Faith and Universities in a Religious and Secular World (2)

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«How might a university today be true to the core ideals of the Berlin paradigm, including its combination of the religious and secular, but in a way that is appropriate to the repairs and renewal that paradigm now requires?»[1] That was the concluding question raised in the first of these two articles on faiths and universities in a religious and secular world. The article drew on medieval and early modern universities and especially on the archetypical modern university, the University of Berlin founded in 1810, in arguing that from the start universities have involved a range of settlements negotiated not only between disciplines and between three fundamental goals (understanding and truth for their own sake; formation in habits and virtues; and utility in society), but also between the religious and the secular. The latter pair has meant very different things in different periods, but the quality of intellectual life and the nurturing of the university's range of responsibilities to its disciplines, to its academics and students, and to the wider world owes a great deal to the interplay of the two.

The University of Berlin was seen as a creative surprise in various respects, not least in its religious and secular character. But in most of the institutions for which it has been a model, in Europe, North America and elsewhere, the tend-

ency has been towards a dominantly secular ethos. This has led to a serious mismatch between universities and the religious and secular world in which they are situated. The constructive question with which this article opens results from the task set by the earlier article: to envisage «universities that are complexly religious and secular in modes that reflect, reflect on, study, discuss and are responsible towards our religious and secular world in appropriately academic religious and secular ways».[2] This first requires something to be said about the description of our world as religious and secular.

Universities in a Religious and Secular World

Most nations in the world today cannot be labelled simply religious or simply secular: they are *both religious and secular*. The fact that a large majority (estimated at between four and five billion) of the world's population is directly involved in one or other of the world's religions has come back into consciousness recently, after being eclipsed — at least in the West, and especially among intellectuals — for much of the twentieth century. Religions are very important in shaping the contemporary world, for worse as well as for better, and this poses a massive challenge: how best to engage in and resource the

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[1] David F. Ford, «Faiths and Universities in a Religious and Secular World» in *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift* Årg. 81 (2005) p.91.

[2] Ibid. p.84.

continual, complex debates and negotiations within and among religious traditions, and between the religious and the secular. The peace and flourishing of our world in the twenty-first century is likely to depend to a considerable extent on the outcome of such debates, negotiations and settlements embracing the religious and the secular, the breakdown of which frequently results in violence. At present most of the major areas of conflict in our world have religious dimensions, and this seems likely to continue.

I am here using the phrase «religious and secular» in a fairly common sense way. «Religious» refers to what is identified with any particular tradition such as Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism or other faiths of importance on the global stage. The «secular» is what shapes human life, especially in the public sphere, without religious affiliation. A religious and secular society or university is one where both elements are present, and this can be in very different proportions and also in very different relationships with each other, including complex and often creative syntheses or hybrids. So they are not necessarily mutually exclusive terms, even though rhetoric from extreme positions identifying with one or the other often sets them in opposition. They are quite vague, requiring a good deal of further specification — in a discussion of Cambridge University, for example, it is important to do justice to the fact that the major religious influence has been Anglicanism, and that the secular influences have generally been far more concerned about the integrity, autonomy and quality of academic inquiry and teaching, or about non-discrimination in access and appointments, than about opposing religion *per se*. In French higher education, by contrast, the secular has been much more anti-religious and secularist in an ideological sense.

Common sense and vague meanings, besides inviting such specification, can also act as a stimulus to discussion aimed at developing the sense in particular directions, and this is especially important when the phrase is being used prescriptively as well as descriptively. In debates about universities there is bound to be a diversity of prescriptive recommendations for how the

religious and secular should come together, justified in terms of different traditions. I will leave my own Christian prescription till later, but for now want to note, out of the large literature on the topic,[3] two helpful recent contributions to discussion of the religious and secular.

