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The Heretic

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SHANGDI: THE CHINESE DEUS

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"Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel unto every creature" (Mark 16:15 KJV). The Great Commission of the New Testament defined Christianity as a proselytising religion from its conception. Also central to the Christian worldview is the monotheistic belief in an omnipotent and omniscient God, which is effortlessly rendered without much controversy in most European languages as cognates of the Latin *Deus* or conceptual equivalents, such as the English "God". However, the Jesuits of the early sixteenth century found themselves in a conundrum upon arriving in China as the first ever European mission when they encountered an ancient culture possessing a wealth of religious traditions, yet with no word that would obviously accommodate all the meanings and connotations of "God" as understood by Christianity.

Matteo Ricci, the leading Jesuit missionary and arguably the prototypical sinologist, believed that the solution lay in the adoption of the indigenous term *Shangdi* (上帝), a term that is commonplace in the Chinese Classics. This became known as the "term question",[1] a debate surrounding whether existing concepts and terminology in a non-biblical culture could be used in Biblical and doctrinal translations to express the idea of the creator God in the biblical sense. The missionaries against this solution pointed out that the failure of the only previous Christian mission into China, led by Alopen of the Nestorian Church in 635, was attributed partially to the excessive borrowing from Buddhist, Taoist, and Confucian terminology to expound biblical truths such as sin and salvation.[2] The Nestorians went so far as to appropriate the term *arhat* (one who has achieved *nīrvana* according to Buddhism) for the Christian God, causing Christianity to be confused in China as merely a school of Buddhism and eventually condemning it to obscurity. Some of Ricci's contemporaries in Europe were also quick to criticise the choice as compromising Christianity's essential truths and even as idolatrous for equating the Christian God with the object of worship in a pagan tradition.

The alternative was to use a Chinese transliteration of the Latin *Deus* in emulation of the case in the Japanese language, which is seen in a number of Chinese sources from the period as *Dousi* (陡斯).[3] Unlike *Shangdi* (literally meaning "Sovereign-on-High"), *Dousi* was a neologism created from the phonetics of *Deus* that had no inherent meaning in the Chinese language and could therefore be given a meaning by the Jesuit missionaries that was completely congruous to the Christian understanding of God. The great danger of employing this foreign name,

[1] Han Siyi. "Deus and Confucian God: The Theological and Philosophical Reason for 'Deus' Translated as 'Confucian God,' " *Journal for Judaic and Inter-religious studies of Shandong University*, 14 (2016).
[2] Yang Peng. *「上帝在中國」源流考：中國典籍中的「上帝」信仰.* (Taiyuan: Shuhai Publishers , 2014), 8.
[3] Han. "Deus and Confucian God."

however, was that it would become an obstacle to Christianity's indigenisation in China as the Chinese would always perceive Christianity as something foreign, thus counterproductive to the mission's aim to convert the Chinese nation.

Ricci wholly accepted the term *shangdi* as translation for God based on the premise that its usage in key passages of the Chinese classical canon had a theistic significance and seemed to be roughly coterminous with what the Christian God denoted. He cited the following examples in his work *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*:[4]

> "夏氏有罪，予畏上帝，不敢不正。" (The Xia have committed injustices. For fear of Shangdi, we dare not but rectify them) (*Book of Shang*, 商書).
>
> "惟此文王，小心翼翼，昭事上帝，聿懷多福。" (King Wen acted with prudence and glorified Shangdi, inviting many blessings. (*Classic of Poetry*, 詩經)

Ricci thus concluded that *Shangdi* as it appears in the Chinese Classics differed from the conception of the ultimate in the religiously pluralistic China of his time. *Shangdi* was not the impersonal cosmic order of *taichi* as understood by the contemporary Taoists, or the voidness of *Sūnyatā* as posited by Buddhists. It was rather the personal entity whom people in ancient China worshipped, praised, gave thanks to, and served, thereby conforming to the Christian understanding of God.[5] Ricci also discovered that many Christian theological themes could be mapped onto correlating concepts in this ancient Chinese cult of *Shangdi*, one instance being the claim in the *Book of Documents* (尚書), a text largely contemporaneous to the two above, that "wise kings of the Shang Dynasty are all in heaven."[6] An examination of the native Chinese religions during Ricci's time would reveal that the belief that the dead ascended to heaven is completely absent, whereas the notion was wholly coherent with Christian doctrine. It was such findings that led Ricci to his declaration that "Our God is the Chinese *Shangdi*".[7]

A theological link was thus established with this ancient form of Confucianism, and Ricci believed that the conversion of China to Christianity would be a mere restoration of this supposed monotheism of Chinese Antiquity,[8] exclaiming that "the knowledge for serving *Shangdi* has been lost for a long time."[9] This statement was subversive because its implication was that the ancient Chinese received revelations from the Christian God like the Israelites, the only difference being that this revelation had been lost in China in subsequent centuries. This view was later supported by Blaise Pascal, who posited in his *Pensées* regarding God's revelation to the Chinese that "I believe only in the histories, whose witnesses got themselves killed. China obscures, but there is clearness to be found. Seek it."[10] In other words, Pascal believed that Christian revelation perished in ancient China because its witnesses had all been

[4] Weizheng Zhu, *Matteo Ricci: Writing and Translations* (Hong Kong, City University Publications, 2001), 70.
[5] Yin Yanan. "詮釋學視域下God漢譯名之爭." *探索與爭鳴理論月刊*, July 2011.
[6] Zhu, *Matteo Ricci,* 87.
[7] Zhu, *Matteo Ricci,* 92.
[8] Nicolas Standaert, *Handbook of Christianity in China* (Brill, 2001) 642.
[9] Zhu, *Matteo Ricci,* 68.
[10] Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* (The Modern Library, 1941), 193-4.

murdered, but traces of it could be recovered if sought after attentively. This was the essence of Ricci's quest in China's religious environment that was characterised by a multiplicity of deities: To reinstate the worship of the true God whom he believed was already present in the country's own classical literature.

The term question was reignited with the arrival in the nineteenth century of Protestant missionaries, who rejected the translation *Shangdi* as idolatrous. They espoused that since the purpose of missions was to "liberate the Chinese from their polytheistic illusion", translating the divine name of the Bible with *Shangdi,* a term the missionaries interpreted as only one of many deities in the Chinese celestial bureaucracy, would be a hindrance to this end.[11] The Anglican missionary William Boone suggested that the Christian God is more adequately rendered in Chinese as *shen* (神) based on the understanding that this term referred to supernatural beings in general rather than one particular deity.[12] It must be noted that the evangelisation that took place in China during this time was a direct consequence of Western expansion, where missionary activities were tied to the political prowess of the metropole. Therefore, it is suspected that the missionaries' deliberations were coloured as much by theological understanding as by a Eurocentric arrogance in the mentality of the civilising mission.

