

A CASE FOR A DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES IN THE UNIVERSITY OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA

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This paper was written in 1966 in support of proposals to establish a department of theology and religious studies in the University of Papua New Guinea; see previous article. It is published here for the first time with Revd Engel's permission.

A case for a Department of Religious Studies in a modern university rests fundamentally on the fact that theology is a legitimate academic discipline. It is so because it consists of a definite body of knowledge, which is studied with the scholarly skills and methods appropriate to a university.

In this paper, the term is used to include biblical studies, church history, the development of Christian doctrine, and comparative religion. Each of these is a clearly-defined field of work, with plenty of material for exact study and historical investigation. "They can all be studied in a divinity faculty, with the same vigour or finesse as these, or analogous, studies are carried on in other arts faculties; they require the cultivation of a wide variety of skills and types of insight; and there is no intrinsic reason why they should not be studied with the same freedom from bias and dogmatic assumptions."¹ Indeed, as Sir Walter Moberly pointed out in *Crisis in the University*,² "By any ordinary standard of academic eminence, Lightfoot, Westcott and Hort, or Driver and Sanday, or Hoskyns and Dodd, or, overseas, such men as Barth and Brunner, Dibelius and Berdyaev, Maritain and Niebuhr, can challenge comparison with any. Also, to the main point at issue, which is the credibility of the Christian faith, they have devoted a considerably higher quantity and quality of attention than have most of their critics. We conclude that theology is a legitimate subject of university study. And, if legitimate, it is also imperative."

¹ A. R. Vidler, *Crisis in the Humanities*, London UK: Penguin Books, 1964, p. 85.

² Walter Moberly, *Crisis in the University*, London UK: SCM Press, 1949, p. 288.

Daniel Jenkins, writing in Britain in 1946, went so far as to say that “the deliberate exclusion of theology from the curriculum of some universities is a mark of spiritual provincialism, which, to that extent, detracts from the title of these institutions to be considered as forms of the *universitas*.”³

It should also be made clear, at once, that there is no place for the view that theology should be present in the university to counteract the evil influences of some other departments. As Mr W. Ginnane has said firmly, “if *this* is the vision that is had of theology (i.e., one of directing, admonishing, judging, and rectifying the other disciplines) then it is quite impossible that it should be a discipline in the university, as we now understand it.”⁴

In addition to the fundamental reason that theology is a creditable academic discipline, the case for a department of religious studies in the University of Papua New Guinea rests on some particular considerations, which arise from within the Territory itself. These are discussed in the first section of this paper. They are followed by a section called “Some General Considerations”. In it, two of the main objections to the inclusion of theology, and two problems connected with its admission, are discussed.

1. Some Considerations Applying to Papua New Guinea

Various reasons for the inclusion of religious studies in the University were put before the Commission on Higher Education in Papua New Guinea. The Commission included the following reasons in its Report:

- 1) In a rather special sense, Papua and New Guinea is “a Christian country”. This derives from the fact that its history since effective European contact has been, from the indigenous point of view, largely a Christian history. . . . (6.55)

³ Daniel Jenkins, *The Place of a Faculty of Theology in the University of Today*, London UK: SCM Press, 1946, p. 14.

⁴ W. Ginnane, in Conference on Theological Education Morpeth (1965), ed., *The Morpeth Papers*, Sydney NSW: Australian Council of Churches, 1966, p. 21.

- 2) Although half the population is still animist, . . . the fact remains that, so far as any world outlook has replaced the old tribal cosmogonies, so far as there has been any coherent reintegration of beliefs, it has been in Christian terms. (6.55)
- 3) . . . Western civilisation and culture have been presented largely, even mainly, under Christian auspices. (6.55)
- 4) . . . until now, the formative intellectual influences on most educated Papuans and New Guineans have been received in schools with a strongly avowed Christian bias. (6.57)⁵
- 5) And, indeed, the insistence of indigenous leaders that theirs is, and should, remain a Christian country is most striking. (6.57)
- 6) The Missions represent the only sizeable body of informed opinion on education, apart from the Administration, and the ministry of the church is an important and influential calling for indigenous people. (3.26)

The Commission, therefore, concluded that “a university which allowed no place for religious studies would be seriously incomplete in a Territory context; though it would be a disservice to the people were such studies conceived of in narrowly-sectarian, or unduly dogmatic, terms” (6.57).