The first is Talal Asad's essays in *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity.*[4]

> Is «secularism» a colonial imposition, an entire worldview that gives precedence to the material over the spiritual, a modern culture of alienation and unrestrained pleasure? Or is it necessary to universal humanism, a rational principle that calls for the suppression — or at any rate the restraint — of religious passion so that a dangerous source of intolerance and delusion can be controlled, and political unity, peace and progress secured?[5]

Asad is sensitive to the inadequacies of the conceptual binaries closely related to that of religious and secular — non-modern and modern, non-West and West, belief and knowledge, imagination and reason, fiction and history, allegory and symbol, supernatural and natural, sacred and profane. Yet he also refuses to reduce one to the other. Neither is an essentially fixed category and each has a shifting historical identity, but «there were breaks between Christian and secular life in which words and practices were re-

3   Some of the leading contributions include: S. Bruce, *God is Dead: Secularization in the West* (Blackwell, Oxford 2002); J. Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago University Press, Chicago 1994); G. Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging* (Blackwell, Oxford 1994); A. Greeley, *Unsecular Man: The Persistence of Religion* (Schocken, New York 1972); D. Martin, *The Religious and the Secular* (Routledge, London 1969); P. Norris and R. Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2004); B. Wilson, *Religion in Secular Society* (Penguin, London 1966). For a helpful recent survey see Judith Fox, «Secularization» in John R. Hinnells (Ed.), *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion* (Routledge, London and New York 2005) pp.291–305.
4   Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford University Press, Stanford 2003).
5   Ibid. p.21.

arranged. and new discursive grammars replaced previous ones. I suggest that the fuller implications of those shifts need to be explored. So I take up fragments of the history of a discourse that is often asserted to be an essential part of «religion» — or at any rate, to have a close affinity with it — to show how the sacred and the secular depend on each other.»[6] It is such recognition of their mutual dependence and interplay that I find illuminating in approaching the phenomenon of the contemporary university, an institution whose self-image is often exclusively in terms of one side of the binaries — secular, modern, Western, knowledge, reason, history, symbol, natural and profane. Asad opens a conceptual space, supported by social anthropological and historical research and reflection, within which the university can be rethought in religious and secular terms.

The second is Jeffrey Stout's book *Democracy and Tradition*[7] which discusses the place of religious arguments in the public sphere in the USA. Stout opposes Rawlsian (contractarian) and Rortyian (pragmatic) liberals and others who see no place for religious arguments in the democratic arena; but he also opposes antiliberal thinkers such as Alasdair MacIntyre, Stanley Hauerwas and John Milbank who resent what they see as secular liberal success in dictating the terms of public debate and social cooperation to the exclusion of religious traditions and the virtues that are carried within them. For Stout secular discourse is simply a recognition that in a pluralist society with many beliefs and worldviews ways are needed to discuss matters of common concern and these cannot be in the terms of only one group. Such benign, pragmatic secularity seems the only way to have a pluralist society without coercion, and says nothing about the decline of religion or the disenchantment of the world — indeed all the participants in such discourse could well be committed within particular religious traditions, and, given sensitivity and practical wisdom, might bring tradition-specific elements into the discussion.

For my purposes here, two elements in Stout's position are most important. The first is the prescriptive picture he gives of a public sphere that is both religious and secular (the latter being my phrase to describe his conception of a secularity that is open to explicitly religious as well as secular contributions). He does not extend his position from the political sphere into higher education, but his vision is well suited to the conception of universities that I am advocating in these articles. Its key ingredient[8] is recognition among groups in a society that we are mutually accountable for our institutional arrangements and how we behave towards each other; that we owe reasons to each other when we take stands on important issues (including reasons that are only fully justifiable within our own tradition); and that we need to cultivate the sort of conversation that includes understanding others in their own terms across the boundaries of enclaves. The conception of tradition this involves is of an enduring social practice — thus embracing, for example, modern democracy as a tradition with its own classics and characteristic virtues. The modern university likewise represents a tradition, and one that, in my interpretation, calls for the sort of corrective Stout tries to apply to American democracy, countering both anti-religious secularist attempts and neotraditionalist attempts to dictate terms. So Stout can portray his democratic, political ideal in ways that are directly applicable to a secular and religious university:

> All democratic citizens should feel free, in my view, to express whatever premises actually serve as reasons for their claims. The respect for others that civility requires is most fully displayed in the kind of exchange where each person's deepest commitments can be recognized for what they are and assessed accordingly. It is simply unrealistic to expect citizens to bracket out such commitments when reasoning about fundamental political questions.[9]

(For «political» I would read «higher educational».)

[6]   Ibid. pp.25f.
[7]   Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford 2004).

[8]   Ibid. pp.184f.
[9]   Ibid. p.10.

...|I|t is possible to build democratic coalitions including people who differ religiously and to explore those differences deeply and respectfully without losing one's integrity as a critical intellect.[10]

(For «democratic» I would read «academic».)

