleiermacher, *Occasional Thoughts*, 7; quoted in Higton, *ibid.*, 71.

43. Higton, *ibid.*, 77.

Given the historical complexity of Berlin and the development of German theology, can that paradigm be sufficient for thinking about theology's institutional development in other European nations and in the United States? For instance, are the divinity schools and seminaries of the United States or France really comparable, where a constitutional separation of church and state has resulted in an altogether different institutionalization of theology and religious studies from that of Germany? As David Ford has commented with regard to American institutions, "the most obvious feature is the diversity, reflecting as in Britain a complex history of power struggles and negotiation, and resisting a resolution of the debates in favour of one conception or the other."<sup>45</sup> Those private universities that have retained theology are inclined to see it as a purely professional activity within the graduate divinity schools, whereas the English context is described by Ford as "a process" that has been "*ad hoc*, diverse, experimental" with "locally negotiated settlements among stakeholders."<sup>46</sup>

Ford is almost alone among commentators in emphasizing the importance of local history for theology's various evolutions internationally. Recognizing that the diverse relationships between church, society and university have had a profound impact upon the way theologians have practised their discipline across Europe and North America since the early nineteenth century, it is not surprising that Ford contends that the 'new theology and religious studies' found in the universities of the United Kingdom is distinctive and emerges out of a very particular interaction between theologians, their university contexts, the British churches, and wider society.

44. The use of the word *Wissenschaft* by Adolf von Harnack, for instance, is significantly different from that of Schleiermacher. This is of significance for Barth's own frustration with the German theological faculties and interpretation of *Wissenschaft*.

45. David Ford, *The Future of Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2011), 160.

46. Ford, *ibid.*, 158.

If these British ‘settlements’ are indeed so complex, so diverse, and *ad hoc*, is it not then peculiar that theologians have been content to interpret the history of their institutions with an historical model derived from a single institution in early nineteenth-century Prussia? Even if many leading British theologians agree with Karl Barth and his successors that the Berlin model proved, ultimately, deeply noxious for the health of European theology in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (and Howard offers some reason for us to do so), this book begins the work of finding a thicker historical description of theology as an academic discipline in the British Isles, and in particular, England.

### The Making of the English University

Those seeking to gain an understanding of the local history of British theology from the beginning of the nineteenth century will be disappointed by the resources to hand, there being no available account of theology’s institutional development in modern British academic life.

The only book to engage seriously with historical analysis of the university in relation to theology in recent years has been Howard’s study of the German context in the nineteenth century and, in relation to the British context, Mike Higton’s *Theology of Higher Education*. The latter is primarily a theological vision for the secular university, but does devote its first section to an historical examination of Paris, Berlin, Dublin, and Oxford, recognizing each institution as particularly influential in forming a theological account of a university. Oxford and Dublin are considered in a distinct chapter, but Higton focuses not so much with the institutions themselves as with Newman’s own vision for the university emerging from his involvement with both universities. This is an important



and valuable theological account of higher education, and Higton naturally does not explore in depth the development of British theological and university life beyond some short reflections upon Newman's time at Oxford prior to his conversion in 1845. Indeed, even while Newman's *Idea* continues to exercise remarkable influence well beyond the theological sphere, only a few scholars, notably Mark Chapman, have begun to define the origins of that magisterial vision of the university in the distinctive *ethos* of early nineteenth-century Oxford.<sup>47</sup>

There are, however, strong reasons to promote closer investigation of the UK context and not just as an exercise in British exceptionalism. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the British universities, and Oxford and Cambridge in particular, were institutional anomalies in Europe. This was in large part the result of the isolation of Britain from continental revolution. As it was the French Revolution that had prompted the wholesale dismantlement or reconstitution of the traditional university on the continent, so Great Britain's isolation from these turbulent events resulted, paradoxically perhaps, in the consolidation and nurturing of the corporate, collegiate character of its universities.