The Commission went on to say it believed “that both clauses in the preceding sentence would be endorsed by all the major Missions” (6.58). This has, subsequently, been shown to be the case, by the consultation of seven churches and missions, in June 1965, at Port Moresby. These were in order of size, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Methodist, Anglican, Papua Ekalesia, Baptist, and The Salvation Army. Together, their adherents number just over half the population of the Territory. Together, they set

⁵ As at March, 1965, missions were still responsible for two-thirds of the students enrolled: of the 201,069 children enrolled in primary, technical, and secondary schools, 134,381 were in mission schools, compared with 66,688 in administration schools. In addition, missions had 55,000 others in “exempted” primary schools. The comparable figures for 1963, as in the Commission’s report, are: missions 110,450; administration 40,600; and 68,700 in “exempted” schools.

up the Inter-church Committee for Liaison with the University. And together, they agreed on the subjects which might be included in the curriculum of the university. This was in response to the invitation of the Commission on Higher Education to clarify their position.

The Commission had said: “To sum up: in the Commission’s view, there should certainly be some place for religious, specifically Christian, studies in the University; but that place cannot well be determined until the Missions have worked out more precisely what their real desiderata are” (6.71).

The Inter-church Consultation proposed:

1. that there be a Department of Religious Studies.
2. that the Head of the Department be appointed by the University; but that his acceptability to the churches and Missions should be ascertained by reference to a permanent advisory body, as suggested by the Commission in 6.70. The Consultation, taking up that suggestion, proposed that this body be a statutory university authority, with a majority of University representatives, and with representation, direct or indirect, of all Christian churches and missions; and that it be called the Board of Religious Affairs and Education.
3. that the difference between professional training for the ministry, and university theological studies, be recognised, and the university be concerned only with the latter.
4. that the initial aim of the Department of Religious Studies be to provide subjects for general students of any Faculty.
5. that the four subjects suggested in the Commission’s Report be included in the courses offered by the Department of Religious Studies, viz.:
 - a) Biblical Studies
 - b) Church History

- c) History of Theology, and Scholastic Philosophy, as alternatives
 - d) Comparative Religion
6. that it also be part of the task of the Department of Religious Studies to plan courses for students in theology; and to conduct examinations, both external and internal, as the Department sees the need, and in consultation with the Board of Religious Affairs and Education.

It will be noted that the subjects were named, and not described in detail, as that would be the prerogative of the Department. The names bear a fairly generally accepted connotation within theological circles. The question of whether biblical studies would include biblical languages was left open.

No attempt was made to set down how soon, or in what order, the above proposals should be implemented, or when or whether the Department might develop into a Faculty. The Department and the University Council would have to decide these matters, in the light of practical possibilities and the future development of the University. It was nevertheless hoped that a Department would be established soon.

2. Some General Considerations

The discussion in Papua New Guinea is but part of a discussion going on in many countries. In some places, notably the United Kingdom, the discussion has resulted in departments and faculties of theology being established in several modern universities. Of 26 universities in the United Kingdom and Eire, 12 have faculties of theology, nine have departments, and only five have neither. There are 216 full-time theological teachers in these universities, of whom 72 are professors.⁶

⁶ Details of the universities and subjects can be seen in Appendices I, III, and IV of *The Morpeth Papers*. Appendix I also lists faculties in Canada, USA, South Africa, and New Zealand. In addition to those in that list, there are departments in several African universities in which English is the language used. These include the Universities of Ghana, Nigeria, Ibadan, Ife, East Africa (at both Nairobi and Makerere), and Basutoland (or Lesotho), and the University Colleges of Sierra Leone and Rhodesia (see *Directory*:

It is interesting, and significant, that the Report of the Higher Education Mission to the South Pacific, in recommending the establishment of the University of the South Pacific, included theology as one of the initial departments, and recommended that the initial staffing include a senior lecturer and one lecturer in theology (Paragraphs 176, 177).