A digression into the Western nomenclature of God is helpful. In the *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas argued that man can attribute names to the divine being, but such names could never fully express the being's complete nature because it is a product of man's flawed, creaturely capacity for reason.[13] Justin Martyr (100-165) is credited to have first used the term *Deus* to express the Christian God, but the term itself is a cognate with and derives from the Greek *Zeus*, the leader of the Olympian Gods in Greek mythology. Thus, Justin Martyr found a conceptual convergence between the Greek notion of the ultimate being and the supreme God of the Israelites who stated "I am that I am" (Exod 3:14), in a fashion not dissimilar to Ricci's appropriation of *Shangdi* from the Chinese. Yet *Deus* has been understood by the Latin Church throughout the early and mediaeval periods to denote exclusively the God of the Bible, with most believers unaware of the term's pagan origins, much like the way generations of Chinese believers between the times of Ricci and the Protestant missionaries had come to understand *Shangdi* as Christianity's God rather than the deity in the supposed ancient monotheism.

Ultimately, the spread of Christianity into China initiated a cultural dialogue of a deeply philosophical and theological nature, the term question being one of its prime manifestations. The controversy represented an early exploration of the fundamental relationship between Christianity and Chinese culture, a matter still highly personal to Chinese believers and relevant to present-day Christianity's Sinicisation. Today, two parallel versions of the Chinese Bible exist that use the terms *Shangdi* and *Shen* respectively, and Google searches of "*Shangdi*

[11] Han. "Deus and Confucian God."
[12] Han. "Deus and Confucian God."
[13] Thomas Aquinas*, Summa Theologica* (Cosmos Classics, 2007), 272.

so loved the world..." and "*Shen* so loved the world..." (John 3:16) yield roughly equally as many results, both of which are understood by millions of Chinese-speaking Christians in the same way as Anglophone Christians understand "God". It is hoped that the reader sees that the dissemination of the Christian faith has always been an interaction between multiple different, at times conflicting, cultural contexts, and that the purist insistence on one particular name for God is almost always misguided because translations are informed by these human contexts.

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REVIEW

SHANGDI: THE CHINESE DEUS

This is an informative and thought-provoking article that addresses age-old questions about the extent to which Christian missions should make use of existing religious and cultural material in proselytizing non-Christian societies. Specifically, the article focuses on the history of terminology used by Christian missionaries to China to refer to the Christian God and discusses the theological significance of these different terms. As described in the introduction, the "term question" gave rise to four terms for God in Chinese missions: "Shangdi" by Matteo Ricci and the Jesuits, "arhat" by the ancient Nestorians, "Dousi" by the Jesuits, and "Shen" by later Protestant missionaries to China. Of these four terms, only one (Dousi) was a neologism: the other three were borrowed from Chinese usage to be assigned new meaning in connection to the Christian God. Although Dousi was the verbal equivalent of a blank slate, which could be defined as perfectly congruous to the Christian doctrine of God, using a new word presented obstacles to Christianity's indigenization in China since the Chinese would be likely to view it as a foreign import with no inherent relationship to China. Dousi soon fell by the wayside in the terminology debate, giving way to the three terms for God borrowed from the Chinese tradition.

The key difference between these three terms is the degree to which they carry theological baggage from religious traditions other than Christianity. The Nestorian arhat was the most extreme in this regard because of its close ties to Buddhism: the word, indeed, refers to one who has reached nirvana (a theological concept which cannot be harmonized with Christian theology). As the author explains, this heavy borrowing from Buddhism resulted in Christianity being widely thought of in China as a Buddhist sect rather than a distinct religion. Shangdi, by contrast, was native to ancient Chinese culture, but its meaning was congruent enough with Christian understandings of God to serve as a translation of the Latin "Deus".

Indeed, Shangdi in the classical Chinese sources was "a personal entity whom people in ancient China worshipped, praised, gave thanks to, and served." The attributes of Shangdi and their similarity to the Christian doctrine of God led Matteo Ricci to believe that Christian missionaries, far from being foreign to China, were in fact restoring a monotheism that was native to China but had been lost due to its witnesses being martyred. The last Chinese divine name, Shen, was applied by later Protestant missionaries to China, who denounced the use of Shangdi as idolatrous and even implying polytheism. Instead, missionaries such as the Anglican William Boone proposed Shen as a divine name, understanding it to refer "to supernatural beings in general rather than one particular deity." This lack of specificity in Shen made it more semantically malleable than previously used divine names, allowing the missionaries to apply it to the Christian God without importing any association to earlier Chinese religion, especially polytheistic forms. But this advantage could also be a downside, for using Shen as a name for a specific god rather than gods in general risks undermining Christianity by casting it as a foreign import with no history in China.

Ultimately, the author concludes that it would be ill-advised to insist on choosing between Shen and Shangdi: both words are used in Chinese translations of the Bible and are recognized by Chinese Christians as referring to the Christian God. In the West, both the Latin and Greek theological traditions have argued that names predicated of God must not be understood as fully expressing or encompassing the divine names, hence the many divine names given in Scripture are appropriate to help us overcome linguistic boundaries that might otherwise limit our understanding of God. Thus, rather than coming to a conclusion on which of the four names most properly fits the Chinese Deus, the author advocates a more organic approach that allows different names for God to be used within different cultural and linguistic contexts: "it is hoped that the reader sees that the dissemination of the Christian faith has always been an interaction between multiple different, at times conflicting, cultural contexts, and that the purist insistence on one particular name for God is almost always misguided because translations are informed by these human contexts." While the article turns out to be more descriptive than deliberative, it provides a historical precedent for naming God in a non-biblical culture which is valuable not only to contemporary theological reflection but also to today's Christian missions and the translation projects that support and accompany them.

SINFUL SAINTS AND SAINTLY SINNERS: PARADIGMS AND THE PRIORITY OF BEING IN THE DOSTOYEVSKYAD

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> Then turning towards the woman, he said to Simon, 'Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little.' (Luke 7:44-47, NRSV)

The writings of Fyodor Dostoyevsky represent a passionate struggle to display Christian holiness. As an icon in the Orthodox tradition communicates something of the beauty of the Christ, so too are each of Dostoyevsky's characters an icon, a sacred receptacle by which the grace of God might be displayed. No figure is immune from such a representation, indeed, often it is those who are most sinful and depraved through whom God's grace shines brightest in the Dostoyevskyad, and merely those who are indifferent to such a grace that repel it. Holiness, for Dostoyevsky, relates to being and intentionality. Those who relate to being with a passionate intensity and commitment, are those who know God, whereas those who are completely indifferent to being, are merely stooges of the devil.

