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# Theology as Worship: The Place of Theology in a Postmodern University

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# SIXTEEN

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## THEOLOGY AS WORSHIP

### *The Place of Theology in a Postmodern University*

ALAN G. PADGETT

*If you are a theologian, you will pray truly. And if you pray truly, you are a theologian.*

EVAGRIUS PONTICUS

*Divine theology brings into harmony the voices of those who praise God's majesty.*

DIADOCHUS OF PHOTIKE

**I**t is an honor and a privilege to contribute to Thomas Oden's *festschrift*. He was my favorite teacher in systematic theology at Drew University, and I have learned so much from him over the years. It was wonderful to be at Drew among his students, just as he was publishing his *Agenda for Theology* and working out his new position in "postmodern orthodoxy."<sup>1</sup> From Professors Oden and James Pain I first learned to honor and study the great mothers and fathers of the first ecumenical centuries of Christian thought, and this orientation has never left my theological reflection.

In this chapter I will take a page from Oden's "postmodern" orientation to classic Christian sources, asking the questions "What is the true nature of theology?"

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas C. Oden, *Agenda for Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979). This was later revised as *After Modernity . . . What?* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1990).

Where is the true home of theological reflection?<sup>2</sup> This is not a question about geography, but a spatial metaphor for revisiting the “agenda of theology.” In particular, I wish to explore theology’s self-understanding of its nature and purpose. In brief, my answer will be that *theology is a form of worship*. Perhaps I ought to say, good theology can and should be a form of worship, a form of giving glory to God. In developing this view of the nature of our theological task, I will also discuss the role theology thus understood can play in a postmodern university.

### Theology as Worship

What is theology all about? I believe no reasonable answer to this question can be given until we settle what the aim, goal or *telos* of theology is. Philosophy of science has taught me that our understanding of methods and principles in science is dependent to a great deal on our grasp of the *aims* of that science. Our first question then is this: What is the aim of theology? I am going to defend a traditional answer: The goal of theology is to praise and worship God.<sup>3</sup>

Theology is concerned with knowing God and with the study of God. But for too long that study has been isolated from the spiritual and religious quest to know God in a personal way. The spiritual and religious quest, this hunger for God and for the truth of God, is the true root of theological reflection. One example of the divorce between knowing God in a spiritual and in a “scientific” way is the division between Protestant orthodoxy and Pietism in the seventeenth century. The roots of this breach go back to the founding of university faculties of theology in Europe. But this is a story we cannot detail here.<sup>4</sup> After the end of the Enlightenment project, in our postmodern times we have been given the opportunity to heal this breach in the heart of theology. Once again, we can seek to know God truly in both an existential and an academic way.<sup>5</sup> Only this holistic approach will, in the end, satisfy our spiritual and intellectual needs. I am in full agreement with the Westminster Divines when, in their Shorter Catechism (question one), they taught that the chief end of humans is to know God

<sup>2</sup>Earlier thoughts on this topic were stimulated by three summers with the Consultation on Teaching Theology (1996-1998), Wabash College, funded by the Lilly Endowment through the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion. Many thanks to Raymond Williams, William Placher, Lucinda Huffaker and Sherry Macy for their hospitality, and to my colleagues and friends in the consultation for their stimulating discussion.

<sup>3</sup>See also Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); Dan Hardy and David Ford, *Praising and Knowing God* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985); and Frans Jozef van Beeck, *God Encountered*, vol. 1: *Understanding the Christian Faith* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1989), chap. 7.

<sup>4</sup>See one version of this story in Edward Farley, *Theologia* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983). Another version is found in David Kelsey, *Between Athens and Berlin* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1993).

<sup>5</sup>See David Kelsey, *To Understand God Truly: What's Theological about a Theological School* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1992)

and enjoy him forever. This point has deep roots, going back to Aquinas and Augustine. Both of them argued that the ultimate human happiness lies in the knowledge and love of God.<sup>6</sup> As Augustine states in *On Christian Doctrine*:<sup>7</sup>

For the divinely established rule of love says, "you shall love your neighbour as yourself" but God "with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" so that you may devote [*confero*] all your thoughts and all your life and all your understanding to the one from whom you actually receive the things that you devote to him.