At the present time, discussion is going on in Sydney, Melbourne, and elsewhere, in regard to theological studies, while Queensland already has a Faculty and Sydney has a Board of Studies in Divinity. In 1966, the Australian Society for Theological Studies was established “to promote the interests of theology within the academic world, through the goodwill and interest of academics”.

While these facts prove nothing in relation to Papua New Guinea, they indicate that the proposal for a Department of Religious Studies is not such an unusual or special case as might be thought. The natural tendency of Australian academics to consider the matter purely against the historical background and assumptions of Australian secular universities can, in fact, be misleading.

3. Some Difficulties

There remain, however, some intellectual difficulties about the admission of religious studies into a modern university. These cannot be ignored.

In the case of Manchester University, there was a serious discussion prior to the institution of the Faculty of Theology in 1902.⁷ In Australia, two important papers were published in *Melbourne Studies in Education* (1963), by E. J. Stormon, Rector, St. Thomas More College, WA, and J. D. McCaughey, Master, Ormond College, Melbourne Vic.⁸ An even more

Theological Schools in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America, and the South Pacific, New York NY: Theological Education Fund, 1966).

⁷ More recently, the present occupant of a Manchester Chair, Professor Gordon Rupp, has contributed a relevant essay in Frederick H. Hilliard, and E. Gordon Rupp, *Christianity in Education*, the Hibbert Lectures for 1965, London UK: Allen & Unwin, 1966.

⁸ E. J. Stormon, “Inadequacies in the Concept of Neutrality”, in *Melbourne Studies in Education* (1963), E. L. French, ed., Carlton Vic: Melbourne University Press, 1963; J. D. McCaughey, “Tradition and Freedom in Education”, in *Melbourne Studies in Education* (1963), E. L. French, ed., Carlton Vic: Melbourne University Press, 1963.

recent contribution is *The Morpeth Papers* on theology and tertiary education, referred to above, which were read at the Bishop of Newcastle's Conference on Theological Education, 1966. The contributors include both Roman Catholics and Protestants, as in the case in *Melbourne Studies in Education*.

Similarly, in 1964, there was published by Darton, Longman & Todd, London, *Theology and the University: An Ecumenical Investigation*, edited by John Coulson. Initiated by Roman Catholics, it consists of papers given by Anglicans, Free Churchmen, and Roman Catholics at an ecumenical symposium under the auspices of Downside Abbey. It begins: "theology can choose; it can remain dead and neglected, or take the pressure of the times and live: but if it chooses life it has need of three things: a university setting, lay participation, and the ecumenical dialogue".

The Editor goes on to describe the book as "not a manifesto, but the testing of a hypothesis before a tribunal of expert witnesses", and cautions against wrenching passages "out of their context for purposes of polemic". While heeding this, it can be said that the papers on "The Existing Practice in British Universities", and the final one on "Proposals for the Teaching of Theology in an English University", contain much material relevant to the Papua New Guinea discussion. It may be useful to quote three main principles enunciated and applied in the final paper:

1. There must be a combination of teaching and research: this is the basis of English university studies, and theology should be no exception.
2. In teaching theology, lectures should be combined with seminar discussion: this is essential for theology, because it is concerned both with what is given in divine revelation, and with what is found in human experience. This has some bearing on the complex problem of collaboration in teaching between the clerical and lay sections of the Christian community.
3. The whole faculty must be ecumenical in spirit: not simply because this is demanded by circumstances, but because the

divided Christian communities are not self-sufficient: each needs the others.⁹

To come, then, to some of the difficulties. There are at least four which require attention. These can be expressed in four questions:

1. Would not the introduction of religious studies betray the secular nature of the University?
2. Is theology a proper object of academic study?
3. Would not a department of religious studies become simply a centre of Christian propaganda?
4. Is there any real possibility of Roman Catholics and Protestants accepting each other as colleagues in such a department, and allowing a Catholic to teach Protestants, and vice versa?