All of Dostoyevsky's work from *Crime and Punishment* onwards, is an attempt to portray holiness in the form of a commitment to being; he does this by depicting deliberately sinful and depraved characters, who yet commit to God with the same intensity as they commit to their sin, demonstrating a love for the creator far more radical than any traditional form of piety. Love itself, whether it is directed to its proper end or not, is for Dostoyevsky, divine. Beginning with Sonya, the righteous prostitute, continuing with Natasya Filipovna, she who loves the Prince so much she refuses to burden him with her sinful self, and culminating with Mitya Karamazov, he who will love Christ into the chasms of hell, the Dostoyevskyad is a shelf of icons designed to pull the reader onto their knees before Christ, that they might kiss his feet, break all their perfume over him, and wet him with their tears. The foundations for such a project can be seen in Demons, Dostoyevsky's penultimate masterpiece, which serves as the inverse of his other great novels, displaying not the sanctity of love but the insanity of indifference. Demons is essential for understanding Dostoyevsky's aim in his other works, and in this regard, it could be regarded as his most important work.

Nikolay Vsevolodovich Stavrogin, a key character in the work, is the single figure furthest from God in the Dostoyevskyad, on account of his sheer indifference to the world. He marries Marya Timofeyevna Lebyadkina not out of love, but on a whim, "On one occasion, as I was

looking at the lame Marya Timofeyevna Lebyadkina, who occasionally came in to tidy the rooms, and was not yet insane but merely an ecstatic idiot, and madly and secretly in love with me (our people had found that out), I suddenly resolved to marry her."[1] He stops committing a particular sin, not because of remorse or the pursuit of will, but as an exercise in will, "Until the age of sixteen I gave myself over, with extraordinary abandon, to the vice that Jean-Jacques Rousseau confessed to. I stopped the moment I decided I wanted to, in my seventeenth year. I have always been master of myself when I have wanted to be. And so let it be known that I do not want to look at environment or illnesses for the causes of my irresponsibility when I commit crimes."[2] At his lowest moment, as the child Matryosha sings softly to herself in her room, he pursues unnatural relations with her not because of the strength of his desire, but merely because he knows he has the power to say no, and yet wills not to, "My heart began to pound. But then I suddenly asked myself again: can I stop? And I immediately answered myself: I can. I stood up and began creeping towards her."[3] Stavrogin is the embodiment of evil with the Dostoyevskyad. He is demonic. But he is utterly essential for understanding the portrayal of holiness in the wider corpus. As Dostoyevsky wrote in his notebooks, "Everything turns on Stavrogin's character. Stavrogin is *everything*."[4]

Bishop Tikhon's words to Stavrogin, after their reading together the letter to the church of Laodicea in the book of Revelation, opens up the heart of holiness within all Dostoyevskyanalia, "You were struck by the fact that the Lamb has greater love for the cold man than for one who is merely lukewarm...and you don't want to be *merely* lukewarm."[5] Stepan Trofimovich, on his deathbed discovering this passage for the first time, says something similar, "Just listen: better to be cold, cold, than lukewarm, than *only* lukewarm. Oh I'll prove it."[6] This, for Stepan Trofimovich, serves as a preamble towards his great profession of faith before he dies, "And what is more precious than love? Love is higher than existence, love is the crown of being, and how is it possible that existence is not subordinate to it? If I have come to love him and have taken joy in my love, is it possible that he should extinguish both me and my joy and turn us into nothing?"[7] This is a wonderful succinct expression of the faith expressed within Dostoyevsky's novels.

In other words, for Dostoyevsky, it is better to have a misdirected love than none at all, and one might even say, that it is only those who passionately direct love with all the strength of their being into any direction, though it be misplaced, who can understand the passionate love of God for the world. One must love being itself, in order to love the being of beings. Cue Ivan Karamazov. Ivan's character amongst the brothers is absolutely fascinating, representing the most atheistical person in the Dostoyevskyad. He must be understood in the light of Bishop Tikhon's words to Stavrogin, that "the complete atheist stands on the next-to-last highest rung

[1] Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Demons,* tr. Robert A. Maguire and ed. Ronald Meyer (London: Penguin, 2008) 773.
[2] Dostoyevsky, *Demons*, 765.
[3] Dostoyevsky, *Demons*, 766.
[4] Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Notebook Entry 16 August 1870,* quoted in Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Demons,* tr. Robert A. Maguire and ed. Ronald Meyer (London: Penguin, 2008), xxxiii.
[5] Dostoyevsky, *Demons*, 760.
[6] Dostoyevsky, *Demons*, 722.
[7] Dostoyevsky, *Demons*, 732–33.

leading to the fullest and most complete faith (he may take that step, or he may not), but the indifferent man has no faith at all, except an ugly fear."[8]

Ivan Karamazov stands proudly upon that 'next-to-last highest rung'. "What harmony can there be when there is hell,"[9] Ivan declares, boldly asserting the logic of goodness which proceeds from God using it to energise his rebellion against him. Writing about Ivan's infamous formulation of the problem of evil, Hart writes,

> That, at base, Ivan's is a profoundly and almost prophetically Christian argument. In part, this is true because, even in the way Ivan frames his arraignment of the divine purpose in history, there are already foreshadowings of a deeper Christian riposte to the argument. Ivan's ability to imagine a genuinely moral revolt against God's creative and redemptive order has a kind of nocturnal grandeur about it, a Promethean or Romantic or Gnostic audacity that dares to imagine some spark dwelling in the human soul that is higher and purer than the God who governs this world; and, in that very way, his argument carries within itself an echo of the gospel's vertiginous annunciation of our freedom from the "elements" of the world and from the power of the law.[10]

Ivan, therefore, almost knows God. He loves being. As he says, "If I am indeed capable of loving the sticky leaf buds, then I shall love them at the mere memory of you. It is enough for me that you are somewhere here, and I shan't yet lose my will to live...If you like, you may take it as a confession of love."[11] A fragile, perhaps, but undoubtedly genuine confession of the priority of being, rooted in love for another self.