I propose to follow Augustine and locate the proper home of theology in the greatest commandment, that is, in the commandment to love the Lord with all our mind (among other things). Even before Augustine, Clement of Alexandria taught that the true Christian theologian (gnostic) "is before all things a lover of God."<sup>8</sup> The purpose of the section of his unfinished *Stromateis* from which this quote is taken was "to prove that the gnostic alone is holy and pious, worshipping the true God as befits him; and the worship which befits God includes both loving God and being loved by him" (*Stromateis* 7.3). I think we are within our rights to interpret Clement's "Christian Gnosis" as the discipline of Christian theology itself, for our day.

The thesis I am putting forth, then, has deep roots in the classical Christian tradition. This basic ecumenical understanding of the knowledge of God grounded in the love of God leads to my larger point: the knowledge of God comes within the life of prayer, worship, praise and obedience that is the spiritual life of the church. For these things are the way that the church loves God. Thus the knowledge of God, and so also theology, finds its proper home in the worship of God.<sup>9</sup>

The praise and worship of God, in both Scripture and in our Christian liturgy, includes telling the wonderful deeds of the Lord and extolling his glorious divinity. The Psalms are filled with such theology, and we find it often in Paul and in the book of Revelation. Take Psalm 8, an early hymn of praise, as an example. Mixed together in this psalm are both the praise of God and a truth-telling about the majesty and glory of God. The name of the Lord is majestic in all the earth, and the psalmist praises God as Creator of all: the starry heavens, the human race and all living things. This hymn ends as it began: "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" Notice that the praise of God is grounded in the truth about

<sup>6</sup>Aquinas *Summa Theologiae* Ia-IIae.Q3; Augustine *City of God* 19.26.

<sup>7</sup>Augustine *De Doctrina Christiana* 1.22, ed. R. P. H. Green (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 30.

<sup>8</sup>Clement *Stromateis* 7.4; in *Alexandrian Christianity*, ed. J. E. L. Oulton and H. Chadwick, Library of Christian Classics 2 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954), p. 95.

<sup>9</sup>I am in great sympathy with Ellen Charry's notion of the sapiential and salutary function of theology in *By the Renewing of Your Minds* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

God, that is, in theology. To rightly worship God, we need to know the story of God. Right worship implies sound theology, and sound theology can and should be a kind of worship. The purpose of theology, I am pressing, is to know God, to tell the truth about God and to give glory to God: in short, to worship God.

The English word *worship* is related to the word *worth*. To worship someone is, etymologically, to tell of their worth, esteem, honor and renown. In biblical language the concept of worship is conveyed for the most part either in bodily terms, such as "bowing down before" (e.g., Gen. 22:5, John 9:38), or it comes under words like *glorify* or *praise* (e.g., hallelujah). Like the English word for worship, the biblical terms to *glorify* or to *praise* also suggest a telling of the wonderful honor, esteem and magnificence of the one who is to be praised.<sup>10</sup>

This basic point is also clear in the history of Christian liturgy and hymnody. First-class hymns are also first-class theology! The best liturgy has always been grounded in and expressed the best theology. To take just one example from the service of Holy Communion: in the Great Thanksgiving there is a long section on the mighty deeds of God in Jesus Christ which form the foundation of the sacrament. My argument is that this giving of glory to God in Jesus Christ is the proper place of theology. Theology is best done, one might say, before the Word and Table in the worshiping community of faith. This is, I am arguing, the true home of theology.

I have learned a great deal from Geoffrey Wainwright and accept his basic point in *Doxology* that "worship, doctrine and life," all three, intend the praise of God.<sup>11</sup> I cannot agree with him, however, when he makes liturgy itself the primary language of Christian worship, moving theological language to the role of a secondary reflection upon "the primary experience" of worship.<sup>12</sup> Theology too is an integral aspect of the liturgy and worship and praise of God. *Prayer, sermons, hymns, worship and liturgy are already theology*. I find the separation between theology and worship to be rather artificial.

