

2009

Theology, spirituality and the academic study of religion in public universities

Don Saunders

University of South Florida

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/etd>



Part of the [American Studies Commons](#)

Scholar Commons Citation

Saunders, Don, "Theology, spirituality and the academic study of religion in public universities" (2009). *Graduate Theses and Dissertations*.

<http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/etd/4>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact scholarcommons@usf.edu.

Theology, Spirituality, and the Academic Study of Religion in Public Universities

by

Don Saunders

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
Department of Religious Studies
College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Florida

Major Professor: Darrell Fasching, Ph.D.
Dr. Mozella Mitchell, Ph.D.
Dr. James Strange, Ph.D.

Date of Approval: April 2, 2009

Keywords: (Academic Theology, Holy, Religion, Questions of Ultimate Concern, Humanities)

© Copyright 2009, Don Saunders

Dedication

9X & BΣ

Acknowledgments

Darrell J. Fasching, Dell deChant, and the entire University of South Florida Religious Department Professors, Instructors, Faculty, Administration, Graduate Assistants and Students.

“A human being is part of the whole called the universe, a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings, as something separated from the rest, a kind of optical delusion of...consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in all its beauty. Nobody is able to achieve this completely but the striving for such achievement is in itself part of the liberation and a foundation for inner security” - Albert Einstein

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iv
Chapter One: The Controversy over the Place of Theology and Spirituality in the Academic Study of Religion.....	1
Introduction: The Humanities and the Spiritual Questions of Mortality and Meaning	1
The Controversy over the Place of Theology and Spirituality in the Academic Study of Religion.....	4
Thesis: Theology and Spirituality Are Essential to the Academic Study and Teaching of Comparative Religions in State Universities.....	10
Chapter Two: Theology as an Artifact not an Academic Discipline	13
Ninian Smart: Theology is not a Reputable Academic Discipline	15
Russell T. McCutcheon: Theology as Data	16
Ivan Strenski: Theology as Confessionalism Cloaked in Postmodern Garb.....	17
Chapter Three: Academic Theology and the Quest for Wisdom in the Humanities.....	20
Theology of Culture: Tillich’s Proposal for an Academic Theology	20
John Dunne’s Model of Spiritual Theology as Academic Theology.....	29
Darrell Fasching’s Alienated Theology as a Model for Academic Theology	40
Chapter Four: Conclusion: Theology, Spirituality and the Humanities.....	50
References.....	54
Bibliography	56

Theology, Spirituality, and the Academic Study of Religion in Public Universities

Don Saunders

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines whether the secular institutions of American higher education should address students questions of meaning, purpose, wisdom, and human destiny. That is, it investigates the place of the normative analysis of religious experience and behavior within the public university. I use the work of Ninian Smart, Russell T. McCutcheon and Ivan Strenski to illustrate the case against the inclusion of theology and spirituality in the academic study of religion. In their view, theology is at best an artifact, like ritual or religious art and not an academic discipline. Conversely, I use the work of Paul Tillich, John Dunne, and Darrell Fasching to argue for the emergence of an academic theology that can play an important role in the contemporary university. In their view, theology and spirituality address the questions appropriately raised by the humanities, and can be done as long as confessional and apologetic strategies are rejected. I will show how their theories help us understand the nature of the academic study of religion to be inclusive of theology and spirituality, and so respond constructively to the negative views of Smart, McCutcheon and Strenski. My thesis is that, contrary to Smart, McCutcheon and Strenski, theology and spirituality are essential to the academic study and teaching of comparative religions in state universities. If higher education is to achieve the ideals of a liberal arts education and to offer more than the aims of a technical-vocational college curriculum, I maintain that the university education should address students'

questions of meaning, purpose, wisdom, and human destiny and not just their need for technical skills. This should be offered under the umbrella of the humanities, including the religious studies department and is best represented in an academic theology that can inspire students to live a life that facilitates a cross-cultural and inter-religious ethic of human dignity.

Chapter One

The Controversy over the Place of Theology and Spirituality in the Academic Study of Religion

Introduction: The Humanities and the Spiritual Questions of Mortality and Meaning

In *A Confession*, Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy (1884) tells an ancient Eastern tale of the anxiety of the human condition as he sees it. A traveler is running across a field pursued by a ferocious beast. Coming to an empty well, the traveler starts to climb down the well to safety. Halfway toward the bottom, he realizes that a hungry dragon is waiting for him below with open mouth. To save himself he grabs a small branch protruding from a crack in the wall. Dangling helplessly, the traveler begins to feel his strength ebb away. To make matters worse a mouse appears above him and starts to gnaw through the branch. As the poor traveler hangs between these two oblivions he glances up and sees a cluster of berries growing nearby, reaching out, he picks several and swallows them with gusto, How sweet they taste!

Leo Tolstoy views humanity hanging in the well of existence between the mystery of birth and death. “We wait annihilation, while dangling; we pass the time gobbling up the small pleasures that fall to our lot. Then the branch snaps and we plunge into nothingness. We have persevered a certain number of years and by now, if we are lucky we have seen through the façade of society’s values and rewards. The best step is to face these monsters of life and death and choose for ourselves certain *questions*.” These questions are: “What will be the outcome of my life? Why should I live? Why should I do anything? Is there in life any purpose which the inevitable death that awaits me does not undo and destroy?” In the end, he discovered that these two worlds were not as separate as he had imagined, and that it was “this very emptiness, the

terrible sense of nothing happening,” that restored his faith in divine providence. It was at this point he believed is the “time to begin the sacred journey of life, the journey of the soul.”

John Dunne studied various cultures, lives, and religions and tried to discover what it is that is most taken for granted within each of these areas. What Dunne discovered most necessary in a culture or a life or a religion is the culture’s solution to the problem of death. In his book, *The Way of All the Earth*, he puts it this way, “The question of Being in a culture, it seems, is the problem of death, in that culture. What I mean by the ‘problem of death’ is not so much the question of what happens to man after death as the question of ‘what to do in the face of man’s mortality?’ That is, “if a man must die someday, what can he do to satisfy his desire to live?” (p. 70). Dunne’s hypothesis is seemingly correct considering the measures often taken in our culture toward prolonging, preventing, and even by some accounts over obsessing the biological battle with death. One analysis, from a National Medical Care Expenditure Survey, estimated that total health care expenditures during the last six months of life for 2.1 million people amounted to 44.9 billion dollars. (<http://www.trinity.edu/~mkearl/deathmed.html> accessed Jan 2009). Other examples of the financial resources devoted to this cause, reveal that over one half of the federal budget is spent on either death prevention or refining the institutions of death. Such items include; sponsoring environmental controls and clean-ups; requiring health warnings; financing weather apparatuses to monitor and predict severe storms and earthquakes; feasibility studies of nuclear weapons against threatening asteroids; Department of Defense budget; and paying for nearly one-third of the nations’ health care bill (ibid).

Although we undertake tortuous and heroic measures to prolong the last physical signs of life we typically do so without considering the whole well-being of the dying person. The biological cycle of birth, growth, decay, and regeneration is the basic life sustaining process of the planet and is evident throughout nature. Death is a natural part of the cycle of life, and

through direct observation, one can witness that death is the matrix in which new life is born. However, it is possible that with medicine and science controlling the final rite of passage, death and the dying are being stripped of many of its traditional connotations. Whereas, those who are dying are being stripped of their identities, their “inner” self, and their pasts. With continuing advances in technology, symptoms as opposed to whole selves increasingly become the unit of treatment. Death is increasingly perceived to be a “technological phenomenon” that occurs when the medical staff decide that nothing more can be done. As a result, death is decreasingly likely to convey any of the meaning that brought solace to generations past, and the deceased are remembered not for who they were but rather for what killed them.

In the hospital and the nursing home it seems people are too often reduced to their biological self, with no regard to the inner dialogue of their psychological, spiritual self, and are generally treated by strangers. One’s inner dialogue becomes not “who am I”, but rather “what am I?” In these surroundings and under these circumstances, fears of ‘dying’ are replacing the fears of ‘death’. With medicine in control of the final rite of passage, basic cultural fears have alternated from concerns over death to the dying process itself. A latent result of this attitude is that the medicalization of old age has become equated with the dying process. Life expectancy increases would seem to provide the occasion for social celebration. However, these life increases of the elderly are culturally viewed as a social problem.

In view of the perception that most premature deaths are nowadays self-induced, there is a shared sense that such deaths are avoidable and therefore controllable. Ironically, even though the physician has become the cultural expert, formally in charge of an individual’s final rite-of-passage, he or she has little socialization about dying, grieving, and palliative care. The following example is one illustration, from a recent resident at an American hospital, who reflected on his lack of experience with handling a dying patient “there was nothing to do for this young man with

head and neck cancer who was 'end stage.' He was restless and short of breath and he looked terrified and couldn't talk. I didn't know what to do for him, so I patted him on the shoulder, said something inane and left and at 7:00 a.m. he died. *The memory haunts me. I failed to care for him properly because I was ignorant.*" (Emanuel LL, ed, von Gunten CF, ed, Ferris FD, ed. "The Education for Physicians on End-of-Life Care (EPEC) curriculum." Available at: <http://www.EPEC.net>. Accessed Jan 2009)

What was once in most pre-modern religious cultures, an interior, spiritual, and personal journey has now evolved into an exterior, physical, theoretical one. The medical field is without the vocabulary or wherewithal to engage in these matters. Many physicians can recount how poorly prepared they were as students and residents to encounter dying patients and their families. Deficiencies in undergraduate, graduate, and continuing education for end-of-life care reflect a medical culture that defines death as failure and ignores care for dying people as a source of professional accomplishment and meaning (American Board of Internal Medicine, 1996). Fortunately, Professional organizations including the American Medical Association and the American Board of Internal Medicine have launched major educational initiatives directed at both students and established clinicians, and individual medical schools are redesigning their curricula devoted to end-of-life care (National Cancer Institute, 1997).

The Controversy over the Place of Theology and Spirituality in the Academic Study of Religion

Although there are many possibilities, the word "religion" probably comes from the Latin verb *religare*, referring to a sense of being "tied and bound", to what people hold sacred, to whatever powers are believed to govern ones' destiny. The study of religion is first and foremost the study of what people hold sacred. There are many methodologies and interpretative models, used in Religious Studies that provide a structure for the analysis of religious phenomena. My

thesis is oriented by a phenomenological attitude “that seeks to understand the meaning of human actions from the actor’s point of view” (Fasching, “Religious Studies and the Alienation of Theology,” p. 169). One task of the great world religions is to find a way to transform the biological story of human lives from birth to death into a meaningful journey whose destination transcends physical death and the loss of self.

John Dunne suggests that one way to transform the biological story into a meaningful journey is through “dramatic poetry and in the historical and biographical prose of the culture” (*The Way of all the Earth*, p. 70). This is accomplished through the humanities and the students encounter with literature, religious and otherwise. Tolstoy’s encounter with the questions of mortality and meaning is a classic example. Is the question of our mortality and its challenge to meaning a legitimate topic to be addressed in a university curriculum? I shall argue that it is an important question to human beings and that the humanities hold a legitimate place in the university curriculum that addresses these questions.