This leads us to Mitya and Alyosha, who in differing intensities, do know God and know him truly. Mitya, after his confession to Alyosha regarding his sinfulness, precipitates the response, "I blushed not because of the things you were saying, the things you said you'd done, but because I am the same as you are...They are the rungs of the same ladder. I'm on the very lowest rung, and you're somewhere up at the top, on the thirteenth. That's the way I see this matter, but it's all the same thing, it's absolutely one and the same story."[12] Mitya and Alyosha live out the same life, merely in vastly different intensities. The shocking implication here, is that Mitya not only stands above Alyosha upon the ladder of vice, but also upon the ladder of virtue.

Hear Mitya's words as he speeds upon the troika towards the love of his life, "O Lord, take me in all my lawlessness, but do not judge me. Let me pass without your judgment... Do not judge, for I myself have condemned myself; do not judge, for I love you, Lord! I myself am loathsome, but I love you: if you send me to hell, even there I will love you and will cry from there that I love you until the end of the ages... But let me love to the end."[13] Mitya loves God

[8] Dostoyevsky, *Demons*, 758–59
[9] Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov,* tr. David McDuff (London: Penguin, 2003), 320.
[10] David Bentley Hart, *The Doors of the Sea,* (Eerdmans, Michigan; 2005) 42-43.
[11] Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov,* 343.
[12] Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov,* 146–47.
[13] Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov,* 532.

purely for who he is; God. Where Mitya's final end is, does not matter nor change his profession of faith. The very fact that God is, and Mitya is, is enough that God should be praised, even from the depths of hell. The very same movement within Mitya's soul that energises such devotion and love to God, is the same that animates his illicit love for Grushenka. He continues, "For I love the empress of my soul. I love and I cannot but love. You yourself see the whole of me."[14] It is perhaps Dostoyevsky's peculiar gift that a crazed man on his way towards a night of carousing and drunkenness with his illegitimate mistress and who hopes to kill himself immediately henceforth can become an icon of the most high God.

The sacred aspect of the love between Mitya and Grushenka is expressed in her words to Mitya in the moments before Mitya's arrest, "I want to scrape the earth with these hands of mine. We must work, do you hear? Alyosha has commanded it. I shall not be your lover, I shall be faithful to you, I shall be your slave, I shall work for you."[15] Here, the love for being itself associated with love for God is associated with a love for the earth that God has made itself. This passage provides a parallel to Alyosha's earlier exclamation of love for the earth after the death of Zossima,

> His soul, filled with ecstasy, thirsted for freedom, space, latitude. Above him wide and boundless keeled the cupola of the heavens, full of quiet, brilliant stars. Doubled from zenith to horizon ran the Milky Way as yet unclear. The cool night, quiet to the point of fixity, enveloped the earth. The white towers and golden domes of the cathedral sparkled in the sapphire sky. In the flowerbeds luxuriant autumn flowers had fallen asleep until morning. The earth's silence seemed to fuse with the heavens, the earth's mystery came into contact with that of the stars... Alyosha stood, looked and suddenly cast himself upon the earth like one who has had the legs cut from under him. Why he embraced it he did not know, he did not try to explain to himself why he so desperately wanted to kiss it, kiss it, all of it, but weeping he kissed it, sobbing and drenching it with his tears, and frenziedly he swore to love it, love it until the end of the ages.[16]

Love for God and love for being are coterminous. This can be contrasted sharply with Lizaveta Nikolayevna's (one of Stavrogin's many love interests) vision of an eternity spent with Stavrogin, "It always seemed to me that you would carry me off to some place where a huge evil spider as big as a man lives, and we would spend our entire lives looking at him and being afraid of him. That's how our mutual love would pass."[17] The indifference of Stavrogin and Liza to the world and to each other, opens up a terrible monstrosity, a grotesqueness enabled to exist merely by indifference to being. Whatever one does, one must commit to one's existence, and only then will one see God.

Thus, it is Mitya Karamazov who consents to a being that torments him, who out of love for

[14] Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov,* 532.
[15] Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov,* 568.
[16] Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov,* 468–69
[17] Dostoyevsky, *Demons,* 581.

another would choose the eternal wrath of God and then praise that God anyway because he is, and rejoice in that praising, who wills to be against any and every torment because to be is to be free to love and to love is as much greater than it is to be, than to be is than not to be. Mitya breaks open hell in the simple claim that God can be rejoiced and praised from within it. What a chorus of praise that would be, from those who love God because of who He is, in spite of the torment he brings them, a praise far deeper and far more sincere than praise from those who had never suffered at His hand. Hell has become a kind of heaven, and Mitya has entered it out of the extravagance of love, love for Grushenka at his own tremendous expense.

George MacDonald captures it well:

> And what shall we say of the man Christ Jesus? Who, that loves his brother, would not, upheld by the love of Christ, and with a dim hope that in the far-off time there might be some help for him, arise from the company of the blessed, and walk down into the dismal regions of despair, to sit with the last, the only unredeemed, the Judas of his race, and be himself more blessed in the pains of hell, than in the glories of heaven? Who, in the midst of the golden harps and the white wings, knowing that one of his kind, one miserable brother in the old-world-time when men were taught to love their neighbour as themselves, was howling unheeded far below in the vaults of the creation, who, I say, would not feel that he must arise, that he had no choice, that, awful as it was, he must gird his loins, and go down into the smoke and the darkness and the fire, traveling the weary and fearful road into the far country to find his brother?—who, I mean, that had the mind of Christ, that had the love of the Father?'[18]

Mitya Karamazov is that man, who is "more blessed in the pains of hell than in the glories of heaven," who loved his beloved Grushenka into the chasm of hell for her salvation, as is Sonya, who travels into the exile of Siberia out of love for Raskolnikov, and thereby redeems him, for "what had revived them was love, the heart of the one containing an infinite source of life for the heart of the other."[19] Mitya Karamazov is the man for whom the lizard of lust becomes the stallion of love, riding on into eternity towards the love which moves the sun and other stars. It would perhaps be fitting to end with something from Zossima, the usual font of wisdom amongst Dostoyevsky lovers, however it would not be in keeping with the spirit of the paper. Rather let us end from the words of the truest saint in this book, he who knows the love of Christ more deeply than any other in this novel, Mitya, as he speaks of his impending exile,

> Oh yes, we shall be in fetters, and shall have no freedom, but then, in our great misery, we shall again rise up in the joy without which it is impossible for a man to live, or God to exist, for God gives joy, that is his privilege, a great one... O Lord, let man melt away in prayer! How is it possible that I shall be down there under the earth without God?...If God is driven from the face of the earth, we shall meet him under the earth! It is impossible for a convict to be without God, even more impossible than for someone who is not a convict! And then, we, the subterranean folk, will sing out of the bowels of the earth a tragic hymn to God, with whom is joy! All hail to God

[18] George MacDonald, *Unspoken Sermons.* (Whitehorn; Johannesen, 1997) 144.
[19] Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Crime and Punishment,* tr. David McDuff (London: Penguin, 2003) 655.

and his joy! I love him![20]

Amen.

