

THE FUTURE OF THEOLOGY AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES FROM A
CONFESSIONAL STANDPOINT¹

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Introduction

A friend tells me the following story²—she was newly appointed as a professor in a theological seminary located in close proximity to a provincial university. As she was a leading scholar in her field and had published a number of significant monographs and other works, she was interested in contact with similar-minded scholars in the religious studies department of the university. A meeting was arranged with the head of the department there, and the Old Testament scholar from the theological seminary asked the head of department what opportunities for individual or collective collaboration there might be between their two educational entities. The response of the head of department was at first a blank stare, and then he said, “You’re at a confessional institution.” The Old Testament

1. This paper was originally delivered at the “Thinking ‘Beyond Borders’: Teaching Religious Studies and Theology” symposium sponsored by the Canadian Society for the Study of Religion and Canadian Theological Society, Congress 2008 of the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of British Columbia, 2 June 2008. I would like to thank Dr. Jane Barter Moulaison for the invitation to deliver this paper. This paper also relies upon Porter, “Theological Education,” especially for the statistics used below from the Executive Summary of the Ipsos-Reid Evangelical Fellowship of Canada/Christian Higher Education Canada Poll, issued in July 2007.

2. This story has been significantly massaged, while trying to retain the essential features, so as to make its general impact stand out, rather than having it become a story about two individuals.

scholar was unsure how this answered the question, as it seemed to state the obvious. Some tentative discussion between the two seemed to indicate that, from the department head's standpoint, if one taught at a confessional institution, one could not collaborate—such as share courses or even seminars and joint projects—with someone in non-confessional religious studies. There was clearly the suspicion that those who worked in a confessional context were second-rate scholars (perhaps not even scholars at all), whose judgment had obviously been clouded by their confessional stance. Thus, they could not make a contribution to their respective academic fields, but were merely able to teach (albeit in an uncritical way) those preparing for the lesser world of vocational ministry. At this point, the Old Testament scholar remembered that the head of department had in fact contributed to a collaborative work that the Old Testament scholar had edited, at which point she asked the head of department: “When you contributed your article to the encyclopedia that I edited, which was published by [a well-known confessional, in fact, evangelical, publisher], does that mean you gave me second-best work?” The Old Testament scholar, on the basis of what she had just heard, was now surprised that the head of department had even participated in this project, as it placed his work among those of a confessional nature. The head of department now spluttered, “Well, of course not, no, I did the same work that I would do for anyone.” At which point, the conversation came to a fairly speedy and unsatisfactory end.

This scenario reveals a number of presuppositions and assumed conclusions about the differences between religious studies and theology—to the point that the two disciplines appear to be at cross purposes. In this paper, I wish to address the relationship between religious studies and theology, especially from two vantage points. One is from my particular location as President of McMaster Divinity College,³ and the other

3. McMaster Divinity College is an independent, free-standing seminary that offers graduate-level degrees to serve the church, academy, and society. These degrees include the MTS and MDiv (granted by McMaster University, for historic reasons), and the MA in Christian Studies and the PhD in Christian

from my affiliation with an organization called Christian Higher Education Canada (CHEC).⁴

Definitions of Terms

The question that this paper addresses is the relationship between religious studies and theology, and, for me in particular, how that relationship affects institutions such as mine, or others that are members of CHEC. Before I can attempt to answer such a question, I think that some definitions are in order. The first, and most important, definition is the difference between religious studies and theology. The definitions that I present are not rigorously researched, but are adequate for the task, I believe.

Here is a useful definition of the two, and a statement of their differences:

Religious studies, or **Religious education**, is the academic field of multi-disciplinary, secular study of religious beliefs, behaviors, and

Theology (granted by McMaster Divinity College). McMaster Divinity College is the parent of the current McMaster University, but they had formal separation in 1957 through distinct and individual acts of the provincial parliament that gave the re-founded College its free standing. The College is, nevertheless, affiliated with the University, in its own building on the campus of the University.