Oxford had been a candidate for reform in the late eighteenth century as a resolutely High Church Tory institution that stood in opposition to the dominant Whig and latitudinarian culture. Its motto, *Dominus Illuminatio Mea* ('The Lord is my light'), the opening verse of the twenty-seventh psalm, speaks to this day of an institution with an unmistakable Christian heritage. Moreover, during the upheavals of late eighteenth century Europe, the Church of England's 'possession' of the English universities was cherished rather than

47. Mark Chapman, "Newman and the Anglican Idea of the University", *Journal for the History of Modern Theology*, 18 (2011): 212-22. Cf. J. Pereiro, *'Ethos' and the Oxford Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

rejected; the deep shock of revolution from across the Channel led to a swift reaction against both revolutionary and Idealist educational philosophies, and the English gentry began sending their sons in increasing numbers to Oxford and Cambridge. Institutions that had been previously scorned as bastions of religious and political obscurantism became, within a generation, important defences against a British guillotine. Better, Britain's landed classes thought, to have their sons read Homer and Virgil in the context of what were still considered to be seminaries of the Church of England than risk their exposure to seditious ideologies. Only Russia, interestingly, showed comparable enthusiasm among the other nations of Europe for the sustenance of the corporate university; tellingly, perhaps, both tsars Alexander I and Nicholas I received honorary degrees from Oxford.

Unlike the Scottish universities, Oxford and Cambridge are institutionally interesting because they also largely resisted utilitarian impulses to offer explicitly professional education for undergraduates. In England, lawyers were recruited through the Inns of Court rather than the universities and medical training was provided in the London and provincial hospitals. Even as the civil service expanded, specialist training was avoided, leaving the primary seats of learning in England with robust faculties of arts and weaker higher faculties. A classical education had become the distinctive mark of the English university in revolutionary Europe, and was defended from attacks in the *Edinburgh Review* most famously by Edward Copleston of Oriel College in 1810.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, the complex development of institutions in Great Britain in the early nineteenth century meant that even those who were dissatisfied with this consolidation and strengthening of the confessional status quota Oxford and Cambridge could always

48. See Asa Briggs, "Oxford and its Critics, 1800-1835" in *History of the University of Oxford*, 6:134-145. Copleston's defence of Oxford was echoed in Newman's *Idea* decades later.

send their sons to Scotland, and Nonconformists could attend their own colleges or, from 1826, University College London. Those Anglicans unable to meet the high costs of Oxford or Cambridge could in due course go to St David's, Lampeter (in Wales, founded 1822), King's College, London (founded 1828-9), and Durham (1832).

Accordingly, political momentum ensured that Oxford and Cambridge were not compelled by Parliament to be reformed into the likeness of Berlin or the French *Université* during the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>49</sup> Instead, a relative lack of state intervention alongside the creation of new universities and colleges resulted in a more diverse settlement for English higher education during the nineteenth century. The relative freedom from the state enjoyed by Oxford and Cambridge have, and remain, crucial to their self-understanding; the preservation of ancient endowments allowed both universities to remain independent, corporately governed institutions that were, in essence, free from governmental interference until the need to expand scientific research during the First World War invited state investment.<sup>50</sup> Even as funding from the British government increased during the twentieth century as a proportion of university income, the self-governance of these collegiate research universities has been considered by many to be so integral to their success that, even in recent years, attempts to bring greater external influence to bear upon university governance have been regarded with intense suspicion and, in 2006 at Oxford, rebellion in its governing assembly.<sup>51</sup>

49. L. Brockliss, *ibid.*, *History of the University* 6:131.

50. It could thus be argued that it was global warfare, rather than either the growth of the professional middle class or a secular mindset, that was the greatest catalyst for any unravelling of the liberal educational ideal at Oxford and Cambridge.

51. In that instance, Congregation (the University's parliament) defeated the Vice-Chancellor John Hood's attempts to introduce two positions for external members on the Council of the

While this autonomy of the academic guild averted the uncomfortable (and, at points, disastrous) Germanic equation of the university professoriate with the state civil service, this independence also resulted in the retention of the medieval collegiate structure. For most of its modern history, the heads of the colleges at both Oxford and Cambridge (and especially the former) have wielded more influence than the professors. These self-governing bodies within the corporate university retained their wealth and authority despite efforts at centralization: an aspect of university life that remains a source of frustration as much as pride; the dispersed nature of authority in the university has complicated and slowed the process of reform, even as it has arguably preserved the university from despots. More significantly for Oxford's theological life, as we shall see, it also enabled the colleges to prioritize the education of undergraduates over the advancement of research for most of the universities' modern history. The tutorial, so cherished by Newman as a distinctly pastoral and religious office, has consequently remained a distinctive aspect of this 'Oxbridge *Bildung*', despite the immense changes and funding challenges to higher education in Britain during the twentieth century.<sup>52</sup>

Interestingly, too, the preservation of the tutorial as a feature of university life did not suffer from the increasing influence of the German research ethos in the latter half of the nineteenth century. As Brockliss has commented, this integration of research into Oxford and Cambridge was "relatively painless" since "the research emphasis in the Western world in the late nineteenth century focused on just those areas – philology, mathematics, history and natural science – to which the University [of Oxford] after 1850 devoted its teaching

University. This was, in part, a reaction against the growing influence of corporate business interests in higher education that was being encouraged by central government.