The second key element is Stout's own practicing of what he preaches. He makes it clear that he is not part of a religious tradition, nor does he identify with the positions of Rawls and Rorty. Yet repeatedly he demonstrates his understanding of the latter pair and of religious thinkers and others in their own terms. It is especially unusual to find a secular academic who has taken the trouble to become literate in theology. Indeed he makes a most perceptive contribution to internal Christian theological debates about Christianity and the secular. He both holds Christian thinkers accountable in relation to their own tradition and also shows how that very tradition has rich resources for arguing in favour of the sort of religious-secular coalition favoured by Stout on other grounds.

The urgency in Stout's argument comes from his reasoned perception that the common good of the USA and its relations with the rest of the world are at risk because of the impoverishment of its democratic culture. The anti-religious secularists offer a thinned out public discourse that cannot engage deeply enough with groups or issues; the neotraditionalists withdraw into enclaves; powerful groups identify their own interests with those of society, and serve them; and the energies of neither the modern democratic tradition nor the religious traditions are mobilised effectively for the common good.

The urgency in my argument comes from a similar concern for the health of universities, and the societies (including religious traditions) towards which they are responsible. Let me risk a few general judgements, which would of course have to be nuanced in different countries and contexts. Powerful cultural, political and economic forces compete to dominate universities and compromise the richness of education, the integrity of thinking and research, and core values such as «truth-seeking, rationality in

argument, balanced judgement, integrity, linguistic precision, and critical questioning».[11] There are numerous academic enclaves, but across their boundaries common discourse has thinned out, and there is a lack of mutual accountability and lively conversation. Institutions, academic disciplines and educated elites are especially ill-equipped to handle the challenges of a religious and secular world. What I am proposing here concentrates largely on one dimension, the need to contribute to a renewal of universities through a coalition (in Stout's sense above) of wisdom traditions, both religious and secular, in order to cope with their task of understanding, teaching and researching in a religious and secular world. I approached that in the earlier article through considering European university history and especially the single most influential model for contemporary research universities, that of the University of Berlin. Now I will explore what such a coalition might involve today, especially for Christian thinking, if the challenge of the opening question is to be met adequately.

Challenge to the Berlin Tradition: The Negotiable University Today

The previous article began to describe some of the current problems of the Berlin model of the modern research university. It is worth briefly articulating the questions raised by these before asking, with special reference to the combination of the religious and secular, about how to address them.

I would identify six key areas in which there are major questions. First, can there be appropriate forms of interdisciplinarity and communication across fields in a situation of increasing fragmentation, with multiplication of disciplines and sub-disciplines? Second, can teaching and research be combined in the same institution so that both benefit? Third, what, if anything, should be attempted in the way of all-round educational formation of students? Fourth, what sort

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[10] Ibid. p.91.

[11] David F. Ford, «Knowledge, Meaning and the World's Great Challenges» in *Scottish Journal of Theology* 57 (2) 2004 p.187.

of collegiality among academics and students is desirable and possible? Fifth, who controls the university, and through what sort of instruments and polity? Sixth, what are the appropriate contributions to society, both national and international, of the university?

Any one of those areas would require one or more books to itself if it were to be dealt with adequately, and that underlines the great complexity of the issues. If one just focuses on major world class universities that sustain teaching and research across a wide range of fields it is likely that in any given institution all six of these will be in play together, with many interconnections between them. The contemporary university (like many other organisations) is a site of constant negotiation and renegotiation in relation to such matters and all the practicalities that they entail. In this «negotiable university» it is vital what informs the negotiations. They are easily taken over by immediate pressures and short-term considerations. How might other considerations be appropriately formative? In the terms used in the first article, how might the «seven evaluative propositions» identified at the heart of the academic ethic be kept in play? Or how might the three fundamental goals of truth, formation and utility be balanced and their claims given due attention? If, as I would argue, the seriousness of the issues suggests the need for a response as creative and comprehensive as the Berlin surprises at the start of the nineteenth century, how might this be arrived at?

In what follows I discuss the need for an intensive, wisdom-seeking conversation comparable to that which helped generate the University of Berlin; the need for contributions by diverse wisdom traditions; the importance that these traditions be academically mediated; the character of that mediation in relation to Christianity; and something of what is required in the conversation and negotiation.