4. I currently serve as the Chair of the Board of Trustees of Christian Higher Education Canada or CHEC (www.evangelicalfellowship.ca/NetCommunity/Page.aspx?pid=329&srcid=832), an organization founded in 2005 that represents 34 institutions of higher education within Canada. All of these organizations identify themselves as being Christ-centered, hiring confessing Christians as full-time faculty and senior administrative staff, and being members of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada. There are a number of Bible colleges, several Christian universities and university colleges, a number of seminaries that are connected to either a Bible college or a Christian university or university college, and a handful of free-standing seminaries or graduate schools, of which McMaster Divinity College is one. As a member of the Executive Committee of the CHEC council, I am interested in all of the various areas of theological education, though I have focused interest on my own type of institution and inevitably know it best. In this paper, I will use the word *confessional* in terms of those who profess Christian faith, with CHEC institutions being a distinctive sub-set of this group. I speak only for myself, and not for CHEC in this paper.

institutions. It describes, compares, interprets, and explains religion, emphasizing systematic, historically-based, and cross-cultural perspectives.

While theology attempts to understand the subject matter of religion from within a particular religious tradition, religious studies tries to study human religious behavior and belief from outside any particular religious viewpoint. Religious studies draws upon multiple disciplines and their methodologies including anthropology, sociology, psychology, philosophy, and history of religion.

Religious studies originated in the late nineteenth century in Europe, when scholarly and historical analysis of the Bible had flourished, and Hindu and Buddhist texts were first being translated into European languages . . . Today religious studies is practiced by scholars worldwide. In its early years, it was known as Comparative Religion or the **Science of Religion** and, in the USA, there are those who today also know the field as the History of Religion . . . The field is known as *Religionswissenschaft* in Germany and *Sciences de la religion* in the French-speaking world.⁵

There are a number of key elements to these definitions: religious studies is a non-confessional or secular, and by implication value-free or neutral, study of religious topics; it uses analytical methods in its endeavor; it is multi-disciplinary; it is essentially what used to be called comparative religion or history of religion, that is, it is naturalistic and evolutionary in nature. By contrast, theology analyzes the same subject matter but from a confessional standpoint or within a particular religious tradition; further, although this is not stated in the definition, presumably theology is not analytical in its methods, not multi-disciplinary, not comparative or historical, and hence not naturalistic and evolutionary in nature.

A guide to religious writing at a major university describes the contrast between religious studies and theology in this way:

5. This definition was taken from the Wikipedia entry for Religious Studies, found at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religious_studies. Similar material can be found in Brandon, "Religion, Origins of," 4:92–99, esp. 94–95. I use the Wikipedia entry because it seems to reflect well the kinds of stereotyped definitions often used in this discussion.

Writing for religious studies takes place within a secular, academic environment, rather than a faith-oriented community. For this reason, the goal of any paper in religious studies should not be to demonstrate or refute provocative religious concepts, such as the existence of God, the idea of reincarnation, or the possibility of burning in hell. By nature, such issues are supernatural and/or metaphysical and thus not open to rational inquiry.

A more appropriate approach in religious studies involves contextualizing such questions. You might examine a particular Buddhist's conception of reincarnation, Nietzsche's questioning of the existence of God, or a piece of medieval Catholic artwork that depicts eternal damnation. In other words, your reader will likely be more interested in what a particular historical figure, community, or text reveals about such issues than what you actually believe.⁶

This must have been what was at the back of the mind of the head of department who had the stilted conversation with my Old Testament colleague. The one statement, "You are at a confessional institution," was apparently a shorthand for saying you are confessional, working within a particular religious tradition, not academic or analytical in method, not multi-disciplinary, not comparative or historical, not naturalistic and not evolutionary or developmental in nature, and you may actually ask inappropriate questions (i.e. metaphysical ones), whereas we are all those things you are not, and (by implication) we are in some way definably better.⁷

There is only one major problem that I can see with these definitions—they are not accurate or even particularly useful.

6. This is taken from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill guide to writing in religious studies, which guide is found at: http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/religious_studies.html.