The fact that theology is worship raises the issue of the truth about God. To worship is to proclaim the worth, to ascribe the glory and to describe the worthiness of someone. Unlike flattery or marketing, worship is interested in the *truth* about the one we worship. True worship can only be grounded in the truly wonderful things about the one we worship. True worship then is grounded in truth. Schubert Ogden correctly insists that the Christian witness of faith carries with it

<sup>10</sup>I have in mind here the Hebrew roots *halel* (לָלַל) and *yadab* (יָדַבַּר) and the Greek words *aineō* (αἰνῶ) and *doxazō* (δοξάζω).

<sup>11</sup>Wainwright, *Doxology*, p. 10.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 21.

an implicit truth claim. "Any act of Christian witness, just like any other act of human praxis, necessarily implies, even if it may not express, certain claims to validity."<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately, Ogden goes on to find those claims to validity primarily in a pseudo-universal "common sense" rationality. Here I must disagree.<sup>14</sup> The truth as we know it in the story of God and most of all in Jesus Christ must be allowed the freedom to correct our common human reasonings. These are, after all, distorted by sin—as most of the Christian tradition has affirmed.

I am arguing, then, that theology is not merely a "critical reflection" on some other kind of experience or language or rationality that is "primary." Theology is a reflection only in the sense that it is a response: a response to the love of God, to the priority of God's action in salvation and creation. Theology as I see it is fundamentally a participation in the worship of God by telling the truth about God. It is grounded in the quest to know God in a deeply personal way: in the words of Clement, to love and to be loved by God. Theology, of course, does have many tasks and dimensions, including critical reflection. But theology should not be reduced to *academics*.

This understanding of theology is not far from what we find in Karl Barth, especially in the first part of his *Church Dogmatics*. Barth explicitly begins by stating, "theology is a function of the Church. The Church confesses God as it talks about God."<sup>15</sup> But Barth goes on to talk about theology as a science, which he sees as "the third, strictest, and proper sense of the word."<sup>16</sup> Barth rightly sees that the Church itself "puts to itself the question of truth."<sup>17</sup> He then goes on to state, "Theology follows the talk of the Church to the extent that in its question as to the correctness of its utterance it does not measure it by an alien standard but by its own source and object," namely the Word of God. So Barth understood this latter, proper task of dogmatics to be "the task of testing, criticising and correcting the actual proclamation of the Church at a given time."<sup>18</sup> The basis for this criticism, of course, is the Word of God. And this Word, for Barth, is clearly established only in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. In a late essay on the relationship between the-

<sup>13</sup>Schubert Ogden, "Process Theology and the Wesleyan Witness," in *Wesleyan Theology Today*, ed. Theodore Runyan (Nashville: Kingswood, 1985), p. 65, reprinted from the *Perkins Journal* 37 (1984): 18-33, and newly reprinted in *Thy Nature and Thy Name Is Love: Process and Wesleyan Theologies in Dialogue*, ed. Bryan Stone and Thomas Oord (Nashville: Kingswood, 2001). See further Schubert Ogden, *On Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), esp. pp. 3-21. Note this telling remark in the latter book: "[theology's] appeal in support of this claim [to truth] is to no other conditions than those universally established with existence as such" (p. 20). I would love for Ogden, or any philosopher, to spell out convincingly just exactly what those conditions are!

<sup>14</sup>See further my essay, "Putting Reason in Its Place," in Stone and Oord, eds., *Thy Nature and Thy Name Is Love*.

<sup>15</sup>Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/1 (1932; English translation, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975), p. 3.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 288.

ology and philosophy, Barth wrote, "In Jesus Christ the free grace of God summons the gratitude of the human being, and the free gratitude of the human being answers the grace of God, not the reverse!"<sup>19</sup>

I agree fundamentally with Barth's notion of theology as a free response of gratitude toward the work of God, especially in Christ. I also agree with Barth that revelation must, for the theologian, be the primary source of insight into the God whom we worship. But I do not and cannot agree that the "third sense" of theology, the critical or "scientific" task, is the most proper sense of theology as an academic discipline. As Barth correctly argued, theology as an academic discipline must take as its axiom the First Commandment, to worship the one true God, and him alone.<sup>20</sup> But this implies that the critical moment for theological reflection is secondary to the primary aim of telling the truth about God, that is, praising the Lord.

