

*Part I*

THE WISDOM OF  
THEOLOGY



Q1



# Chapter One

## THEOLOGY

### Definitions of Theology and Academic Theology

Theology at its broadest is thinking about questions raised by, about and between the religions. The name 'theology' is not used in all religious traditions and is rejected by some. It is a term with its own history, which will be sketched below. Yet there is no other non-controversial term for what this chapter is about, so it is used here in full recognition of the disputes and diverse associations surrounding it. Theology has many analogues or comparable terms such as 'religious thought', 'religious philosophy', various technical terms for the teaching and deliberative dimension of particular religions and even 'wisdom'. Indeed, wisdom (though itself a complex idea with different meanings and analogues in different traditions) is perhaps the most comprehensive and least controversial term for what theology is about. Wisdom may embrace describing, understanding, explaining, knowing and deciding, not only regarding matters of empirical fact but also regarding values, norms, beliefs and the shaping of lives, communities and institutions. The broad definition of theology given above could be refined by reference to wisdom. The questions raised by, about and between the religions include some that are not necessarily theological, and many of these are formative for the disciplines in the study of religion. One helpful (if still quite vague) further determination of the nature of theology by reference to wisdom is: at its broadest, theology is thinking and deliberating in relation to the religions with a view to wisdom.

This chapter is mainly about the narrower subject of academic theology as pursued in universities and other advanced teaching and research institutions, especially in settings variously called departments of religion, religious studies, theology and religious studies, theology or divinity. The primary focus is on this academic theology in its European history and its present situation in universities that are in continuity with that tradition and its

expansion beyond Europe. There have been numerous traditions of theology (or its analogues) originating in other parts of the world and in various religious traditions, some of which are increasingly significant within contemporary universities; but an appropriate way of portraying academic theology within one chapter is to concentrate on its characteristics in the academic tradition that generated the field often called the study of religion or religious studies.

In that tradition, as will be seen, theology is an inherently controversial discipline because of its subject matter, because of its history, because of the relations of other disciplines to religious issues and because of the nature of modern universities and the societies that support them. Academic theology is distinguished from theology in general mainly by its relation to the various disciplines of the academy. So a preliminary definition of academic theology (and analogues of theology) is that it *seeks wisdom in relation to questions, such as those of meaning, truth, beauty and practice, which are raised by, about and between the religions and are pursued through engagement with a range of academic disciplines.*

The final preliminary definition to be considered is that of religion. This too is a contested concept. For the purposes of this chapter it is sufficient to identify religion in a low-key, non-technical way through a number of generally accepted examples. Religion, it is assumed, includes such ways of shaping human life in communities and their associated traditions as are exemplified by Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism. This is not an exclusive definition; it simply limits the scope of reference of this chapter, while allowing that much of what it says could be applied to other instances of religion and to traditions (such as cultures, philosophical schools, or secular worldviews and ways of living) which might not be included in a particular definition of religion. It is also a definition that does not entail any particular position on such disputed matters as the essence, origin and function of religion.

Before focusing on the discipline of academic theology it is important first to say more about theology and its analogues in the broadest sense.

### Theology Beyond the Academy

The religious communities mentioned in the definition above all place a high priority on learning and teaching. An immense amount of time and energy is spent on such activities as the study and interpretation of key texts, and instruction in tradition, prayer and ethics. Much learning happens through imitation, and the adoption of habits of thought, imagination,

feeling and activity, which are assimilated through participation in a community's life. Such learning and teaching have been important in helping those traditions survive and develop over many generations.

It is, however, never simply a matter of repeating the past. The texts and commentators raise questions that require consideration afresh by each generation; each period and situation raises new issues; there are conflicts, splits and challenges from inside and outside the tradition. Even when the verdict is that what is received from the past ought to be repeated and imitated as closely as possible in the present, that is a decision which cannot be arrived at without some deliberation. Thinking about appropriate ways to understand and act in the context of a particular tradition comes under my broad definition of theology. Such thought is pervasive and usually informal, and teaching usually aims at turning its basic features into implicit, taken-for-granted assumptions in the light of which questions are faced and behaviour shaped. Yet, because of the many factors which prompt internal and external questioning, explicit thought may also be provoked, and theological inquiry, in the sense described above, may be generated. What is the right interpretation of this text? How should children be educated in this tradition? What is the right response to legal or political injustice? Does God exist? If so, what sort of God? What about death, creation, salvation, gender issues? What, if any, is the purpose of life? How should those with very different traditions and conceptions be treated? Such questions may give rise to theological inquiry.

Yet it is not only those who identify with a particular community and its traditions who ask such questions. Religions provoke inquiry in many beyond their own members; and some of their own members may dissociate themselves from their community but may still (sometimes even more energetically) pursue such questions. In addition, there are public debates about every major area of life – medicine, politics, economics, war, justice and so on – which raise religious issues and require deliberation and decision. Such debates display various types of theological thinking, both implicit and explicit.

Therefore theology in the broad sense is practised not only within religious communities but also by many who are beyond such communities or in an ambivalent relationship with them; and it is also present between religious communities and in public debates, both within and between nations.

Finally, theological questions arise at all levels of education. They may be focused in religious or theological education, but, because of the considerations discussed above, they are also distributed through other subjects, and they are relevant to overall educational policy and practice.

Overall, it is important to remember that only a very small part of the theology going on in the world is taught and learnt in the university settings that are the main concern of this chapter.

### Academic Theology: Early History in Europe

The Greek word *theologia* meant an account of the gods, and it was taken over by the early Christian church to refer to the biblical account of God's relationship to humanity. This close relationship to scripture was maintained through the Middle Ages in Western Europe, when theology in the narrower sense of a specific discipline studied in universities arose with the development of universities in the early thirteenth century. It is significant that these universities themselves had many characteristics in common with Islamic institutions from which Christian scholars learnt a great deal.