7. To see that this is not too far off the mark, compare this statement from the web site of the religious studies graduate program at McMaster University (<http://www.socsci.mcmaster.ca/relstud/graduate/>): "The department has no confessional ties; it seeks, rather, to cultivate a positive appreciation of the world's religious traditions in a spirit of free, open enquiry, critical reflection, and solidly-grounded judgment. The department draws on a wide variety of methodological resources, especially philosophical, philological, literary, historical, and social scientific, in the effort to understand religion and religious phenomena."

Here are some of the problems with such definitions (a non-inclusive list, to which you are free to add)—

a. There are confessing people who teach in religious studies departments at provincial universities. I will leave it to them to sort out how—if this definition that is given above is correct—it is possible for a person who claims to make such a confession to then take a value-free or neutral stance with regard to the subject matter. If it does happen, I suspect it is sometimes similar to the position that a colleague outlined for me once, when he said, “At points where higher criticism and my Christian faith conflict with each other, higher criticism always wins out.” On the other hand, perhaps it works out in another, unanticipated way. If religious studies is being done by confessional people, does it become theology, and in what sense?

b. Religious studies has an internal definitional problem. It cannot be both secular in the sense of value-free and theory-neutral, while also tracing its roots back to and sharing the assumptions of naturalism in comparative religion and evolutionary development in the history of religions. Naturalism and evolution are not value-free and theory-neutral—they describe an approach to the world. Besides, there are those in theology who also (whether rightly or wrongly) hold to some of the principles of comparative religion and developmental theories. Admittedly, probably most in theological studies are not naturalistic and entirely developmental in their thought. However, the problem here is that neither discipline is secular, but both are confessional. Religious studies is also confessional, in that it confesses to particular assumptions in the study of religion, just different assumptions than those in theology.

c. Theology is also multi-disciplinary, both by definition and according to the methods that it uses. In fact, by definition theology is inherently interdisciplinary. Theology functions as an inclusive term for all that is studied within the traditional Christian theological curriculum—including such topics as systematic, dogmatic, and historical theology, exegetical theology, practical and pastoral theology, and moral theology (now usually known as ethics). Each of these has its own approaches to the discipline that intersect with numerous other disciplines. Within

the field of biblical studies alone, as a theological discipline (to be more specific), history, literary studies, social sciences, linguistics, anthropology, ancient-world studies, psychology, philosophy, and other disciplines are utilized.

d. Some will be surprised to hear that metaphysical questions are excluded from religious studies, and those who have spent time analyzing questions regarding, for example, the existence of God—still a legitimate question in philosophical and theological studies—will probably be surprised to learn that these questions are off limits. The reason for such exclusion is no doubt presuppositionally based, although framing it in anti-rational or supernatural terms skirts the issue. The bracketing out of these questions circumscribes the discipline itself, and might even indicate that religious studies and theology, at least in so far as certain questions are concerned, are not so much at odds with each other as two parallel lines never intersecting—with religious studies asking questions such as “what was Nietzsche’s view of God?” versus theology asking questions such as “what if Nietzsche was right or wrong?” According to the definitions above, each question is legitimate within its area of asking, and it would only be one who was driven by efforts to restrict enquiry who would deny the other the opportunity to ask them within their respective field of enquiry.

e. There are religious studies departments at confessional institutions, such as Trinity Western University (TWU) in Langley, British Columbia. At one point, TWU probably had the academically strongest religious studies (or theology) department of any university, college, or seminary in Canada—at the same time that the University of British Columbia, while it was rumored to be contemplating closing down its religious studies department and eventually folded it in with classical and Near Eastern studies, refused to accept religious studies credits from TWU transfer students. TWU is a member of CHEC, so religious studies at TWU must mean something different than it means at a provincial university, even if they are called the same thing.

f. There is significant scholarly and academically rigorous work being done by theologians. It is difficult to quantify such work, but an examination of the major journals in any

theological or related field, and the monographs appearing from reputable publishers, indicates that theologians are at least as prolific as those in religious studies. It would be unfair to pick out further institutions or particular scholars, but one has no problem identifying them. Anecdotally speaking, when I was teaching undergraduates at a Christian university, I had one student in his junior year write his first article, which was published in one of the major scholarly journals. Since then, I have had a number of students, while they were studying at confessional institutions in theology, publish significant work that stands up to the best in the discipline. I am particularly proud of the number of students from my own institution who have won student essay prizes over the last several years.