The primary emphasis of the humanities is to engage in what it is to be human. Humans have a basic need for meaningfulness. If death were understood to be an absolute end, many would find life devoid of meaning. Life would be futile no matter how one lived on earth—whether one was evil or virtuous, selfish, or altruistic—or what one achieved, the conclusion would remain the same: total nothingness and extinction of the self. Throughout most of history, religion has been the social institution controlling the rituals and knowledge associated with this world, and in particular, death. Its message has generally been the same: life does not conclude in this world with death, but rather one is resurrected, reincarnated, absorbed into some collective soul, or moves on to some heaven, hell, or world of shades. Utilizing the stories of the Great World Religions the ultimate goal is to be converted and enlightened. “Each of these types of life story goes with a way of life, and each story or each way of life is an answer to death. By doing

deeds that will live on after his (her) death...by realizing himself (herself) during life, man (woman) defeats death and overcomes his (her) own mortality. Each of these ways of overcoming death," Dunne continues, "is a way of participating in Being. If one looks more closely at man (woman), if one turns from man (woman) in the large as he (she) appears in cultures to man (woman) in the small as he (she) appears in individual lives, one finds further and more far-reaching possibilities. To take an interest in Being," he explains, "is to reflect upon what all beings share upon what is common to all, upon what is most taken for granted." (*The Way of All the Earth*, pp. 69 - 70)

In Wayne Teasdale words', from his book *The Mystic Heart: Discovering a Universal Spirituality in the World's Religion*: "All forms of spirituality prepare us for our eventual encounter with death and what follows, whether this is conceived and experienced as heaven or some form of paradise, transcendence of the human condition, subject to *Samsara* or rebirth, or some other ultimate state of realization" (p. 230). Spirituality, here understood as an exposure of human consciousness to the undefined and the undefinable and is the essence of human beings' hunger for meaning. The wisdom of how to live in the face of death is a question every human being ought to be asking. It is the question the young doctor was ill prepared to ask and answer and so he failed his dying patient. Such unasked and unanswered questions impoverish our experience in all walks of life. Without the humanities these deeply profound and troubling questions go unaddressed in a university education and that failure impoverishes the students who pass through the universities. Too often our students ask only how much they can make *in life* and not often enough do they ask how much they can make *of their life*.

According to several studies of higher education in the United States, the driving force for today's college students has shifted from learning to earning ("Financial Security is Students' Goal - Pay is Bigger Motivator than Learning in College" *Modesto Bee* (CA) – September 2,

2007 author Michelle Hatfield). These studies reveal that the current trend within the public university is that this student emphasis is more in-line with the aims of a technical-vocational school. This may correspond to an uneven balance of the pursuit of a “skill” over and above the development of the “whole” student. Darrell Fasching is one voice among many within the higher education that warns that “a university in which the humanities in their normative modes of reflection are viewed as marginal is a university educating a generation of technological barbarians – those whose knowledge of scientific facts and technological skills are for sale to the highest bidder” (“Religious Studies and the Alienation of Theology,” p.157). I am interested in exploring these “normative modes of reflection” within the humanities, specifically the spiritual dimension of the human personality and the importance they have for the student.

Rachel Kessler, from the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, suggests that one reason for excluding a “spiritual dimension within the secular institution is a mistaken belief that this is required by the separation of church and state.” In the opening of her book, *The Soul of Education*, she surmises that “It has become common practice for teachers to suppress student expression or exploration of their own beliefs, longings, or search for a spiritually meaningful experience” (p. xiv). Kessler’s evaluation of the role of education and the connection to a spiritual variable is that “If we are educating for wholeness, for citizenship and leadership in a democracy, spiritual development belongs in schools. But because we have concerns about separation of church and state...we fear reprisal from ‘the other side’ in a decade of ‘cultural wars,’ educators have been reluctant to develop a methodology and curriculum to directly address this aspect of human growth” (“Nourishing the Inner Life in Schools,” p. 30). Her definition of spiritual incorporates and advances my thesis concerning of spirituality as that which pertains to “...the inner life; to the depth dimension of the human experience; to students’

longings for something more than an ordinary, material, and fragmented existence” (Kessler, *The Soul of Education* , p. X).

She maintains that, “The First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States protects [the] public... from the imposition of any particular worldview or religious practices. Any teacher who espouses spiritual beliefs or who conducts devotional practices in the classroom is indeed violating the ‘non-establishment’ clause. At the same time, the First Amendment protects the rights [of the students]... to *freely express their own beliefs*. Many teachers have tried to be so vigilant about keeping religion out of the classroom that they have unknowingly violated the rights of their students” (ibid, p. xiv). The crux of this dialogue according to Kessler is that, “If we define spirituality in terms of beliefs that one group holds and others do not, we violate the First Amendment by imposing such beliefs through curriculums in public schools.” And in her experience, listening to students for many years has shown her that “there are many experiences that nourish their spiritual development and *yet are not directly related to worldview or religious dogma*. It is her conviction that public institutions *can* honor the First Amendment without abandoning students’ spiritual development” (ibid).

Linell E. Cady, Director of the Center for the Study of Religion and Conflict at Arizona State University, cites the importance of institutional location in addressing these issues. “Given the strong church-state separation in the United States, it is not surprising that scholars of religion at public institutions appear most concerned about sustaining the objectivity of the scholar of religion. Nor is it surprising that private institutions seem to provide a more hospitable context for including the study of religion within the mission of a traditional liberal arts education.” According to Cady, “whereas, before one could point to the private institutions for developing these virtues, aspects of the human spirit, this is presently a limited option according to today’s

matriculation statistics.” In which, “almost eighty percent of students attending institutions of higher education in the United States now attend public institutions” (pp. 10-11).

Furthermore, Dr. Astin, co-author of the UCLA report, “The Spiritual Life of College Students,” discloses that despite the dwindling options available there still remains considerable interest among students to explore their spirituality “...if you dig beneath the surface, you’ll find students have a curiosity in spiritual development”. The UCLA report found that students showed a generous level of religious tolerance and acceptance for those outside their own beliefs and Dr. Astin posits that, “an atheist student needs that just as much as a believer to make sense of their lives and understand themselves better [and that] having an academic basis for it would make it all the more powerful of an experience” (“College Students’ Spiritual Side Fleshed Out in National Study” by Natasha Lee *Los Angeles Times*).

Delwin Brown argues that regardless of these demographic trends the “public university is an appropriate environment for the analysis of religious belief, because it is an open-minded forum interested in the discovery of the diverse aspects of being a human without biases, and how these discoveries can contribute to society in universal discourse towards, ‘all’ individuals regardless of culture, gender, race, or religion”(“Academic Theology in the University” pp. 135 – 136). His position is that, “The academy has become an increasingly influential arbiter of knowledge during the modern period in Western culture” (ibid). The premise of his statement is that “today the university is our culture’s central and most comprehensive producer of knowledge. Individuals, especially young people, who once were educated in homes, religious communities, guilds, community organizations, social movements, and the like, now complete their education in the university” (ibid). He emphasizes, “the massive influence of the university” is “the best argument for including within the academic curriculum the study of any phenomenon of social and cultural importance,” and relates this argument to other studies such as those related

to the “physical world and the social, political, and cultural dimensions of the human world”(ibid). Each of these” he argues “is of such significance that a sensible society cannot afford to exclude them from careful academic scrutiny.” Brown reports that “the same considerations hold for religions, their histories, rituals, organizational structures, and patterns of influence and change - and of course, religious beliefs” (ibid). Darrell Fasching seems to be in agreement with Brown as to the role of the public academy as an “increasingly influential arbiter of knowledge” and suggests that “ there is no neutral, universal public realm of discourse, and that ‘secular’ discourse is just one more narrative tradition of sacred discourse alongside many others.” (“Religious Studies and the Alienation of Theology,” p. 164).

Although, Russell T. McCutcheon is not one necessarily in favor of including a “spiritual” dimension within the disciplines of the Public University, he offers an explanation of Brown’s and Fasching’s views: “we must never fail to recognize that *[all]* scholars are just as deeply involved in the art of rhetoric, contestation, and social formation as anyone else” (“The Study of Religion as an Anthropology of Credibility,” pp. 18-19). “The driving question,” Brown contends, “is not whether this or that ... [religious] outlook is true or truer than others, but how it is to be understood and appraised in relation to the various criteria, conceptual and practical, that are defensible within the academy” (“Academic Theology in the University,” p. 136). For the university to neglect a disciplined examination of theology and spirituality within the academic study of religion would be in Brown’s words as “foolish as excluding an examination of the philosophical presuppositions, economic practices, and gender roles operational in society” (ibid).

Thesis: Theology and Spirituality Are Essential to the Academic Study and Teaching of
Comparative Religions in State Universities

This thesis examines whether the secular institutions of American higher education should address students questions of meaning, purpose, wisdom, and human destiny. That is, it investigates the

place of the normative analysis of religious experience and behavior within the public university. I use the work of Ninian Smart, Russell T. McCutcheon and Ivan Strenski to illustrate the case against the inclusion of theology and spirituality in the academic study of religion. In their view, theology is at best an artifact, like ritual or religious art and not an academic discipline. Conversely, I use the work of Paul Tillich, John Dunne, and Darrell Fasching to argue for the emergence of an academic theology that can play an important role in the contemporary university. In their view, theology and spirituality address the questions appropriately raised by the humanities, and can be done as long as confessional and apologetic strategies are rejected. I will show how their theories help us understand the nature of the academic study of religion to be inclusive of theology and spirituality, and so respond constructively to the negative views of Smart, McCutcheon and Strenski.

My thesis is that, contrary to Smart, McCutcheon and Strenski, theology and spirituality are essential to the academic study and teaching of comparative religions in state universities. If higher education is to achieve the ideals of a liberal arts education and to offer more than the aims of a technical-vocational college curriculum, I maintain that the university education should address students' questions of meaning, purpose, wisdom, and human destiny and not just their need for technical skills. This should be offered under the umbrella of the humanities, including the religious studies department and is best represented in an academic theology that can inspire students to live a life that facilitates a cross-cultural and inter-religious ethic of human dignity. To this end, I will investigate how an individual seeks and finds the answers to what Paul Tillich referred to as ultimate questions such as: Why am I here? Where am I going? What is my purpose? Within these questions one examines their customary conceptions of life, death, knowledge, society, politics, and the world in general. I will explore the question of whether the secular institutions of American higher education should address students' questions of meaning, purpose, wisdom, and human destiny, and the findings of my discovery. The procedure for carrying out the task will be rather straightforward. In order to present this thesis in a

coherent fashion, my argument will be divided into four chapters. This first chapter has set forth the problem and my thesis statement. Chapter Two will investigate three of the leading scholars who consider theology as an artifact and not an academic discipline; beginning with Ninian Smart, who views theology as preaching, typically connected to denominational roots in a community, not as a reputable discipline within the public university. Russell T. McCutcheon advances Smart's observations and believes that the only prospect of theology is to function as a source of data within the anthropological field. Ivan Strenski dismisses theology as a "sophisticated form of confessionalism, cloaked in postmodern garb," and concludes that it is 'too late' to nuance the term, given its deep theistic and confessional ties."

Chapter Three will analyze three important responses to the positions of Smart, McCutcheon and Strenski, beginning with pioneer, Paul Tillich and his model of a theology of culture. Such a theology seeks normative moments in all the religions using the methods of history, philosophy and the social sciences. Followed by John Dunne's theory of passing over and coming back, which he describes as a 'spiritual adventure' attentive to the wisdom found in the lives and literatures of all religions and cultures. Concluding with Darrell Fasching's "alienated theology," a theology that seeks to identify normative insights found in the narratives of hospitality that are found in diverse religions and cultures. Finally, in Chapter Four I will summarize my argument showing how theology and spirituality can make important and essential contributions to religious studies, the humanities, and the curriculum of secular institutions of higher education as a whole.