52. W.P. Neville, ed., *Addresses to Cardinal Newman with his Replies, 1879–81* (London: Longmans Green, 1905), 184, quoted in M. Chapman, *ibid.*, 223.

resources.”<sup>53</sup> Paradoxically, Brockliss argues, as undergraduate education was weakened in the German universities in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the collegiate structures and tutorial teaching of Oxford and Cambridge allowed the English universities to model Humboldt’s combination of research and teaching almost more convincingly than Berlin by the turn of the century.<sup>54</sup>

### The Making of Modern English Theology

If the claim of educational historians that Oxford and Cambridge, and arguably British universities more generally, have modern genealogies that are distinctive from their continental counterparts is true, what might this mean for our understanding of theology’s development as a modern academic discipline in Britain, and more specifically in England? The aim of this book is to offer the first substantive attempt at an answer, through a study of the origins of theology as a modern discipline in the University of Oxford.

Even to this day, Oxford is unusual among British and European faculties. Despite changing its name to ‘Theology and Religion’ in 2012, as I write, its senior professors are still required to function as canons in the unusual Tudor union of college and Church of England cathedral that is Christ Church, leading worship and preaching regularly. Unlike even Cambridge, the Oxford faculty’s life and work remains entwined with the work of the various theological halls of various Christian denominations (called ‘Permanent Private Halls’) that are constitutionally part of the University, and despite having supposedly succumbed long ago to the juggernaut of secularization,

53. L. Brockliss, *ibid.*, 6:131.

54. One need only look at the architecture of most Ivy League campuses to observe the enduring ideal of medieval education. This was particularly true in the aftermath of the First World War, “which sent Germanic principles of university organization into temporary eclipse” (B. Harrison, “College Life, 1918-1939” in *History of the University*, 6:84); see also, E. Tamarkin, *Anglophilia: Deference, Devotion and Antebellum America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

the vast majority of Oxford and Cambridge colleges retain their Anglican chapels and chaplains according to the stipulations of the Universities Tests Act 1871. The University sermons are still delivered in the official churches of the universities, the deans of divinity survive, the higher degrees are awarded in the name of the Holy Trinity at Oxford, and all this to the irritation of the ‘new atheists’.

There is almost no material, currently, which accounts for how this constitutional peculiarity endures, or what such peculiarity might suggest about the standard accounts of the supposed secularization of theology faculties and universities. Indeed, there are no historical surveys that describe how theology adjusted itself to the institutional reforms of the English universities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. One of the clearest of accounts of Oxford theology’s modern origins probably remains Maurice Wiles’ brief reflections in his inaugural lecture as Regius Professor of Divinity (succeeding Henry Chadwick) in 1971, entitled, “Jerusalem, Athens, and Oxford.”<sup>55</sup> Surveying his field of early Christian doctrine, Wiles gives an engaging account of how approaches to ‘orthodoxy’ and the study of Christian theology had changed in Oxford since the time his distant predecessor, Renn Dickson Hampden, was appointed in 1836 amid controversy over his own orthodoxy.

The most substantive reflection on theology’s changing position within the university remains Owen Chadwick’s description of theology at Oxford and Cambridge in the second volume of *The Victorian Church* (1970), where he considers both institutions in the context of a chapter on secularization in Britain in the latter half of the nineteenth century.<sup>56</sup> The universities, Chadwick asserts, became

55. Maurice Wiles, “Jerusalem, Athens, and Oxford: An Inaugural Lecture as Regius Professor of Divinity in the University of Oxford” in *Working Papers in Doctrine* (London: SCM, 1976), 164-79.