g. A number of confessional institutions without religious studies departments also offer courses in non-Western religions, where they are studied in their own right. Some of them may even offer significant numbers of such courses, especially as part of a cross-cultural studies emphasis. TWU, though not offering as many courses in the world's religions compared to other such departments, has a very well-developed cross-cultural studies area.

h. Some institutions even have both theology and religious studies in one department, or theologians teaching in religious studies. I was once head of just such a department of theology and religious studies. This department was not in a confessional institution, but in one with a somewhat remote Christian heritage. Of our ten or so faculty members, two of them taught Islam and Hinduism, and a course in world religion. I was never sure how the departmental title related to what we did in the department. At my current institution, we provide all of the Hebrew language teaching for both our seminary and the nearby University.

In other words, if I had to draw a distinction between religious studies and theology, the only distinction that can be generally (though not entirely) sustained, it seems to me, is that religious studies and theology—though both are presupposition-based disciplines—take different presuppositional approaches. The subject of enquiry and the approaches used are otherwise

generally indistinguishable, apart possibly from religious studies somewhat arbitrarily limiting some of the questions it allows itself to ask.

The Relationship of CHEC Institutions to the Religious Studies versus Theology Discussion

Let's say for a moment that a meaningful distinction can be made between religious studies and theology, and let's say for a moment that this distinction does not relate to prejudicial caricature, but is related to the two disciplines as being presuppositionally distinct. In the light of such a distinction, where would CHEC institutions find themselves in the discussion over religious studies and theology?⁸ I believe that several observations can be made.

a. The first is to recognize that theological education, when compared to religious studies, is not insignificant, and should not be easily dismissed.

The 34 CHEC institutions represent approximately 17,100 students in total, from undergraduate through to graduate level students. This is out of about 60 or so theological institutions in all of Canada, who also have students studying theology. The CHEC institutions include students in Bible colleges, Christian universities and university colleges, seminaries, and graduate schools. This is admittedly a very small proportion of those students involved in higher education in Canada. If we were to limit ourselves to those in higher education involved in religious studies and theological studies, it is even more difficult to calculate, but perhaps more revealing. My rough—and I repeat that these are very rough (informed guess)—estimates are that there are somewhere in the neighborhood of only around 7,000 students (less than half those in CHEC schools) studying in religious studies departments in non-CHEC Canadian institutions, at

8. For this part of the paper I use information gathered from my fellow CHEC institutions (including information on the CHEC web site), as well as the Ipsos-Reid poll and article mentioned above.

the undergraduate and graduate levels.⁹ This does not take into account that there are probably more confessing students studying in religious studies departments (e.g., graduates of CHEC institutions going on for graduate work in these departments) than there are non-confessing people studying in theology departments, certainly at CHEC institutions. This figure does not include students who may take a religious studies course or two as part of their undergraduate program. Most students in CHEC institutions take a significant number of courses in theology. In Bible colleges, as well as most Christian universities and university colleges, students must take a significant number of theology courses—as many as 10 courses (30 semester credits), even if not majoring in theology and related subjects. In seminary programs, the number of courses is usually much higher. In other words, those in CHEC schools studying theology almost assuredly outnumber those studying religious studies in Canadian institutions, quite possibly being up to twice as many.