[20] Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov,* 756–57.

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REVIEW

SINFUL SAINTS AND SAINTLY SINNERS: PARADIGMS AND THE PRIORITY OF BEING IN THE DOSTOYEVSKYAD

In 'Sinful Saints and Saintly Sinners,' the author succeeds in three ways: first, he presents a compelling summary analysis of holiness in Fyodor Dostoyevsky's novels; second, the author asserts the importance of theology in literary studies; and third, he implicitly contends – like Flannery O'Connor, C.S. Lewis, and many others – that literature is not the homebound escapist's opioid but a shot of adrenaline to the self. Rather than forgetting oneself in the turning pages of another life, reading is the act of injecting your life into the mind of another; it is sitting at the author's table and charitably receiving whatever he or she serves, understanding the following narrative could take you anywhere. Reading good literature, then, is no safe endeavor. It is an exploration into virtue and vice, holiness and depravity, the divine and the mortal, and the relation of that exploration to yourself. 'Sinful Saints and Saintly Sinners' hinges upon this classical understanding of reading.

The author sets out to prove that Dostoyevsky's fiction represents the passion-infused struggle to attain Christian holiness. He does this through examination of how multiple characters in the 'Dostoyevskyad' relate to virtue and vice. This only makes sense; the pursuit of virtue, within orthodox Christianity, is the pursuit of holiness. Individuals whose lives are characterized by passion, for good or ill, are presented as icons of holiness in Dostoyevsky's novels. In contrast, characters who live lives of casual indifference to virtue and vice alike are shown to be icons of negative virtue. Here passion is virtuous and apathy vice. The author links holiness to intentional being, while depravity is characterized by apathy and indifference. It is far better, he claims, to be a passionate sinner than an apathetic one. The author's argumentative structure serves the article well; by examining multiple characters across multiple of Dostoyevsky's works and epistles, the author presents a thoroughly convincing analysis of holiness in the 'Dostoyevskyad'.

However, the way passion for both virtue and vice lead to holiness could have been fleshed out more. Traditionally, virtue and vice have existed as in opposition to one another. Is Dostoyevsky arguing that it would be better to be a passionate sinner than an apathetic saint? Or is he simply rejecting apathy in general while still maintaining the benefits of traditional virtue? If the author believes Dostoyevsky shifted the axis of holiness from traditional virtue-vice to passion-indifference, that's fine. But more space on this point would have strengthened the argument by clarifying what is meant by virtue and vice in relation to passion and indifference.

Ultimately, this article makes a case for the synthesis between literary studies and theology. It is an example of strong analysis grounded in historical documentation and outside scholarship, but it also merges those things with theology to create a meaningful close reading oriented towards the pursuit of truth. Fyodor Dostoyevsky's works represent such a struggle towards truth. By merging these two fields of study, the author not only creates an article worth reading

but continues in a deeper inheritance of thought oft neglected by mainstream scholarship today.

TEN MINUTES FOR THE PROPOSITION 'GOD IS'

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Author's Preface

The following speech was written in September of 2022 for a debate jointly hosted by the Union Debating Society and St Mary's College Society. Interestingly, the proposition turned out not to be the one agreed upon by the participants. 'This house believes God exists' was somehow changed to the proposition 'This house believes in God.' Not only did this work to our favor (we still lost) but, conceptually speaking, the changed proposition was more appropriate to my arguments. When, in Aikman's, the idea for a debate was conceived, the aim was at once to try to do something basically different from the norm. This is how.

The question about God is seen here not a metaphysical question about the existence of a being. It is a question about our future. The future, understood theologically is exactly what is ultimate; it gives meaning to and uncovers itself as the determining ground of all that went before. I would like to refer my readers to Wolfhart Pannenberg for whom God is the power of the future. He develops this identity further in denying the present existence of God, 'in a limited but important sense.' By referencing the dying words of Jesus, I mean to draw in this idea from Pannenberg, i.e., I mean to affirm the present debatability of God as a genuine, 'ontologically dense' feature of creation. Doubt is a valid, prayerful way of being related to God. (Indeed, here one enters intimate fellowship with Jesus.)

Obviously, this changes the terms of debate about God entirely. Instead of affirming the existence of God, the aim here is to affirm the faithful longing for God's sovereignty over creation (a reality which is in this fallen world invisible), as not only something rational, but as a lack which unifies suffering humanity in a world divided along the lines of what people claim to possess (be this their race, nation, or even their faith). Lastly, it can be noted here that in affirming the present debatability and incompleteness of the ground of all that exists, of truth itself, faith becomes more atheist than most atheisms today which, often by scientistic faith, affirm the completeness and ontological wholeness of what presently exists.

The Speech

'Who?' is *the* religious question. It is a question about the other man and his claim, about the other being, the other authority. It is a question about love for one's neighbour."

I want to orient my entire argument with this quote from Dietrich Bonhoeffer because it captures exactly the fundamental theme, it captures what is at stake with the question of God's

existence.

Let's begin by clarifying what is implied in the question 'Who?' "'Who?' is *the* religious question". (He refers to 'Who are you?', the question addressed to Jesus.') That is as opposed to 'What?'; 'What is there?' 'What do the scriptures mean?' It is also opposed to the question 'How?' 'How was the universe created?' and so on. These are fascinating questions, but as *you* ask yourselves, 'does God exist?', you must admit that deep down, this is not what is of gravest concern. The decision for or against God is an existential decision *before* it is worked out in theories of 'How?' or 'What?'.

The question 'Who?' points to an order of knowledge which is prior to the epistemic or theoretical curiosities implied in the other modes of questioning. In other words, an order of knowledge which is ethical and interpersonal.

If we take as an example an interpersonal encounter, you may enjoy the theoretical game of questioning whether the other person *really* exists; that is the old skeptical problem (which, of course, has no theoretical solution). But in the end, you must *acknowledge* the fullness of the other person and the claim that they have on you. This *acknowledgement* of the other person is a way of knowing that they exist.[1] Even if, epistemically, I cannot see into the other mind and prove it exists, I am bound to acknowledge them. If I do not, I undermine my own being in the world and ultimately my own identity. Behind theoretical curiosities are ethical modes of questioning which are more fundamental for our existence.