Responding to the Challenge

In general terms it is unlikely that the challenge will be met unless three dimensions come together: a favourable political, economic and cultural context; material provision for institu-

tional renewal; and convincing ideas about reshaping the university.[12] It is not appropriate here to comment on the first two dimensions except to say, first, that with regards to the need both to meet the challenge facing universities, and specifically to relate the religious and secular more satisfactorily within them, the present situation in many Western countries seems more favourable now than for many years; and, second, that there appear to be many resources and increasing demand for higher education. The critical lack seems to be of appropriate conversation producing ideas that might inform the negotiations: the external conditions are there for major developments and even innovations, but universities themselves have not generated the sorts of ideas and visions that might meet their new situation creatively.

Under pressure from continual change in all major areas (including advancement of knowledge), the major players in the academy (both academics and administrators), as in government and business, find it hard to think fundamentally enough about universities — there are always more urgent matters. The result is that most strategies are variations on «more of the same». There has been an extraordinary vacuum in fresh thinking about universities that deals with the range of matters mentioned above,[13] and this is a major obstacle to creative reshaping. How might this vacuum be filled?

[12]   Randall Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies. A Global Theory of Intellectual Change* (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge Mass. and London 1998) pp.623ff..

[13]   With regard to Britain, for example, Gordon Graham, professor of philosophy in the University of Aberdeen, has spoken of «one huge and glaring omission, one topic and context in which academics have signally failed to engage in critical thought and for the most part shown themselves sadly lacking in independence of mind. I mean the subject of the university itself.» — «Intellectual Values and the Knowledge Economy» (Paper delivered to the conference «Changing Societies, Changing Knowledge», Selwyn College, Cambridge, 9–10 January 2003) p.1. Cf. Gordon Graham, *Universities. The Recovery of an Idea* (Imprint Academic, Thorverton and Charlottesville 2002) for an overview of recent university history in Britain.

Berlin points to the need for intensive discussion over some time. The conception of the University of Berlin was generated through intensive conversation, debate and controversy over many years. Remarkably creative philosophical, theological, scientific and literary networks interacted with each other. Chief among these were three.[14] One was centred in Königsberg, associated with Kant, Hamann and Herder. In 1769 when Goethe was twenty he met Herder and later found a position for Herder in Weimar. The ducal court of Weimar and the nearby university at Jena became the second centre. «By the 1790s, Jena-Weimar had become a hotbed of rival groups, each with its own journal: Goethe and Schiller's *Die Horen*, the Romantic circle's *Athenaeum*, a little later Schelling and Hegel's *Kritisches Journal der Philosophie*.»[15] The third centre was Berlin. Fichte moved there after he was accused of atheism in Jena, and Schleiermacher, a theologian and preacher at the Prussian court, was also there. After the foundation of its university, Berlin outstripped all the others as an intellectual centre. It is crucial that this was not only about excellence in specific fields; nor was it only about interdisciplinarity; it was also about leading thinkers engaging with each other and with the government explicitly on the subject of university reform. Fichte delivered his *Lectures on the Scholar's* Vocation in 1794; and in 1808 during the French occupation his *Addresses to the German Nation* placed educational reform at the centre of his vision of future German greatness. Kant's last published work in 1798 was *The Conflict of the Faculties*, discussing the relation of the philosophy faculty (which for him included the arts, humanities, mathematics and the natural sciences as well as logic, metaphysics and ethics) to the «higher faculties» of theology, law and medicine, and arguing for the overarching importance of the philosophy faculty as regards truth.[16] Schelling's *Lectures on the Method of University Study* were delivered in 1802-03, and Schleiermacher, Hegel and others in their circles also addressed the topic. What we see here is a discourse that was decisive in shaping the University of Berlin, and which was internalised within the new university through the overarching role of a philosophical faculty that related to all disciplines. It was a discourse that embraced deep differences in politics, philosophy and religion. It led to a university that was not simply according to one person's vision, yet still had a clear conception of its identity — an identity strong enough to leave its imprint on all the leading universities of the twenty-first century.