56. Owen Chadwick, *The Victorian Church* (2 vols., London: A&C Black, 1966, 1970), 2:439-62.

“neutral in religion except for the historic connexions with the Church of England; and as places of academic enquiry, far more detached in their study of religion.” This was most apparent in the faculties of theology that, Chadwick claims,

inherited the duty of teaching the ordinands of the Church of England, and if they failed to perform that duty they would hardly find pupils. For this purpose they must teach religion [i.e., the practices of religion, rather than the study of religion] as well as theology. Yet if they were to gain the respect of their colleagues in the university they must become (or at least thought sometimes that they must become) drily academic, and seek to squeeze the last drop of religion out of their theology. And if they were to teach the growing number of nonconformists who came forward, they must not be denominational.<sup>57</sup>

In order to become “drily academic” and respectable to the secular disciplines, Chadwick suggests that theology became “scientific” and the “easiest way to make theology scientific was to make it historical.” Chadwick claims this to be the reason behind church history and textual criticism becoming the primary activity at Cambridge under Westcott, Lightfoot, and Hort. In these few pages, Chadwick claims that the research interests of scholars and the subjects for examination were, as in Germany, shaped by the broadly secular interests of university reformers.

Little more information about English theology’s development can be gleaned from the multi-volume histories of the universities. The magisterial eight-volume *History of the University of Oxford* carefully analyses the collegiate University’s origins and development, with the two volumes allotted to the nineteenth century covering the dominance of Greats, the development of geology, medical education, modern history, law, English, modern languages, mathematics, the natural sciences, and music. Theology, however, is

57. *Ibid.*, 450–51.

notable chiefly by its absence, discerned only in several paragraphs in Peter Hinchliff's article on "Religious Issues, 1870–1914" in the seventh volume, and again in Frank Turner's article on "Religion" in the eighth.<sup>58</sup> Theology's development as an academic discipline has largely been considered marginal and its difficulties as an academic discipline are normally interpreted as part of the university's dismantling of its ecclesiastical structures in the second half of the nineteenth century and twentieth century.

Moreover, the sources employed in both articles in the *History of the University of Oxford* are limited to examination papers, the occasional pamphlet, and the *University Calendar*. This, at times, leads to broad generalizations: the thrust of Turner's analysis, for example, seems to turn on David Jenkins's contribution to a compendium on theology and the university, which, observed (with the outré liberalism characteristic of Anglican academia of the early 1960s) that "the present practice in the Theology faculty at Oxford is not constructive enough for believers and not open and relevant enough for unbelievers."<sup>59</sup> Employing another article by the Anglican theologian, Leslie Houlden, Turner infers that the theology faculty inexorably succumbed to that division between religion and theology that resulted in theology becoming "increasingly separated from personal devotional life, the priestly vocation and the corporate life of the church."<sup>60</sup>

The Faculty of Divinity in the University of Cambridge has been granted greater consideration in the official university history. The

58. Peter Hinchliff, "Religious Issues, 1870–1914" in *History of the University of Oxford*, 6:97–112; F.M. Turner, "Religion" in *History of the University*, 8:293–316.

59. David Jenkins, "Oxford: the Anglican tradition" in *Theology and the University*, ed. J. Coulson (Baltimore, MD: Helicon Press, 1964), 159; quoted in Turner, *ibid.*, 308.

60. J.L. Houlden, *Connections: The Integration of Theology and Faith* (London: SCM Press, 1986), 21; quoted in Turner, *ibid.*, 309. It ought to be noted that, within ten years of Houlden's book, the faculty had integrated vocational theological degrees (the BTh and the MTh) into its portfolio of degrees.



one volume that accounts for the history of Cambridge since 1870 by Christopher Brooke commits an entire chapter to theology, separating it from his survey of religious activity in the University. However, almost half of this chapter considers the important historical-critical and textual work of the Cambridge ‘trio’ of Westcott, Lightfoot, and Hort. The rest is dedicated to the establishment of the various theological colleges and the building of the Selwyn Divinity School, with references to leading theological figures in the early twentieth century such as J.F. Bethune-Baker and Charles Raven.<sup>61</sup>

The limited research into the institutional development of theology at Cambridge in the modern era is also evident in David Thompson’s important book, *Cambridge Theology in the Nineteenth Century*. His study is a valuable *ad homines* survey of theology at Cambridge since the late eighteenth century, with Thompson advancing a ‘Cambridge tradition’ that he opines has been characterized by breadth and tolerance. By its focus upon the purely theological, rather than the institutional, however, little can be discerned about how Cambridge theology emerged as a distinct university discipline. Furthermore, Thompson’s claim for a Cambridge ‘tradition’ of breadth and tolerance must rest to some degree upon a characterization of Oxford’s theologians as narrow and intolerant of developments in philosophy and biblical studies. While there were certainly figures within Oxford’s faculty who might have qualified for such a characterization, this judgement omits a number of highly influential theologians, both before and after the death of Edward Pusey, who demonstrated great originality – if not the same panache as Westcott, Lightfoot, and Hort – in their engagement with biblical criticism, modern philosophy, and church history. Even

61. C.N.L. Brooke, *A History of the University of Cambridge* (4 vols., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988–2004), 4:134–50.