I have been arguing that the proper and primary goal of theology is worship: the praise of the one true God. If I am right, several serious questions, which come from our Enlightenment heritage and which we cannot ignore, raise their head. How can theology be a rigorous academic discipline? How can theology as an academic discipline ("science") legitimate its truth claims? How does theology as a discipline relate to the other arts and sciences of the university? It is to these questions we now turn.

### Three Audiences for Theology

David Tracy argues that theological literature has three "publics," or audiences: the church, the academy and the broader culture or society.<sup>21</sup> Tracy's work regarding the rhetorical audience of theological works (written or spoken) is important for answering the question of the "scientific" character of theology. But my argument so far suggests a very different set of answers to the question, Who is addressed in theological discourse? The first audience is neither the church nor society, but God. This is because theological literature, like so much (but not all!) of our worship, is a linguistic form of the praise of God. The blessed Trinity is the first audience for our theological literature.

<sup>19</sup>Karl Barth, "Philosophy and Theology," in *The Way of Theology in Karl Barth*, ed. H. M. Runscheidt (Allison Park, Penn.: Pickwick, 1986), p. 90, originally published as "Philosophie und Theologie" in the Festschrift for his brother, Heinrich Barth, who was a philosopher. See *Philosophie und christliche Existenz*, ed. Gerhard Huber (Basel: Helbing & Lichtenhahn, 1960).

<sup>20</sup>Karl Barth, "The First Commandment as an Axiom of Theology," in Runscheidt, *The Way of Theology*; German original, "Das erste Gebot als theologisches Axiom," in *Theologische Fragen und Antworten: Gesammelte Vorträge*, Band 3 (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1957).

<sup>21</sup>David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), p. 21.

The second audience, then, is the community of all those who, alongside us, praise and worship the one true God. They will, as cocelebrants with us in the life of worship, be interested in the truth about God as we understand it. I, for one, do not believe this community is coextensive with the visible church.

In principle, the third audience includes all of humanity, for it is all those interested in "the Christian thing." All people of reason and good will, interested in knowing about Christians and their God, comprise this third audience. And it may well be that the theologian, from time to time, needs to address this audience directly, to explain the substance of gospel truth and Christian practice to the wider culture of our own time and place. This may be the very best kind of apologetics. But nevertheless even such apologetic writings are written to the glory of God and in fact have God as their primary audience. We know that at least God will read what we write if no one else does!

What then about the so-called criteria for truth, meaning and adequacy in theology? If God is our first audience, we will want most of all to be true to God's own revelation. The majority of Christian theologians would affirm that God is revealed in history (and to a lesser extent in nature and reason), with the acme of this historical revelation being in Jesus of Nazareth. The Scriptures are the primary witness to this revelation. They embody this revelation in textual form. Therefore, they form the first, or primary, source and norm for theological reflection. The Wesleyan Norms (or Quadrilateral) would also include ecumenical, orthodox tradition as a second norm, followed by reason and experience. These norms are also concerned to discover the truth about God, wherever it may be found. The theologian draws on all of these sources, *in this order*, in order to speak the truth in praise of God (to be clear: the order of the Wesleyan norms is a methodological, not a chronological one).

Tracy, along with many others, allows the terms of theological meaning to be dictated to by the third audience, that is, by our broader society. "The theologian," he states, "should argue the case (pro and con) on strictly public rounds that are open to all rational persons."<sup>22</sup> There is a sense in which we can and should agree here. Theological works should be understandable and clear so that our second and third audiences may grasp what it is we are saying. Yet our ultimate source of truth, meaning and coherence comes from revelation, not a supposed universal human experience or rationality (*pace* Tracy and Ogden).