Is there any possibility of the twenty-first century vacuum being filled in a comparable way? Many conditions would need to be fulfilled, but one essential is that there be contributions from different traditions of wisdom and understanding, each of which has risen to the challenge. Because of the comparative neglect of living religious traditions in universities, not just as subjects of study but also as sources of wisdom for the university, special challenges face the religions to contribute to the renewal of universities and the universities to enable this to happen. If the religious communities do not try to contribute when what is at stake includes matters of truth in relation to other concerns, formation of people who play key roles in society as well as in religious communities, and the appropriate uses of knowledge and know-how, then

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[14] Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies* op. cit. pp.623ff.

[15] Ibid. p.627.

[16] «Now the philosophy faculty consists of two departments: a department of *historical cognition* (including history, geography, philology and the humanities, along with all empirical knowledge contained in the natural sciences), and a department of *pure rational cognition* (pure mathematics and pure philosophy, the metaphysics of nature and of morals). And it also studies the relation of these two divisions of learning to each other. It therefore extends to all parts of human cognition (including, from a historical viewpoint, the teachings of the higher faculties), though there are some parts (namely, the distinctive teachings and precepts of the higher faculties) which it does not treat as its own content, but as objects it will examine and criticize for the benefit of the sciences. The philosophy faculty can, therefore, lay claim to any teaching in order to test its truth.» — Immanuel Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties* (1798) in *Religion and Rational Theology*, translated and edited by Allen W. Wood and George Di Giovanni (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1996) p.256.

they have abdicated key responsibilities. Christianity, which played such a major role in the origins and development of universities, is particularly responsible for attempting this, and the rest of this article is largely about what might be involved in doing so.

Christian Rethinking of the University in the University: From Berlin to Cambridge via Yale

My first article gave an account of the seven core values of the medieval university. The teachings underlying them were: God as creator of a world order accessible to human reason; human imperfection; humanity in the image of God; the appropriateness of public argument and discussion to the absoluteness of scientific truth; scientific and scholarly knowledge as a public good transcending any economic advantage it might bring; the cumulative and self-correcting process of the growth of knowledge; and the equality and solidarity of those committed to the pursuit of knowledge. Each one of those has continued to be thought through, and it is a massive task to rethink them in relation to the university too. This must be done in academically mediated ways for it to carry conviction in the university. There is no space here to develop their content, but it is crucial for each tradition that it has suitable institutional contexts in which to do that.

The University of Berlin was a renewal of the medieval model that embodied all those teachings, but with considerable innovation, not least in the nature of its religious and secular settlement. Schleiermacher, perhaps the greatest Christian thinker of the nineteenth century, managed to bring about a setting for academic Christian theology outside the sphere of official ecclesiastical control, and he also successfully resisted Fichte's conception of the monolithic university controlled by the idea of *Wissenschaft*. So in principle he opened up the university to a negotiated pluralism of irreducibly different frameworks. Yet by the time of Harnack a century later we find a Christian theology that no longer has the capacity to re-envision the university or to allow for Christianity's distinctiveness within it. In his conflict with Karl Barth one of

the central issues is the *Wissenschaftlichkeit* of theology. Barth with justice accuses Harnack of imprisoning Christianity within *Wissenschaft*, not allowing it, for example, to affirm in faith what is not demonstrable according to academic historical criteria.[17]

What of Barth himself, perhaps the greatest theologian of his period, in his relationship to the university? He was deeply critical of Schleiermacher's theology, but for most of his life was a student or teacher within the German-language university system that owed so much to Schleiermacher. There is a paradox that this strongly ecclesial thinker did not do most of his theology within a church institutional setting. Nor did he try to re-envision the university. He was always uneasy within the university but, unlike Schleiermacher and Harnack, did not make a major institutional contribution to it.

It was left to Hans Frei, who was born in Berlin and went on to become perhaps Barth's most influential interpreter in the United States, to analyse the relationship of the thought of Schleiermacher, Harnack and Barth to the Berlin university model.[18] Harnack gives decisive priority to *Wissenschaft* over Christian particularity;[19] Schleiermacher treats them as autonomous equals to be correlated but not systematically integrated; Barth gives priority to Christian particularity but still engages in *ad hoc* correlation in ways that bring various academic disciplines

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[17] See M. Rumscheidt (Ed.), *The Barth-Harnack Correspondence* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1972); Hans W. Frei, *Types of Christian Theology* (Yale University Press, New Haven and London 1992), pp.116ff.

[18] Hans W. Frei, *Types of Christian Theology* op. cit. especially Chapters 4 and 6; Appendix A and B.