Before the foundation of universities, theology had been nurtured in the many monasteries around Europe and in associated rural schools. Theology was there inseparable from the duties of worship and prayer, pervaded by the life of the cloister. In the cities the cathedral schools, founded for training diocesan clergy, were important theological centres. In addition, theology in the cities became part of the guild-oriented activity of a new rising class of freemen, both students and teachers, who responded favourably to new forms of argument and teaching and to the rediscovery of forgotten writings of the past. Here theology in schools (hence the label 'scholastic') was becoming a specialty subject for professional, philosophically trained dialecticians. Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109), based in a monastery, brought fresh systematic and argumentative rigour to theology, and described it as 'faith seeking understanding'. Peter Abelard (1079–1142) represented the new sort of teacher and dialectician. In Paris, the new religious movement embodied in the Augustinian canons of St Victor mediated between the claims of the monastery and the schoolroom. This was an age of discovery, compilation and integration, which culminated in producing what became (in addition to the Bible) the standard theological text for discussion in the university schoolrooms of Europe during the next four centuries. This was the *Sentences* of Peter the Lombard (d. 1160), a collection of four books of the theological wisdom of scripture and of the early Fathers of the church.

After the formal establishment of the first universities in the first part of the thirteenth century, scholastic theology developed under a new influence, the mendicant religious orders of Franciscans and Dominicans. Both flourished in the new University of Paris. Thomas Aquinas (1225–74) among the

Dominicans and Bonaventure (1221–74) among the Franciscans developed distinctive ways of doing theology within the new universities. They drew on traditional monastic resources such as Augustine and Pseudo-Dionysius, and, especially in Thomas's case, on newly discovered texts of Aristotle as well. Their disputation-dominated educational environment produced several major theological syntheses, which remain classic texts. One persistently contentious issue remained the nature of theology. Whereas all agreed that it was a form of *sapientia* (wisdom) there was dispute about its status as a *scientia* (branch of rational knowledge relying on its own first principles).

In the later Middle Ages theology split into distinct 'ways' based on the religious orders. After 1450, as the Renaissance and other changes occurred in Europe, the dominance of Parisian theology was broken as many European universities established theology faculties. The largely Dominican faculty at Salamanca replaced Lombard's *Sentences* with Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae* as the basic text for classroom commentary. The Salaman-can theologian Melchior Cano (1509–60) produced a systematic treatise combining various kinds of authoritative texts, scriptural, scholastic and Renaissance humanist, including historical and scientific, covering the main theological *loci* (places). This gave birth to systematic theology in the modern sense.

By this time, humanist scholarship, especially represented by Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1536), together with the initiation of the Protestant Reformation by a professor at the University of Wittenberg, Martin Luther (1483–1546), had begun a reaction against a scholastic theology that had become highly specialized and abstruse. The humanist and Protestant emphasis was on recovering the original sense of scripture and of early Christian writers. They produced scholarly editions of the texts based on the best possible manuscript evidence, and they interpreted the 'plain sense' of the texts with the intention of approximating as near as possible to what the authors meant. The result in Protestant universities was that the main task of theology became the interpretation of scripture studied in Hebrew and Greek.

Catholic theology continued to be scholastic in form, with Thomas Aquinas dominant, though often understood through the medium of later interpreters and summaries in manuals. Polemics between Catholics and Protestants increasingly shaped both sides, as they developed systematic statements of their positions and counterpositions. A further dimension was apologetics defending theological positions against an increasing number of critiques and challenges, some of which made a sharp distinction between 'revealed' and 'natural' religion and theology. During the eighteenth century,

theology began to lose its role as the 'leading science' whose word carried authority for other faculties. The rise of sovereign states, whose practical demands were less theological than legal, gave pre-eminence to the law faculties. These in turn were superseded by the 'new sciences' that entered the curriculum, studying the 'book of nature'. Many of the ideas that had most effect on later discussion of theological issues were generated by those outside theology faculties, whether Protestant or Catholic.

During these centuries, theology also became increasingly differentiated into branches. By the twentieth century the main branches had become: systematic (or dogmatic or doctrinal or constructive) theology; historical theology; biblical theology; moral theology (or theological ethics); philosophical theology; practical (or pastoral) theology and mystical theology (or spirituality).

### Academic Theology in the Modern University

A formative event in the shaping of the modern academic tradition of Christian theology in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was the foundation of the University of Berlin in 1809, which became for many the archetypal modern university.<sup>1</sup> There was considerable debate about whether theology ought to be included in it. Some (such as the philosopher J. G. Fichte) argued that it had no place in a university committed to modern standards of rationality. The position which won was that of the theologian F. D. E. Schleiermacher, who affirmed the role of rationality in the university without allowing it either to dictate to theology or to be in competition with theology. He saw theology as a positive science or discipline (*Wissenschaft*), by which he meant that it was not included within any one theoretical discipline but that it related to several disciplines with a view to the practical task of educating those who would lead the Christian church. The usual pattern of theological faculties in the German university became that of the state overseeing and paying for a faculty which both owed allegiance to general standards of rationality (*Wissenschaft*) that presuppose academic freedom, and also was committed to training clergy for the state Protestant church. Two consequences of this make modern German theology a specially good focus through which to study the discipline in modernity.