Chapter Two

Theology as an Artifact not an Academic Discipline

I will begin this section with a brief review of the history of theology. Theology comes from the Greek words *logos* and *theos* which are literally translated as “words about god.” Theology began with the use of the allegorical method to interpret Greek myths. This method was transferred to Hellenistic Judaism, especially by Philo of Alexandria, a Neo-Platonist, whose intent was to bridge both the Jewish and Hellenistic worlds. The Christian Neo-Platonists, such as Clement and Origen of Alexandria, in turn adopted the allegorical method to assimilate Jewish and Christian myth. When Jewish Hellenism died out what remained was the application of philosophical reason to beliefs about God and the rational illumination of theism towards the development of a Christian theology. The great figures of Christian Theology include Origen, Augustine of Hippo, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Søren Kierkegaard, Karl Barth, and Paul Tillich to name a few.

Theology, as an academic discipline emerged with the rise of medieval universities during the 12th and 13th Centuries. It had the status of “queen of sciences” due to the interdependent nature of the discipline, employing and governing all other disciplines towards the rational interpretation of religious substance, albeit exclusively Christian. It became less legitimate with the rise of the enlightenment. New intellectual ideals arose focusing on autonomy of the scholar, open inquiry, and empirical studies, rather than appeal to ‘authoritative sources’ (Cady and Brown, *Religious Studies, Theology, and the University*, p.3). Immanuel Kant was an important figure in the evolution of theological studies in the academic environment. In his work entitled, *The Conflict of Faculties*, Kant argued for the distinction of philosophical studies from

professional studies. With this, the university focused on liberal art studies, while professional schools focused on disciplines like law, medicine, and theology. In the United States, the study of religion was usually found in theology departments in private, religiously affiliated universities and colleges. The academic study of religion in public universities did not begin until the 1960's. The distinction between religious studies and theology was established to allow the inclusion of the study of religion as a university discipline, defined as teaching *about* religion, whereas theology is identified as the teaching *of* religion. Many theologians transferred into the field of religious studies, and presented theology as a human science. This is when the debate began that paired theology and religious studies against each other" (Ibid).

Linell Cady and Delwin Brown, remark that the discipline of theology in the North America context has been largely a Christian theology, due to the dominance of Christianity in the West. Therefore, religious studies had primarily emerged to some extent within, and to some extent over against the Christian theological inquiry. Although, "theology" sometimes presupposes the Christian modifier, reflecting the historic roots of the discipline, they believe, "it has increasingly been appropriated to identify a form of intellectual reflection within other world religions, such as Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism, and more amorphous religious/cultural traditions such as post-Christian and New Age." They also recognize that there are problems with the global extension of the term "religion" beyond its Western roots. Nevertheless, they speculate that "the migration of the term "theology" beyond its Christian prototype does have interesting implications for the issue of its relationship to religious studies and the university in an increasingly global environment" (Ibid, p.12).

There are a wide range of positions regarding the boundary between religious studies and theology, and their appropriate institutional locations. However there are basically two major factions: on one camp scholars believe that religious studies should be restricted to the social

scientific study of religion, and the other that religious studies should balance the scientific approach with the humanities; such as, literature, drama, art, language, philosophy, history, and theology. Religious studies “is construed as a social science that belongs within the university. Theology, on the other hand, is viewed as a form of spiritual instruction that belongs within an ecclesiastical or religious community concerned with personal formation. The presumption,” Cady and Brown state, “is that religious studies is (or more accurately, perhaps, should exclusively be) an objective, empirical form of study, and theology, a subjective, religious activity. This mutually defining dialectic, or close variants,” according to them, “has provided the basis for the self-understanding and justification of religious studies within the modern university: legitimated the displacement or marginalization of theology from the university to the seminary or divinity school; and , in consequence, heavily influenced the character and conversation partners of theology in the modern period” (Ibid, p.2).

Ninian Smart: Theology is not a Reputable Academic Discipline

One major voice for the social scientific approach is the influential former President of the American Academy of Religion, Ninian Smart. According to Smart, “Religious Studies, as conceived and developed during the 1960’s and beyond, is the multidisciplinary or poly-methodic study of religions and analogous institutionalized ideologies. Religious studies, is secular, impartial and empathetic” (Smart, “Religious Studies and Theology,” in *The Council of Societies for the Study of Religion Bulletin* 25, no. 3 September 1997: pp.66-68). In Smart’s view theology is an artifact not an academic discipline. He believed that theology is religious, partisan and apologetic. Theology, “typically connects to denominational roots in a community” (Ibid). That is, he adds, “theologies and theologians are data which religious studies scholars sometimes study, alongside of texts, ritual, archeological artifacts, etc” (Ibid). He saw the distinction between the two as explaining religion versus preaching it. Religious studies, “is empirical,

descriptive, explanatory and methodologically agnostic. Engaging in religious studies,” he tells us, “is like holding up a mirror to the religions of the world, it reflects them but makes no assumptions, leaving that to each individual beholder” (Ibid). Religious studies is “non-finite.” Its subject matter is inherently open-ended so as to permit further development of its methods and subject matter, as opposed to theology, which he claims is a faith-based and church related activity. Theology is “essentially preaching” no matter how sophisticated it gets. He believed that the difference between religious studies and theology is that the first uses “descriptive studies” and the latter is based on “value judgments” and “anyone who cannot tell the difference is ‘unprofessional.’ Theology, he surmised “is what it has always been and it must not claim to be something else in order to be smuggled into the religious studies field” (ibid.)

Russell T. McCutcheon: Theology as Data

Standing on the same end of the continuum as Smart is Russell McCutcheon who, perhaps unaware, emphasizes Smart’s comments when he italicizes the following statement in his article, “The Study of Religion as an Anthropology of Credibility,” that “...*all theologians are fair game as data*” (p. 14). For McCutcheon, “theology constitutes part of the ‘data’ that scholars of religion seek to theorize and any perceived overlap simply reflects a failure to distinguish the markedly different order of question each addresses.” McCutcheon, a disciple of Smart’s through Donald Wiebe, argues that “a clear line of demarcation separate religious studies and theology, in theory if not in practice and the intellectual credibility of religious studies depends upon protecting the viability of this line” (Cady and Brown, *Religious Studies, Theology, and the University*, p 2). There are many academics in religious studies departments like McCutcheon, “who oppose the inclusion of theology in religious studies because it blurs this line between the two studies and therefore weakens their position as a legitimate discipline within the secular community. Significantly, the wall separating theology from the academic study of religion in

McCutcheon's conceptual landscape also functions to separate the humanities interpreter of religion who, in his view, essentially "reinscribes the emic perspective, from a more anthropological variant of the academic study of religion" (Ibid, p 6). McCutcheon treats the humanities, in the same light as Smart in he sees it as just another form of preaching.

Ivan Strenski: Theology as Confessionalism Cloaked in Postmodern Garb

Ivan Strenski similar to Russell McCutcheon is a proponent of maintaining the boundary between religious studies and theology. Arguing that "a clear line of demarcation separates religious studies and theology, and the intellectual credibility of religious studies depends upon protecting the viability of this line" (Ibid, p. 6). He dismisses the recent challenge to this boundary inclusive of a more theological spectrum "as a sophisticated form of confessionalism, cloaked in fashionable postmodern garb," and the other he considers "a form of hermeneutics, perfectly appropriate within religious studies but not distinctively theological." Reflecting on the various senses of the term theology and the motivations for seeking to retain it, he concludes that it is "too late to nuance the term, given its deep theistic and confessional ties" (Ibid). "Theology cannot escape its home generative context in real religious discourse. In the university... 'theology' can never be the banner under which students of religion might unite because, rightly or wrongly, the term raises too many suspicions" (34). He does however offer a suggestion "as a possible distinctive role for a properly rehabilitated theology within the university. That is not to reshape theology into religious studies rather seek what theologians have contributed to the religious tradition in which they had a part and to assume the place in religious studies that many of us wait for them to occupy" (43).

In concluding this chapter, I am in agreement with Strenski, Smart, and McCutcheon, that there is no place for confessional (church related) theology within the state universities. However, without going into great detail, they and other functional reductionists are anti-phenomenological. That is, these scholars are of the mindset that religion can, in every case, be reduced to some other root cause. Or, more brusquely stated by McCutcheon, "...unlike the theologian, for the scholar of religion qua anthropologist of credibility there is nothing religious about religion" ("The Study of Religion as an Anthropology of Credibility," p. 26). Of course, if this is how one defines religion, theology, whether academic or not, has no place within religious studies. Further, any attempt to justify doing so is at the risk of undermining the integrity of religious studies. For those that do not pre-suppose the existence of an ultimate reality or ultimate power, normalizing endeavors, be they academic or otherwise, are vacuous, even foolish, exercises. For McCutcheon, religious studies has long been trying to prove and maintain its credibility in the academy. As he notes in his essay, "...every new generation of academic intent on studying religion as nothing more or less than human behavior will have to keep reinventing the wheel so as to retain a space in the public university for their brand of scholarship" (McCutcheon, "The Study of Religion as an Anthropology of Credibility," pp.13-14). This statement speaks volumes as to the chasm between the two camps; it is as if they are speaking of two distinct topics. In many ways, they are. In the end, whereas Smart saw the line of theology and religious studies "blurred" and McCutcheon admits that they are "intimately related" it is Strenski, perhaps more than the other two, who offers the most clarity into the ongoing dispute within the academic study of religion. Strenski believes that the serious differences over the relation of theology, "run deep" that neither side of the debate "has succeeded in understanding one another as much as we would like and that both are "insufficiently clear about how best to join the issues" (Ibid). In the following chapter, I will present three leading scholars who Strenski

calls the “folk on the opposite side of the debate,” and their views on how they reason theology would best be represented within the public university discourse.

Chapter Three

Academic Theology and the Quest for Wisdom in the Humanities

Theology of Culture: Paul Tillich's Proposal for an Academic Theology

The path to finding spiritual wisdom is a personal inner journey into the core of the interiority of all humankind. My thesis identifies this as an aspect of the holy. No discussion of the holy within an academic setting can take place without some mention of Rudolf Otto's "*Das Heilige*," *The Idea of the Holy*. For it is through Otto's definition of the holy "as that which commands our respect, as that whose real value is to be acknowledged inwardly" as a "combined, complex category...of both rational and non-rational components ...referred to something still deeper than the 'pure reason'... named the *fundus animae*, the 'bottom' or 'ground of the soul'" that my thesis has employed to identify the Holy, (p. 51 & 112). The idea of the Holy unfolded throughout this thesis follows along Otto's, as a "category of interpretation and valuation peculiar to the sphere of religion" (p. 5). Therefore the greater part of my thesis takes place within the background of religious studies. The irony to those who are familiar with Otto's work, "*Das Heilige*", is that he found the term Holy no longer accurate nor suitable to reflect the true essence of his Idea of the Holy. So much so, that he chose to eliminate the term altogether and renamed it "numinous". My thesis is in agreement with Otto to the extent that the term has lost some of its effectiveness; however, one task I will undertake will be to retain the integrity of its meaning.

The religious sphere for Otto, as for many, is distinctive and "set apart" from the culture as a whole. As a matter fact, in Hebrew (qadosh) the word 'holy' signifies being "set apart". However, one scholar who did not completely agree with this conclusion was Paul Tillich.

