

What Makes Theology Theological?

John Webster

St Mary's College, The School of Divinity, University of St Andrews

Abstract: An understanding of the nature of theology comprises an account of its object, its cognitive principles, its ends and its practitioners. The object of theology is two-fold: principally God the Holy Trinity, and derivatively all things in relation to God. God is considered first absolutely, then relatively; all other things are treated relative to God, under the aspect of creatureliness. The objective cognitive principle of theology is God's infinite knowledge, of which God communicates a fitting share to creatures; the subjective cognitive principle of theology is the regenerate human intellect. The ends of theology are scientific (acquiring the knowledge of the matter which is proper to creatures), contemplative (rapt attention to God the cause of all things) and practical (regulation of the enactment of human life). The practitioners of theology are regenerate persons in the church whose creaturely intellect is instructed by God and all of whose works are accompanied by the practices of religion.

I

We determine whether or to what extent a specific intellectual act or intellectual practice or domain of study is theological on the basis of an understanding of the nature of theology. An understanding of the nature of theology comprises, *inter alia*, an account of theology's object, its cognitive principles, its ends, and the virtues of its practitioners. Acts of creaturely intellect are theological to the extent that they are directed to this object, operate on the basis of these cognitive principles, pursue these ends, and are undertaken by persons in whom these virtues may be discerned. Further, the various studies – historical, literary, speculative, and moral-practical – which are found in the theological curriculum are not disparate inquiries having no common genus; they are elements of a unified science, and their purpose, scope, and proper operation are ascertained by reference to their place in the theological encyclopaedia, the circle of theological study and instruction.

II

The object of Christian theology is twofold: God the Holy Trinity and all other things relative to God.

Journal of Analytic Theology, Vol. 3, May 2015

10.12978/jat.2015-3.091413220417

©2015 John Webster • © 2015 Journal of Analytic Theology

1. The principal object or matter of Christian theology is God. This matter is treated under two aspects. First, Christian theology considers God absolutely, that is, God in himself in his antecedent self-existent perfection, integrity, beatitude, and simplicity as Father, Son, and Spirit, prior to and apart from any relation to creatures. Theology's first object is the divine essence and properties, and the persons of the godhead in their specific modes of being and their eternal processions. 'The divine being itself is the first formal reason, foundation, and object of all religion', says John Owen (1965, 44) – and we may also say the first formal reason, foundation, and object of Christian divinity. This matter – invisible, entirely exceeding our comprehension, and yet possessing infinite fullness of actuality – is the first and final matter to which all theological studies are directed in their different ways and with varying measures of explicitness. As theological intelligence tends to this object, it necessarily gives its attention to interim, mediating matters: Greek syntax, the eschatology of the apostle Paul, the political history of the Gregorian Reform, practices of eucharistic presidency. But, however absorbing, such studies are preparatory, contributory or dispositive, serving to conduce the mind to contemplation of the infinite excellence of the divine being. Intellectual activity is theological if it tends to that contemplation.

Second, theology considers God relatively, that is, God in his works towards creatures. Theology treats these transitive works in relation to their source in the goodness and wisdom of the divine nature and counsels, and then considers their outer enactment in the divine works of nature and grace, which, under the direction of divine wisdom, communicate divine goodness by making, sustaining, and perfecting created things. God relatively rather than absolutely considered is a derivative element of theology's attention to its principal matter; it is not first science, and it is not self-standing. The nature of God's works *ad extra* cannot be grasped without immediate reference to God's intrinsic self-satisfaction which is their principle or ground; put differently: the temporal divine missions are intelligible only as derivative from the eternal divine processions. Outward communication is for God not natural or necessary but gratuitous. Yet, because God has so acted – because from his inner personal acts there flow his transitive operations – theological attention to God in his absolute being must be accompanied by attention to those acts in which of his charity God sets himself in relation to other beings as their first cause and final end.