First, it meant that theology was carried on in an environment where it was continually in engagement with and informed by other academic dis-

<sup>1</sup> Hans W. Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, eds George Hunsinger and William C. Placher (Yale University Press, New Haven, CT and London, 1992), p. 95ff.



ciplines in their most advanced forms. Christianity became the religion that was most thoroughly examined, explained, critiqued and argued about in the nineteenth-century European university.

Second, the attempt to hold together the requirements of academy and church built into theology the tendency towards a tension between 'reason' and 'faith'. This tension is one way of approaching the task of describing basic types of modern Christian theology.<sup>2</sup> These types are of wider relevance than to the German or the Christian context, and developing them will provide a helpful framework later in this chapter.

The German pattern might be described as confessional theology (in the sense of theology according to the belief and practice of one religious community or 'confession' of faith) funded by the state. This continues to be the norm in Germany and other countries which follow its pattern, and some universities contain both Roman Catholic and Protestant faculties of theology. In addition, some German universities teach religious studies or 'history of religions', and there is a fluid situation as regards the relations with theology.

Elsewhere, different patterns have emerged. Those in North America and England exemplify the main contrasting ways in which the discipline is present in universities today.

In North America the tendency has been to separate theology from religious studies. Theology has often been understood as a confessional discipline (whereas the description given above includes confessional theology but is not limited to it) and has been largely taught in institutions affiliated to a Christian church or group of churches. The main location of theology has therefore been the 'seminary' or 'divinity school', sometimes attached as a professional school to a non-state university. Because of the separation of church and state, theology has rarely been taught, except as intellectual history, at state-funded universities, but many church-affiliated universities have departments of theology. Departments of religious studies exist in many state and private universities. These embody various understandings of the discipline, ranging from a few which integrate theology with religious studies, to others which define religious studies over against theology (a position that has been represented controversially by Don Wiebe<sup>3</sup>). Judaism, numerically far smaller than Christianity, displays a comparable range of

<sup>2</sup> See Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*; David F. Ford, (ed.), *The Modern Theologians. An Introduction to Christian Theology since 1918*, 3rd edn (Blackwell, Oxford, 2005). cf. below pp. ••••.

<sup>3</sup> Donald Wiebe, *The Politics of Religious Studies: The Continuing Conflict with Theology in the Academy* (St Martins Press, New York, 1999).

relationships in the institutionalization of its theology or (to use a term which is preferred by many Jews) its religious thought (see pp. 73–4).

In Britain university theology has become largely state-funded, and has developed from being exclusively Christian and Anglican to embracing, first, other Christian traditions, and then, in the later twentieth century, other religions. Departments in British universities are called variously theology, religious studies, theology and religious studies, and divinity. Whatever the name, most now embrace both theology and religious studies.

Most universities in other parts of the world roughly correspond to the German (confessional theology), American (separation of theology and religious studies) or British (integration of theology with religious studies) models for the field, and both within countries and internationally there is a continuing debate about which is to be preferred. The next section will outline the main issues in the debate.

### *Theology in distinction from religious studies*

Theology has advanced reasons why it should be separate from religious studies; religious studies has likewise had reasons for being separate from theology; and there have been advocates of integration who refuse to accept such separation. We will consider each set of reasons in turn, while recognizing that there are also those who interpret the reasons on one or both sides as rationalizations of religious, political or economic interests intent on maintaining or gaining power and influence.

Theology's reasons for favouring separation centre on three related considerations.

First, especially in the Abrahamic faiths (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) there is the role of God in knowing God, and of faith and commitment in doing theology. If theology includes knowing God (or analogues of God), and if knowing God depends on responding in faith and obedience (or on some other form of self-involving practice) to God's initiative, then surely those who are not believers cannot do theology?

Second, moving beyond the possible individualism of the first point, there is the relation of theology to a community and its tradition. If a particular theology is intrinsically connected to a particular community, then surely it can only be genuinely pursued in the context of that community? The logic of these points is to confine genuine theology to confessional faculties, seminaries, divinity schools or other institutions in affiliation with the community whose theology is being studied.

Third, there has been some theological suspicion of the very category of 'religion'. Whereas, for example, God in Jewish, Christian or Muslim belief can be understood as relating to and transcending all creation, religion has often been seen as one domain of human existence among others. The objection of theology to being paired with religious studies is that this constricts the scope of theology. The effect of the Enlightenment (not least through inventing the modern sense of the word 'religion') tended to be to privatize religion, so that it became a matter of private discretion with its proper sphere in human interiority. Where religion's public role was concerned, the tendency was to limit its power and to deny its contribution to public truth. Its competitors in the public sphere included not only nationalism, capitalism and communism, but also new understandings of the universe, humanity, history and society which were closely associated with various academic disciplines. When these disciplines focused on their limited concepts of religion, theology did not find that they could do justice to its questions of meaning, truth, beauty and practice.

### *Religious studies in distinction from theology*

Religious studies, for its part, has been aware that its origins in European and American universities lay partly in a desire for academic freedom for the study of religion without being answerable to religious authorities. Institutional separation from theology had a political point.

Academically, the key issue concerned knowledge and the methods which lead to it. The study of religion developed as a loose alliance of disciplines whose main concerns were elsewhere. It has never had a generally agreed method or set of methods, despite many proposals. In one of the most comprehensive accounts of the field, Walter H. Capps finds its fragile coherence in an Enlightenment tradition stemming from Descartes and Kant in its conception of knowledge and method.<sup>4</sup> Religious studies has focused on questions such as the essence and origin of religion, the description and function of religion, the language of religion and the comparison of religions. But, in dealing with those questions through disciplines such as philosophy, psychology, sociology, phenomenology and anthropology, Capps suggests that the most fundamental feature of the field has been a broadly Kantian epistemology (if that can be taken as allowing for both empiricist and hermeneutical developments). The concern for academic

<sup>4</sup> Walter H. Capps, *Religious Studies. The Making of a Discipline* (Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1995).

autonomy in line with that tradition has often persuaded it to prefer separation from theology, except where theology (or its analogues) is willing to accept its terms. Capps is hospitable to theology, which is willing to find a role contributing to his conception of religious studies, but he also recognizes the need to go beyond his own paradigm. The next section offers one conception of how that might be achieved.