According to Fasching, Tillich saw the sphere of religion not so much as being an exclusive sphere of culture but rather as a depth dimension that underlies all cultural activities...whether that culture assumes a 'religious' or as 'secular' guise" (Fasching, "Religious Studies and the Alienation of Theology," p. 162). In this section I will contemplate this view and consult Paul Tillich and his model of "theology of culture" as well as his identification of the depth and ground of being and how this is applicable to the expression of the Holy, theology, and spirituality. In the remainder of this chapter, I shall discuss John Dunne's theory of passing over and coming back, heretofore mentioned as a "spiritual adventure", concluding with Darrell Fasching's assessment of the role an "alienated theology" could play to the development of an academic theology.

Paul Tillich argues that while in the past, theology was confessional, the present requires a new way of doing theology, an academic theology. "Theology is not a historical discipline; it is a constructive task. It does not tell us what people have thought the ... message to be in the past; rather it tries to give us an interpretation of the ... message which is relevant to the present situation" (*Systematic Theology*, p.4). Theology, as Tillich insists, is about "that which concerns us ultimately. Theology must consider the creative interpretation of existence, an interpretation which is carried on in every period of history" (ibid). Theology deals with "the meaning of being for us (rather than philosophy that deals with the structure of being in itself.)" (Ibid, p. 22). "Nothing can be of ultimate concern for us which does not have the power of threatening and saving our being...the term 'being' means the whole of human reality, the structure, the meaning, and the aim of existence"(Ibid, p. 14). "A statement is 'theological' not because it relates to a particular B/being called 'God', but because it asks *ultimate* questions about the meaning of existence: it asks what, at the level of *theos*, at the level of its deepest mystery, is the reality and significance of our life." (Robinson, *Honest to God*, p. 49).

Tillich evaluated the possibilities for the emergence of an academic form of theology in his 1920 paper entitled, "On the Idea of a Theology of Culture." He was the first to propose a non-church, secular based academic model for theology, called a "theology of culture." Theology of culture, according to Tillich is a theology which "emphasizes that the religious dimension is present in all spiritual and intellectual life" (*Systematic Theology*, p.42). A theologian of culture defines its subject matter not as "God" or "revelation" or even "dogma" but rather as the study and critique of human religious experience (i.e., of the sacred in all its diversity). In this, his first ever published work, the concern that preoccupied Tillich was the function of theology in a modern, secularized, scientific culture, and the place of theology among the faculties of the modern university. He recognized that the academic study of religion changed the way in which one would have to do theology. That is, "academic theology could not be 'Christian theology' in any traditional sense" and "only when theology is understood as a "normative branch of knowledge concerned with religion can it find its place in the secular university" (*What is Religion?* p.180). It is noteworthy to mention that although he started his career attempting to move beyond his apologetic, church theologian beliefs, toward an academic theology through his theology of culture, he did not embrace it but remained an apologetic theologian for most of his life.

Tillich established four assumptions on the connection and correspondence of individual revelation and religion and the possible relationship between religious meaning and culture. "First, one must say that revelatory experiences are universally human. Religions are based on something that is given to a man (woman) wherever he lives" (p. 81). His (her) second assumption states "that revelation is received by man (woman) in terms of his finite human situation." That is, "man (woman) is biologically, psychologically, and sociologically limited. Revelation is received under the condition of man's (woman's) estranged character. It is always

received in distorted form.” Third, one must accept the relationship of revelation to its limits. The fourth assumption is of particular interest towards understanding the foundation for such revelatory universalistic significant experiences originating from within the Holy. According to Tillich, the experience of the holy de-sacralizes and calls into question the sacredness as sacramental in three distinct ways. The three critical expressions of the holy oppose the way things are with the way things ought to be. Such criticism takes three forms: the mystical, the prophetic, and the secular. Within the mystical, there is a type of mysticism that criticizes the sacred metaphysically or ontologically, declaring that the holy is radically different or “wholly other” than this world and therefore cannot be identified with any finite thing. Specifically Tillich points out that, “the mystical movement means that one is not satisfied with any of the concrete expressions of the Ultimate or Holy. One goes beyond them. Man (woman) goes to the one beyond any manifoldness. The embodiments are justified. They are accepted but they are secondary. One must go beyond them in order to reach the highest, the Ultimate itself” (ibid, p. 87). Secondly, the prophetic is a critique of the ethical danger of identifying the finite (one’s particular way of life) as ultimate in being and value. This identification leads to treating one’s sacred way of life as beyond all criticism. Lastly, the secular is the ethical critique of the irrationality of the sacred and calls into question the demonic irrationality that allows religions and cultures to teach hatred and prejudice toward others (strangers) and call it good because doing so serves what is sacred, or because “God commands it” (Ibid, p. 89).

Tillich reminds us that, “we are all at the same time going through this secularism... the daily work going on [the] campus and elsewhere is based on the secularism of the Western world, stemming from the Renaissance. We cannot escape it. There can be very solid expressions of ultimate concern in secular language. That is, they *can* be this as long as a religious substance remains effective in them despite the secularization, or as long as the ultimate concern or the

‘infinite passion’ is still in them and shines through them”(pp. 34 – 36). This “infinite passion” that Tillich speaks of is what I have identified as one aspect of the Holy. The comparative experiences of the Holy across cultures is one emphasis of an academic theology. Tillich believed that the “key to the theological understanding of a cultural creation is its style. There is a style of thought, of politics, of said life, etc, and the style of the period expresses itself in its cultural forms, in its choice of objects, in the attitudes of its creative personality, in its institutions and customs. It requires religions intention, on the basis of an ultimate concern, to look into the depth of style, to penetrate to the level where an ultimate concern exercises its driving power. This is what is demanded of the theologian of culture, and in performing this function he opens up a creative source for theology” (*Systematic Theology*” p.40).

Over time, the Holy became slowly the morally good, or the philosophically true, and later the scientifically true, or the aesthetically expressive.” But then, according to Tillich, “a profound dialectic appears. The secular shows its inability to live by itself. The secular which is right in fighting against the domination by the Holy, becomes empty and becomes victim of what I call ‘quasi-religions’” (*The Significance of the History of Religions for the Systematic Theologian*, p. 90). He sees “quasi-religions” as inadequate to overcome the sense of separation and estrangement of man (woman), “because they grow out of a victorious secularism” (Donald Mackenzie Brown, “Ultimate Concern - Tillich in Dialogue,” p. 38). He defines secularism here as “a means of turning toward the cultural productions of the finite and in doing so, producing philosophy, sciences, and politics independent of their religious source” (*The Essential Tillich: An Anthology of the Writings of Paul Tillich* By Paul Tillich, F. Forrester Church, 1999, p. 199). These “quasi-religions” “lose their relationship to the ultimate sources (the Holy) of meaning,” and consequently, he believes “they become empty,” and “provoke or invite other forces to enter into it” (ibid). And this emptiness is according to Tillich the danger of “the loss of meaning,

because of the turning of the mind toward the production of cultural goods in autonomous ways - autonomous, in the sense of following the independent forms of these various cultural ideas (aesthetic, logical, ethical, political) and thus losing the religious substance [the Holy] which underlies all of them at the point of their highest creativity” (ibid). One must recognize that there are “elements in the experience of the Holy which are always there, if the Holy is experienced.” (*The Significance of the History of Religions*, p. 86).

Tillich derives that the lasting necessity of religion is the fact that “religion is the substance of culture, and religion’s intentionality is toward substance, which is the unconditional source and abyss of meaning, and cultural forms serve as symbols of that substance. Culture’s intentionality is toward the form representing unconditional meaning” (“*On the Boundary*” p.70). Every culture, Tillich argues, “is driven by its religious substance, which is the human need for meaning expressed and embodied in its ultimate concern. (i.e., what matters most or is held sacred). The way in which such meaning is expressed is shaped by the symbolic forms available in the culture. The religious dimension is revealed not by the content in itself (whether it is scientific, political, economical, or artistic activity, etc...) but rather by the meaning attributed to the content through symbolic forms of expression (the narratives and ritual actions that convey the power and importance of these activities)” (ibid). “Ritual acts, forms and attributes do not contradict a ‘passion for the secular’ if they are understood for what they are, symbolic forms in which the religious substance that supports our entire existence is represented in an unique way. The meaning of a ritual or sacramental act is not that the act is holy in itself, but that it is a symbol of the Unconditional which alone is holy and which is and is not, in all things at the same time” (Ibid, p.73). “In the presence of the Unconditional ... there is no preferred sphere. There are no persons, scriptures, communities, institutions, or actions that are holy in themselves. The profane can profess the quality of holiness, and the holy does not cease to be profane. It seems to

me that the unconditional character of religion becomes far more manifest if it breaks out from within the secular, disrupting and transforming it. It is a question, rather, of their openness to the holy, the sacred, in the unfathomable depths of even the most secular relationship” (pp. 46-48).

Tillich viewed the task of the theologian of culture to identify and critique the religious dimension implicit in all cultures, including secular culture. “The (systematic) theologian can interpret that which transcends all possible systems, the self-manifestation of the divine mystery, in a systematic form” (Ibid, p.68). The powers struggling with one another in history can be given different names according to the perspective from which they are viewed. The critique draws upon a typology of possible relations between religious meaning and culture, namely, the typology of heteronomy, autonomy, and theonomy. “First, autonomy asserts that man (woman) as the bearer of universal reason is the source and measure of culture and religion, in other words, that he (she) is his (her) own law. Second, heteronomy asserts that man (woman), being unable to act according to universal reason, must be subjected to a law, strange and superior to him (her). Third, theonomy asserts that the superior law is, at the same time, the innermost law of man (woman) himself (herself), rooted in the divine ground contained within man’s (woman’s) ground, in which, the law of life transcends man (woman), although it is, at the same time, his (her) own” (*Writings in the Philosophy of Culture*, By Paul Tillich, Michael F. Palmer, p. 199).

Applying these concepts to the relationship between religion and culture, Tillich called an autonomous culture, the attempt to create the forms of personal and social life without any reference to something ultimate and unconditional, following only the demands of theoretical and practical rationality, and this he relates to the secular. A heteronomous culture, on the other hand, subjects the forms and laws of thinking and acting to authoritative criteria of an ecclesiastical religion or a political quasi-religion, even at the price of destroying the structures of rationality, and relates with some particular institution, such as the Church. Finally, a theonomous culture

expresses in its creations an ultimate concern and a transcending meaning not as something strange but as its own spiritual ground, and relates to a theology of culture (ibid). “Theonomy is not about God “*Theos*” as a dogmatic category but about the experienced demand for self-transcendence, both individual and communal. In this context theology is understood within an academic discipline in the modern university as all authentic experiences of self-transcendence, whether construed in theistic or non-theistic terms. The task of theology of culture is not to impose some arbitrary dogmatic heteronomous religious vision on culture, but to release the inner drive toward self-transcendence already at work in every sphere of culture. It is the question put to every answer, the utopian inner drive for meaning and understanding that can break through any given form and transform any and every sphere of cultural activity” (Fasching, “Religious Studies and the Alienation of Theology,” p. 164).

