

WITH THE
GRAIN
OF THE
UNIVERSE

THE CHURCH'S WITNESS
AND NATURAL THEOLOGY

BEING THE GIFFORD LECTURES
DELIVERED AT THE
UNIVERSITY OF ST. ANDREWS
IN 2001

With a New Afterword

Stanley Hauerwas

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Stanley Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe*

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To Paula
for the beauty
and gracefulness of
her witness

The point that apocalyptic makes is not only that people who wear crowns and who claim to foster justice by the sword are not as strong as they think—true as that is: we still sing, “O where are Kings and Empires now of old that went and came?” It is that people who bear crosses are working with the grain of the universe. One does not come to that belief by reducing social processes to mechanical and statistical models, nor by winning some of one’s battles for the control of one’s own corner of the fallen world. One comes to it by sharing the life of those who sing about the Resurrection of the slain Lamb.

John Howard Yoder,
“Armaments and Eschatology”

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Preface

To give the Gifford Lectures was not for me the fulfillment of a dream. I never dreamed that I would be asked to give the Gifford Lectures. Theologians did not have a conspicuous role in the Gifford Lectures in the second half of the twentieth century. Moreover, I am not even a proper theologian but a representative of the even more disreputable field called Christian ethics, and it is not clear that I am a competent worker in that “field” because it is not apparent what constitutes competence in Christian ethics. I am part philosopher, part political theorist, part theologian, part ethicist, but I have no standing in any of the “parts.” I am not complaining but only suggesting why, given the eccentric nature of “my work,” it never occurred to me that I would be asked to give the Gifford Lectures.

So it was with the delight that comes only from an unimagined gift that I received the invitation to be the Gifford lecturer at the University of St. Andrews in 2000–2001. At least part of the gift was to be asked four years in advance, giving me ample time to think through what I wanted to do, as well as to increase my general worry captured in the thought: “What have I gotten myself into?” Of course it has become apparent for many years, apparent even to me, that God has blessed me with a sublime absence of self-protective strategy. I often go where angels fear to tread. I should like to be able to attribute my “recklessness” to courage, but I do not have the appropriate fear to so name it. Rather, I become so possessed by what I think needs to be said that I begin to understand, and to count the costs of, what I have said only after it is too late.

I do not pretend, therefore, that what I have attempted in *With the Grain of the Universe* is modest. The Gifford Lectures are, I think, best done on a large canvas. My aim is nothing less than to tell the theological story of the twentieth century by concentrating on three of the greatest Gifford lecturers—William James, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Karl Barth. I argue that Karl Barth is the great “natural theologian” of the Gif-

ford Lectures because he rightly understood that natural theology is impossible abstracted from a full doctrine of God. Mine is a thesis clearly aimed to get attention, but more important, it is one that I think true.

I wish I could say that because I had four years to work on these lectures that this book is different—more thoughtful, more fully argued—than my past work (a description, I might add, that I dislike because it presumes that the way I have worked is not “careful”). But this is not the “big book” that many of my friends and critics have suggested I should write. Indeed, if this book is different than my past work, I hope the difference is simply that here I make clear why I do not think theologians, particularly in our day, can or should write “big books” that “pull it all together.” Any theology that threatens to become a position more determinative than the Christian practice of prayer betrays its subject. At best, theology is but a series of reminders to help Christians pray faithfully. So if this book does anything different than my past work, it does so only to the extent that it displays why my work cannot help but be as occasional and unfinished as Barth’s *Church Dogmatics*. Of course, I do not pretend that my work has the power of Barth’s extraordinary performance. I can only follow at a distance.

Some of the more friendly readers of earlier drafts of the lectures have expressed disappointment that there is not more of “me” in it. They feel that, particularly in the last lecture, I should have returned to my emphasis on the church and the difference the church makes for reflection on war, peace, suicide, abortion, the mentally handicapped, baseball, and Trollope. These readers want me to show how the work I have done in *With the Grain of the Universe* requires the kind of redescriptive display present in what might be called “my casuistry.” Those readers who would have me end differently think that to conclude with a discussion of the difference Christian practice should make for the knowledge that constitutes the university is to end with a whimper not a bang. All I can say is that I saw no reason to go over well-plowed ground. Moreover, given the challenge that Lord Gifford’s will presents to the Gifford lecturer, I did not think that I could or should avoid the question of the kind of knowledges that constitute the practices of the modern university and determine for many what counts as “rationality.”