The question about knowledge and methods is a mirror-image of the problems, mentioned above, which theology has with religious studies. Religious studies has usually wanted to bracket out, for example, any conception of God being involved in the knowing that goes on in the field; and its pursuit of questions of meaning, truth, beauty and practice has tended to be limited to the methods of its constituent disciplines. It prefers to use such methods in rigorous pursuit of what can be known and justified to dealing with larger or more synthetic issues without those methods or beyond them. Overall, therefore, a basic concern of religious studies has been that of the academic integrity of the field.

### *Theology integrated with religious studies*

Those who advocate the integration of theology with religious studies rarely suggest that all theology and religious studies should be institutionally combined. They recognize that religious communities will want to have their own academic institutions in which confessional theology (or its analogues) would be the norm; and that many universities will want to specialize in their religious studies (e.g. by focusing on a few disciplines such as sociology, anthropology or phenomenology) so as exclude theology as well as some other disciplines. There are many factors (historical, religious, political, economic, cultural) other than the overall conception of the field which help determine its shape in a particular institution. Their main point for integration is the academic case in principle for the inseparability of the two. One version of the case is as follows.

First, theology is not in competition with religious studies but needs it. If theology is to be rigorous in its pursuit of questions of meaning, truth, beauty and practice then it needs to draw on work in other disciplines. This will not just be a matter of using their results when they are congenial, but rather of entering into them from the inside and engaging both critically and constructively with their methods and results. Academic theology has done this much more thoroughly in some areas than in others. It has been most widely practised in relation to philosophy, textual scholarship and history. In each of these fields there are many practitioners who integrate

their discipline with theology, and also many who do not. This gives rise to considerable debate about issues that are not likely to be conclusively resolved (a common situation in philosophy, textual interpretation and history). The argument is that for the health of the field it is desirable to have some settings where such debates can be carried on as fully as possible.

Second, theology is not just pursued by those who identify with a particular community, and it can be studied in many ways other than confessionally (see p. ••). Universities are obvious settings for those who wish to pursue theological questions in such ways. For the members of particular religious communities there can also be advantages in doing theology in dialogue with academics and students of other faith traditions and of none.

Third, religious studies need not be in competition with theology. Certain definitions of the field exclude certain definitions of theology (see above pp. ••–••), but other definitions of religious studies open it towards integration with theology. A key issue is how far questions intrinsic to the field may be pursued, and whether some answers to those questions are to be ruled out in advance. For example, is the question of truth concerning the reality of God as identified by a particular tradition allowed to be pursued and then answered in line with that tradition? If so, then the way is opened for critical and constructive theology within a religious studies milieu. If not, what reasons can be offered for cutting off inquiry and disallowing certain answers? Such cutting off and disallowing either appears arbitrary or it relies on criteria that are themselves widely contested and debated within the field. The irresolvability of the dispute over boundaries and criteria has been intensified by similar disputes, often bitter, in other disciplines with which religious studies and theology engage, such as literary studies, philosophy, history and the human sciences.

Fourth, the three main responsibilities of theology and religious studies can be argued to converge and so make integration appropriate for them in university settings. The first is their responsibility towards the academy and its disciplines. The requirement is excellence in the study and teaching of texts, history, laws, traditions, practices, institutions, ideas, the arts and so on, as these relate to religions in the past and the present. This involves standards set by peer groups, work within and collaboration between disciplines and a worldwide network of communication. The second is their responsibility towards religious communities. This includes the tasks of carrying out their academic responsibilities critically and constructively, educating members of religious communities as well as others, and providing forums where religious traditions can engage in study, dialogue and debate

together. Universities have increasingly become centres of such interfaith engagement in which theological concerns with, for example, questions of truth and practice, go together with the use of a range of academic disciplines. The third is their responsibility to society and the realm of public life. Issues in politics, law, the media, education, medicine and family life often raise questions which require complex interdisciplinary, interreligious and international collaboration. These questions embrace theological as well as other matters.

Fifth, in the light of the above four points, the case for a fundamental dualism in the field is undermined. It is still appropriate to have institutions with particular emphases and commitments, but the overall intellectual and ethical 'ecology' of the field embraces theology and religious studies.

### Types of Christian Theology

How can the field of academic theology be described so as to do justice to the range of theologies and their different ways of relating to other disciplines? One typology worked out in relation to Christian theology is that of Frei.<sup>5</sup> It takes account of the importance of institutional contexts both historically and today. Frei takes the University of Berlin as his historical point of departure (see above pp. ••—••), and his typology also relates to the American situation of theology and religious studies. He recognizes that there are very different types of theology, some of which are more at home in universities than others. His typology therefore grows out of the academic tradition with which this chapter is mainly concerned and it is limited to Christian theology; but it can also be developed in relation to other religious traditions. Its attempt to do descriptive justice to the current state of the field results in allowing both for the separation of theology and religious studies and for their integration.

There are five types on a continuum, of which the two extremes will be described first.