2. The second element of the two-fold object of Christian theology is 'all things relative to God'. Three matters are to be noted here. First, attention to non-divine things is a necessity for theology, whose accomplishment of its task remains incomplete unless it addresses itself also to these things. This is not, however, because non-divine things bear any intrinsic claim upon theological attention, still less because they are believed to have an immediate density and presence which obliges theology to consider them. Rather, theology treats non-divine things because it first treats God in himself, and then God the maker of heaven and earth. Theology treats things other than God, not because there is a world, but because there is God and there is a creation. Second, accordingly, theology's treatment of non-divine things derives from its treatment of its principal object; it is an extension of its contemplation of God. When theology turns to consider non-divine things, it does not suspend its talk of God, moving into easier waters

where it can count on its competence to deal with things which are both more available and less demanding. In talking of non-divine things, theology talks of the effects of God, and does so as an enlargement of its consideration of the outer work of God the origin and cause of all being. Consequently, third, theology treats non-divine things with a particular interest namely 'relative to God'. Theology is a comprehensive science, a science of everything. But it is not a science of everything about everything, but rather a science of God and all other things under the aspect of createdness. It considers creatures not absolutely but relatively, as caused and as caused causes, as realities which live and move and have their being in God.

So far, then: the two-fold matter of Christian theology is God and created things; intellectual acts across the different domains of theological work are theological insofar as they intend this matter. As theological intelligence does this, it is required to be attentive to proper order and proportion in its inquiries. The material order – God in himself, God's external work, created things – is irreversible, because created things are comprehensible only as effects of God's external operations, and those operations are in turn comprehensible only as they are seen to flow from God's perfect beatitude and simplicity. This material order is, of course, not necessarily the order of discovery or instruction, where for prudential reasons we may legitimately begin from creatures; what matters is not primarily cognitive or pedagogical sequence but rather that what one discovers or teaches be manifested in its inherent disposition and arrangement.

This disposition is to be reflected in the proportions of a theological treatment of the matter, that is, in decisions about what requires the most ample consideration, what may safely be treated less fully, and in expectations about which elements of the matter of theology bear the greatest weight. Here theology finds itself in a permanent quandary. What is first in material order and has the greatest material proportion – God in himself – infinitely exceeds our comprehension: about this supremely great matter, therefore, theology has very little to say. Faced with this restriction the temptation is to evade its demand by passing on quickly to other things – to the works of God in the economy, or to creatures, believing these things more manageable. We may be more disposed to take this turn as inheritors of a long history in which the order of discovery from created things to God has been projected onto the order of being, in such a way that God in himself drifts to the periphery of theological concern. The cultural history of this neglect – the history of naturalism or phenomenalism and its theological variants – is complex and beyond my scope here. It ought not to be forgotten, however, that there is also a spiritual history of this neglect: complacent satisfaction with consideration of creatures and creaturely histories apart from their cause; preference for surfaces rather than origins; reluctance to allow the intellect to follow divine instruction and be conducted to God. Such defects impede theological inquiry; sometimes they defeat it. They may be corrected only by the *conversio ad rem* which is a chief work of the Spirit in the sanctification of theological intelligence. Theology *becomes* theological.

III

We turn, next, to the principles of theological knowledge. Theological work involves a range of intellectual acts – acts of reading and interpretation, of historical inquiry, of conceptual abstraction, of practical judgement. All these different acts will count as theological insofar as they are undertaken in accordance with theology's cognitive principles, which may be stated thus: the objective cognitive principle of Christian theology is God's infinite knowledge of himself and all things, a share of which God communicates to creatures; the subjective cognitive principle of Christian theology is regenerate human intelligence.

1. Reflection on theology's cognitive principles begins with the doctrine of God: not, that is, with survey of the capacities, incapacities, and operations of human knowers, but with contemplation of the Lord who is 'a God of knowledge' (1 Sam. 2.3). In beginning thus, theology continues its *conversio ad rem* by turning to a knower and a knowledge which are objective, extrinsic to theology itself. Theology does this in repetition of its creaturely condition, and therefore in genuine normality (as well as, perhaps, in anxious or cheerful defiance of its idealistic neighbours). What is to be said of the divine knowledge on which theology rests?

God's knowledge of himself and all things is 'beyond measure' (Ps. 147.5). It is so extensively and exhaustively: God knows everything, and everything about everything. Further, the perfection of God's knowledge includes its entire self-sufficiency. It has no internal or external cause, because God knows all things by his own being, and has need of no instructor (Isa. 40.13). God's knowledge is not acquired; it is already, as Augustine puts it 'infinitely capacious' (*City of God* XII.17), not open to extension; it is, therefore, not discursive but simultaneous, eternal, and uncompounded. God's knowledge is a single, simple act of intuition of unrestricted scope.