This book is like my past work not only in its refusal to pull everything together, but in its display of my dependence on others. Alasdair MacIntyre was particularly helpful when I was trying to think through the overall conception of the lectures. Discussions with Alasdair helped me map the main outlines of the argument I wanted to make with my focus on James, Niebuhr, and Barth. Of course, my indebtedness to MacIntyre has been apparent for many years, though, needless to say, he is not to be held responsible for the way I may use his work to come to conclusions that he may well find quite foreign.

Peter Ochs has from the beginning to the end been a wonderful friend and critic. I wish I was as competent a Christian philosopher and theologian as he is a Jewish philosopher and theologian. Bruce Kaye was also an extremely helpful questioner in the early stages of my work. We discussed "Why Barth?" during a wonderful vacation that Paula and I enjoyed with Bruce and Louise in the American West. Barth, I should like to think, would have enjoyed knowing that his work was being questioned amid the grandeur of Colorado, Utah, and Arizona. I often observe that being a Christian in our time makes the world small just to the extent that we actually bump into one another. Knowing that Bruce and Louise pray for us means that Australia does not seem so distant.

As usual, I have relied on a wide community of friends to read and criticize what I have written. Listing their names is an insufficient indication of how much I owe them, but it is the best I can do. They are Michael Quirk, Terry Tilley, Scott Davis, Frank Lentricchia, David Aers, Jim and William Buckley, Mark Nation, Bill Werpehowski, Joe Mangina, Jim Burtchaell, David Burrell, Ralph Wood, Rusty Reno, Hans Reinders, Bill Hart, Reinhard Hütter, Arne Rasmusson, Travis Kroeker, Sam Wells, Nicholas Adams, Rob McSwain, Charlie Reynolds, Bruce Marshall, Robert Jenson, John Bowlin, Fergus Kerr, Catherine Wallace, Russ Hittinger, Robert Richardson, Glen Stassen, Gary Dorrien, Tommy Langford, and Jim McClendon. Tommy died before I finished the lectures, but his advice was invaluable for revision of the first lecture. And a few days before his own death, Jim McClendon called me for the last time to urge me to take a stronger stance in the last lecture. I miss them both.

My life has and continues to be gifted by past and current students who make me better than I am. I have relied on them for criticism at various stages of my work. They include Mike Cartwright, Mike Baxter, Charlie Pinches, Steve Long, David Matzko McCarthy, Phil Kenneson, John Berkman, Bill Cavanaugh, Dan Bell, Jim Fodor, Scott Williams, Alex Sider, Charlie Collier, Chris Franks, Peter Dula, Tom Harvey, Jeff McCurry, Roger Owens, Richard Church, and Joel Shuman—to name only those who read and commented on the text of the Giffords. Of course, what I have done in this book depends on learning from all the students who have trusted me with their lives.

I am grateful to the Louisville Institute for making it possible for Martin Copenhaver, John McFadden, Dale Rosenberger, David Wood, James Gorman, and Carl Becker to read *With the Grain of the Universe* and to attend the last week of my lectures. Having ministers—who are in the trenches, so to speak—read the text gave me some idea how what I have done may or may not help face the challenges of the church in our day. Richard Neuhaus was kind to convene a session of the Dulles Col-

loquium in which the first and last of my lectures were discussed. Joe Mangina gave me an opportunity to test what I had done by having a class at Wycliffe College, Toronto, read an earlier version of the lectures. I learned a great deal from these opportunities.

I am grateful to the Luce Foundation for awarding me a Luce Fellowship. That support made it possible for me to have the time to put the lectures into their final form. Duke University has been extremely supportive, and I am grateful to John Strohbehn and Peter Lange for the support they provided from the office of the provost. Colleagues and students in Duke Divinity School were wonderful companions during the time I worked on the lectures, but I owe a special debt to my friend and dean, Greg Jones. He not only read and criticized the lectures in various stages but made wonderfully constructive suggestions about how to make them better. What a gift it is to have a dean who is at once smart and good.

Rodney Clapp made this book possible by imagining Brazos Press. Not only is Rodney an old friend, but he has the extraordinary ability to give institutional form to the dream many of us have for a revitalized and faithful church. Moreover, I think it is a wonderful thing for a native of Oklahoma to name the press after a river—a river I have crossed and recrossed many times—in Texas. Rodney and his fellow conspirators at Brazos also gave me a great gift by having David Toole copyedit this book. David—also a former student, as well as the author of the extraordinary book *Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo*—went well beyond the normal responsibilities of a copy editor to help me clarify as well as strengthen my argument. It is rare indeed to have a copy editor with David's philosophical and theological skills.