Tillich affirms in his article, “The Significance of the History of Religions for the Systematic Theologian,” concerning theonomy and the relationship between religion and culture, that “the history of religions in its essential nature does not exist alongside the history of culture. The sacred does not lie beside the secular, but it is its depths. The sacred is the creative ground and at the same time, a critical judgment of the secular. But the religious can be this only if it at the same time, a judgment on itself, a judgment which must use the secular as a tool of one’s own religious self-criticism”(p. 82). “For the first time in the history of civilization, human beings have come to realize that they do not live directly in nature but rather in culture that is to say, language and story , not in a divinely constructed natural order but a humanly constructed social order” (Fasching, “Religious Studies and the Alienation of Theology,” p. 162). The way in which meaning is expressed within this new order is shaped by these narratives and symbols available in culture. Consequently, natural theology would have to be replaced by theology of culture. Paul Tillich lays it out this way, “Let us therefore forget these concepts, as concepts, and try to find

their genuine meaning within our own experience” (*The Shaking of the Foundations*, p. 46). “We all know that we cannot separate ourselves at any time from the world to which we belong. There is no ultimate privacy or final isolation. We are always held and comprehended by something that is greater than we are, that has a claim upon us, and that demands response from us. The most intimate motions within the depths of our souls are not completely our own.” These, Holy, ‘intimate motions’, “belong also to our friends, to mankind, to the universe, and to the Ground of all being, the aim of our life. The centre of our whole being is involved in the centre of all being; and the centre of all being rests in the center of our being”(ibid). In his final lecture, “On the Significance of the History of Religions for the Systematic Theologian,” Tillich hypothesized that “religion is not a special function of man’s spiritual life, but it is the dimension of depth in all of its functions, within the Ground of Being.” (p. 86). When Tillich speaks of “depth”, he is not speaking of another being *at all*. He is speaking of the “infinite and inexhaustible depth and ground of all being” (ibid). My thesis identifies this “Ground of Being” as a characteristic of the holy, in-line with an earlier reference to Otto who identified the non-rational elements of the Holy to something still deeper than the pure reason, the *fundus animae*, the bottom or ground of the soul. One of the keys of my thesis is in positioning the realm of the holy, to exist simultaneously and in a complementary way within the different dimensions of human experience. The theoretical deployment of Tillich’s theology of culture, understood as reasoned discourse about an Ultimate Concern that grasps or binds an individual, culture, religion, or whole nation in the experience of the Holy within the finite through the depth and ground of being is one of the places where my thesis identifies a way theology and spirituality can be recognized in a cross-cultural inter-religious way within the public institutions of American higher education.

Despite proposing an academic theology of the history of religions, Tillich never fully developed the theological model he first prepared in 1920. He spoke of his own theological stance

as being “on the boundary” between Christianity and secular culture, between Christianity and other religions, etc. In spite of his “academic theology” proposals, he never quite became the free agent he envisioned at the beginning of this career. In his last published paper shortly before his death, he returned to his apologetic Christian beliefs, envisioning a tentative Christological center to what he called “The Religion of the Concrete Spirit” (*The Significance of the History of Religions*, p.87). The dilemma he faced it seems was how to speak from a concrete standpoint and still be a free agent open to other experiences of transcendence. In the next section, we will investigate John Dunne’s spiritual methodology of ‘passing over’ as a viable option for advancing Tillich’s theology of culture, experiencing, expressing, and conveying the “non-rational elements of the Holy” as a bridge over to the academic discipline of theology in the public institution.

John Dunne’s Model of Spiritual Theology as Academic Theology

John Dunne’s book, *The Way of All the Earth*, is in his words “The third phase of a personal journey”. In the first phase he engaged in what he called “passing over” to other cultures, in terms of their answers to their questions about death discussed in his work, “*The City of Gods*”. In the second phase, “*In Search for God in Time and Memory*,” his concern of culture’s answers for the questions of death led him to the individual’s “life story” within Western Culture and is when he began to use the term “passing over” as is related to this thesis. In *The Way of All the Earth*, he culminates his study to include different standpoints of the individual life story, found in the diverse religions and cultures of the world. We will be most attentive to his methodology for a spiritual odyssey that involves a passing from one’s individual standpoint over into another’s life, culture, and religion. Equally important in this “adventure” is returning back, back to one’s individual standpoint. The goal of which is that one will gain new insight into one’s own culture, one’s own way of life, and one’s own religion, as well as the others’.

If one passes over from one religion to another one is set apart upon an inner journey. This journey towards an inner peace is experienced as collective, shared Holiness expressed within the Ground of Being not found in any one of the religions alone. This inner journey is that of a man in pursuit of wisdom who is willing to find wisdom not only in the Gospel, if he has been brought up as a Christian, but also in the Dharma and the Koran. Choosing this way of life would mean turning “whatever specific way of life one chooses into a path of prayer or voyage of discovery [then] living by the discoveries and understanding which one obtains on that path or voyage” (p. 126). A further realization that the being towards which one is becoming is not purely personal, that is a shared being, comes about as one passes over from one’s own life and culture and religion to other lives, cultures, religions and returns to a more comprehensive understanding of one’s own. This Dunne claims, “places him at a distance from all the religions, even the one to which he travels... therefore, reflecting as it does his own heart, mind, and soul and will not necessarily be the traditional path by which his religion was spread” (p. 130). This could be the focus of all inner journeys to what we all share, the *axis mundi*, and the ground of being.

Gandhi’s life and his work is the inspiration for Dunne’s methodology, particularly, Gandhi’s autobiography, *Experimenting with Truth*, and his application of allegory. According to Dunne, “The holy man of our time, it seems, is not a figure like Gotama or Jesus or Mohammed, a man who could found a world religion, but a figure like Gandhi, a man who passes over by sympathetic understanding from his own religion to other religions and comes back again with new insight to his own” (*The Way of All the Earth*, p. ix). Buddha, Mohammad, and Jesus are studied by Dunne and the location of the common (Holy) “spiritual” components within each of the Great World Religions as expressed through these religious founders. However in the course of his studies he began to recognize that the spiritual experiences on which the religions were based were common experiences shared by all, and the uncommon thing was the insight of the

religious founders, not the experiences, that is specifically their “enlightenments” and “revelations” (p. xii). This section will identify those experiences, and present a theory connected to understanding Dunne’s theory of passing over and coming back, as a spiritual adventure. Consequently, this section will disclose that one way the spiritual is manifested is through what Dunne calls passing over in relation to Tillich’s understanding of an ultimate concern for Depth and Ground of Being. The spiritual adventure for our times is a passing over to another’s Ground of Being through narratives into the depths of the other and returning back enlightened with compassion to the underlying meaning that lie outside the narrative itself.

Let us recall, by way of review, that when Tillich speaks of God in the depths, he is not speaking of another being at all. He is speaking of the infinite and inexhaustible depth and ground of all being, of our ultimate concern, of what we take seriously without reservation not only to the depths of our personal life but to the deepest springs of our social and historical existence. Dunne’s understanding of the relationship between the depth and ground of being appears similar to that imagined by Tillich and useful as a gateway to human interiority. “A depth can appear in the most common human experiences, an abyss which opens like a narrow and bottomless crevice at crucial points in a human life. A man leaps over the abyss as he goes from one stage of life to another. He crosses over the abyss by ‘sympathetic understanding’ to another human being and crosses over again in coming back to himself” (pp. xii – xiii). This “opening” that Dunne speaks of could be the gateway into where Tillich located “the center of our whole being...involved in the center of all being; and the centre of all being rests in the center of our being” (“On the Significance of the History of Religions for the Systematic Theologian,” p. 86). That is a characteristic common to all humanity. By incorporating Dunne’s notion of passing over into Tillich’s Depth and Ground of Being, one may be able to locate the Holy within oneself’ and also recognize the Holy within the other. This could be, to utilize a religious

metaphor, a type of Jacob's ladder, in which one enters through their individual Ground of Being into the Holy and gains access from the Holy into another's Ground of Being and vice-versa. In this way the spiritual adventure, the journey is through the embodiment of the holy into the Ground of Being. "The spiritual adventure of our time," according to Jung, "is the exposure of human consciousness to the undefined and the undefinable" (*The Way of All the Earth*, p. 112). This is the journey Dunne would persuade us to embark upon however he believes that "to expose one's consciousness to new experience and understanding would be exposing it to something undefined but nevertheless definable. The constant exposure to what is undefined but definable which occurs as one goes through life, taking each new stage of life as further experience and finding in it a further understanding of things, is rather a journey with God" (Ibid, p.113). God, here following Tillich, is a symbol for the depths of your life, of the source of your being, of your ultimate concern, of what is taken seriously without any reservation.

Dunne would have his readers "imagine two figures on a road walking together into the distance. As long as the daylight lasts the two can be seen walking side by side. As the night comes on, however, it becomes difficult to distinguish them any longer. As the darkness grows the two seem to merge into one. Say the two figures are man and God. Say the day's journey is the course of man's life from birth to death." This "merging of the two figures at nightfall, in man's death," according to Dunne "suggests the famous sentence of the Upanishads, 'You are that' (*tat tvam asi*)... the sentence could mean he postulates that 'You are what God is'...The experience which leads to statements like these is the inspiration for "passing over, passing over to other men and passing over to God. Passing over to other men, passing into their ground of being, entering into their lives by sympathetic understanding is an experience of sympathy and resonance." That, he states "means finding within yourself something corresponding to what you see in another. It leads to the general discovery that you have within yourself everything that

exists in every other man..." (ibid, p. 219). This creative power at work in man's life is according to Dunne what God is, "and that this power's aim, its vision of man, is what man is" (p. 228). In other words, it means, Dunne believes "that I have within me the basis for understanding not only other human beings but also all other living beings indeed all beings that the creative power at work in my life is the same power which is at work in other human lives and in all lives and existences" (p. 231). This creative power is a manifestation of the holy. "The same creative power seems to be at work in time as mankind goes from prehistory to history, as the world religions arise, and as mankind goes on from history to world history. The same creative power seems to be at work as the inorganic world becomes an organic world and as the organic world becomes a human world" (ibid). Tillich reveals a corresponding "creative nature" a "*natura naturans*, the creative ground of all natural objects." He is aware that "In modern naturalism the religious quality of these affirmations has almost disappeared, especially among philosophizing scientists who understand nature in terms of materialism and mechanisms" (Robinson, *Honest to God*, p. 31).

Dunne believes that all of humanity can share in the "creative" common experiences of humankind. "The technique of passing over is based on the process of eliciting images from one's feelings attaining insight into the images, and turning insight into a guide of life." The one condition to passing over is "essentially, a matter of sympathetic understanding; a man must have within him somehow what he finds in another." That is, to "become receptive to the images, which give expression to his feelings, attain insight into those images and then come back enriched by this insight to an understanding of one's own life which can guide one into the future" (*The Way of All the Earth*, p. 53). One way to elicit images from one's feelings is rooted in experience, for, if we don't experience it ourselves, we cannot speak of it. The ultimate experience shared by all of humanity is the problem of death expressed in the questions of

Ultimate Concern. “Passing over to others...means finding within yourself something corresponding to what you see in another. It leads to the general discovery that you have within yourself everything that exists in every other man,” for example the questions of ultimate concern. “The other half of the process, nevertheless, the coming back to one’s own life and one’s own way of life, indicates that the individual returns to himself. One passes over to the life of another, but then one comes back to one’s own life enriched. This coming back is a return to self” (p. 56).