This infinite divine knowledge is not merely the remote and inert background against which created cognitive acts appear in relief. It is, rather, an *operative* cognitive principle, that which alone makes possible, forms, and guarantees the knowledge of creatures. Recollection of and appeal to the super-eminent divine *scientia* is to accompany any act of theological intelligence, because any such act is not first of all a cause but an effect of knowledge. Only in this subalternate position – in this reference to God – is an act of theological intelligence also a cause of the acquisition of knowledge. This reference to God's knowledge is, of course, an element in the pathos of theology, because it is a reference to that which exceeds visible demonstration, and so may engender a certain dishonour in the minds of our fellows and dismay in our own. But subalternation is not primarily a negative state of affairs, the embarrassing absence of intrinsic grounds for knowledge. Much more is it an affirmation that a movement of love has taken place and continues to take place: God condescends to communicate to creatures a share in his knowledge and to invite them into rational fellowship.

In one sense, of course, God's knowledge is proper to him alone, incommunicable to creatures: 'no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit' (1 Cor. 2.11). Yet: 'what no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived ... God has revealed to us through the Spirit' (1 Cor. 2.9f.). Theology is possible as a well-grounded work of created intelligence because it is

enclosed and activated by a divine work, by virtue of which creatures come to *know*. Of this work of God we may say: (1) it is a work of divine originality, which takes place in the revelatory missions of the Son and Spirit. 'No one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him' (Matt. 11.27) – the 'and' there signifies not mere accumulation of further cognitive subjects, but the Son's ministry of election and apocalypse. 'We have received ... the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God' (1 Cor. 2.12) – here, as elsewhere in 1 Corinthians, 'from God' signifies the infinite divine depth from which the gift of understanding comes forth. (2) This work of God is an outward enactment of God's generosity in which he fulfils his intention that creatures should flourish by knowing and so reach out towards the completion of their nature. (3) It is a work of revelation or instruction in which God condescends to establish intelligent fellowship with rational creatures, taking the initiative to set aside and overcome our incapacity, reluctance, and resistance. Our divine educator, Clement tells us, 'does not simply follow behind but ... leads the way' (*Christ the Educator* I.1).

This divine work is not void of creaturely form and extension. Addressed to creatures and summoning them to acts of knowledge, it is also a created quantity. Divine instruction is not immediate but mediate, served by creaturely assistants and accommodating itself to the forms of creaturely intelligence. These assistants are, principally, the prophets and apostles and then, secondarily, other human teachers who repeat and apply the heavenly doctrine which they have received from its prophetic and apostolic ambassadors. With these embassies, the revelatory missions of the Son and Spirit reach their human goal.

All this means that theology is possible. There is not only *theologia in se*, the archetypal knowledge of God himself; there is also *theologia nostra*, ectypal theology. The possibility of human intellectual acts which are genuinely theological is discerned not first of all by enumerating human capabilities but by attending to the fullness of God's own life and knowledge and by tracing the outer works of God's love. *Mirabile dictu*: we have received the Spirit, we have the mind of Christ.

2. The subjective cognitive principle of theology is regenerate human intelligence.

Divine revelation is not manifestation *tout court*; it is teaching which intends reception and effects learning. Divine teaching is not conditional upon its reception; but it is purposive, and its telos is not reached apart from its activation of the work of created intellect. Much energy might be expended in distancing theology from some deep instincts of modern intellectual culture which extract human intelligence from the economy of creation and regeneration, and consider it a capacity for transcendent judgement. But the chastening of cognitive pretension, however resonant with some themes in the theology of sin and grace, is not without risk. Imprudently prosecuted, it may threaten to eliminate the human knower; this threat will loom larger in the absence of a well-formed theology of creation. Divine revelation is not magnified but restricted and made ineffectual by the absence of creaturely intellect. What then is Christian theology required to say about the creaturely co-ordinate to God's infinite knowledge and loving acts of instruction?

(1) Created intelligence is a set of capacities bestowed and preserved by God. Having these capacities, creatures exercise intelligence to apprehend and understand reality in more than its sheer phenomenal presence, to reach judgements about reality and to direct conduct in relation to reality. The exercise of intelligence is a moved movement: inalienably our own, but only so because moved by God *intrinsically*, and therefore neither wholly spontaneous nor devoid of the dignity of an act which is proper to us. As God sets himself before created intelligence, he does not stun it but causes it to live and move.