Shakespeare's *Othello* is perfect here because the whole tragedy turns on Othello confusing these two modes of questioning: ethical and epistemic.[2]

Othello is deceived into thinking Desdemona is cheating on him. All Desdemona can do is beg to be trusted when she says, 'I love you,' beg that her claim, her word be acknowledged. Othello, however, confuses this sort of relation with an epistemic one, and he tragically responds with: 'you love me? Prove it. Give me the evidence.' It is a hysterical, impossible demand.

The history of these debates has more or less committed this Othellian error. 'God exists? Prove it.' Crucially, when Othello makes his demand, he undermines exactly what is meant to be proven; he destroys the loving relation which is grounded on faithfulness and trust. In just the same way, atheists and theists alike risk deploying modes of questioning which obscure what is being questioned after. 'How do I know God exists?' is just as valid a question as 'How do I know that you love me?'

These questions are meaningful and good as expressions of profound insecurity and

[1] All credit goes here to Stanley Cavell's 'Knowing and Acknowledging', and in particular, Judith Wolfe's discussion of the essay in her *Heidegger's Eschatology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).
[2] This argument references a lecture by J. M. Bernstein in which he also discusses Cavell's essay. https://www.bernsteintapes.com/lectures/Hegel/18SelfConsciousnessB.mp3.

loneliness; the persistent temptation to ask these questions betrays our separation from God and protests His silence. ('Why have you forsaken me?') Or 'how do I know you love me?' expresses the opacity of the other person which makes us anxious; an unavoidable feature of our social lives.

So, in this limited sense, 'How do I know God exists?' is a valid question. But if the question comes instead from the standpoint of theoretical curiosity, that is, if it genuinely expects a satisfying answer or a list of reasons, it is invalid. It obscures what is being questioned after.

'Does God exist?' 'How can I know?' This may be a way of asking 'Do I have a future? Do we have a future? Or is this it?'

We should note that the secular world continues to grapple with exactly this theological anxiety; 'Do we have a future?' is an extremely pressing political question right now. Will something new happen, or will right wing populism dominate? We are locked in a history without any events; everything changes but nothing happens. Do we have a future? Or is this it? This question bears on us every time ecological crisis manifests itself.

What this shows is that theological ways of thinking and asking *persist* even or especially where theology is disavowed. There are countless other examples; my old professor, the late Christoph Schwöbel, was always eager to remind his students that our speech about the *market* is distinctly theological; we say 'it is volatile' or 'it is upset'; this mystifies the market's dependence on human decisions and poses it as something with a *will* of its own.

In a word, what I have been trying to communicate this is that *theology is an intractable problematic.* This is shown whenever you are compelled to *acknowledge* the other person; here you are *dependent* on them, just like Othello depends on the word given to him. His refusal of this word was in the end his self-destruction. Dependence, the notion that as humans we have our center always *outside ourselves*, this is what theology is all about.

Nonetheless, humans make attempts at self-possession or self-groundedness; they refuse their dependence on the other person and the vulnerability which this implies. This history of modern capitalism is the history of man's striving for self-possession, striving to locate the ground of his existence *in himself.*[3] But what this history shows is that such striving always ends in some perverse theological relation; we depend on the market, it gives us our desires. In advertisements we read what 'the Other' wants from us. Consumer society is a system of *orienting knowledge*; it is a means of securing our place in the world. Again, do we have a future? Or is this it?

Now I will attempt a summary of my entire argument. When we say 'God exists', we grapple

[3] And the psychoanalytic resonances are very strong here: if theology structures human life according to a 'lost object' (God), then the secular society of commodity production is *fetishistic.* The fetish object, the commodity, obscures our own lack and erects the 'phantasy' of wholeness, completion, possession.

with having our center outside ourselves. The proposition is not a theory about the universe which cancels our anxiety by securing for us a stable place in the cosmos. The proposition 'God exists' is a way of reconciling ourselves to a fundamental insecurity; we are always in the place of Othello. We must either depend on a word given to us, even in the absence of any external guarantee, or else we refuse this word and destroy ourselves.

REVIEW

TEN MINUTES FOR THE PROPOSITION 'GOD IS'

This article for the proposition 'God is' is an excellent and engaging piece that expertly guides the reader through various complex streams of thought, relating not so much to proving God's existence, but instead to a theological, and an underlying yet distinctly eschatological, concern with the future. As the author notes at the outset, this article is written as a debate, thus, the argumentative structure of the work is paramount. Upon reading, it strikes me that the article's axis swings on one fundamental concern: orientation. The crux of the argument appears to be how it is that we orient ourselves: having to orient oneself around something outside of ourselves will always result in us either having to enter into a state of acceptance, despite the ways in which this fundamentally abhors us, or rejection and thus, like Othello, end up destroyed. The first half of the essay is especially strong, the author lays the foundations of their work on a quote from Bonhoeffer:

> 'Who?' is the religious question. It is a question about the other man and his claim, about the other being, the other authority. It is a question about love for one's neighbor.

By doing so, the reader is immediately struck with what the author understands to be the central question at stake in this debate. And it is from just that, what is at stake, that the article derives its momentum. By tackling the question of God's existence from the angle of what is risked in asking the question at all, the author has imbued the piece with a sense of urgency and strategic pace that works effectively.

As noted above, the vehicle through which the argument is made is in an exploration of orientation at both a basic and a wider level. The general sense of this is clear and made well throughout. However, seeing as this is one of, if not the, focal point of the piece, it would have been beneficial for the author to link each related point back to this in a more explicit manner. This would have been especially useful owing to the fact that the article's format is a persuasive debate. By way of illustration, let us take the valuable (yet perhaps underdeveloped in the meta-structure of the article) reference to the personification of the market, and thus the omnipresence of theological discourse in primarily secular circles. This section links excellently with the overall argumentative structure at play here, and yet it could have been made clearer by stating how exactly the omnipresence of theology directly correlates with the necessity of acceptance of the religious question. I admit that this is a simplification of the thought process but with a debating format in mind, it is essential that each component of the piece can be immediately tied together upon first reception.