The Great World Religions are one place many seek for the answers to the Questions of Ultimate Concern. Dunne’s investigation guided him to the founders, behind these religions, through the spiritual paths of Jesus’ (“The Way”), Buddha, (“Middle Path”), and Mohammad, (“Straight Path”) and their unique insights. Through their revelation and enlightenment many have found what they did in their holy center of stillness. That which filled the void of the emptiness they experienced within their Depth and Ground of Being brought up the ultimate questions of concern. “When one passes over to the lives of Gotama, Jesus, and Mohammad, one must finally come back to one’s own life...in the process of coming back, and that is finally to come back to the autobiographical standpoint itself, they share these same experiences of revelation and enlightenment” (Ibid, p. xii). “This convergence we are envisioning,” Dunne sums up, “does not involve the deliberate choice of a single standpoint. It consists rather in a mutual understanding, a going over from one standpoint to another. The peace it would lead to, accordingly, is not a ‘tranquility of order,’ as in the classic definition, at least not a tranquility of order arising from the establishments of a single perspective. It is the tranquility of an inner order, and it leads to the tranquility of an outer order” (ibid, p. 129). This “inner peace” Dunne is referring to is “contained within each of the great religions, the peace within man, which leads to

an outer peace, a peace among men, but by different paths, reflecting the different lives of the founders” (ibid).

In Dunne’s opening chapter of *The Way of All the Earth*, he postulates that, “the religions of Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam, have ceased to seem new and revealing, and “men began searching once again to find about themselves for themselves and from themselves.” He points out that in the wake of Christianity, the “newest disclosures of man, and of God too, seem to be found in personal documents rather than scriptures,” almost as though, “personal religion and personal creeds had replaced the great religions and the common creeds.” He discovered that there is a way “of finding about man and God that seems to combine the way of religions and that of memoirs” (p. 3). Dunne spoke of Gandhi’s “experiments with truth” as one such example of personal discovery for truth within a central Hindu scripture, the *Bhagavad-Gita*. The story of the *Bhagavad Gita* is embedded in the *Mahabharata*, an epic about King Bharata and his descendents, King Pandu and his sons, including Arjuna. When Arjuna’s father dies, his uncle, Dhritarashtra, takes the throne and his sons try to cheat Arjuna and his four brothers out of their rightful half of the kingdom. It is to right this wrong that Arjuna finds himself on the battle field where he agonizes about whether he should be killing his own cousins. He finds himself engaged in a dialogue with his chariot driver; Krishna whom we later learn is really the incarnation of the all-highest deity, Vishnu – Lord of Life and Death. Arjuna agonizes because he neither wants to kill nor be killed. He is caught in a “double bind” because as a *Kshatriya* warrior his caste duty (*Karma* yoga) is to fight injustice but it is also considered immoral to kill your caste/family members. So he is damned if he does and damned if he doesn’t so to speak. Either way he surmises he accrues negative *karma*. Krishna’s task, according to Hindu lore, is to help Arjuna see the illusion of the self (*jiva*) and his true identity as *Brahman* or *Purusa*. If he realizes his true identity he will realize that his true self, like all other selves, is never born and never dies then he

will no longer fear death, whether it is his own dying or taking the life of others. The essence of Krishna's teaching is that as long as Arjuna does his duty without thought of personal gain, he will not accrue negative *karma* and can still achieve *moksha* or liberation. The lesson of this vision is that it is not he, Arjuna, that determines who lives and who dies but Vishnu, the Lord of life and death. At the end of the Gita, Arjuna is transformed and stands up ready to do his duty and fight (Fasching and deChant, *Comparative Religious Ethics*, pp.111-2).

The "double-bind" Arjuna faced to fight injustice as a *Kshatriya* but forbidden to kill his caste/family members is, in Gandhi's way of thinking, that which forces the mind into an allegorical mode where it can grasp the true spiritual intent of the Gita's meaning. Gandhi believed that the power of allegory lay in seeing in the literal stories of the scripture a deeper symbolic meaning based on what he believed was profound universal religious experience and wisdom. To this end, the *Bhagavad Gita* for Gandhi was allegorical and was meant to be understood not literally but symbolically. Reading the story allegorically, Gandhi puts his argument this way, "The field of battle is our own body. The fight is there, but the fight as it is going on within...The message of the *Gita* is to be found in the second chapter of the *Gita*, where Krishna speaks of the balanced state of mind. These verses show that the fight Krishna speaks of is a spiritual fight" (Fasching and deChant, *Comparative Religious Ethics*, p. 128). The technique of passing over, we recall "is based on the process of eliciting images from one's feelings attaining insight into the images, and turning insight into a guide of life." Death is a great elicitor of evoking images from one's feelings.

Dunne categorized Gandhi as someone who found truth not only within his Hindu faith, but in all the great religions and was "involved in persistent endeavors to "enforce meaning." Enforcing the meaning of scriptures is what Dunne called "turning poetry into truth. Making the poetry of the religions come true in one's life" (*The Way of All the Earth*, p. 4). Turning poetry

into truth requires one to begin in imagination but to end in reality. That is acting upon the moral of the story rather than acting out of the story itself. Gandhi, Dunne points out, turned poetry into truth by “enforcing the meaning of the *Gita* and the Sermon on the Mount” (ibid). At this point it may be useful to refer to Fasching’s understanding of Dunne’s notion of turning poetry into truth as, “symptomatic of the spiritual adventure of the post/modern world.” He points out that Gandhi’s “encounters with Theosophists and the followers of Tolstoy’s radical Christianity “awakened” in him memories of his own childhood and a desire to find in the spiritual depths of the *Gita* parallels to the ethic of the Mount.” Perhaps we can see the correlation of this idea of being “awakened” and Tillich’s description of being grasped by an Ultimate Concern. “By passing over into another religion and culture, Gandhi came back with new insight and appreciation for his own. This was true for Gandhi in relation not only to Christianity but also to other religions, such as Buddhism, Jainism, and Islam.” “Gandhi found truth in all the great religions and that truth always drove him back deeper into his own tradition” (Fasching, *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima*, pp. 206 – 211). Gandhi’s life experiences Dunne argues, are not those experiences which are uncommon, what is un-common is his insight into his own experience; his enlightenment. Gandhi, as well as, Dunne, would like us to believe that the way to enlightenment or revelation is not exclusive to any one religion. “Gandhi believed every man is an incarnation, an embodiment of the holy, that all embodied life is in reality an incarnation” (Dunne, *The Way of All the Earth*, p.94). If one accepts Gandhi’s belief that every man is an incarnation of the Holy then it should be possible for us to find a basis within ourselves for understanding this and perhaps as Dunne adds, “... that spirit becomes manifest in one human being after another” (ibid).

This idea of a ‘holy spirit’, if you will, is akin to Tillich’s “Ground of Being” within all humans, an incarnation of an ultimate reality. Ultimate reality, we have concluded, is found

within each culture's answers to the questions of ultimate concern. One example of these questions Dunne points out is from the Buddha: "What is the origin of suffering?" One possible answer to this question within Buddhism, conceives the end of suffering through compassion, "the abolition of the closed world of self" (p. 55). That is through the doctrine of *anatta*, "no-self". *Anatta*, in this context claims that part of the human psyche which refers to "I am" is an illusion. We conclude this section with Dunne's utilization of this doctrine of "no - self" as a component of his passing over theory towards self-realization, representative of my thesis' idea of the Holy found within one's Ground of Being. "Passing over to other lives," Dunne postulates, "is the only way I can see of achieving a state of *anatta*, 'no-self'." "The 'no-self'" he observes, "is a condition which appears to exist only in the moment of passing over to other lives and times." However, he continues that, "when a man comes back to his own life and times the self, the "I am," reappears. So in the last analysis the self is enhanced, not destroyed" (p. 56). This is not the teaching of the Buddha, of course, but Dunne's observation based on the experience of passing over and coming back.

Here is the example of Dunne's method:

Step #1 Our Own Life – "I Am"

Step #2 Our withdrawal by passing over to other's lives and times – "No self"

Step #3 Our Return – "I Am" transformed

The technique of passing over is based on the process of "eliciting images from one's feelings, attaining insight onto the images, and turning insight a guide of life." What one does in passing over is try to enter sympathetically into the feelings of another person, become receptive to the images and then come back enriched by this insight to an understanding of one's own life which can guide one into the future" (p. 53). This is the method we described earlier in this

chapter that was employed by Gandhi in his experiments with truth through the vehicle of the Holy. "Passing over," Dunne sums up, "entering sympathetically into other lives and times, if we are on the right track, is the way to completeness. For whenever a man passes over to other lives or other times, he finds on coming back some neglected aspect of his own life or times which corresponds to what he sees in others'. Passing over has the effect of activating these otherwise dormant aspects of himself" (p. 180). In other words from loss of self to no self to true self. True self, following Gandhi's description, is an incarnation of the "spirit of truth" which Dunne labels "Being" and this thesis understands as complementary to Tillich's Depth and Ground of "Being," as an embodiment of the Holy. The dilemma, Dunne points out, is that at times, "to care for Being can mean to ignore beings." "Is there a way" he wonders, "of caring about Being without ignoring beings?" He suggests that one "might take an inductive approach to being, seeking to find Being in beings rather than in itself" (p. 95). Dunne's concern is that, "in his care for Being not to lose sight of particular beings. The Ground of Being, he realizes, "is what all beings share, and to care genuinely for Being, is therefore to care for all particular beings; but to actually do this, he knows too, is for him a lifelong task, since it means finding the (Ground of) Being in beings rather than in itself" (p. 103).

This is one possible way to overcome the estrangement of the depth and ground of our being that Tillich speaks of. According to Dunne's analysis, the implication is that the spiritual adventure is into the holiness found in other lives religions, or cultures. Therefore, the spiritual adventure for our times is the passing over to another into the Ground of Being and returning back enlightened with compassion, a characteristic of the Holy. Here, Dunne's spiritual adventure overcomes the issue of Tillich's Christo - centricism without abandoning his own individual ideas of truth. Dunne's views move Tillich's theology of culture one step closer toward

an interdisciplinary scholarship within the secular university, as a basis for an academic theology, the subject of the next section.

Darrell Fasching: Alienated Theology as a Model for Academic Theology

According to the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act, “the term ‘humanities’ includes, but is not limited to, ...those aspects ... which have humanistic content and employ humanistic methods; and the study and application of the humanities to the human environment with particular attention to reflecting our diverse heritage, traditions, and history and to the relevance of the humanities to the current conditions of national life.” The humanities are essential to the university education for spreading human wisdom throughout human culture. The task is to grasp what meaning is for humans through a quest for wisdom across cultures and how important this is to all aspects of the human journey of discovery and development. By appropriating the orientation of the humanities these models offer a base for the academic study of religion. As the founding legislation of National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) states, “an advanced civilization must not limit its efforts to science and technology alone, but must give full value and support to the other great branches of scholarly and cultural activity in order to achieve a better understanding of the past, a better analysis of the present, and a better view of the future.” We “face an increasingly complex and interconnected world,” the NEH continues, “our citizens need the broad tools that an education in the humanities provides, including: knowledge of world cultures and history, language proficiency, critical thinking and analysis. The humanities are innovative,” and “help us understand the social and cultural impact of advances in science and technology. Humanities scholars are using digital technology to generate new knowledge, enhance access to works of enduring value, and improve education” (*2008 Issue Briefs* The following issue briefs were prepared for Humanities Advocacy Day 2008. National Endowment for the Humanities © 2009 National Humanities Alliance. Washington, DC).