#### *Type 1*

This type gives complete priority to some contemporary philosophy, world-view, practical agenda or one or more academic disciplines. In its academic form it subjects Christian theology to 'general criteria of intelligibility,

<sup>5</sup> *Op. cit.*

coherence, and truth that it must share with other academic disciplines'.<sup>6</sup> Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) is seen as the main historical exemplar of this in modernity. He applied his criteria of rationality and morality to theology and offered an understanding of religion 'within the bounds of reason alone'. In terms of the previous discussion, a Kantian Type 1 is in line with a conception of religious studies which insists on a particular set of epistemological criteria being met by any theology than is to be admitted to the academy. It therefore excludes other types of theology mentioned below. It also gives philosophy (of a particular type) priority as the main cognate discipline of theology.

Other versions of Type 1 use different external criteria to judge theology – for example, an ecological worldview, or a feminist ethic, or a political programme or an imaginative aesthetic.

### *Type 5*

This type takes Christian theology as exclusively a matter of Christian self-description. It is the 'grammar of faith', its internal logic learnt like a new language through acquiring appropriate conceptual skills. It offers a scriptural understanding or a traditional theology or version of Christianity as something with its own integrity that is not to be judged by outside criteria. All reality is to be seen in Christian terms, and there is a radical rejection of other frameworks and worldviews. Examples include some types of fundamentalism (such as those seeing the Bible as inerrant and all-sufficient for theology) and also more sophisticated conceptions of a religion as a distinctive and embracing 'language game' or 'world of meaning'. In terms of the previous discussion, Type 5 is in line with a conception of theology which prefers separation from religious studies and other disciplines.

The two extremes of Types 1 and 5 can be seen to come together in their tendency to see everything in terms of some given framework (whether Christian or non-Christian) and to cut off the possibilities for dialogue across boundaries.

### *Types 2, 3 and 4*

Between the two extremes come three types that in various ways incorporate dialogue.

<sup>6</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 2.

Type 2 tries to correlate general meaning structures with what is specifically Christian. It interprets Christianity consistently in terms of some contemporary philosophy, idiom or concern, while trying to do justice to the distinctiveness of Christianity. One example is the German theologian Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976), who reconceived the Christian Gospel in terms of existentialist philosophy. The overall integration is biased towards the general framework, and so this type is close to Type 1.

If Type 2 moves in the other direction towards a correlation which does not attempt a comprehensive integration, then it becomes Type 3. This non-systematic correlation is a thoroughly dialogical form of theology. Theological questions, methods and positions are continually being correlated with other questions, methods and positions. Theology can learn a great deal from other disciplines and positions without giving a single one overarching significance, and it is only from within the process of dialogue that judgements can be made. Schleiermacher is an example of this type, as is Paul Tillich (1886–1965) who correlated fundamental questions about life and history with the meaning offered by Christian symbols and ideas.

Type 4 gives priority to Christian self-description, letting that govern the applicability of general criteria of meaning, truth and practice in Christian theology, yet nevertheless engaging with a range of disciplines and with other worldviews and theological positions in *ad hoc* ways. It does not go to the extreme of Type 5, but still insists that no other framework should be able to dictate how to understand the main contents of Christian faith. It is 'faith seeking understanding', basically trusting the main lines of classic Christian testimony to God and the Gospel, but also open to a wide range of dialogues – not least because God is seen as involved with all reality. The Swiss theologian Karl Barth is of this type, resisting the assimilation of Christian faith to Western culture and ideologies, especially that of the Nazis. Type 4 sees Type 3 as inherently unstable: there can be no neutral standpoint from which to carry on dialogues, and therefore there has to be a basic commitment for or against Christian faith – which yet needs to be tested in encounter with other positions. A favoured cognate discipline of this type of theology as practised in Britain and North America is the more descriptive (rather than explanatory) types of social science.

### *Assessment of the types*

Any complex theology is not likely to fit neatly into a single type, and the purpose here is not to set up neat pigeonholes enabling all theologians to be labelled. Many will display subtle blends and uncategorizable positions



which resist easy description. Rather, the aim is to portray a range of types which spans the field and enables a judgement about theology in relation to other disciplines, including those embraced in religious studies. The judgement is that, while Type 5 is likely to be least at home in the university and Type 1 least at home in the Christian community, Types 2, 3 and 4 can, in different ways and with different points of tension, be at home in both. There are Christian communities that would exclude the first four types, and there are universities that would exclude the last four types, but these ways of drawing boundaries are controversial and many institutions are more inclusive. The practical conclusion is that an overview of the discipline of theology, as it has developed in universities carrying forward the European tradition, argues for a definition that can embrace all five types. This in turn supports the argument above in the previous section that it makes academic as well as theological sense to see the field as whole, embracing theology and religious studies. The different types of theology construe the field very variously, and particular institutions and traditions need to take fundamental decisions about which types they embrace – but that is the case in many other fields too.

### Beyond Christian Theology

The above typology has been deliberately tradition-specific. The next question is whether something like those types do justice to the other religious traditions which are the examples being used in this chapter: Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism. There was a blossoming of the study of these and other religious traditions in the universities of Europe and the US in the nineteenth century, though apart from the special case of Judaism the study was mostly outside theological faculties. A major factor in the rise of the field of religious studies was an attempt to do fuller academic justice to religions other than Christianity. From a standpoint at the beginning of the twenty-first century it is possible to see that attempt as having two main phases, the second still in progress and provoking much debate.

The first phase involved the establishment of religious studies over against theology (usually against confessional Christian theology). The main concern was for properly academic study through disciplines such as the philosophy, sociology, anthropology, psychology and phenomenology of religion.