### Theology and the Postmodern University

There is and must remain a critical moment, a self-searching, for theological litera-

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 64.



ture, even understood as a type of worship. We want to do the very best for God, and in the realm of the intellect this means searching out the truth with diligence, vigor and clarity. Anything less would not honor the One who is the Truth. Because theology is a kind of worship, we are interested in the truth about the One we worship. This truth can indeed come from many sources, including other academic disciplines. Still, many theologians go wrong in making the other arts and sciences of the university too independent of the truth as we know it in Christian revelation and faith. Barth argued as he did only because, for him, philosophy, science and the rest could only begin their work apart from faith. On this specific point both Ogden and Barth follow Kant, Schleiermacher and indeed most of the Enlightenment. Modernism insisted on the importance of independent faculties of arts and science: independent, that is, of church dogmas and regulations. Schleiermacher, ever the preacher, put it this way:

Unless the Reformation from which our church first emerged endeavors to establish an eternal covenant between the living Christian faith and completely free, independent scientific inquiry, so that faith does not hinder science and science does not exclude faith, it fails to meet adequately the needs of our time.<sup>23</sup>

There is a sense in which we should agree with Schleiermacher, and a sense in which we cannot and should not follow him down this path. We can and should agree that all of the university, all the arts and sciences, are free of political control by Christians. Indeed, they should be free of all merely political (as opposed to ethical) controls, of any ideology or faction. Science and art must be free to pursue the truth as they know it. But this freedom is not and cannot be completely independent of all philosophical or religious issues. As I have argued elsewhere, the modernist myth of a purely value-free science is the nightmare of the twentieth century.<sup>24</sup> Scientific pursuit and technological innovation, apart from ethical concerns, are destructive to the planet and harmful to all living things, including human beings. Apart from these humanistic and ethical limitations, however, theology and the church should support the freedom of the arts and sciences to pursue and publish the truth as they see it.

However, no academic discipline is free of presuppositions, nor are they self-interpreting. This "freedom" we cannot allow the arts and sciences, since they in fact are dependent in exactly these areas. No science or academic discipline is value free or neutral: all are based on certain presuppositions, and all have results that

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<sup>23</sup>Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On the Glaubenslehre*, trans. J. Duke and F. S. Fiorenza (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1981), p. 64.

<sup>24</sup>See my "Advice for Religious Historians: On the Myth of a Purely Historical Jesus," in *The Resurrection*, ed. S. T. Davis, D. Kendall and G. O'Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

can and should be more fully interpreted within a particular worldview (and its associated tradition).<sup>25</sup> This implies that there is room for a faith-based approach to any academic discipline, including physics, art criticism, computer science and the rest. What I am talking about here is Christian learning, or Christian scholarship.<sup>26</sup>

Enlightenment thinkers like Kant would argue that the very idea of a Christian approach to science or art would be a betrayal of the rigor and intellectual discipline of that subject. This understanding of the rigor of academic pursuit has been called into question by philosophers as diverse as Søren Kierkegaard, Abraham Kuyper and Wilhelm Dilthey. In the last century, thinkers as diverse as Heidegger, Polanyi, Kuhn, Gadamer and Habermas would reject a “value free” or “neutral” understanding of what counts as good academics (*episteme*, *scientia* or *Wissenschaft*), and rightly so. The distinction between science and theology is not found in the difference between reason and faith or knowledge and myth or some other muddle-headed confusion. Both the sciences and theology draw on faith and reason. The *aim* of the arts and sciences on the one hand and theology on the other dictates differences in what counts as data and good methods in each. The true differences lie in the goals of each discipline. All are rational in their own way, however, and all are grounded in certain basic commitments that they cannot fully justify on their own. The Enlightenment ideal of a universal rationality has to be abandoned because it simply failed to achieve its goals according to its own principles (whether those are empiricist, Hegelian, Cartesian, etc.)