Finding spiritual wisdom in the meeting of the world religions is one task of the humanities. By engaging comparatively in the narrative expressions of these traditions, in particular in the way they embrace the journey of life and death, through their questions of ultimate concern, we are enlightened to the spiritual truths they reveal in seeing the world through the eyes of the other. The University does a good job at identifying the theoretical, vocational, and practical aspects of this journey however it needs to engage the journey of self with the same commitment. The purpose of educational needs are not just to have courses in theory and technology those that involve “making a living,” but insight also necessary in “making a life”. Fasching developed a way in which both of these aims can be met. He does this by appropriating Tillich’s theology of culture and Dunne’s spiritual adventure into an ethic of hospitality towards the “stranger” to exist under the umbrella of the humanities, as a component of religious studies.

As you may recall, there are many academics in the religious studies departments who oppose the inclusion of theology in religious studies because it blurs the line between the two studies and weakens their position as a legitimate “discipline” within the secular academic community of scholars. Darrell Fasching mediates these two views by appropriating both perspectives. Fasching’s assessment and advancement of these two perspectives illuminates those aspects of which the anti-phenomenologists, such as Smart and McCutcheon, do not specifically address, “that ‘secular’ discourse is just one more narrative tradition of sacred discourse alongside many others and there is no neutral language of explanation” (Fasching, “Religious Studies and the Alienation of Theology,” p169).

McCutcheon reluctantly seems to admit as much, in his statement that “scholars in the study of religion... [and] their explanations are purely a function of their interests and the theories they propose and apply” (“The Study of Religion as an Anthropology of Credibility,” p. 18). However, Fasching argues “the critics, who define religion to be reduced to some other root cause

...unbeknownst to them, are doing a type of apologetic theology in which they are defending their “truth” and “superiority” of their own sacred tradition of secular fundamentalism against the false, inferior views of other traditions” (*The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima*, p.5). A type of theology that these critics have emphatically dismissed. Rather, “each narrative will have to stretch its vocabulary to understand and include the stranger in his or her world” (“Religious Studies and the Alienation of Theology,” p.164). Fasching proposes to do academic theology as a narrative approach to comparative religious ethics, best classified as a “decentered” or an alienated theology. He is in agreement that “confessional and apologetic theology, Christian or otherwise, is not an academic discipline as understood in the contemporary university,” but McCutcheon, as well as, Smart are incorrect to suggest that theology cannot be academic. “The role of the theologian of culture, operating as an interdisciplinary scholar within the secular university, sets about this task in a manner that sets him or her apart from the confessional theologian. Apologetic theology seeks to defend the “truth” and “superiority” of one’s own tradition against the “false,” “inferior,” and “alien” views of other traditions. Alienated theology is done as if one were a stranger to one’s own narrative tradition, seeing and critiquing one’s own tradition from the vantage point of the other’s narrative tradition” (p. 167). In this way, Fasching is able to reconcile Tillich’s theology of culture, as a creative interpretation of meaning and existence with Dunne’s spiritual theology of walking in the way of mutual understanding, through an expansion of understanding how these narratives are cultural expressions and symbols of what it means to be human, expressed in diverse stories of hospitality to the stranger.

Through Gandhi’s example, proposed in the previous section regarding his transformation of allegorical narrative, it may be deduced that two of the primary and most pervasive ways religious traditions shape behavior are through storytelling and spiritual practices. Storytelling shapes the ethical imagination of its members, especially through stories of heroes

and saints. However, they are not only deeply affected and shaped by their indigenous stories but also the stories of others. The narrative's of the world's great religions offer a way that transforms the way we see and experience the "anxiety of the human condition...of the monsters of life and death," as Tolstoy phrased it. Narratives of hospitality in the world's great religions "de-center our ethnocentrism and foster an awareness of our interdependence – our unity in diversity. By achieving an ecological balance between these diverse narrative contexts, accepting the claims that others make upon us when our consciousness is sensitized by "becoming the other," and so becomes our conscience. These and other stories ... have unique ethical power," according to Fasching and deChant , "for they recognize the humanity of the one who does not share one's own story and cannot be defined by it - the one who remains a stranger. Through such stories the sacred center is desacralized and the holy is encountered outside one's ethnocentric community - in the coming of the stranger" (Fasching and deChant, *Comparative Religious Ethics*, p. 299).

According to McCutcheon, the scholar of religion "understands the term 'religion,' or such rhetorical pairs as sacred/profane, as one way that certain human communities concoct cognitively and socially habitable 'worlds' ("The Study of Religion as an Anthropology of Credibility," p. 16). However, drawing on Tillich, and following the lead of Fasching, I propose a different perspective of "the holy and secular" as related and complementary. He identifies these two terms, "sacred" and "holy", as antonyms where they are usually paired synonymously. In other words, contrary to McCutcheon and the like, who equate and identify the profane exclusively with the secular, I am in agreement with pairing the sacred with the profane and the holy with the secular. "The sacred" and "the holy" name two tendencies at war in each person and in every community. The experience of the sacred encourages us to divide the world into sacred and profane, such that we see ourselves as human and all strangers as profane and less (or less than) human" (Fasching and deChant, *Comparative Religious Ethics*, p. 18). However, "...the

experience of the Holy generates a human response to the sacred, which calls it into question by insisting that ultimate truth and reality are radically different than this world and its sacred powers and sacred orders. Consequently, the holy encourages doubt and questioning. The task of an ethic of the holy is not to eliminate the morality of a society, but to transform it by breaking down the divisions between the sacred and profane through narratives of hospitality to the stranger, which affirm the human dignity of precisely those who do not share one's identity and one's story" (158). "Therefore the task of the study of religion lies not, as Eliade suggests, in awakening the sacred beneath the profane so as to overcome the secular, but rather in discovering that the study of religion as a secular activity is itself a manifestation of another kind of religious experience - the experience of the holy" (Fasching, "Religious Studies and the Alienation of Theology," p169) "The real focus of our energies as scholars in this interdisciplinary area of study is not religions but "the sacred" (Ibid, p.157). "Religion must be defined in terms of the sacred and not vice-versa. What we are really studying is the diverse ways in which a sense of the sacred is manifested and responded to in various cultural activities (in science, politics, economics, art, religions, etc.) and how that affects belief and action in every sphere of human activity" (Ibid, 158). In the end, "if religious studies must be conceived in terms of "the sacred," manifest in a sacred way of life, theology must be reconceived in terms of "the holy," manifest as an experienced "inner" demand for self-transcendence that calls for alternative ways of life; "Theos" or "God" is only one name for such experiences" (159). Figure 1.1, entitled, "Characteristics of the Sacred and the Holy," outlines some of the key features of these opposing patterns of religious ways of life, according to Fasching's thesis. (Fasching and deChant, *Comparative Religious Ethics*, p.18)

Sacred Society

Center (Ideal of identity) within itself

Sameness = measure of the human

Hostility to the stranger

Sacred is opposed to profane

Sacralization of the finite cosmos/society,
expressed in a sacred way of life

Cosmos writ small (sacred order)

Answers are absolute: answers imprison us
in the finite

God/the holy in the image of self/in-group

Honor (morality defined by social status)

Hierarchical

Morality

Is=Ought

The way things are is the way they ought to
be

This-wordly

Holy Community

Center outside of itself in the stranger

Difference = measure of the human

Hospitality to the stranger

Holy and secular are complementary

Desacralization or secularization of the
finite in the name of the infinite – only the
holy is holy: the world is not profane but
secular

Human writ large (dignity and justice)

Questioning and doubt as measure of
faith: we always have more questions than
answers, and this keeps us open to the
infinite

Created in the image of a God/the Holy
without image

Dignity (ethics of equality and
Interdependence)

Equality and interdependence

Ethics

Is vs. Ought

The way things ought to be calls into
question the way things are

Other-wordly

The distinction they are making between the sacred and the holy is typological. That is, it is a model to be used to help us sort out human experiences and behaviors. This leads to the discovery of what it is to be human. One obligation of the public university is to study those human experiences that are both, holy and sacred in order to understand ethnocentrism and its cure. The emphasis of my thesis is on those human experiences that are related to the Holy. This relationship is based within a humanities curriculum and emphasized through an alienated theology under the religious studies banner. "A fundamental axiom of alienated theology is that the sacred closes me off from the stranger whereas the holy opens me to the stranger. The experience of the sacred defines the stranger as profane and so dehumanizes him or her. That is, the category humanity is defined to include all who are *the same* and exclude all who are *different*. By contrast the holy pluralizes and secularizes to embrace difference as a humanizing experience that finds expression in welcoming the stranger" (Fasching, "Religious Studies and the Alienation of Theology," pp. 158 -159). "To be human is to be capable of migrating into new worlds in time, space, and imagination. Our openness to the infinite requires openness to other worlds (both actual and possible). In this sense, the claims of the holy as a type of human experience demand from us a hospitality to the strangers and their strange worlds" (Ibid, p.161).

Theology, academically conceived as alienated theology, requires engagement with the plurality of human experiences. The alienation required to do academic theology converges with the phenomenological attitude required by religious studies (for what is "bracketing" but a form of estrangement from oneself to enter the world of a stranger)" (Fasching, "Religious Studies and the Alienation of Theology," pp. 167 - 168). In 1965, according to E.E. Evans-Pritchard who published the highly influential work *Theories of Primitive Religion*, phenomenology is "arguably

the most influential approach to the study of religion in the twentieth century." "The phenomenological attitude that is central to religious studies simply makes explicit what is unique to the intentionality of the humanities in general" (Ibid, p. 169). That is a descriptive methodology, because it wants to be attentive to how things appear, it wants to let things speak for themselves. What the phenomenological attitude calls for is passing over to see the world through the eyes of the stranger. This requires the experience of alienation, of being a stranger even to oneself. For when we become strangers to ourselves, we experience a new vulnerability and (if we do not panic and retreat into some sacred and unquestionable world) a new openness to the other, other persons, other ideas, other cultures, and other ways of life" (ibid, pp. 165 - 168).

"To engage in religious studies, including theology of culture, within the context of the humanities requires that I desacralize all sacred traditions, beginning with my own, through surrender to the critical questions of the scholar who seeks to understand. The purpose of these questions is not to profane these traditions but to secularize them" (Ibid, p. 169). The tradition of hospitality, an ethic of welcoming the stranger, requires a selfless compassion, a compassion or empathy that is a way of conceiving one's own concrete standpoint that both acknowledges its particularity and yet requires one to pass over the boundary into the life, religion, and culture of the stranger and see one's tradition through the eyes of the other, transformed by new insight. "Doing so opens me to what is holy in each" (ibid).

"From this point of view, the inner demand for rationality (i.e., that our doubts and questions be pursued and answered) in every field of human inquiry is in itself a form of religious experience, an opening of the self to the infinite" (Ibid, p. 160). The relationship between doubt and the stranger is that they both challenge one to consider a perspective apart from one's own sacred way of life. "Our answers are always finite but there are always more questions than answers, this is what keeps us open to the infinite. To follow the questions is to "go beyond" (the

literal meaning of transcendence) the answers and transcend the sacred worldview they presuppose” (Ibid, pp. 159-160). This does not “require making any metaphysical claims about “the Infinite.” But it does require an ontological claim, namely, that that our humanity is constituted by our openness to infinite possibilities that carry us beyond the horizon of possibilities culturally defined by the sacred order of our own particular time and place” (Ibid, pp. 160-1). “Alienated theology forbids me the option of integrating the other into my world-view. It demands that I respect the other as a transcending presence within my world. I must welcome the stranger precisely in his or her *otherness* , not as a potential candidate for *sameness*. For only as I am open to the otherness of the stranger am I open to the *otherness* of transcendence”(Fasching, *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima*, p. 159).