Let us consider each of these.

(a) *The secular nature of the university.* This is a treasured achievement and characteristic of Australian universities. It has its roots in the sectarian jealousies and controversies of the 19th century, when the Universities of Sydney and Melbourne were founded. Dr R. L. Sharwood, Warden of Trinity College, Melbourne, has recently discussed the controversy in Melbourne, in 1910, over a proposal for a School of Theology.¹⁰ He writes:

The central propositions of all these arguments (against the proposal) are, I think, fairly clear: that systematic theological studies would necessarily involve dogmatic teaching in matters of religious belief, and such dogmatic teaching would at once raise sectarian quarrels. Both propositions, if true, would certainly warrant the conclusion that theology had no place in a University. While one may concede the second, however, one must reject the

⁹ Laurence Bright OP, in *Theology and the University: An Ecumenical Investigation*, John Coulson, ed., London UK: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964, p. 269.

¹⁰ R. L. Sharwood, in *The Morpeth Papers*, pp. 5ff.

first. Theological studies *may* be linked with dogmatic instruction in matter of religious belief, and in many seminaries probably are, but this is not of necessity. Objective theological scholarship was an established fact in numerous overseas universities long before these Melbourne debates of 1910. It was even well-entrenched at the University of London, the very institution, which had been taken as the model of a secular university by the founders of Melbourne and Sydney – an irony, which the memorialists were not slow to underline.

Another subsidiary argument, which lurked in these debates, was that it was improper for a university to have anything to do with the professional training of ministers of religion. Again, it was not an argument which can survive examination. In the first place, the University had shown no reluctance to train for other professions. In the second place, the argument wrongly assumed that theological studies must be sectarian and dogmatic. And, finally, the University was already, in any case, assisting in the professional training of ministers of religion through its other Faculties, notably Arts, and thus (to adopt the language of the counter-memorial) applying a portion of the public revenue, and engaging the resources of a public agency, to forward the attainment of an end connected with religion.¹¹

Dr Sharwood goes on to point out an unfortunate consequence of the refusal of Australian universities to admit theology. “Thus if Australian Theology has acquired that character which universities and governments have most feared and disliked – if it is, overall, sectarian and seminarian, and second-rate – this is, in a large part, because the policy of universities and governments has allowed it to be no other. It has never really had a chance. It has been caught at this point in a vicious circle.”¹²

A main stumbling block in Melbourne in 1910 was that the Roman Catholic church did not desire any change. The fear of sectarianism was, therefore, heightened. Today, this is no longer relevant, either in Australia or in Papua New Guinea, owing to the changed relationships between the Roman Catholic and other churches. Even prior to the new

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 8.

ecumenical spirit engendered by the Second Vatican Council, there was growing co-operation, as, for example, in Queensland, which led to the introduction of religious studies there as far back as 1940.

It is proper that a university insist on an ecumenical approach to theological studies. Such insistence can now be met by the churches, and they do so, not simply out of deference to university authority, but out of Christian conviction. "Ecumenism springs from something deeper than the mere wish to get together; it springs from the realisation that no man, no church, possesses the fullness of theological truth, or ever will: that fullness resides in the mind of Christ, who is Lord of all, and, in this life, our share of it is only partial."¹³

There, nevertheless, remains the ingrained reluctance of many Australian university leaders to depart from the strictly secular nature of the university. With respect, however, it must be suggested that such a view is not soundly based. Being an inherited view, arising from historical controversy, it rarely leads to serious consideration as to what it is that confers on a university a secular nature. In fact, a university is secular, not because of the subjects it teaches or does not teach. It is secular not because it has no relations of any kind with religious bodies and institutions. It is secular because its authority and control is secular. It is not the content of its curriculum, but the nature of its constitutional authority, and of its controlling body, which make it a secular institution, and guarantee its continuing secularity. Even the presence of a few ecclesiastical leaders on a university council in no way alters the secular control of the institution, in so far as they are there primarily as university men or community leaders. Alteration would only occur if they were there as official representatives of churches, with sufficient power to introduce religious domination. Secularity means, in essence, freedom from religious control, and it is this which makes a university a free community. Granted this, not even a complete faculty of theology can threaten the secular nature of the university.