In terms of graduate or seminary study of theology, CHEC institutions hold even more significance. Again, it is difficult to estimate the number of students in graduate study in religious studies in Canadian universities, but they perhaps total as many as 3,000. By contrast, when we take a look at seminaries in Canada (i.e., Association of Theological Schools accredited institutions), we find that there are about 6,400 total students in such institutions. Of these, nearly 3,600 or 56 percent are enrolled in CHEC or related institutions. There are, in other words, about the same number of students in theological seminaries in Canada as there probably are studying graduate-level religious studies.

b. The second observation is to note that Canadian culture has not recognized the significance of theological education, and CHEC institutions, which are attempting to recruit within this

9. These figures are my own, and admittedly subject to error. I estimated them on the basis of the number of majors in religious studies at a number of universities, and multiplied by the number of universities, compensating for the size of the universities. As the numbers I used were from larger institutions, the figure may well be inflated.

market, are aware of this fact and would like to address it. The 2007 Ipsos-Reid CHEC/EFC poll set out to define the possible market for Christian post-secondary education in Canada. Some interesting results emerged that have a bearing on theological education.

1. *Small numbers.* The numbers of students that we are dealing with are relatively small. On the basis of the value and role of faith and religion within Canadian society, the survey determined that there were six population segments: Evangelical Enthusiasts (12% of Canadians), Cultural Christians (10%), Private Believers (14%), Church & State (19%), Deeply Disinterested (19%), and Ambivalent Agnostics (27%).¹⁰ Only the first three show any measurable interest in Christian higher education. There is room for each of us to grow in market share, with only about 6,400 students in seminary. However, CHEC institutions are basically saying that realistically their total potential market group (Evangelical Enthusiasts) is probably only slightly larger than the population of Toronto and immediate environs.

According to the survey, however, those within any of these groups that expressed some interest in possibly attending a Christian higher education institution were much smaller. This resulted in only 5.3 percent of the Canadian population, or 1.78 million people also identified as Evangelical Enthusiasts, being considered as a viable market for Christian higher education. This is only two-thirds of the population of Toronto. However, 3.7 percent of the Canadian populace (1.23 million) among those identified as Cultural Christians, and 4.8 percent of Canadians (1.59 million) who are Private Believers also expressed interest. Interestingly, 2.8 percent of Canadians among those identified as Ambivalent Agnostics, and 2 percent among those described as Church & State people, said they would also be interested in Christian post-secondary education. The total of all these groups of potential “customers,” however, is still just over 6 million.

10. Evangelical Enthusiasts equals 3.98 million, Cultural Christians 3.32 million and Private Believers 4.64 million, equaling 11.94 million Canadians.

2. *Lack of knowledge.* There is surprisingly little knowledge of Christian higher education among Canadians. Most of those surveyed could not name a single institution of Christian higher education in Canada. When asked about the various types of institutions—e.g., Bible colleges, Christian universities and university colleges, and seminaries and graduate schools—two-thirds of those unconnected with such institutions did not know enough to be able to indicate the difference between them.

3. *Limitations.* The survey discovered a number of areas of enquiry where Christian post-secondary institutions were rated lower than secular institutions by those surveyed. Most of these results are geared toward undergraduate institutions. One of these results is that the educational institution does not offer the programs that students are interested in. Those who are potentially interested in seminaries are as likely to be shopping at the post-secondary level for the kind of degree program that they want as they were as undergraduates. Of the ten areas where Christian post-secondary institutions were ranked lower than their secular counterpart, three of them had to do with location. Those responding wanted their institutions to be close to home so they could save money, be close to their friends and family, and be located in a city with good social and cultural activities. Respondents to the survey are essentially saying that they are not willing to relocate, because of the perceived loss caused by location. Those institutions located in cities, however, are experiencing similar recruiting woes as those outside, according to the statistics, because the city has its own downside, including elevated costs of living for housing and other things, and the added costs of being entertained and entertaining.

4. *Cultural blind spots.* The Ipsos-Reid survey indicates that there is a lack of knowledge or even mistrust of Christian post-secondary institutions, and a generally high regard for non-Christian institutions in Canada. In particular, the provincial university seems to constitute the standard against which confessional institutions are evaluated, with the expectation being that these Christian institutions will attempt to rise to a particular standard. Among professional schools, seminaries are not seen as constituting a legitimate career rival to law or business or

medicine among the professions. In light of the general lack of knowledge regarding seminaries, and especially if they are not located at or affiliated with various provincial universities, these institutions will often not be considered by students. If they are considered, people know them already to be focused upon training ministers.