Pusey, as we shall see, has his contemporary defenders: evidence, if nothing else, of the persistently diverse accounts of theology's purpose and methods still present in our universities today.

### The Making of Oxford Theology

If it is accepted that the modern theologian's confusion over the place of theology in the modern university is to some degree rooted in a poverty of historical reflection, what might be gained from a closer examination of how theology developed as a discipline in a particular English context, namely the University of Oxford?

As has already been stated, it is necessary from the outset to recognize the indirect effect of revolution. Unlike in the continental universities, theology's position as a higher faculty at Oxford and Cambridge was never essentially threatened since the Church of England and its institutions (the universities included) never had to endure the sort of upheaval that was encountered in France and its vassals. On the contrary, the *ancien régime* idea of the university was strengthened by events across the English Channel such that both institutions sought, instead, to teach the religious principles that would avert the free-thinking radicalism that was perceived to have been so injurious to civil society and the church in France. Theology was consequently not rejected but rather bolstered as a foundational aspect of undergraduate education, with every student required to be examined in divinity to be able to graduate in the faculty of arts from the examination statutes at the beginning of the nineteenth century until as late as 1932 at Oxford. The Church of England's status as guarantor of this ethos was unquestioned for the first half of the nineteenth century.

Despite the religious turbulence and conflict provoked by wider changes in the relationship between the Church of England and society, and especially the Tractarian Movement at Oxford, this idea

of theology as ‘queen of the sciences’ was only reinforced as High Churchmen and Tractarians sought to sustain the ecclesiastical ethos of the University. These men, as we shall see, also contended that the conversion of theology into a distinct discipline for undergraduates would be perilous; the content and manner of theology was not suited for young minds and, beyond the basic knowledge of Scripture and the Thirty-nine Articles that was expected of undergraduates in the divinity examination, theology should be preserved purely for graduates in the form of the Bachelor of Divinity (BD) and the Doctor of Divinity (DD) degrees.

This paradigm for theology is explored in the first chapter and how it altered as the threat of revolution ceded into the distance and a more utilitarian politics dominated public life. Central to the desires of the reformers, both in Oxford and Cambridge, was the expansion of undergraduate curricula beyond their diet of mathematics, classics and a basic examination in divinity. Alongside proposals for undergraduate courses in natural science, law, and modern history, there also emerged suggestions for a distinct theological school. Rather than wishing to rid the university of theology or to ‘Germanize’ its methodology (even the theological liberals were regularly critical of German methodologies), the desire was for ordinands to be trained alongside their peers at Oxford in the study of the Bible and the history of doctrine. The proposal was rejected by the High Church professoriate at Oxford, and instead theological education for ordinands began to be set, not in the university, but in extra-mural graduate institutions such as Cuddesdon Theological College, founded just outside Oxford in 1854. Consequently, despite the university still being an essentially Anglican institution, theology continued to fade as a distinct discipline even as the development of new undergraduate courses nurtured other studies. The compulsory divinity examination came to be seen as a questionable test in an age

in which biblical criticism and the findings of the natural sciences were shaking wider society's confidence in the Christian worldview.

The second chapter surveys how this High Church and Tractarian response to theological liberalism continued to limit theology's development as a modern discipline in the university. When a theology school was finally instituted in 1869, it was understood both by its founders and the wider university as a means of consolidating Christian belief in a university that was about to loosen its bonds to the Church by Act of Parliament. As an overtly professional school, however, this reactionary institution was positioned uncomfortably in a university that was still resolutely committed to a liberal education for its undergraduates. With shrinking resources in the colleges, and with scholarships still largely reserved for classicists, theology was consequently an unpopular course with the colleges, suffered dismal results, and possessed weak appeal to potential ordinands. Graduates desirous of ordination could go, far more cheaply, to one of the theological colleges that had been founded by the very same figures who were now trying to spur a theological revival at Oxford.