(b) *Is theology a proper object of academic study?* It is often assumed, in academic circles, that theology is not a proper object of study in a university. This assumption rests on one or more of several bases. It

¹³ Bright, *Theology and the University*, pp. 277ff.

is, in part, a legacy of the sectarian controversies of the 19th century, which led academics to believe that theology was not one but many. Consequently, and correctly, it was felt that a university could not choose between a Catholic and a Protestant theology, or between various Protestant ones.

The assumption also rests on memories of the science and religion controversy of last century. It is assumed that theology is antiscientific and obscurantist, because some clerics took such attitudes to Darwin.

Again, there is often ignorance of the extent and quality of the exact and careful literary and historical criticism of biblical literature in the last 100 years, or of the intellectual integrity and stature of the leading theologians of Europe, Britain, and America, of whom there have been an unusual number in this century, most of whom have worked from within universities.

Of more importance, as an objection, is the view that theology is primarily a matter of religious belief. It is, therefore, a personal matter, in which individuals are free to become involved, and about which they are free to differ. It is, consequently, an appropriate subject for debate in a university philosophical club, or for study in one of the student religious societies, but not in a university course; for it is a collection of personal opinions and convictions, and not an object for academic study.

This view rests on a misunderstanding of the difference between personal religious belief and theological study. The difference is put succinctly by Mr W. Ginnane, of the Philosophy Department of the Australian National University: "Doctrines may be *de fide*, i.e., a person may commit himself to, assent to, a certain doctrine as a matter of faith, and his church may require this of him. But, when we talk about *theology*, we talk not so much about doctrines being adhered to as a matter of faith, but rather about analyses, the drawing of conclusions, the testing of hypotheses, and so on. And this is a human activity subject to canons of criticism."¹⁴

¹⁴ W. Ginnane, "Theology in the University", in *The Morpeth Papers*, p. 25; cf. Sharwood, *The Morpeth Papers*, n. 10, above.

Earlier in the same paper, Mr Ginnane stated that theology today has three characteristics, which entitle it to be properly at a university. It has an agreed subject matter; it embodies an agreed public notion of testability, i.e., it has commonly useable, and interchangeable, procedures of analysis and verification; it has an agreed and defensible set of standards of excellence of performance.¹⁵

This opinion could be substantiated by reference to the 60 years' experience of theology as a faculty by the University of Manchester, or by examination of the published theological writings of such scholars as Charles Raven of Cambridge, Karl Barth of Basel, Jacques Maritain of Princeton, and Nicholas Berdyaev, to name only some of the better-known names of the Anglican, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, and Russian Orthodox traditions in the first part of this century. Significantly, one has to stop to think before stating their church affiliation, because modern theology has been an international and ecumenical activity for a century or more. The influence of each of these on the others has not been slight. No modern theologian can work within the limits of his own denominational tradition. As in philosophy, so in theology, there are differences of opinion, and schools of thought, but these are schools of a single discipline. "One sees no reason why the dialogue between theologians of different traditions, which is taking place in the larger world, should not be reproduced in small within the university. It has not proved impossible elsewhere, and there is no reason to think it would be impossible here."¹⁶

Another objection to the admission of theology into a university is that this would involve a departure from the neutrality and objectivity which have long been cherished by Australian universities. The fact is, however, that the inadequacies of both of these concepts is now seriously disputed. For example, in writing of the nature of the university today, Professor David P. Derham says:

The matters for enquiry, and the questions for debate, include many which do not respond to neutrality. Men will not be neutral in treating of them, and they should not be asked to pretend neutrality. That they should be as objective in the assessment of the materials

¹⁵ Ginnane, "Theology in the University", p. 24.