A postmodern approach to science and higher education will avoid the errors of Enlightenment rationality, but I am likewise unwilling to abandon the pursuit of truth as the goal of science and the university. Academic disciplines pursue truth in the areas of their interest and focus, based on certain value judgments they *own* but cannot *ground*. Such virtues as honesty, humility, attention to detail and rigorous testing of theories are commitments that come to each discipline from the broader culture: we might say, from a worldview.<sup>27</sup> Yet at the same time the postmodern academy should not be committed to any one religion, philosophy or worldview. The Christian too is committed to “welcome the stranger” and appreci-

<sup>25</sup>See further my essay “The Mutuality of Theology and Science,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 26 (1998): 12-35.

<sup>26</sup>See, among recent expositors, George Marsden, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); and Nicholas Wolterstorff, “Public Theology or Christian Learning?” in *A Passion for God’s Reign*, ed. Miroslav Volf (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998); cf. Wolterstorff’s earlier *Reason Within the Bounds of Religion*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1984).

<sup>27</sup>For some early reflections on the nature of worldviews (*Weltanschauung*) and their role in philosophy, academic disciplines and life, see Wilhelm Dilthey, *Selected Writings*, ed. H. P. Rickman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

are the great variety of voices and perspectives within the academy and culture. While a postmodern university should allow diversity and embrace difference, the various disciplines are still committed to the pursuit of truth and scholarship according to the epistemic practices of that discipline's tradition. To learn chemistry, for example, or film criticism is to be tutored into particular epistemic practices and to be initiated into a particular tradition of inquiry. These various traditions of academic inquiry assume certain values and principles, which they cannot and do not pretend to justify. Furthermore, the results of these sciences and arts must still be interpreted and reflected on within the broader culture and within specific worldviews. Aspects of our worldviews both make the academic disciplines possible and place them into a broader perspective in which they are interpreted and applied.

Christian theology then has two roles in the postmodern, public academy. First, Christian theology is a key part of the Christian worldview, which in turn informs Christian scholarship in the postmodern academy. Christian scholarship or Christian learning is scholarship informed by, grounded in and interpreted within the Christian worldview. This worldview in turn arises out of Christian tradition, practice and faith. Not only the theologian but the economist, scientist and poet should, if they are Christians, approach their work in a way that is informed by Christian commitments. This should not lead to shoddy scholarship. On the contrary, since this intellectual work, too, is done to the glory of God, only the best scholarship is admissible. What counts as good data, excellent methodology and acceptable theory is determined by each discipline.

The Christian enters into this method of inquiry with a specifically Christian grounding for the value judgments and presuppositions that make it possible. Christian scholars may well be guided by their ultimate concerns in choosing a topic for intellectual study. The Christian scholar also will interpret the results of this academic discipline within a broad Christian worldview. Finally, I have argued elsewhere that Christian scholars are right to accept that theory which is most in consonance with their faith when two or more theories are equally sound according to the standards of their discipline. In fact, the Christian scholar may wish to defend that theory as "best"—not on the basis of special revelation or faith, but on the basis of what counts as good evidence and argument in that discipline.<sup>26</sup> Of course, Christian scholarship is only one form of scholarship, but it should be allowed within a pluralistic, postmodern academy along with the many other voices and perspectives. So this is the first role of Christian theology in a postmodern university: as a key element in a Christian worldview that informs and inter-

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<sup>26</sup> Padgett, "Mutuality," pp. 24-25.

prets Christian learning in all the arts and sciences.

From this perspective religious studies is just like any other academic faculty in a pluralistic university. Christians may be experts in Islam or Taoism, in Hebrew studies or early Christianity. The roles can also be reversed, with fine Jewish scholars in New Testament studies and the like. The many academic disciplines that make up "religious studies" will determine what counts as excellence in scholarship in any of these specializations. Christian professors in religious studies departments will do their best to explain, without advocating, the religion in which they are academic specialists (even if that religion is their own). A pluralistic and open academic context would not allow the advocacy of any one religion. In such a context the activity of Christian theology as the worship of the one true God, in proclamation and praise, can only be described in the classroom. It cannot be engaged in within the classroom and academy of a postmodern, pluralistic university.