The question is how to respond to such results. Some of the issues can (at least in theory) be addressed, such as location. Others focus upon much larger issues where an entire cultural mind-set is operative, such as cultural perceptions of education. Changes in Canadian society alone indicate that one is aiming at a moving target. Nevertheless, theological institutions of all types will need to face the realities of a Canadian culture that has limited knowledge of what it is that they do, in some cases even less interest in finding out what they do, and probably increasingly smaller numbers of people who want to know. This will probably be the same for those in religious studies as well, if it is not already.

c. The third issue is how CHEC institutions can address such a situation. One of the temptations is to think that if CHEC institutions were to become more like their provincial counterparts their public relations and other problems would be quickly eliminated. In other words, if they were to become less theological institutions and more religious studies institutions they would have a wider and more favorable appeal among the populace. There are several responses to such a proposal.

1. The first response is that the numbers given above indicate that theologically based institutions are already having a wider appeal than is often recognized. If the statistics that I have cobbled together are at all close to accurate—and even if they are not for the religious studies departments, they are roughly accurate for theological studies—then theological institutions attempting to become more like religious studies institutions cannot be the way forward, as it would indicate decreased numbers and appeal. Such a transformation may have a perceived positive impact upon perceived prestige and respectability, but it will probably not have the corresponding results in terms of popularity, student numbers, and finances. This is not to say that

theological institutions cannot have more courses that address some of the concerns of religious studies. However, such an approach does not seem to hold out much hope.

2. Many theologically oriented institutions have, I believe, incorrectly focused their academic gaze. Their goal has been to simply be as good as their provincial counterparts, or rather as good as they perceive their provincial counterparts to be. In other words, by adopting a religious studies approach, they believe that they can show others that they are as good as their provincial equivalents. They have failed to realize that in many instances they have value-added features that already give them benefits over the provincial counterparts, especially when a comparison of religious studies and theology is made. The solution is not for theology to become more like religious studies, but for theology to continue to be theology, just as religious studies continues to be religious studies.

3. I would go further and assert that there is a legitimate role for theology within academic study at all levels, and that it should not be thought to be the preserve of one perceived orientation. At one time in Canada, so did many others. At one time, there were both institutions that confined themselves to study of the Bible and related topics, and those that had a larger perspective, but in which theological study was also done. Many of Canada's universities were established on religious foundations. Examples include McMaster University as a Baptist institution, envisioned as an excellent Baptist university by its benefactor Senator William McMaster; University of Western Ontario as an Anglican institution that reflected Anglican ethos and orientation; Acadia University, one of the oldest universities in Canada, another Baptist institution; Wilfrid Laurier University, formerly Waterloo Lutheran University (they didn't even need to change the signs or letterhead, with the name change); Queen's as a Presbyterian institution; among others. These universities were, of course, founded alongside those without religious foundations, such as McGill University and many of the western provincial universities. However, apart from the Catholic universities, due to changes in Canadian society, these religiously based

universities eventually became provincially funded and non-sectarian universities.

This is consonant with the development of higher education within the Western world. In part as a response to Arabic institutions of higher education (e.g., the University of Al-Azhar, founded in 970 in Cairo, and still in operation), Europeans started to form their own educational institutions. The northern European universities, such as Paris, grew out of cathedral schools. With their religious heritage and roots, they specialized in the study of theology, while also providing other subjects, such as law and medicine. Political tensions at Paris led both teachers and students to flee to England, where what was to become Oxford University came into existence. The southern European institutions, such as Bologna, one of the oldest universities in Europe (dated to the late eleventh century), focused on the study of law. Study of law was study of Justinian's code, the major portion of which was concerned with religious law.¹¹ In the United States, which provides the educational model for Canada in many ways, education began as a theological enterprise. Virtually all of the early universities (except Pennsylvania) were based on religious foundations. Even with the rise of land-grant universities and other secular universities (such as the University of Virginia), religiously based institutions continued to be founded. Many of these institutions continue to be important on the US educational scene, including several in the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU; www.cccu.org), and others.