¹⁶ Stormon, "Inadequacies in the Concept of Neutrality", p. 60.

with which they work as their self-discipline permits, goes without saying when the purpose is rational enquiry.¹⁷

In the same volume, Dr J. D. McCaughey takes “the view that objectivity in any form of education is logically and psychologically impossible; and that an attitude of neutrality is equally so, but, in addition, is dangerous, in that it does not foster the virtue of tolerance. Neutrality is, in fact, the opposite of freedom, with which it is so often confused.”¹⁸

Or again, if, as Professor Derham states, “neutrality has meant, in the main, not taking sides on issues which, at any given time, are likely to divide the community in passionate partisanship”, then, today, theology is hardly to be numbered amongst such issues, both because of the indifference to it in society, and the ecumenical approach to it in the churches.

The chief issue should no longer be the exclusion of theology, but the re-thinking of the concepts and possibilities of neutrality and objectivity in a modern university. Dr McCaughey makes an important contribution towards this in his paper “Tradition and Freedom in Education”,¹⁹ in which he shows that it is tradition and freedom which should be primary concerns, rather than objectivity and neutrality.

In doing so, he asserts that theology can meet the conditions which Professor Michael Polanyi, in *Science, Faith, and Society*, states to be necessary for the continued existence of a community of science. These are:

1. The acceptance by its members of one tradition of learning, and of a community of trust between the scholars concerned;
2. The nature of authority within the scientific tradition as not a specific central one which demands obedience, but a general one, which requires the free acceptance of its existence;

¹⁷ D. P. Derham, in *Melbourne Studies in Education* (1963), E. L. French, ed., Carlton Vic: Melbourne University Press, 1963, p. 21.

¹⁸ McCaughey, “Tradition and Freedom in Education”, p. 62.

¹⁹ McCaughey, “Tradition and Freedom in Education”.

3. The recognition of the temporary character of the opinions expressed;
4. A commitment to science alone.²⁰

Dr McCaughey, within the limits of his paper, tests the case for introducing theology into a university against these “conditions”.

Of the first of these, he comments: “The same is true of Christian theology. After a period of apparent and acute division, we see theology today, across divisions of history and confession, acknowledging one tradition of learning, and a high degree of trust between scholars concerned. . . . Anyone can test this for himself by an hour or two spent browsing in scholarly journals.”

Of the second, he writes: “Whatever the historic and dogmatic differences between Roman Catholicism and any of the Protestant churches on the question of authority, in matters of scholarship and learning, events of recent years have shown that the consensus of scholarly opinion is an immensely strong force, making for a kind of general authority among Roman scholars in a manner in which we are all familiar with in our various branches of study. At all events, I as a Protestant can see no more objection to a Roman Catholic teaching theology in a university than I can to a Roman Catholic teaching history or philosophy; and the university is enriched by the presence of both. What the university ought to ask of prospective theologians is not whether they are Protestant or Roman Catholic, but whether they know their stuff. The quality and integrity of their scholarship can be tested by their peers in precisely the same way as the quality and integrity of the work of a historian or philosopher.”²¹

Of the third, the temporary character of opinions, he states: “this acknowledgment is a fundamental assumption of modern theology. The misunderstanding, current still among liberal rationalists, that theology is a discipline in which you know the answers before you have begun to ask the question, could easily be removed by taking a little trouble.” He gives

²⁰ Michael Polanyi, *Science, Faith, and Society*, London UK: Oxford University Press, 1946.