(2) Created intelligence is finite, neither intuitive nor comprehensive. It is discursive and laborious, operative in the process of coming-to-know over time, and, though there is genuine creaturely acquisition and accumulation of knowledge, creaturely intelligence remains always *in via*, never fully achieved.

(3) Created intelligence is fallen and regenerate. Estranged from God, our intellectual acts participate in the disrepair and enfeeblement of our nature brought about by the fall. The intellect's operation is hampered by passion, given to idolatry or to fascination with surfaces, cunning and deceitful. Yet even here, caution is not out of place: theology may sometimes give disproportionate attention to intellectual depravity, especially when it takes the form of highly-charged undifferentiated critique of the cognitive regimes of modern intellectual culture. The shaming of such pretensions may be undertaken in application of the theology of sin and alien righteousness; but imprudently prosecuted, it may threaten to diminish the importance of created intellect and may reflect malformation or restriction of the theology of creation and regeneration alike. Created intelligence is caught up in the reality of regeneration in which created powers are reborn, ordered to right objects, liberated from self-reliance and so set free to begin to operate to their utmost extension.

In sum: a properly theological theology will operate in conformity with these cognitive principles, the principles supplying orientation in a theological subject domain as well as norms by which to order intellectual operations, to deliberate about procedures, and to evaluate success.

IV

1. Christian theology is not an arbitrary activity but an activity governed by and directed towards ends which antecede particular theologians or theological acts. What may be said of the ends of theology?

Ends are not the same as purposes. A purpose is a human intention, something which some agent wishes and for the acquisition of which that agent acts. An end, by contrast, is not intentional but natural, belonging to the nature of something itself independent of human desire. To speak of the end of a thing is to indicate the completeness or perfection which it comes to have when its nature is fully achieved, when it is what it is to the maximal degree. Inanimate and animate things, beasts and humans, human acts and their products (including the

arts of the mind) all have their proper ends in which their several natures are brought to fulfilment.

In human creatures, ends and purposes are not easy to disentangle. This is because we are rational and moral beings, and we fulfil our nature in an intentional way. Our nature presents itself to us as a vocation. We fulfil our nature not simply instinctually, but by processes of deliberation and choice: we appropriate our nature and its ends, we make these ends into our purposes.

In our present state of moral and spiritual deformation, in which the repair of our nature has begun but remains incomplete, we often find it difficult to maintain the distinction between ends and purposes, and to govern purposes by ends. This is because our purposes are driven – sometimes overwhelmingly so – by our desires, and our desires may be inadequately formed, or immoderate, or vicious. Moreover, our absorption in ourselves and our fondness for self-rule may so overwhelm us that the purposes which we set for ourselves may come to eclipse or replace the ends which are given with our nature and which hold out our good. In all domains of human existence and activity, therefore, we are required to exercise vigilance and conform purposes to ends.

Christian theology is an intellectual activity with ends which derive from our nature as that nature is caught up in the history of creation, revelation, and redemption. These ends are scientific, contemplative, and practical; theology will be theological when it makes these ends into its purposes, directing and moderating its activities accordingly.

2. Christian theology pursues scientific ends, that is, the acquisition of that knowledge of its matter which is proper to creatures, in accordance with its cognitive principles. Pursuit of scientific ends is an element of the fulfilment of our intellectual nature, and is a creaturely good. Human creatures are by nature studious. We have an appetite to acquire knowledge beyond what is necessary for the immediate fulfilment of our animal nature, and we possess intellectual powers which we apply to satisfy this appetite. Well ordered, temperate studiousness is not self-derived or wholly spontaneous; it is creaturely, the exercise of powers which have been given and which are moved, preserved, and fortified by a movement beyond themselves. Studiousness is the arduous application of these powers; it is not indolent or casual, but concentrated, determined, painstaking, and resistant to premature termination.