This leads to the second role for Christian theology in a pluralistic university. The primary audience in such a context will be the third audience for Christian theology, that is, all people of reason and good will interested in the Christian thing. The Christian theologian may well be employed in such a context as an expert in Christian or biblical studies. Here the Christian theologian must focus primarily on the third audience for theology, but without forgetting the first and second audiences. Christian theology in all its variety can and must be described and evaluated but not advocated within this context. Even in this context, however, Christian religious studies professors will seek to glorify God in excellent academic description and evaluation of Christianity. In other contexts outside the pluralistic academy and classroom, they are free to worship God more openly in their academic work. They will not (if they are wise) lose sight of the true goal and primary audience of their scholarly productions.

A corollary of my argument is that Christian theology can be fully articulated and taught only within a faith-based institution of higher learning. This turns on my previous point, that the true home of theology is at Word and Table, in the worshiping community. When seminaries understand their scholarly production flows from preaching and liturgy, then some healing of the unfortunate state of our theological schools (at least the mainstream Protestant ones) may begin. Whether these are Christian universities or theological seminaries, *the full and complete teaching and learning* of Christian theology is not possible in a pluralistic context. Again this has to do with the aim of theological work. Of course people, anywhere, can engage in Christian theology in the privacy of their own study. We should be allowed to write and publish as we see fit. But these facts are irrelevant to my point, which is about corporate teaching and learning. Teaching and learning Christian theology as a worshipful activity can only take place in a fully Christian

context, that is, in the context of the worship and praise of God in a Christian university, college or seminary.

In a recent volume titled *Taking Religion to School: Christian Theology and Secular Education*, Stephen Webb argues that the teaching of religion is always itself a religious act.<sup>29</sup> I am in full agreement with this viewpoint. But he insists that by way of empathetic engagement, the religion scholar can appreciate and present a variety of religions in the classroom. Further, he argues that each religion teacher should come clean with respect to their own religious biases, which we are usually bad at hiding from bright students anyway. The classroom then becomes a safe place for a diversity of religious perspectives, including the teacher's own, but without imposing any one religion as the true one. I find this book to be a refreshing essay on its topic and agree with the main points. But my point is that teaching theology *as theology* requires advocating the truth of a particular religion, and this can only be done in a faith-based context. The pluralistic context that Webb is discussing can and should embrace his proposals. *But he is not suggesting we advocate a particular religion as the true one in class.* That advocacy is what I find unique about theological education in the strict sense and why a faith-based context is vital to it. Will such a "confessionalism" not lead to irrational, nonacademic religious instruction? That is the next question to explore.

### The Academic Character of Theology

We are now in a better position to answer the question of the "critical moment" in theological reflection. In what way is theology "scientific" or academically sound? How can theology meet the needs of modern intellectuals without losing itself? In my work on the problem of induction, I argue that there are no univocal, universal standards of good informal arguments.<sup>30</sup> Instead, there are "family resemblances" among the standards in various traditions of inquiry. The standards of argument, inference and evidence must be contextualized by each discipline, given its aims and focus of study.<sup>31</sup> What counts as a "good argument" or "evidence" or "coherence" differs slightly from discipline to discipline. These values and criteria do exist in a general way, but they are vague and need to be spelled out within each tradition of inquiry.

Theology is no different from the other academic disciplines in this regard.

<sup>29</sup>Stephen Webb, *Taking Religion to School: Christian Theology and Secular Education* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Brazos, 2000).

<sup>30</sup>See my essay "Induction After Foundationalism," published as an appendix in my book *Science and the Study of God: A Mutuality Model for Theology and Science* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, forthcoming).

<sup>31</sup>Formal systems of reason such as mathematics and symbolic logic are more universal. But even they must be applied properly in each context.