The second phase has accompanied the multiplication of universities around the world and the growth of the study of theology and religious studies in them. The last half of the twentieth century has seen an unprecedented expansion in higher education and of the disciplines and

subdisciplines that study religions. One crucial feature of this second phase has been that considerable numbers of academics and students in universities now study their own religion as well as the religions of others. This has led to debates similar to those which have surrounded Christian theology in the European tradition. How far is it appropriate to be a Jew and pursue critical and constructive Jewish thought in a university? If a Buddhist academic is discussing ethical issues, how far is it appropriate to develop Buddhist positions? Increasingly, the answer has been that it is appropriate; then the debate moves on to consider the criteria of appropriateness. But, once it is granted that members of traditions can contribute in such ways to academic discussions and utilize a range of disciplines in doing so, then what has been defined above as academic theology is being practised. The result is that the type of religious studies which defined itself against Christian confessional theology is now being challenged to 're-theologize'. Can it recognize the academic validity of inquiries, debates and dialogues which are theological (in the sense of seeking wisdom about questions of meaning, truth, beauty and practice relating to the religions and the issues they raise), which use various academic disciplines, and which relate to other traditions besides Christianity?

The impetus towards such theology has been strengthened by suspicion directed towards the ways in which religions have been studied by Western academics. For example, the accounts of Judaism by non-Jews (especially Christians) have been subjected to thorough critique (especially by Jews); Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism have struggled to resist the imposition of 'orientalist' identities projected by Western scholars; and Christians have often judged accounts of their faith to be distorted by post-Enlightenment academic presuppositions and criteria. In particular there has been a rejection of 'ideologies of neutrality' and associated positions such as the dichotomy between fact and value, or the separation of knowledge from ethics and faith. The key point has been: 'no one stands nowhere', and it is desirable that religious traditions (together with genders, races, classes and cultures) have their own academic voices that can speak from where they stand. Huge questions of epistemology, ethics, theology and the meaning of 'academic' are at stake here and are likely to remain in contention; but once they have been raised they are hard to suppress, and many institutions have created the settings for pursuing them. One such setting is the integrated field of theology and religious studies.

The typology suggested by Frei is an attempt to devise a conception of the field that fits such a setting. It is applicable to religions besides Christianity insofar as each is a tradition (or set of traditions) whose traditional identity can be rethought and developed in the present according to the

five types. For example, there are those who assimilate Buddhist ideas and practices to a variety of non-Buddhist frameworks (Type 1); others are 'fundamentalist', or convinced of the self-sufficiency of a particular set of traditional Buddhist ideas and practices (Type 5); and others arrive at more dialogical identities which balance differently between those extremes (Types 2, 3 and 4).

Yet each of the sample religions with which this chapter is concerned has a distinctive history in relation to theology or its analogues. In line with this chapter's limited scope (focusing on theology in the university tradition begun in Western Europe in the Middle Ages, continued today in research universities that are successors to that tradition in and beyond Europe and America, and concerned especially with the relation between theology and religious studies) it is not possible to discuss the history of each tradition in detail. What are offered below are some considerations from the standpoint of each of the five traditions as they take part in theology and religious studies in contemporary universities. Most space is given to Judaism as the tradition which has, besides Christianity, been most intensively engaged with academic study and thought in the universities of Europe, North America and more recently Israel.

## Judaism

The term 'theology' is often considered suspect among Jewish thinkers. This is partly because theology is sometimes seen as being about the inner life of God, which has not usually been a Jewish concern. Partly it has been a reaction of a minority against oppressive and dominant confessional theology: it has not been safe for Jews to condone public or university theological talk, since Christians (or others) could use it to seek domination or to proselytize. Partly, too, theology has been seen as abstractive, intellectualizing and even dogmatizing (in the bad sense) instead of practice-oriented discussion about community-specific behaviour. Perhaps the most acceptable term is Jewish religious thought.

The main institution for articulating Jewish religious thought has been the rabbinic academy, whose origins are in the 'yeshivah', a centre of learning and discussion going back to the Mishnaic period in Palestine, and continuing in the Talmudic academies of Palestine and Babylonia, and later in centres spread around the diaspora. The discourse of these centres combined study of biblical texts (with a view to expounding both its plain sense and also its relevance to traditional and current issues), ethical discussion, jurisprudence, literary interpretation, folk science and much else. The

rabbinic academy is still the normative institution for the religious thought of most orthodox Jewish communities, and there are equivalents in other forms of Judaism – for example, rabbinical seminaries, Jewish colleges and other institutes.

There have been other non-university centres of Jewish religious thought besides the rabbinical academies. Beginning in the late Persian or Second Temple period, sages, and later rabbis and textual scholars, included devotees of the esoteric circles that generated Jewish mystical practice and literature or 'kabbalah'. These kabbalistic circles conducted 'theology' in the sense of studying the inner life of God, or at least those dimensions of God that are processual and descend into levels of human consciousness. Hasidism is a large, popular movement of lived kabbalah, and some contemporary Jewish academics are paying increasing attention to kabbalistic study.

One influential tradition in Jewish thought has been sustained by intellectuals, scientists and statesmen working in a succession of empires and civilizations – Persian, Greek, Roman, Islamic, Christian, modern European and American. They have been social and cultural brokers in statecraft, finance, medicine, the sciences and scholarship, and have produced much sophisticated and often influential thinking which mediates between Jewish and non-Jewish interests and understandings and which might be categorized under Types 2, 3 and 4 above. Examples include Moses Maimonides (1125–1204) in medieval Spain, the Jewish doctors, mystics, scientists, scholars and diplomats of Renaissance Italy, the Jewish intelligentsia in twentieth century New York, and communities of lively religious thought which flourish outside the universities in Israel.