All theological activity requires this kind of purposive pursuit of scientific ends: revelation awakens theological science. It is through study that God becomes actually intelligible, and defects in the acquisition and exercise of studiousness threaten the attainment of other ends in theology. However, pursuit of scientific ends is instrumental and interim: necessary, but not sufficient or final. Forgetfulness of the instrumental status of scientific ends arises from disordered intention: our purposes for this activity fail to coincide with its intrinsic ends, and excessive devotion to scientific ends inhibits attainment of the true ends of theological intelligence. Much harm to theology is done by this disordered purpose. Theology's object becomes one which is ours to appropriate or master by *scientia*; its cognitive principles become naturalised; the dependence of theology on divine instruction is neglected. Some kinds of institutional setting in which theology is undertaken may provide opportunities for such distortions to flourish, but their chief cause is the crookedness and

futility of our intellectual nature after the fall. Only with the restoration and regeneration of that nature can our purposes be taught to direct themselves to fitting ends; theology will be theological as it is caught up in this renewal.

3. Christian theology also pursues contemplative ends. Contemplation – what Aquinas calls ‘the simple act of gazing’ (*Summa theologiae* IIaIIae.3 ad 1) – requires the mind to move through created things to the divine reality of whose self-communication they are signs and bearers. Contemplation is rapt attention to God the cause of all things rather than to the things of which he is the cause. ‘[I]n contemplation “the Beginning”, which is God, is the object we seek’ (Gregory the Great, *Morals on the Book of Job* VI.61). This contemplative end of theology expresses a certain teleology of human nature, according to which that nature is completed in knowledge of God. ‘The contemplation of God is promised us as being the goal of all our actions and the everlasting perfection of all our joys’ (Augustine, *On the Trinity* I.8).

It is no exaggeration to claim that a good deal of modern theology has been reluctant to consider contemplation a proper end of theological intelligence. The marks of this reluctance are not difficult to find. It may be seen, for example, in the remarkable prestige enjoyed by literary-historical science in the study of Holy Scripture; or in presentations of Christian doctrine which are devoid of metaphysical ambition and treat dogma as ancillary to the science of Christian practice which is first theology. The assumption (sometimes the explicitly articulated conviction) in both cases is that only the historical is the real, that intellect can extend itself no further than the economy of texts or moral practices. It is an impatient assumption, but one which has proved remarkably adept in shaping the purposes with which theological study is undertaken. Its elimination of the contemplative is an inhibition of theology’s theological character.

4. Christian theology pursues practical ends. Contemplated truth forms and governs the enactment of our lives, because this truth presents us with the law of our existence. In a remarkable passage of thought, Aquinas ponders whether the gift of understanding is only contemplative. Apparently so, he begins, because ‘understanding penetrates to the depths’ whereas ‘the practical intellect works more on the surface, namely with the individual occasions which engage our actions’ (*Summa theologiae* IIaIIae 8.3 obj. 1) Again, the practical intellect ‘is engaged, not with necessary truths, but with contingent things which can be otherwise and which are wrought through human action’ (IIaIIae 8.3 obj. 2.). He clearly feels the tug of these considerations; but in the end he finds them restrictive. ‘For the gift of understanding the field is not confined to matters which fall under faith primarily and principally, but includes as well all interests relevant to faith. Among them are good deeds ...’ (IIaIIae 8.3 resp). Or again, in reply to the second objection: ‘the value of the gift which is understanding lies in this, that eternal and necessary truths are considered not only as they are in themselves but also as certain rules for human conduct’ (IIaIIae 8.3 ad. 2). There is no moralisation of theology here, no elevation of the practical over the speculative intellect. Rather, there is the sense that contemplation does not exhaust the ends to which theological intelligence directs itself. Primarily and principally, theological intelligence intends eternal and necessary truths, by the

gift of God penetrating to their depths. But by derivation these truths are regulative, and theological intelligence would have too narrow a view of the interests of faith if it did not also consider the realm of human conduct.

Such in brief compass are some of the ends of theological intellect. The objectivity of these ends makes acts of theological intellect occasions for the extension, even the transcendence, of self. That is, these ends place us in a situation and establish a vocation not of our own invention, to which we are required with divine assistance to conform ourselves, which we must learn to love and take into our intentions. Moreover, because ends present the natural law of the intellect – that which the intellect has to be, those ways in which it must act, if its nature is to be complete – they furnish the basis for ordering and ranking specific intellectual tasks and determining the validity or utility of specific intellectual procedures. Does analysis of discourses of power illuminate early Christian asceticism? Our answer will depend in large part upon what we take to be the ends of theology. But ends can perform this discriminating function only as they are appropriated. And in Christian theology the appropriation of ends cannot take place without mortification and vivification, the repetition in the life of the mind of the baptismal pattern of all Christian existence. With this, we turn to consider the virtues of the theologian as a fourth element in what makes theology theological.