The manuscript would have never gotten to the stage of being copyedited if it were not for my secretary, Sarah Freedman. It always feels a bit odd for me to call Sarah "my secretary" because Sarah is simply too wonderfully complex to be called a secretary, and in particular "my secretary." She has her own views about much that I write and is never hesitant to tell me when she thinks I may have it wrong. Yet Sarah has, with her normal wacky sense of humor, endured without complaint the various revisions of the text. I thank her for putting up with me.

Finally, I must thank those at St. Andrews who not only invited me to be the Gifford lecturer but provided such wonderful hospitality over the month I delivered the lectures. I am particularly grateful to Mrs. Elaine McGonigle and Mrs. Joyce Scott of external relations at St. Andrews for the work they did to make Paula's and my stay at St. Andrews so delightful. Dr. Brian Lang, Principal of St. Andrews, and Ron Parent, Head of the Divinity School, were wonderful hosts. Philosophy professors John Haldane and John Skorupski were extremely gracious just to the extent that they were willing to take me seriously. Alan

Torrance, Chris Seitz, Trevor Hart, and Richard Bauckham made theological conversations rich as well as fruitful. St. Andrews can rightly be proud not only of their students but of the kind of serious training in theology the Divinity School in St. Mary's College represents.

St. Andrews is a charming and lovely town on the coast of Fife facing the North Sea. I enjoyed my stay at St. Salvator's College and was honored to be asked by Rev. Dr. James Walker to preach in the University Church, St. Salvator's. I confess I was a bit apprehensive when I learned that I was to be locked in the pulpit stall until I preached the gospel, but I am glad to report I was let out. Paula and I were in St. Andrews at the beginning of Lent. We are particularly grateful to All Saints Episcopal Church of Scotland and to Rev. Jonathan Mason for making possible our participation in the wonderful liturgies at All Saints. To begin Lent with the Great Litany followed by evensong and the benediction of the Eucharist made this a memorable Lent for us. It is surely a good thing for a Gifford lecturer to come to the end of his lectures confronted with Christ's cross.

I

God and the Gifford Lectures

God, at least the God whom Christians worship, has seldom held center stage in the Gifford Lectures. That the god of the Gifford Lectures is rarely the Trinity is not surprising, given the conditions of Lord Gifford's will and the times and circumstances in which the Gifford Lectures have been presented. The god that various Gifford lecturers have shown to exist or not to exist is a god that bears the burden of proof. In short, the god of the Gifford Lectures is usually a god with a problem. That some Gifford lecturers have actually tried to show that something like a god might exist seems enough of a challenge. For a Gifford lecturer to maintain that the God who exists is the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit seems wildly ambitious, if not foolish.

Yet the heart of the argument I develop in these lectures is that natural theology divorced from a full doctrine of God cannot help but distort the character of God and, accordingly, of the world in which we find ourselves. The metaphysical and existential projects to make a "place" for such a god cannot help but "prove" the existence of a god that is not worthy of worship. The Trinity is not a further specification of a more determinative reality called god, because there is no more determinative reality than the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. From the perspective of those who think we must first "prove" the existence of god before we can say anything else about god, the claim by Christians that God is Trinity cannot help but appear a "confessional" assertion that is unintelligible for anyone who is not already a Christian.

That God is Trinity is, of course, a confession. The acknowledgment of God's trinitarian character was made necessary by the Christian insistence that the God who had redeemed the world through the cross and

resurrection of Jesus was not different from the God of Abraham, Moses, and the prophets. God has never not been Trinity, but only through the struggle to render its own existence intelligible did the church discover God's trinitarian nature. Accordingly, Christians believe rightly that few claims are more rationally compelling than our confession that God is Trinity. Of course, our knowledge that God is Trinity, a knowledge rightly described as revelation, only intensifies the mystery of God's trinitarian nature.

I am acutely aware that claims about God's trinitarian nature seem to be no more than sheer assertion for those whose habit of thought has been nurtured in modernity. Surely there must be a better, or at least more polite, way to begin the Gifford Lectures? Yet I assume that a Gifford lecturer is rightly held to say what he or she takes to be true. And I am a Christian theologian. As such, I am not trying to think a new thought or to rethink an old one in a new way. Rather, I must show why Christians, even Christians who are theologians, can be no more than witnesses. And the very character of that witness is an indication not only of who God is but of why that which exists, that is, God's created order, cannot avoid witnessing to the One who is our beginning and end.