Jews were long excluded from the Christian-dominated university tradition of Europe, but since their entry into these academic settings they have, considering their small numbers, been disproportionately influential in many disciplines. Some have approximated to Types 1 and 2 above, attempting to accommodate Jewish religious traditions to the categories of Western thought. This was developed in German universities in the nineteenth century, Moses Mendelssohn (1729–1786) being a major figure. Others studied Judaism according to the canons of *Wissenschaft* (see p. ••), with a strong historicist tendency. This tradition, known in German as *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, remains the strongest influence on Jewish academic religious study. At its heart is the study of Jewish texts by explaining how and in which contexts they were composed, and what their sentences meant to those who composed and received them. This study is 'theological' in the sense used in this chapter insofar as it sometimes argues that the religious meaning of the texts is exhausted by what can be elicited through its methods.

Out of this tradition of *Wissenschaft* have come more complex forms of interaction, brokerage or dialogue with various types of academic inquiry, perhaps best labelled 'humanistic Jewish studies'. The study of texts has been opened up by such approaches as hermeneutical theory, structuralism and deconstruction, and the range of human and natural sciences has been related to Jewish concerns. In terms of the types above, it has most affinities with Type 3, but relates happily to any of the first four.

Finally, a recent development has called itself 'postcritical' or 'postliberal', sometimes welcoming the label 'Jewish theology'. Influenced by literary studies, postmodernism, and twentieth-century Jewish philosophies originating in Germany, France and America, these thinkers try to integrate three elements: philosophical inquiry; academic studies of texts, society and history; and traditional forms of rabbinic text study and practice. Its main affinities are with Type 4 in its concern to maintain a community-specific identity while learning from a wide range of dialogues – including dialogues with other religious traditions.

## Islam

Islamic theology shares some of the strategies and concerns of Christian and Jewish discourse about God, since all three traditions are rooted in ancient Semitic narratives of a just and merciful Creator, and have historically evolved under the influence of Greek thought. For some three centuries after the death of the Prophet Muhammad (632 CE) the theology of the new religion was stimulated by encounters with several eastern Christian traditions, a debt which was later to be repaid when Avicenna, Ghazali and Averroes exercised profound influence on theologians of the Latin West in the Middle Ages. In spite of these convergences, however, the term 'theology' has no one Arabic equivalent, and theology in the sense used in this chapter has been pursued across many of the traditional Islamic disciplines.

One such subject area is Islamic jurisprudence (*usul al-fiqh*), which incorporates discussions of moral liability, natural law, the status of non-Muslims and other topics which received exhaustive treatment of a theological nature.

Sufism, Islam's highly diversified mystical and esoteric expression, also included systematic expositions of doctrine and cosmology in which mystical and exoteric teachings were juxtaposed, frequently in order to justify speculative or mystical insights to literalists.

A further discipline of great historic moment was Islamic philosophy

(*falsafa* or *hikma*), which inherited late Greek philosophical syntheses and developed them into multiple religious systems. Many of these were regarded as too unscriptural and were therefore frequently confined to the status of private belief systems among elite circles.

Interacting with all these disciplines was *kalam*, conventionally translated as 'Islamic theology'. This is primarily a scriptural enterprise, applying forms of reasoning of Greek origin to the frequently enigmatic data of revelation. Ghazali (d. 1111) and Shahrastani (d. 1153) incorporated aspects of the *falsafa* tradition to shape *kalam* into a highly complex and rigorous Islamic world-view. Their tradition, known as Ash'arism, is still taught as Islam's orthodoxy in most Muslim countries. Orthodox status is also accorded to Maturidism, a theology which prevails among Muslims in the Indian subcontinent, Turkey, Uzbekistan and the Balkans. The debates between these schools are due mostly to the greater weight attached to rationality by Maturidism over against the comparatively more scriptural Ash'arism.

There have been various institutional settings for these types of theology, perhaps the most distinguished being Al-Azhar University in Cairo. In the twentieth century there have been many new universities. Those in Saudi Arabia, for example, have rejected the forms of reasoning from scripture found in both Ash'arism and Maturidism in favour of a strict literalism. These 'fundamentalists' (*Salafis*) are in a polemical relationship with traditional institutions such as Al-Azhar, and it may be that this engagement has become a more significant and widespread activity than the engagement with the discourses of modernity. In terms of the types used in this chapter, the main debates are between a Type 4, which inhabits and interprets the Qur'an with the aid of traditional Greek-influenced rationality, and a Type 5, which finds the Qur'an self-sufficient.

So far there has been comparatively little Muslim theology analogous to Types 1, 2 or 3. This is partly because of the widespread acceptance of the divinely inspired status of the Qur'anic text, and a rejection of the relevance of text-critical methodologies. There are some modern Muslim theologians open to post-Kantian approaches to metaphysics, found in more secular institutions such as Dar al-Ulum, a faculty of Cairo University or the Islamic Research Academy of Pakistan. Perhaps partly because the Qur'an contains comparatively little cosmological or other material that might clash with modern science, the defining controversies in modern Islam concern the extent of the relevance of medieval Islamic law to modern communities. So it is in matters of behaviour rather than belief that the greatest range of types is found.

It is in universities in the European tradition that some of the potentially most far-reaching developments are now taking place. Due to the establish-

ment of large Muslim communities in Europe and North America, making it now the second largest religion in the West, Muslim scholars and theologians are increasingly present in faculties of theology and religious studies. The study of Islam has shifted there away from 'oriental studies', and new forms of dialogue and interpretation are being developed.