V

Understanding the theological character of the Christian theological intellect requires, finally, some attention to its practitioners and their obligation to exercise certain virtues. Rational objectivity and Christian common sense alike prohibit us from saying too much too early about the subjectivity of the theologian, which enters into consideration only after we have treated theology's object, cognitive principles, and ends. Yet in its proper place a modest sketch of the personal graces which the theologian is to exhibit is a necessary extension of an account of the theological intellect in the realm of regeneration. The telos of that divine work is our sanctification: the cleansing and enrichment of our corrupt and impoverished nature by the Holy Spirit in which our life, including our intellectual life, is renewed. That renewal, communicated in baptism and continually reiterated in the putting off of the old nature and the putting on of the new, includes the renewal of the spirit of the mind (Eph. 4.22-4). It is both condition and vocation, the gift of a new moral and intellectual history of which the work of theology is also an instance. What more may be said of this history?

God is the maker and instructor of created intellect, creating, preserving, and addressing himself to us. Our intellect is therefore possessed by us as creatures. To have intellect is to stand in relation to God its giver; as a property of our created nature, it remains an endowment, and in having it we are, as Calvin puts it, 'clothed and ornamented with God's excellent gifts' (*Institutes of the Christian Religion* II.ii.5). In the exercise of this endowment, we enact our creaturely condition, because that exercise is a self-movement which is moved by God who, Calvin continues 'fills, moves and quickens all things by the power of the Spirit, according to the character bestowed upon each kind by the law of creation' (II.ii.16).

Yet the performance of our intellectual nature is distorted by the fall. The depravity of the intellect is not such that our intellectual nature is wholly destroyed: 'something of intelligence and judgement remains as a residue' (II.ii.12). But in the wake of the fall, our intellect is no longer well-directed; it no longer moves swiftly to its goal, but is dissipated. 'The longing for truth ... languishes before it enters upon its race because it soon falls into vanity. Indeed, the human mind, because of its darkness, cannot hold to the right path, but wanders through various errors and stumbles repeatedly, as if it were groping in darkness, until it strays away and finally disappears. Thus it betrays how incapable it is of seeking and finding' (II.ii.12). Fallen intellect is 'futile' (Rom. 1.21; Eph. 4.17f.).

In this state of futility, studiousness is distorted into curiosity. Curiosity is the disorder of the intellectual appetite in which created intellectual powers are applied to improper objects of new knowledge. Curiosity seeks to know created realities without reference to their creator – as phenomena, not as created things – and the process of coming-to-know takes place inordinately, indiscriminately, and pridefully. Baptism sets an end to curiosity; but it does not eliminate it, and it continues to harass us, even in the work of theological intellect. How does curiosity enter theology?

Curiosity enters when theology neglects the particular object of theology and instead gives itself promiscuously to whatever sources of fascination present themselves, particularly if they are novel; and so, theology becomes restless and unstable. Curiosity enters when theology ignores or detaches itself from its location in the sphere of divine instruction and considers itself spontaneous and quodlibetal, busy about the acquisition of all sorts of new knowledge but no longer shaped by the curriculum of the school of revelation. Curiosity enters when theology terminates on surfaces, failing to complete the intellect's course in running to God. Absorbed by the natural historical properties of the various matters to which it attends, it does not follow their indication, it does not allow itself to be directed by them to divine truth. Curiosity enters when theology distorts its proper ends, attaching itself so intently and exclusively to the ends of science that contemplation and the formation of conduct are allowed to atrophy.

Curiosity is absurd, the spurious enactment of a nature which does not exist, the failure to enact the nature which does exist. For it is the office of the eternal Son to terminate corrupt nature and in its place to create a new nature; and it is the office of the Holy Spirit to make this new nature actual and operative in creaturely conduct. Through the Spirit's 'physical' work, the new nature is imparted and its course governed, so that the spirit of the mind is indeed renewed. Christian theology is an instance of this renewal, and its pursuit summons us to undertake its tasks in ways which demonstrate the righteousness and holiness of the new nature. Some examples ...