Canada as a society (and academics within the larger educational context), and certainly Canadians personally, are not so theologically oriented. For all of these, advocacy of a religious position is suspect. As a result, theological approaches to the teaching of religious subjects is also suspect. There are many reasons given for such an orientation.

One is the suspicion that those who are confessional theologians are not able to attain the academic standards of those who are non-advocates. But there is nothing inherent in being a

11. See Reed and Prevost, *History of Christian Education*, esp. 140–46.

confessional theologian or not that dictates the level of one's academic performance. In fact, the vast majority of those who are involved in study of the Bible in the Western world, and I would estimate in Canada as well, are probably theologians. At least in North America, the majority of those who are theologians teach at theological and related institutions.

Another widely-held suspicion is that one cannot do complete justice to a discipline if one is confessionally oriented toward it. There are several responses to this. One is that the notion of non-advocacy is a myth. This is not to say, with the supposed post-modern agenda, that there are not things like truth, understanding, and knowledge. What I am saying is that there is advocacy or confession on all sides. There are no disinterested parties. The ones who are potentially in the most precarious position are those who pretend to believe that they can do non-confessional scholarship while they themselves are confessional people. A second response is to wonder why the notion of being non-confessional is even entertained. Are there other disciplines where those who practice them attempt to deny or at least bracket out fundamental notions of the discipline itself? Are there many disciplines where systematic doubt of the discipline itself and its underpinnings is considered a virtue? Admittedly there are a few who pretend to such, but they are on the fringe. I am not convinced that it is a virtue to try to do theological study by maintaining the position that God does not exist (has this been proved?), or that to bracket God out of discussion is the only way in which theology can be done. A third response is that the results of theological study are at least as important as the work of religious studies scholars. A final response is that there are other forms of confessional or advocacy criticism that are allowed a place at the academic table—various types of ideological and related criticism are a staple of many guilds now, so why not in the study of religious topics?

Conclusion

The proper response to this situation, I believe, is for theological institutions to continue to do the things that theological

institutions can do well and best. This involves recognition of the particular presuppositional stance from which theological study takes place, the continued use of multidisciplinary approaches to the subject, and the asking of questions that are not being asked elsewhere. As we all know, in a large number of areas, the work of a person in religious studies and of one in theology is identical. The parsing of verbs, the outlining of a seminal thinker's position, the tracing of a historical theme, and the like, look identical within a religious studies or a theological context. However, it is at what might be called the higher levels of the disciplines, where the presuppositions influence and orient analysis, that the differences are readily seen. It is here that there is certainly a place for theology.

I cannot pretend to speak for all CHEC institutions, but I think that I have sufficient knowledge about enough of them to be able to give an idea of their general orientation and response to this discussion.

Many CHEC institutions would probably welcome greater conversation with those in religious studies, so long as they believed that they would not be expected to abandon their confessional stance to be able to engage in such discussion. The response to the question of participation of simply "you're confessional" is bound to give the impression that those in religious studies believe that there is only one way to examine religious topics, and that theologians are not welcome to the discussion.

The second possible response is that many CHEC institutions would bring many assets to the table in such a discussion. As I have already indicated, many of them would bring commendable scholarship that perhaps clarifies matters of interpretation. More than that, however, theologians from CHEC institutions might bring new questions to the discussion—or at least raise again questions that have been bracketed out from previous discussion and that push all to contemplate topics that might even be uncomfortable. No doubt the discussion with a fuller audience will bring new issues and solutions to the fore.

The third and final response is that the raising of such questions by CHEC scholars might have a liberating and freeing effect on the discipline of religious studies, as well as having a

broadening effect on those in theological studies, as people become concerned not only with what Nietzsche thought—as important as this is—but with whether Nietzsche may be right, and how one would discuss such questions.

In conclusion, let me simply say that my friend in Old Testament is still awaiting a positive response to her invitation for collaboration from the head of department. In the meantime, she has gone on and continued to do more significant work that has further established her international reputation in her field, not bothered or hindered by the fact that she is a “confessional” person.

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