Even Cambridge's theological tripos – their route to an undergraduate BA – was introduced too late (the first examinations were sat in 1873) to become a significant presence in the teaching provided by that university.<sup>62</sup> While Westcott, Lightfoot, and Hort had greater success in establishing the course, gaining better results for theologians than at Oxford, both theology courses were curious vestiges of Anglican dominance and played an ambiguous role both within the Church and the universities. Recognising that both universities were not the primary loci for professional ministerial training, theologians were soon trying to justify their place through

62. The name 'tripos' dates back to the seventeenth century, when candidates would read selected verses from a three-legged stool (a 'tripos') at graduation ceremonies.

a presentation of their schools as exemplary courses in liberal education, offering philosophical, linguistic, textual, and historical skills to undergraduates who might seek a more religious slant for their arts degree. Far from seeking to be *wissenschaftlich*, Oxford professors seemed concerned at a more basic level about convincing students and their parents that theology was an appealing course, a subject young Englishmen might like to read if they were unlikely to excel in studying classics.

Inevitably, however, part of persuading the wider university that theology was a satisfactory undergraduate discipline coincided with a growing appetite in British university life to compete with the German research universities. In the third chapter, we see how theologians after the death of Pusey became self-consciously “scientific” by the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1911, it was even proposed that the faculty of theology should become a department of comparative religion, setting aside completely its duties to the Church of England. As in the German faculties, however, the abiding influence of the national Church inhibited such attempts and the faculty’s proposals to make theology an “undenominational” discipline were roundly rejected by Oxford’s graduates, who flooded into Oxford to vote down the measure in the Sheldonian Theatre in the spring of 1913.

This is not to assert, however, that, with an inevitability implied by certain contemporary dogmatists, English theology faculties felt duty-bound to imitate their German cousins. Indeed, the desire to turn away from confessional approaches to theology came not so much from secularist impulses so much as from the growing influence and presence of Nonconformist theologians at both Oxford and Cambridge in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, particularly at the Congregationalist college in Oxford, Mansfield. Congregationalism, for historical reasons, had enjoyed stronger

associations with continental theology and was evidently far less defensive of an inherited body of orthodox dogma, protected by a hierarchy. The impressive breadth of theological and philosophical knowledge and range of critical skills displayed by Nonconformists such as A.M. Fairbairn altered the tone and direction of Oxford theology merely by their presence. Despite Mansfield College students winning a very high number of first-class degrees and university prizes, however, the regulations still limited the higher Divinity degrees to Anglican clergymen, and Nonconformists were not allowed to be examiners in the theological school. This protective confessional framework for theology came under attack for what seemed like its manifestly unjust treatment of these leading Free Church theologians, and proposals for reform largely emerged from a desire to rectify this.

Rather than an 'undenominational' model of comparative religion, as was being explored in the new Victoria University in Manchester, or the strictly confessional faculties that defined the German theological system, what emerged at Oxford and Cambridge between 1913 and 1945 was a broadly ecumenical model that allowed for confessional pluralism within the faculty but which resisted its reduction to the purely 'scientific'. As a result of the Oxford faculty's historical bonds to the Church of England that could not be easily dismantled (most particularly in the fusion of the theological professorships with canonries at the college-cathedral that is Christ Church) and the large number of chaplain-fellows who dominated teaching in the faculty, it was a multi-denominational, rather than undenominational, faculty that emerged under the leadership of Arthur Cayley Headlam as Regius Professor of Divinity in the years following the First World War. It was this broadly ecumenical model of theology as a discipline of the humanities, secured in the inter-war period, that is explored in the fourth chapter. This ecumenical

paradigm, undeniably shaped by the liberality of the Anglican ethos, served Oxford and Cambridge until the end of the twentieth century, when pressures for the study of other religions in an increasingly multi-faith society presented altogether different questions about theology's position in the university.