In regenerate theological activity, intellectual greed is replaced by hunger for divine instruction. 'I will meditate on thy precepts, and fix my eyes on thy ways ... thy testimonies are my delight, they are my counsellors ... teach me good judgement and knowledge, for I believe in thy commandments' (Ps. 119.15, 24, 66). There is in what the Psalmist says an entire metaphysics and morals of the theological intellect: trust that its undertakings can flourish because there is divine counsel; a sense of the infinite loveliness of divine teaching; eagerness to

give undistracted attention to God's instruction; confident appeal to God to continue to bestow knowledge.

In regenerate theological activity, attention is directed to a singular matter with a definite interest. Christian theology is a comprehensive science which treats God and all things. But for all its scope, Christian theology is an exercise in concentration, required to fix its eyes not on everything but on the ways of God (Ps. 119.15); only in assent to this restriction will theology find itself having something to say about everything.

Regenerate theological activity will be accompanied at every point by the practices of religion. 'Religion' is the condition of being bound to God; it denotes, as Aquinas puts it 'a relation to God. For it is he to whom we ought to be bound as to our unfailing principle; to whom also our choice should be resolutely directed as to our last end; and whom we lose when we neglect him by sin, and should recover by believing in him and confessing our faith' (*Summa theologiae* IIaIIae.81.1 corp). The practices of religion are those acts which are fitting expressions of the situation of fellowship with God into which, after the long exile of sin, we have been newly introduced by the reconciling missions of the Son and the Spirit. Fellowship with God and the religion to which it gives rise are the setting for all regenerate life: domestic, civil, practical, and intellectual. Theology cannot long retain its theological character in the absence of religion. If it is not intent upon Holy Scripture, if it does not appeal to God's beneficence in prayer, if it does not mortify distraction by right use of the body and set aside ironic detachment from its object, theology will be at best of indifferent value, at worst a strange figure in the kingdom of divine goodness.

VI

These preliminary remarks do not even begin to address the cultural and religious history at whose latter end we find ourselves, in the course of which this understanding of the nature of Christian divinity has largely disappeared. In particular, they do not address the fragmentation of theology over the course of the eighteenth century, its dispersal into a diverse set of inquiries into cultural-religious objects studied by different methods, and the attempts of theological encyclopaedia to recover theology as a unified science. Nor do they give attention to the naturalisation of both the objects and the operations of theological intellect. Nor, again, do they say anything of the effect of these processes on the various settings in which theology is pursued, or on the curricula established in such settings. Had we but world enough and time ...

When is theology theological? Not when it considers itself a polite, if somewhat deferential, contributor to the wider discussions of the academy, bringing its set of 'values' to an agenda which it did not generate, and often finding itself reading out a script written by someone else: that is simply the triumph of the philosophical faculty which Kant considered theology's fate in the age of criticism. Nor, again, when theology tries to give some coherence to its activities by earnest conversations between sub-disciplines: 'theology and biblical studies' and the like. Such conversations, pleasant enough and instructive though they are, commonly assume that though the family has broken down and its members have gone their own separate ways, there's no reason not

to have an occasional get-together. Something more comprehensive is asked of us: a recovery of *sacra doctrina* in its full sense and with its attendant notions of divine instruction, church, holiness, and the like. Whether theological institutions possess the willingness or capacity for such a recovery remains unclear. But a properly theological theology has no reason to be locked in lament and every reason for that magnanimity in which we extend ourselves to great matters. 'If thy law had not been my delight, I should have perished in my affliction', the psalmist says (Ps. 119.92); but: the Lord's word is indeed 'firmly fixed in the heavens' (Ps. 119.82), and so, theological theology is possible.

Bibliography

- Aquinas, Thomas. 2006. *Summa Theologiae*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Augustine. 1994. *City of God*. Nicean and Post-Nicean Fathers, Series 1, vol. 2. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans
- _____. 1994. *On the Trinity*. Nicean and Post-Nicean Fathers, Series 1, vol. 3. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans
- Calvin, John. 1960. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Library of Christian Classics. Philadelphia: Westminster Press
- Clement of Alexandria. 1954. *Christ the Educator*. Fathers of the Church. Washington: Catholic University of America Press
- Gregory the Great. 1844. *Morals on the Book of Job*. Parker: Oxford