²¹ McCaughey, “Tradition and Freedom in Education”, p. 77.

several examples, e.g., Karl Barth's study of Protestant theology in the 19th century "From Rousseau to Ritschl";²² and "the perennially fascinating question of the historical Jesus, and His relation to the faith of the church: a question to which every generation of historians brings its own methods, tools, and presuppositions."²³

Of the fourth commitment, he writes: "Certainly commitment must be to the truth, and that commitment must be absolute. . . . There is at least something in the tradition, in which we all share, to strengthen resolve, and to warn us against the difficulty of this commitment."²⁴

The important question, then, is not whether theology is fit to be seen in a modern university, but whether the university is free enough to admit theology. It is not a question of being for neutrality, but being "in regard to all fundamental questions, *for freedom*. Freedom is far more uncomfortable than neutrality; it makes it necessary for men to learn tolerance. Australia is not a tolerant society, and will not become so until it rids itself of its timidity in relation to freedom. On everything, from the paternalism of the censorship, to the edginess of educational authorities in relation to politics and religion, our society regularly evades the issue of freedom."²⁵ Australians establishing a university in another culture need to be particularly sensitive to this kind of judgment.

One reason why new universities have included theology is that they are based on the principle of pluralism, and, therefore, welcome a diversity of thought, and are committed to the tolerance that makes such diversity possible. Such tolerance need not mean the negativism of co-existence, but the vitality of inter-discipline discussion. Such universities should, therefore, be seriously concerned to stimulate thought about basic human questions. However, "it is not for a pluralist university to impose, or to endorse, a single set of answers, whether Christian or otherwise, to those questions, but it ought publicly to recognise their importance, and to see to it that students are given the opportunity to think them as honestly

²² Karl Barth, *From Rousseau to Ritschl: being the translation of eleven chapters of Die protestantische Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert*, London UK: SCM Press, 1959.

²³ McCaughey, "Tradition and Freedom in Education", p. 78.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

and openly and deeply as possible.”²⁶ A department of religious studies could be a useful addition to the means by which a university fosters such thinking about fundamental human issues.

(c) *A centre of Christian propaganda?* The danger of a department or faculty becoming “propagandist” or “doctrinaire” is not confined to religious studies or theology. The history of Australia’s secular universities is not devoid of examples in the fields of philosophy, political science, and English literature. The obvious instances are the appointment of Professor Stout alongside Professor John Anderson, the two chairs of English in Sydney, the controversy in Federal parliament over Professor C. P. Fitzgerald’s appointment to the ANU, and the recent Knopfmacher case. Such instances are not arguments for the exclusion of these disciplines from a new university. They are simply hazards that may occur, and are matters to be dealt with by a university, in the light of its secular, pluralist nature – and in terms of the personalities involved.

From what has been said, above, about theology as an object of academic study, it should be clear that a department of religious studies would be concerned with serious academic work of university quality, done within the limits of the nature of the university itself. Further, such a department, even more than others, would be very sensitive to the danger of over-stepping the limits imposed upon it, whether in the areas of study, research, discussion, or general protocol.

More fundamentally, the recognition of the difference between personal faith and theological study means that the department would be concerned with scholarly work in relation to the Bible, church history, and the growth of Christian theology. “There is no intrinsic reason why they should not be studied with the same freedom from bias and dogmatic assumption” as in other faculties.²⁷ Further, they are basically historical and linguistic studies. In fact, so true is this, that few theological colleges, if any, can be regarded as hot-beds of propaganda!

Dr Vidler, who is Dean of King’s College, Cambridge, and a lecturer in Divinity in that University, states the necessary conditions which would guard against a misuse of position. “The maintenance of a

²⁶ Vidler, *Crisis in the Humanities*, p. 90.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

faculty (of Christian theology) . . . is acceptable in a pluralist university only on certain conditions: (1) that the Christian acknowledge that there would be equal justification for a faculty of, say, Jewish or Islamic theology, if it were needed or endowed; (2) that the members of the faculty are not required to submit to any religious or ecclesiastical tests, but are appointed only on the ground of their academic qualifications; (3) that the university is satisfied that the faculty has the same standards of scholarly objectivity as are demanded in other faculties; and (4) that the faculty advertises its Christian assumptions by calling itself, e.g., “The Faculty of Christian Theology”.