What will be shown in this book is that this distinctive development resulted in faculties of theology at both Oxford and Cambridge that were not wholeheartedly professional in their practice of theology (theology's anomalous position in the arts faculty ensured this), nor were they purely 'scientific' (their continued proximity to living religious communities, and in particular the Church of England, prevented this), nor even were they rigidly confessional, as the inclusion of Nonconformists had necessitated a limited denominational pluralism by the beginning of the twentieth century. This was an *ad hoc* development of theology as a university discipline, shaped by personal bonds of affection, the ecumenical enthusiasm of a string of Regius professors, the defiance of the 'orthodox' in the face of liberalism and 'unbelief', and the changing ambitions and interests of undergraduates as much as the changing methods of theology itself. It led to a model of theology in a leading English university that was distinct from those of Germany, Scandinavia, and the American departments of religion and the professional graduate divinity schools. Gently pluralist, bringing religious communities into conversation with other disciplines, this model resisted theology's simple assimilation into religious studies or its forced exile into seminaries.

Whether this model has proved 'successful' is, in a sense, another question entirely, largely counter-factual, and beyond the limits of this study. It is very hard to know, for instance, whether Christian life and thought in English public life would have been substantially different during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had

a theological honour school been introduced on a more Protestant model at Oxford in 1848 or a department of comparative religion established in 1912. Moreover, with such varying accounts of theology's character and purpose, it is very difficult to make any sort of judgment upon the success or otherwise of this settlement without inviting the criticism of different theological parties today.

There are clear limits to this particular study. This is not a work of historical theology and the primary material for analysis is unapologetically not those seminal moments in nineteenth-century religious history and theology that are already so well documented: the beginnings of the Tractarian Movement or John Henry Newman's conversion to Roman Catholicism, his monumentally influential *Idea of a University*, the nineteenth-century bestseller *Essays and Reviews*, the infamous debate between T.H. Huxley and Samuel Wilberforce, *Lux Mundi*, or the changing theological content of University sermons and the Bampton Lectures. While each of these events or publications are evidently not disconnected from theology's evolving practice at Oxford, this book has sought to bring to light the otherwise ignored events and material that constitute theology's modern institutional narrative: unearthed correspondence between many of the great theological figures from the Bodleian's Special Collections, Pusey House and Lambeth Palace Library; material from newspapers, pamphlets, and journals; examination papers; lecture lists and lecture notes; evidence before parliamentary committees on the condition of the universities; the minutes and reports of the Board of the Faculty from the University Archives; and the reminiscences of students and professors. Amongst other questions, the book asks how theology responded to: the effects of the Royal Commission of Enquiry (1850-52), the opening of the university and its government to non-Anglicans, the development of theology as a discrete undergraduate discipline, the growth of 'scientific theology' rather



than the defence of a Catholic ‘deposit of faith’, the arrival of Nonconformist theological establishments, as well as wider social and religious changes prompted by scientific discovery, secularization, imperial growth, and global war.

What is offered here is a distinctive genealogy of theological practice in English intellectual life that might deepen our understanding of how theology is now practised both in the United Kingdom and internationally. A study of the University of Oxford between 1833 and 1945 clearly cannot, by itself, give a comprehensive account of English theology’s modern institutional origins. Although reference is made throughout this historical survey to Durham, London, Cambridge, the Scottish universities, Germany, and the American divinity schools, this account will no doubt frustrate those who desire a more comparative approach. There, are for instance, all sorts of interesting comparisons to be made with the practice of theology in the new universities that were founded across the British Empire, in institutions that self-consciously imitated the English universities.

This study may also strike the contemporary reader as dominated by men, with women’s voices and experiences being largely peripheral. This silence is not intentional but testament to a theological life that, for the period under consideration, was almost entirely dominated by Church of England clergymen. Those who read for the theology school or the higher degrees were either clerics or intending to be clergymen. For a large section of the period under survey here, there were not even any women’s colleges, and the college fellowships consisted of celibate male clerics.<sup>63</sup> There still

63. The first women’s colleges – Somerville and Lady Margaret Hall – opened in 1879. The first men’s colleges to become coeducational – Wadham, Jesus, Hertford, and St Catherine’s – did not do so until 1974.

remains important work to be accomplished in retrieving women's theological voices in nineteenth-century England.

Indeed, I hope this work functions as the beginning rather than the end of what might be a larger attempt to understand in greater depth the complex institutional contexts for theology's evolution as a modern university discipline in the West. Such was Oxford theology's role during the twentieth century as an internationally influential training-ground for theologians and for leading ecclesiastical figures globally, its institutional history alone merits closer attention. More than this, however, I hope this study might illustrate the importance of institutional histories, the challenges and complex environments, which have shaped theology as an activity of the human mind since the Enlightenment.