The second part of the article that I wish to draw attention to is the use of Shakespeare's Othello as an illustration of "confusing [the] two modes of questioning: ethical and epistemic." This example is an interesting and useful one as it effectively demonstrates that by asking for proof of Desdemona's love, Othello renders the question obsolete and relinquishes any access

he once had to the answer. The key point of Othello's distrust of Desdemona is insecurity, which the author rightly acknowledges as playing a role in pushing him to ask an unanswerable question. However, within the context of the play itself, this point, space permitting, could have been developed further. By doing so, this could have added some additional nuance by directly relating Othello's plight with that of an individual taking the plunge in accepting, against all the odds, God. In the play Iago, the antithesis of the good and truthful, is a vessel for hate and he orchestrates the entire sequence that leads to tragedy, such as by framing Desdemona and Cassio. As a result, Othello can be seen as doomed from the outset, regardless of his reaction to the drama. It was Othello's deep-rooted insecurities that led to his downfall, especially due to him already placing his trust in Iago. Thus, this focus on insecurity would have served the author well in framing the argument and in their statement that "we are always in the place of Othello." The reason being that despite the presence of insecurity, it is essential that we do in fact "grapple with having our centre outside of ourselves" as it is only in doing so that we can resist the urge to reject and instead choose acceptance.

THEOLOGY NOT RELIGIOUS STUDIES: NEO-CALVINISM'S DEFENCE OF THE QUEEN OF SCIENCES' APPARENT SUBJECTIVITY

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Introduction

The "Queen of Sciences" of the medieval university has fallen to the bottom of the modern research university's totem pole. As theology departments close left and right, many voices are skeptical of an academic discipline seemingly based on subjective assumptions. Popular atheist Richard Dawkins charges that while "university departments of theology house many excellent scholars of history, linguistics, literature," and so on, he questions whether theology has "any real content at all"—comparing it with the "study of leprechauns."[1] To philosopher Richard Rorty, theology should be kept out of the public square as it is a coercive attempt "to make one's own private way of giving meaning to one's own life . . . obligatory for the general public."[2] And to philosopher Donald Weibe, theology could only be "academic" if it was a scientific enterprise that "aims at public knowledge of public facts."[3] Indeed, it seems that theology cannot be academic as it is inherently dependent on the subjectivity of its religious adherents' private assumptions.

It was against similar charges of theology's seemingly problematic subjectivity that the Dutch Neo-Calvinist theologians Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) and Herman Bavinck (1854-1921) defended theology's role as the "Queen of Sciences." This essay will explore the two Neo-Calvinists' defenses of theology's place in the modern university by presenting the Modernists' challenge, the Neo-Calvinists' responses, before concluding with the implications of Neo-Calvinist principles to contemporary discussions.

[1] Richard Dawkins, 'Letters: Theology has no place in a university,' Monday, October 1, 2007, *The Independent,* as cited in James Eglinton and Michael Bräutigam, "Scientific Theology? Herman Bavinck and Adolf Schlatter on the Place of Theology in the University," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 7, no. 1 (2013): 28.
[2] Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope,* (New York, NY: Penguin, 1999), 157, as cited in Paul A. Macdonald Jr., "Studying Christian Theology in the Secular University," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 78, No. 4, (2010): 993.
[3] Donald Weibe, "'Why the Academic Study of Religion?' Motive and Method in the Study of Religion," *Religious Studies* 24, No. 4, (1988): 407, 410, 412, as cited in Macdonald, "Studying Christian Theology in the Secular University," 994.

Challenges

Like secularists today, nineteenth-century Dutch modernists charged theology for being unscientific in light of its subjective point of departure.[4] Dutch state universities at that time followed the University of Berlin in embracing *Wissenschaft* (Dutch *wetenschap*; English "science")—an orderly inquiry of objective knowledge using critical methods which remove any pre-conceived influences from the subject.[5] In this view, theology cannot be counted as a science as the discipline presupposes the existence of God and the reliability of his revelation for further study. In this vein, the modernists posited that theology may only be counted as scientific by defining the object of study as an indisputable and unanimous fact—namely the religion observed by society.[6] This challenge led to the Dutch parliament's Higher Education Act of 1876 which mandated that state university theology departments teach religious studies instead of theology.[7]

Neo-Calvinism's Response

In response to the renouncement of subjectivity in academia, the Neo-Calvinists defended the scientific nature of theology through three key arguments:

First, the Neo-Calvinists argued that all academic disciplines *necessarily* require metaphysical presuppositions and hence theology's non-neutrality cannot disqualify it from being considered scientific. Bavinck disputes the absolute neutrality of science with the following theoretical and practical accounts. Theoretically, any scientist requires at least two presuppositions to approach an object of study, that: (1) the object's existence can be verified through empirical observation, and (2) the object is worthy of study.[8] Without assuming the former, there will be no identifiable object to study; without the latter, the object would not be studied in the first place. Yet both presuppositions require a spectrum of metaphysical premises that cannot be reached by empirical science itself: presupposition (1) requires belief in a real object that is bound to natural law consistent across space and time, while presupposition (2) requires a hierarchy of value in evaluating the object's "worthiness" of study (such as utilitarianism). Indeed, as Kuyper added, historical monotheism and the corresponding belief in predestination galvanized the Western world to pursue science with the confidence in the stable nature of a universe governed by natural law.[9] Practically, Bavinck argued that it was impossible for a scientist to abandon all presuppositions, as "a chemist does not cease to eat like an ordinary human being, though as a scientific man he analyzes food chemically and has very different thoughts about it

[4] "Science" hereafter refers to German *"wissenchaft"* or Dutch *"wetenschap."*
[5] David H. Kelsey, *Between Athens and Berlin*, 12; Willem Drees, *What are the Humanities For?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 75.
[6] Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, edited by John Bolt, translated by John Vriend, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 36.
[7] Herman Bavinck, "Theology and Religious Studies," in *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society*, edited by John Bolt, translated by Harry Boonstra and Gerrit Sheeres, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 283.
[8] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1.50-51.
[9] Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, (Grand Rapid, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 114.

than the unlearned person."[10] In other words, the beliefs a scientist holds at home does not suddenly disappear in the lab. Hence, in demanding that theology preclude all presuppositions, modernists fail to acknowledge the inherent presuppositions in all of science itself.

Second, against the charge of subjectivism, the Neo-Calvinists identify the object of theology not with the individual's subjective faith, nor as an untestable practical reason as Immanuel Kant posits, but rather God's ectypal revelation. Accepting the charge that objects of science must be known via the public knowledge of public facts, Kuyper elaborates that ectypal revelation is knowledge of God that "does not lie *outside* of, but *in* the cosmos, and never presents itself to us in any but its cosmical form."[11] Such revelation does not go beyond the world, being masked by the Creator-creature distinction, but is made clear to the public via natural mediums. Yet, this ectypal revelation is not bound to natural theology, but encompasses all forms of revelation about God both general and special. Scripture and church tradition, for instance, are mediums observable by all.