Finally, Fasching argues that “a university in which the humanities in their normative modes of reflection are viewed as marginal is a university educating a generation of amoral technological barbarians – those whose knowledge of scientific facts and technological skills are for sale to the highest bidder – without qualms, since all normative views are purely “subjective” (ibid, p. 157). That is all scholars must recognize that they are preaching their own brand of theology, secular or otherwise. Smart’s, McCutcheon’s, and Strenski’s confessionianism is a failure of objectivity and defines their idea of the sacred. Through Fasching’s eyes, he sees, “there is no future for religious studies as an “objective” discipline without the inclusion of an academic theology” (p.161). There must be an academic mode of doing theology if religious studies is to maintain its integrity as an objective scholarly area of study. Just as religious studies is about more than “religions,” so theology is about more than “God” (p. 159). As Maurice N. Eisendrath reminds us in, *God’s Angry Men*, ““God is dead...What are these churches if they are not the tombs and sepulchers of God?’ Nietzsche asked. But much of Western humanism is dead too. Men do not wander under the silent stars, listen to the wind, learn to know themselves,

question, 'Where am I going? Why am I here?' They leave aside the mysteries of contingency and transitoriness, for the certainties of research, production, consumption. So that it is nearly possible to say: "man is dead...What are these buildings, these tunnels, these roads, if they are not the tombs and sepulchers of man?"(p.62). "The humanities have a normative responsibility - a responsibility not only to understand sympathetically but also to both evaluate critically and be audacious in their defense of our common humanity in its openness to self-transcendence. Through the humanities, we attempt to distill from such human experiences, in every religion and culture, the wisdom to live more humanly. Academic theology, as I have been proposing it reflects such an understanding, an understanding of theology not as a confessional discipline but a professional discipline. Its task is not confessing the truth as seen through one narrative tradition but rather professing the wisdom that can be discerned through a comparative study of the great narrative traditions in their normative moments of self-transcendence" (Fasching, *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima*, p. 170).

Agreeing with Fasching, I argue that an alienated theology is one possible vehicle through which a normative analysis of religious experience and behavior can emerge and inspire students to live a life that facilitates a cross-cultural and interreligious ethic of human dignity. The task of an ethic of the holy is to encourage, discover, and transform those divisions within society through narratives of hospitality to the stranger through stories of spirituality that will impact students to live a life that facilitates a cross cultural and interreligious way within the secular institutions of American higher education. "A place where the basic human experiences that remind man that he is not a machine, and not merely a temporary cog in a technological civilization, that are not fostered within the university" (Eisendrath, *God's Angry Men*, p. 62).

Chapter Four

Conclusion: Theology, Spirituality and the Humanities

Sam Gill declared that there is an eternal marriage weaved between theology and the academics in the Western University curriculum. He explains the situation in his essay, “Embodied Theology:” These positions are finally not separable because most basic premises of the Western academy are interwoven with fundamental beliefs and understandings of reality- theologies- that are continuous with the more explicit theologies of Western religious traditions. Such theologies inform the very architecture, furniture, pedagogy, and research methodology of the Western academy, which in turn, determine to a degree far greater that we commonly acknowledge the way we construct academic business” (p. 91). Gill, seems to be suggesting that implicitly or explicitly, all disciplines approach their subject within the context and in dialogue with the sacred/holy, or “God”-- it is steeped deep within the DNA of the Western academia. The necessity for continually utilizing the name ‘God’ Tillich has stated lies in the fact that “our being has depths which naturalism (science), whether evolutionary, mechanistic, dialectical or humanistic, cannot or will not recognize”(Shaking of the Foundations, p.181).

There is an ongoing battle within the academy and the casualties are the heart and soul of the human experience. Finding spiritual wisdom in the meeting of the world religions is one task of the humanities. Being a human is the *apriori* of all disciplines and the discovery of a university without the humanities in Fasching’s words is “brain dead...soulless and impoverished.” The task of the great world religions is to accept the challenge to find a way to transform the human biological story from birth to death, into a meaningful spiritual journey whose destination transcends physical death and the loss of self. Through the wisdom of the world’s religions one gains the insight to transform the

personal life journey that began with what Shakespeare coined “a tale told by an idiot” into a story of meaning. Put another way, spiritual wisdom transforms the story of life from one of loss to one of completion. Humanities are the heart of liberal education. The university has an obligation to understand both the intended and unintended consequences of human behavior. For example, the celebration of religious holidays. One intended consequence of Christmas we could say is the celebration of the birth of a savior. However, an unintended consequence of Christmas is the economic impact that the holiday brings through the celebration by exchanging of gifts. McCutcheon, Strenski, and Smart-types define religion by those consequences of an unintended nature, unfortunately at the expense of the focus on the intended consequences within the humanities with their focus on meaning. Strenski goes so far as to say, “... I do not believe there is such a thing as a universal human *religious* community – at least at this stage of the human project” (“Why Theology Won’t Work,” p. 42). Perhaps, sadly he is unaware that he is part and parcel of the “universal human *religious* community.” All of life is first and foremost a “universal human *religious* project” in which all play a part. As Walt Whitman said, “The powerful play of life goes on and you may contribute a verse.” When one welcomes the stranger one has accepted others differences and are excited about the potential of what each has to offer, and also what one can become. “Whenever a man has looked at his world, he has found himself in it as a part of it. But he also has also realized that he is a stranger in the world of objects, unable to penetrate it beyond a certain level of scientific analysis. And then he has become aware of the fact that he himself is the door to the deeper levels of reality that in his own existence he has the only possible approach to existence itself.” (Tillich, *Systematic Theology* pp. 62-63). “The immediate experience of one’s own existing reveals something of the nature of existence generally. Whoever has penetrated into the nature of his or her own finitude can find the traces of finitude in everything that exists. And he can ask the question implied in his finitude as the question implied in finitude universally” (Ibid p. 63). This is the place my thesis has defined as the holy.

In the Buddhist tradition, the spiritual master gives his students a *koan*. A *koan* is a spiritual puzzle that has no rational answer. He needs to meditate upon it and solve it. One example of a *koan* from Hakuin Ekaku is “what is the sound of one hand clapping?” Students would meditate this comeback with answers that are usually logical which the master would send him away and have him return with another answer several times until the student is exhausted. “By pursuing this single *koan* he comes to a point where his mind is as if dead and his will as if extinguished. All thoughts vanish and in his bosom burns hot anxiety” (Fasching and deChant, *Comparative Religious Ethics*, p. 63). But then as Hakuin says, “suddenly it occurs that with the *koan* both body and mind break. There is letting go of *ego*. This is called rebirth in the pure land” (Ibid). This is termed seeing ones’ own nature. Everything depends on letting go not having your ego try and figure everything out. Perhaps, all of life is a type of *koan* that is a spiritual puzzle that has no rational answer but needs to be solved. Carl Jung believed that one would be dragged through life if he or she refused to transcend their ego. However, whether one recognized this interior prompting or not, the journey of life toward death is not going to cease moving from one stage to the next stage. The prescription towards recovering from being dragged through life, or even lives, is that there must be both a breaking of both body and mind so as to transcend and “go beyond.” This is what the Zen termed “seeing ones’ own nature,” what we have called the holy. Darrell Fasching’s “hospitality to the stranger”, Paul Tillich’s “theology of culture”, and John Dunne’s “spiritual adventure” represent ways of transcending oneself through the holy. Participating in active empathy is one possible way this thesis sees as a manifestation of the holy. This is important in terms of facing the “other” within and this is then reflected outwardly to the “other” without and this is the basis for recognizing the ground of being and grace, an alienated theology and hospitality to the stranger, and compassion within the spiritual adventure. This leads to a gateway on the road through which all mankind can discover and apply universal compassion. We refer to Heidegger’s advice who said that even before love we must “care for”

first. For what we care about is that which will entice us to act. The question as it applies to this thesis is whether the secular institutions of American higher education should “care for” students’ questions of meaning, purpose, wisdom, and human destiny. I believe it should.

The Beginning

References

- Brown, Donald Mackenzie. *Ultimate Concern: Tillich in Dialogue*. New York: Harper & Row, 1965.
- Cady, Linell E. and Brown, Delwin. *Religious Studies, Theology, and the University Conflicting Maps, Changing Terrain*. New York: State University of New York, 2002.
- Cheney, Lynne V. *Humanities in America: A Report to the President, the Congress, and the American People*. Washington, D.C.: National Endowment for the Humanities, 1988. .
- Dunne, John. *The Way of All the Earth*. IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1972.
- Fasching, Darrell J. and Dell deChant. *Comparative Religious Ethics: A Narrative Approach*. MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2001.
- Fasching, Darrell J., *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima: Apocalypse or Utopia?* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993.
- Otto, Rudolf, Translated by Harvey, John W. *The Idea of the Holy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1958.
- Pelikan, Jaroslav. *Religion and the University*. York University invitation lecture series, 1964. Toronto: Published for York University by University of Toronto Press, 1964.
- Robinson John A.T. *Honest to God*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1963.

Smart, Ninian. *Religious Studies and Theology*. The Council of Societies for the Study of Religion Bulletin 25 no. 3 (September 1997):66 -68.

Tillich, Paul. *On the Boundary; An Autobiographical Sketch*. New York: Scribner, 1966.

---. *On the Idea of a Theology of Culture in What Is Religion?* Translated by James Luther Adams. New York: Harper & Row, 1969.

---. *Systematic Theology*. Vol. 1-3 Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967.

---. *The Shaking of the Foundations*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948.

---. *The Essential Tillich: An Anthology of the Writings of Paul Tillich*. Contributor F. Forrester Church Published by University of Chicago Press, 1999.

Bibliography

Berger, Peter L. *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966.

Bellah, Robert N. "Civil Religion and the American Future," *Religious Education* (May-June 1976): 235 – 245.

Bruce, Steve. *Religion in the Modern World: From Cathedrals to Cults*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Enns, Paul. *The Moody Handbook of Theology*. Chicago :Moody Press, 1989.

Fasching, Darrel J. *Theology and Public Policy Method in the Work of Juan Luis Segundo, Jacques Ellul and Robert Doran*. 1986 *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies* Loyola Marymount University Vol. 5, No 1 March 1987.

---. *Beyond Values Story, Character; and Public Policy in American Schools*. In J.L. Paul, N.H. Berger,

P.G. Osnes, Y.G. Martinez, & W.C. Morse (eds.), *Ethics and decision making in local schools: Inclusion, policy, and reform* (pp. 99-122). Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Company, 1997.

---. *Mythic Story and the Formation of Personal Identity in Augustine's Confession*. The Florida Speech Communication Journal Vol. 15, No. 1 DeLeon Springs, FL E.O. Painter Printing Co., 1987.

Hamilton, William. *A Secular Theology For A World Come of Age*. Theology Today Vol. 18, no.1 (Jan 1962): 435-459.

Jung, Carl Gustav, Editor Campbell, Joseph, and Translated by Hull, R F C. *The Portable Jung*. New York: Penguin Books, 1976

Shapiro, Harold T. *A Larger Sense of Purpose: Higher Education and Society*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005.

Tillich, Paul. ---. *The Courage to Be*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952.

---. *The Protestant Era*. Translated by James Luther Adams. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957.