[19] Yet it is striking that Harnack «played a leading role in the rejection of the proposal to transform the faculty of theology into a faculty or department of the science of religion» (Frei, ibid. p.116). One of his reasons was that «departments of religion encourage dilettantism» (ibid.). The alternative to a religion department in danger of dilettantism is one which takes a range of religions seriously in their full particularity and allows for both critical and constructive engagement with them in a setting that enables fundamental dispute — what is described below as theology and religious studies.

into play. The question between Barth and the university is whether such a distinctively Christian theology can be accommodated within the Berlin paradigm without the latter protesting (which Harnack did in its name) that the integrity of its *Wissenschaft* is being violated. In fact, Berlin and other German universities have proved hospitable to Barth-like theologies, however much it is intrinsic to their advocates to be suspicious of the institution that houses them. Schleiermacher's eclectic settlement has proved its ability to embrace in academic freedom very different types of theology. It has been a continuation of what I described in the previous article (there with reference to the medieval university) as a higher level integration creating institutional space for fundamental dispute.

Yet Frei wrote in Yale, a very different university setting. It has a seminary, Yale Divinity School, and a very separate graduate School of Religion. This represents a deep division in American academic life between what is often called theology (tradition-specific religious thought, constructive as well as critical) on the one hand, and, on the other hand, religious studies (the study through various academic disciplines of various religions as phenomena without allowing constructive discourse by participants in them upon questions of their truth, beauty or practice). He himself tried to bridge the divide, partly by his study and practice of hermeneutics and partly by relating his own theology more to the social sciences than to philosophy. He also attempted, without much success, to bring the two Yale institutions closer — trying, in my terms, to provide institutional space for fundamental dispute. This was the setting that helped to sharpen his perception of the tensions inherent in the Berlin settlement.

Yale is wrestling with a problem that individual German universities have mostly avoided. The classic form of the Berlin model in the area of religion is to have scholarly and theological engagements with Protestant and Roman Catholic Christianity alone, and some German universities have separate faculties for these. This made some sense as a settlement relating to the position of religion in nineteenth century Germany, but it has grave problems in the twenty-first century. At present theology is mostly still

divided along lines arising from the sixteenth century Reformation, while some German universities have developed «science of religion» or «history of religions» approaches (an equivalent to what in the Anglo-American universities is called the study of religion or religious studies) which are rooted in the Enlightenment and the nineteenth century. Yale juxtaposes these two strands, with the difference that its Divinity School embraces a broad range of mainstream Christian traditions. It recognises the desirability of doing justice to Christian particularity and to a range of other religions.

This might be seen as a settlement suited to America until roughly the last quarter of the twentieth century, but since that time the thinking that Yale itself has produced[20] has pointed up its problematic aspects. On the one hand, if one tradition, Christianity, is encouraged within a non-confessional university to develop its theology and practice in both critical and constructive ways, why not encourage an analogous academic engagement with Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and others rather than having them only considered under the heading of «religious studies»? On the other hand, why divide just one tradition, Christianity, between the Divinity School and the School of Religion? Is there any academic rationale, other than limiting «academic» to something like a Fichtean concept of *Wissenschaft*, for the institutional separation of theology and religious studies in a university setting? Or might it be possible to work out something analogous to Schleiermacher's Berlin settlement, but now accommodating not only one religious tradition but several?

That is in fact the general direction of piecemeal reforms over many years in a number of universities in various countries, especially in Britain: to combine «theology and religious studies» in order to be able to engage with matters of wisdom, truth and practice as well as meaning within the various traditions. In a religious and secular society one can plausibly make a case for a secular university or for a religious university, but it would seem to be

20   Cf. Hans Frei, but especially David Kelsey, in particular *Between Athens and Berlin. The Theological Education Debate* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 1993).

irresponsible not to have some universities that are «religious (or interfaith) and secular», on condition that both sets of traditions are academically mediated in appropriate ways.[21]

The Ethos of an Interfaith and Secular University

In such a setting it is important to have an academic department focussed on theology and religious studies that can take account of the religious and the secular in a way that allows for wisdom, truth and practice. But it is even more important that this be the ethos of the whole university with regard to the religions. It might then become an example of the public space Jeffrey Stout envisages (see above), where participants can draw on religious commitments and traditions and explore differences «deeply and respectfully without losing one's integrity as a critical intellect.» Within such an environment it is possible to imagine the conversations, deliberations and negotiations occurring that might lead to wise reform and renewal of universities, alert to the fundamental goals and key current issues of universities and also to the richest available religious and secular understandings.