What counts as clear, coherent and sound arguments will need to be assessed in part by the criteria of intelligibility found in the Christian religion, including its way of life, history, creeds, sacred texts, religious practice and worldview. On the other hand, there will be parallels and analogies in method and logic that theology will borrow from other disciplines. Textual criticism in biblical studies will be pretty much the same as the textual criticism of other literature. What counts as coherent within theology may be similar to what counts as coherent in a particular philosophy. The list can be extended. My point here is that theology must be true to its first source and norm, that is, revelation. Theology must always remember its first audience. These commitments will very often alter and shape the methods, criteria and data brought to theology from other disciplines. Theology should strive to honor reason, but not a supposed universal rationality. Rather, reason in theology is in the service of faith; our minds seek to love the one true God. We are not interested in mind in the abstract, but rather "the mind of Christ" (1 Cor 2:16).

Because theology is about God, including the work of God in the world, it will always be interested in the results of the other arts and sciences. Theology does not stand alone here, however, but depends on Christian scholarship. Christian theology will be done in cooperation with Christian learning, that is, with the best Christian scholarship in the other arts and sciences. Theologians will take on board truth as it is known in other disciplines, but they will depend on Christian experts in those disciplines to fund and interpret this "truth" in a Christian manner. So I argue, against Barth, that theology is based on "revelation and Christian scholarship," and not revelation alone.

Barth himself seems to allow for this in his article "The First Commandment as an Axiom of Theology." He gives three cautions to those who would add the little word "and" to revelation. First, we must speak of revelation "with a notably heightened seriousness and interest, and by speaking of that other criterion only secondarily and for the sake of revelation."<sup>32</sup> Second (and this sounds very much like what I am calling Christian scholarship) theology expresses its commitment to the first commandment by "interpreting those other things according to revelation and not the other way around."<sup>33</sup> Third, theology must permit "no possibility . . . of intermixing, exchanging, or identifying the two concepts in this relation."<sup>34</sup> I believe all these cautions are well taken. Yet there is plenty of room here for theology to be based not simply on revelation but on any truth that bears upon our knowledge of God. The quest for truth about God demands that theology look also to Christian

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<sup>32</sup>Barth, "The First Commandment," p. 73.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 75.

scholarship in all the disciplines as its guide and helper. This would include both philosophy and natural science understood within the Christian worldview.

In a recent lecture on spiritual and practical theology, Randy Maddox argued that there are four “dimensions” or senses of the word theology.<sup>35</sup> First, there is theology in the life and thought of the individual believer, often tacit and undeveloped. This kind of theology is practical and living, including the mind of Christ and the fruit of the Spirit at work in the life of the believer. This is an important sense of “theology” that I admire and believe to be important but have not emphasized here. A second sense is the Eastern Orthodox notion that liturgy—the worship of God in the community—is theology. This is the emphasis of my chapter. A “second order” kind of theology exists, which is the third sense. This is academic, critical theological reflection. I have not emphasized this, although I do accept it and value it. Finally, the fourth dimension of theology is theological method and apologetics, which Maddox calls “third order” theology. This too is crucial. Put in terms of this expansive notion of what “theology” is, my thesis that “theology is worship” I understand to be true for all four dimensions, but especially for the second one.

There is clearly an important place for second and third order reflection on the primary theological data (on the individual and on the worshipping community). Christian theology is an academic discipline because it seeks to know the truth about its focus of study in a rational, rigorous manner. But Christian theology does not allow its notions of rationality to be dictated to it from the outside. That, I think, is the great danger of third-order theological reflection, that is, theological method and apologetics. Rather, even in this domain, as long as it is truly Christian theology it seeks to know and love the One who has revealed himself in Jesus Christ and in all creation as Lord. And it uses methods and standards of reason that are appropriate to this goal, and are likewise clear and coherent. Reason, evidence and argument are not foreign to theology, but they must conform to the standards of faith and revelation to be acceptable. In this way, theology honors the God who is the source of all truth. At the same time, theology retains its proper nature as the worship and praise of God.

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<sup>35</sup>Randy Maddox, “Spiritual and Practical Theology: Trajectories toward Reengagement,” *Association of Practical Theology, Occasional Papers* 3 (1999): 10-16.