It should, however, be noted that Dr Vidler is writing in post-Christian England, in which Christianity is virtually a minority religion. This is not the case in Papua New Guinea. It is, therefore, more natural and reasonable to consider a department of religious studies being established chiefly for the study of Christianity. The question “why Christian studies?” then needs to be considered against the fact of a large Christian community. A footnote by Dr McCaughey is relevant here:

If the question be asked, “Why, if religion is to be studied in our universities, should it be under the guise of Christian theology?” I would answer along the following lines. First, there is no reason why other religions should not be studied also; and, in fact, they are – to some degree – in departments of anthropology, by other social scientists, and in such departments of Indian, Oriental Studies, and so on, as exist.

But second, there is a place for a department or faculty of Christian theology, because that is our traditional context for such studies. The analogy with law takes us some distance. No law faculty begins with the study of comparative law. It begins with the tradition in which we stand. But, just as it would be wrong for a faculty of law in Australia to ignore the context into which the traditional (British, European, Western) concepts and practices of law have been placed in a South-East Asian and Pacific environment, so it would be wrong for theology to be taught and studied in Australia without regard to other religions in our environment. The starting point, and the main weight of our studies, still rightly rests within the tradition we have inherited from

Europe, with its own scholarly method and body of knowledge. Similarly, departments of philosophy still take as their proper tradition to which to introduce the next generation of Australians, all that is represented by Plato and Aristotle, Berkeley, Locke, Kant, and Hume. As for modern studies, it might be suggested that sometimes the teaching of philosophy has been too narrowly British; but, be that as it may, few would suggest that the proper way to teach philosophy in Australia would be to ignore such a traditional context and concentrate on a comparative study of Asian philosophies. An acquaintance with Christian theology can no longer be regarded as an essential part of the equipment of an educated man; but then, in a day of specialisation, what can be regarded as essential for the individual, Christian theology, as a critical and disciplined study, must still be regarded as an essential discipline in the educating community.”²⁸

(d) *Will Roman Catholics and Protestants accept each other?* It has already been shown, above, that they will, and they do in an increasing number of universities and places. It may, however, be argued that this is impossible, or too difficult, in a “missionary” situation, such as Papua New Guinea. Not to do so, however, will be to raise a shield against the winds that are bringing new life and co-operation to the universities and churches everywhere, and from which the Territory cannot itself be protected indefinitely. Not to do so, will also mean placing Christian theology permanently in an intellectual ghetto.

Certain practical considerations need to be borne in mind:

- a) There will, almost certainly, be both Roman Catholics and Protestants on the staff of other departments, sharing in the teaching of philosophy, history, etc. Differences in point of view and interpretation will have to be respected and handled on a mutually-acceptable basis in such departments. Why not also in the Department of Religious Studies?
- b) The University will, itself, be responsible for appointing the staff, and will not be likely to overlook the importance of appointing persons prepared to accept and co-operate with

²⁸ McCaughey, “Tradition and Freedom in Education”, pp. 75-76.

those of a different theological position. There is risk involved here, as in any appointment; but the existence of risk is not an argument for abstaining from action. This is true both for the University and for the churches.

- c) There is no escape from the truth of the maxim that the proof of the trustworthy is to be found only in the act of trusting.
- d) The consensus of the majority of the larger churches should be a sufficient basis on which to go ahead. The unwillingness of a minority should not be a bar in the Territory, any more than elsewhere.

Two Conclusions

If the main argument presented here is pressed to its conclusion, it follows that the University was every right, and, indeed, something bordering on an obligation, to provide for religious studies, whether or not the churches and missions go along with the proposal. Basically, it is a question of the nature and role of the university *qua* university in a pluralistic age. On the other hand, the conclusion for churches and missions is, surely, that the risks are not as great as they appear, and that, unless they are taken, the future of Christianity amongst the educated leaders of the Territory of tomorrow will be seriously jeopardised. They will, in any case, have little time or respect for a Christianity that was afraid of open discussion and candid encounter within the university.

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