If the origins of the University of Berlin are paralleled, the most creative thinking is likely to be done in small groups that engage intensively with each other. Desirable elements in the ethos of such groups includes willingness to offer insights from one's own particular field while also engaging across the boundaries of it, both giving and receiving intellectual hospitality; sufficient trust to risk developing ideas about big topics that transcend anyone's field; recognition that this is an exercise aimed at wisdom, by whatever names it may be called, and needs to take into account the long term intellectual and social environment of the civilisation within which universities with a global reach are set; trying to embody in the process and ethos of

discussion something of the quality that is desired in the reformed university; and devoting time and energy to a project that is hard to categorise in a time allocation survey and needs to take as long as the complex task requires — which may be many years.[22]

Participants in such conversation are likely to be inspired to engage more deeply with their own tradition as well as with others. The intellectual benefits of this for Christianity are potentially considerable, as they have been in many past encounters across boundaries. The oppor-

[21] For a discussion of what is involved in this see David F. Ford, Ben Quash and Janet Martin Soskice, *Fields of Faith. Theology and Religious Studies for the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2005).

[22] Mike Higton's University of Exeter 2004 Boundy Lectures *Thinking about the University* (unpublished) make a perceptive plea for such elements. In the third lecture, «Being a University», Higton makes a well-argued case for university-wide conversations: «If we are serious about being a learning institution — about *being a university* — then we need to ask about the kinds of conversation which hold the whole University together. Not simply the individual and — let's face it — still peripheral conversations which occasionally flicker between one School and another, but the question of what kind of conversation we're involved in as a whole. And the frightening thing is, I'm not sure it makes much sense to try to describe the University that way. I'm not sure there's *anything* much approaching a common conversation. In conversational terms, we're not a *university*, we're a polyversity (even if not yet, I think, a polytechnic): all too much of the time we're a group of very disparate disciplines working in mutual isolation, united more by bureaucratic procedures and by financial constraints than by any form of conversation. So, as well as needing interdisciplinary conversation in order to deepen the forms of learning in which we are involved, I want to suggest that we are in desperate, desperate need of cross-university conversation, and that we are in desperate need of a cross-university conversation that is actually one which might shape our learning — in ways other than bureaucratic. And, as far as I can see, there is only one candidate for such a conversation — only one field of inquiry in which all of our disciplines have some kind of stake, some kind of interest. And that, speaking very broadly, is *ethics*. If I can put it this way, all of our disciplines have some kind of stake in thinking about the common good — whether it be thinking about the ends our work serves, or about the good of the society we're in, or about the flourishing of our students and staff, or about their responsibilities.» (pp.65f. of unpublished typescript) By «the University» Higton means the University of Exeter.

tunities for prophetic wisdom are also considerable, not least in dealing with perhaps the most fundamental challenge to universities today: the commodification of knowledge and education, as higher education becomes a globalised business. This may be the key difference between the Berlin model and the twenty-first century world class university: Berlin was national, funded by the state and, in its religious even more than its secular dimensions, serving the state's interest. Berlin itself suffered traumas through two ideological takeovers, by National Socialism and by Communism. But now it is not so much the domination of nation, race or class that pose the threat but money and the requirements of the global economy. What is Christian wisdom on that? There are no ready-made or easily found answers to this or the other pressing questions confronting universities, and it is very unlikely that they will be worked out (let alone realised) by Christians alone or by any other group alone. Mike Higton may be right in seeing the imperative for cross-university conversation being driven above all by the need for ethical discernment.[23]

Stanley Fish was quoted at the opening of the first article saying that, after high theory, race, gender and class, religion is becoming the new centre of intellectual energy in the academy. This, if true, is not necessarily good news, and he may also have missed the significance of money and money-making. But I have tried to show in these articles that by taking religion seriously, to the extent even of conceiving themselves as «interfaith and secular», universities have the opportunity to enrich the wisdom on which they can draw at a pivotal time in their history, to redress an imbalance in their over-secularized «ecology», and to fulfil a responsibility both towards a fascinating field of thought and study and towards a twenty-first century world in which, for better and for worse, the religions are likely to continue to be widely and deeply formative.

[23]   See previous note.