### Hinduism and Buddhism

Hinduism and Buddhism both have long and complex intellectual traditions of thought in many genres and many types of institutions. As with the other religious traditions, the university plays only a small role in contributing to Hindu and Buddhist religious or theological thought in the sense of a pursuit of wisdom. 'Hinduism' and 'Buddhism' themselves are terms which became popular due to Western interpreters in the nineteenth century but which mask the deeply plural phenomena that more developed understanding of these traditions now suggests. Nineteenth-century university studies often approached these from the angle of philology, with more systematic studies of the religious dimensions frequently shaped by colonial concerns. The earlier conceptualizations of Hinduism concentrated on the Sanskritic (Brahmanical or elitist) forms as representative, with continuing repercussions.

India in the twentieth century has been one of the most important countries for dialogue between religious traditions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam. This dialogue has been deeply affected by Hindu and Buddhist approaches that insisted not only on theoretical and doctrinal discussion and disputation, in which argument (*tarka*) based on textual exegesis (*mīmamsā*) plays a prominent part (and where the argumentation has been vigorously intra- and inter-religious in both traditions), but also on experience or realization of the goal (*anubhava/saksat-kara*, *dhyana*, ultimately *moksa/nirvana*), in what is an integrated grasp of truth-in-life.

This in turn encouraged suspicion of Western academic study applied to religion, especially the stress on the 'objectivity' of truth and knowledge and the tendency to separate understanding from practice. In Indian universities, the secular constitution led to religious traditions being studied mainly in departments of philosophy in ways similar to the more 'neutralist' approaches to religious studies in the West, and this reinforced the alienation of universities from the more wisdom-oriented inquiries of those concerned with the contemporary development of religious traditions and dialogue between them. In other countries of the East, however, there are other patterns – in Thailand, for example, where Buddhism is for all practical purposes the state religion, the study of Buddhism is privileged in the universities.

The numbers of Hindus and Buddhists living in diaspora in the West, together with large numbers of Westerners who now practice versions of these faiths, has begun to transform the situation of Hinduism and Buddhism in Western universities, where the late twentieth century saw a blossoming of posts related to them. The pattern has been repeated of a move from 'oriental studies' to 'religious studies' to a pluralist situation where oriental studies and religious studies continue, but there are also Hindus, Buddhists and others engaged in deliberating about questions of meaning, truth, beauty and practice with a view to wisdom for the contemporary situation.

### Christianity

So far, Christian theology has been dealt with mainly in its history as a discipline, its relation to religious studies and its types. The contemporary situation of Christian theology is described using the five types in Ford.<sup>7</sup>

Of the traditions described above, the closest parallel is with Judaism, and there are analogies in Christian theology for most of the strands in Jewish theology. There is rapid growth at present in studies and constructive contributions to 'theology and ...' topics, the accompanying fields including notably philosophy, ethics, politics (leading to 'theologies of liberation'), the natural and human sciences, culture and the arts, gender (leading to feminist and womanist theologies), race, education, other religions and postmodernity. The German and other European and North American academic traditions continue strongly, but the most obvious new development in the twentieth century has been that of theological traditions in other countries and cultures. African, Asian, Latin American and Antipodean theologies have all emerged (often displaying acute tensions between the types described above), and many of these are networked in transregional movements.

At the same time, major church traditions have undergone theological transformations, most noticeably the Roman Catholic Church through the Second Vatican Council. At present the Orthodox Church in countries formerly Communist is having to come to intellectual (and other) terms with exposure to massive global and local pressures; and the Pentecostal movement (reckoned to number over 300 million) is beginning to develop

<sup>7</sup> *The Modern Theologians*, *op. cit.*



its own academic theology. Between the churches there have developed ecumenical theologies and theologies advocating or undergirding common action for justice, peace and ecological issues. As with other religious traditions, the spread of education has meant that far more members of churches are able to engage with theology, and there are local and international networks with university-educated laypeople addressing theological issues in relation to the Bible, tradition, and contemporary understanding and living.

### **The Future of Theology**

Viewed globally, the vitality of theology in the twentieth century was unprecedented: the numbers of institutions, students, teachers, researchers, forms of theology and publications expanded vastly. It is unlikely that this vitality will diminish. Questions of meaning, truth, beauty and practice relating to the religions will continue to be relevant (and controversial), and the continuing rate of change in most areas of life will require that responses to those questions be constantly reimagined, rethought and reapplied. Higher education is likely to continue to expand, and there is no sign that the increase in numbers in members of the major religions is slowing. The convergence of such factors point to a healthy future, at least in quantitative terms.

Theology in universities is likely to continue according to a variety of patterns, such as the three mainly discussed in this chapter. Quantitatively, the main setting for theology or religious thought will continue to be institutions committed to particular religious traditions. There will also continue to be university settings in which religious studies is pursued without theology. My speculation is that the nature of the field, including its responsibilities towards academic disciplines, religious communities and public discourse, will also lead to an increase in places where theology and religious studies are integrated. The history of the field in recent centuries has not seen new forms superseding old ones (religious studies did not eliminate theology in universities) but the addition of new forms and the diversifying of old ones. Beyond the integration of theology and religious studies, further diversification is imaginable as theology engages more fully with different religions and disciplines and attempts to serve the search for wisdom through each.

Within the university it is perhaps the theological commitment to wisdom that is most important and also most controversial. Seeking wisdom

through pursuing fundamental questions in the context of dialogue between radical commitments is never likely to sit easily within universities. Yet in a world where the religions, for better and for worse, shape the lives of billions of people, there is a strong case for universities encouraging theological questioning and dialogue as part of their intellectual life.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> I am indebted to four other scholars who are joint authors of parts of this chapter: John Montag, SJ on the early history of theology in Europe, Timothy Winter on Islam, Julius Lipner on Hinduism and Buddhism (all from the University of Cambridge); and Peter Ochs on Judaism (University of Virginia).