Emphasising revelation's existence within the cosmos as a basis for theology's objectivity, Kuyper highlights the significance this plays in science. As God rationally created the world through the Logos, "all creation in its origin, existence, and course is a rich, coherent revelation of what God has thought in eternity and determined in His Decree."[12] All observation of the cosmos is therefore an unpacking of God's reason: humanity, having "received holiness, justice, and *wisdom*" as the image of God, have the responsibility of "unwrap[ing] the thoughts of God that lie embodied in creation."[13] This is the basis of science, for which "man engages that ability to rethink God's thoughts from creation."[14] Furthermore, "If the subject of science . . . lies in the consciousness of humanity, the *object* of science must be *all existing things*, as far as they have discovered their existence to our human consciousness, and will hereafter discover it."[15] Therefore, as the object of *all* science is ultimately a form of God's revelation in nature, Kuyper demonstrates that this ectypal knowledge of God does not lie in the subject, but rather has been clearly revealed through all sciences.[16] Hence, theology, the most direct engagement of God's thoughts, is *the* science. As Kuyper famously writes, "no single piece of our mental world is to be hermetically sealed off from the rest, and there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over *all*, does not cry: 'Mine!'."[17]

Third, theology's alternative, secular religious studies, is an incoherent discipline that lacks any real object of study. While modernists may argue that the object of religious studies are the

[10] Bavinck, Reformed Dogmatics, 1.50-51.
[11] Abraham Kuyper, *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology: Its Principles,* translated by J. Hendrik de Vries, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1899), 219.
[12] Abraham Kuyper, "Common Grace in Science," in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader,* edited by James D. Bratt, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 442-444.
[13] Ibid., 444.
[14] Ibid., 445.
[15] Abraham Kuyper, *Encyclopedia,* 65; Dylan Pahman, "Like Bright Stars: Abraham Kuyper on the Nature and Vocation of the Scholarly Sphere," *Journal of Markets and Morality* 23, No 2, (2020): 393.
[16] Pahman, "Like Bright Stars," 393.
[17] Abraham Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty," in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader,* edited by James D. Bratt, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 488.

"religions" practiced by groups, Bavinck points out that the objectivity of "religion" depends on theistic assumptions that nullify the discipline's neutrality. He argues, "religion assumes two facts: the existence and knowability of God. . . . Whoever denies God's existence and revelation completely can discern only a pathological phenomenon of the human spirit in religion."[18] Without assuming a religion based on real ectypal revelation, the "religion" studied becomes a mere collection of subjective beliefs with no external bases. In other words, studying "religion" can only be subsumed under the disciplines of anthropology or history, rather than being studied in and of themselves.[19] Truly "objective" religious studies becomes a motley jumble which merely records disunified subjective claims based on each distinct religion's theological premises. Religious studies, as a discipline distinct from anthropology or history, faces difficulty in defining a subject clearly observable by public knowledge. Theology, on the other hand, affirms that outside the subject is an object that is the basis of their beliefs—an object that is accessible by all.

Conclusion: Theology as the Queen of Sciences

Seeing that (1) all science is metaphysically biased, (2) theology's objective revelation is available to all, and (3) the alternative religious studies is incoherent, the Neo-Calvinists highlight the incoherence of contemporary challenges to theology. Where Dawkins doubts that theology has "any real content at all," Christians treat revelation as the ultimate empirical content of science. Where Rorty assumes theology to be the imposition of one's private life to the public, all scientists impose their private presuppositions into the public square as human beings who share the same thinking faculties in home and the laboratory. And where Wiebe argues that theology cannot be dependent on the subjectivity of private revelations, the Neo-Calvinists highlight that his alternative—religious studies—is ultimately subjective as well.

So as the object of all science is ultimately a reflection of God's thinking, the role of theology as the "Queen of Sciences" is to undergird the sciences. And as modern university departments become more compartmentalized, theology's role in grounding them with a common worldview unites the university into a coherent body striving to deepen their knowledge in the same truth. For Bavinck concludes, "All the special objects of the various sciences originate in God, who sustains them all, preserving them in their diversity yet also binding them together as a cosmos. . . . theology is thus an *Universalwissenschaft* (universal science)."[20]

[18] Bavinck, "Theology and Religious Studies," 287.
[19] Ibid., 283.
[20] Herman Bavinck, "The Science of Theology," in *On Theology: Herman Bavinck's Academic Orations,* edited and translated by Bruce R. Pass, (Leiden: BRILL, 2020), 49-50.

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REVIEW

THEOLOGY NOT RELIGIOUS STUDIES: NEO-CALVINISM'S DEFENCE OF THE QUEEN OF SCIENCES' APPARENT SUBJECTIVITY

This is a compellingly argued and clearly structured article that highlights the predicament of the academic study of theology in modern Universities against the tides of modernist thought that seek to discredit it as epistemologically biased. The article sets out by providing an overview of criticisms of theology in modernity, such as that of popular atheist Richard Dawkins, who doubts "theology has any real content at all," and that of Donald Weibe, who posits that theology is dependent of the subjectivity of the religious adherents' private assumption, which is an inadequate basis from which knowledge of public facts can be derived. Interestingly, the article does not choose to engage with the criticisms of the modern-day secularists directly, instead electing to illuminate the conflict with the historical precedence of the Dutch neo-Calvinists Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck when the Dutch government mandated in 1876 that universities must teach religious studies rather than theology. The article brings to light the fact that the problem in question is not novel, and that the neo-Calvinists' responses to secularism a century and a half ago are still pertinent to the modern university.

The article highlights three arguments for the preservation of theology as a self-sufficient discipline: 1) That theology is far from unique in having metaphysical presuppositions unattainable by empirical observation 2) that theology's objective revelation, such as scripture and church tradition, is observable by all, and 3) that theology's secular counterparts, religious studies, is devoid of substantive content as an individual field of study. Among these, the first argument resonates most with a contemporary audience who is all too familiar with the myth of the natural sciences' pure objectivity. The argument is an antidote to the misguided belief that the natural sciences operate on a mind-independent basis, as just like theology's assumption of the validity of divine revelation, the natural sciences cannot function without the belief that laws of nature are eternally consistent and observable. As the article astutely points out, a deeply imbued Calvinist Protestant piety in fact helped consolidate Western civilisation's faith in the value of the natural sciences because the doctrine of predestination ensured the cosmos' eternal mechanistic functioning according to natural law. As such, there is no inherent epistemological conflict between science and theology, and the two should corroborate each other.