John Milbank has observed that "the pathos of modern theology is its false humility."¹ Theologians, particularly theologians who are paid by universities, too often do theology in a manner that will not offend the peace established by the secular order. Given the requirements of that order, theology cannot help but become one more opinion, one more option, to enliven the dulled imaginations of those who suffer from knowing so much that they no longer know what they know. I hope Milbank's warning about false humility explains why I cannot help but appear impolite, since I must maintain that the God who moves the sun and the stars is the same God who was incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth. Given the politics of modernity, the humility required for those who worship the God revealed in the cross and resurrection of Christ cannot help but appear as arrogance.

That Christian humility cannot avoid appearing arrogant is an indication of why the argument I develop in these lectures entails a politics and an ethics. I show that the very idea that we might know God abstracted from how God makes himself known was the result of the loss of a Christian politics called church. Put in the categories we have

1. John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 1. It is extremely important to note Milbank's observation that the problem facing theology is a "false humility." Theology done rightly requires humility just to the extent that the theologian's work is possible only if the theologian submits to authority. Heresy is but the manifestation of pride. See, for example, Alasdair MacIntyre's account of Abelard in *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 90–91.

learned to use in modernity, I show why ethics cannot be separated from theology. In terms more appropriate to the Christian tradition, I show why the truthfulness of theological claims entails the work they do for the shaping of holy lives.

The title of these lectures, *With the Grain of the Universe*, is a phrase from an essay by John Howard Yoder. The passage that frames this phrase appears as the epigraph to this book, and it is worth repeating here:

The point that apocalyptic makes is not only that people who wear crowns and who claim to foster justice by the sword are not as strong as they think—true as that is: we still sing, “O where are Kings and Empires now of old that went and came?” It is that people who bear crosses are working with the grain of the universe. One does not come to that belief by reducing social process to mechanical and statistical models, nor by winning some of one’s battles for the control of one’s own corner of the fallen world. One comes to it by sharing the life of those who sing about the Resurrection of the slain Lamb.²

The attempt to develop a natural theology prior to or as grounds for subsequent claims about God cannot help but be mistaken to the extent such a project fails to help us see that there can be no deeper reality-making claim than the one Yoder makes: those who bear crosses work with the grain of the universe. Christians betray themselves as well as their non-Christian brothers and sisters when in the interest of apologetics we say and act as if the cross of Christ is incidental to God’s being. In fact, the God we worship and the world God created cannot be truthfully known without the cross, which is why the knowledge of God and ecclesiology—or the politics called church—are interdependent.

Such are the bare bones of the position that I develop in these lectures. Only in the last three lectures will I turn to these claims explicitly, but I state them at the beginning, without argument and qualification, because these are the convictions that have informed the way I have approached these lectures and that have shaped the story I tell. I realize that by stating my views so baldly I risk losing those people who have already decided such theological claims cannot be defended. To these people, I can say only that the proof is in the pudding, and I ask them to have patience—a virtue Christians share with many traditions, but also one that we believe has been given particular form by the worship of the God who would rule all creation from Christ’s cross.³

2. John Howard Yoder, “Armaments and Eschatology,” *Studies in Christian Ethics* 1, no. 1 (1988): 58.

3. For a wonderful analysis of patience and the forms it can take, see John Howard Yoder, “Patience as Method in Moral Reasoning: Is an Ethic of Discipleship Absolute?” in *The Wisdom of the Cross: Essays in Honor of John Howard Yoder*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas, Chris Huebner, Harry Huebner, and Mark Thiesson Nation (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 24–42.

Keeping Faith with Adam Gifford

The question remains whether or not the lectures I am about to give are in fact the Gifford Lectures. In this respect, I am at least in good company. Alasdair MacIntyre begins his Gifford Lectures with the same question.⁴ MacIntyre observes that the Gifford lecturer is someone who should try to implement the conditions of Lord Gifford's will. Yet MacIntyre does not share Lord Gifford's presumption that a nontraditioned account of rationality is sufficient to make natural theology a subject analogous to the natural sciences. Put more accurately, MacIntyre does not think Adam Gifford's understanding of the natural sciences should be a model for natural theology because Gifford's view distorts the character of science. I suspect that MacIntyre also thinks that our knowledge of God is more certain than the knowledge secured through the natural sciences. To that extent his own views cannot help but be at odds with the assumptions that shaped the provisions of Lord Gifford's will.⁵

The clause from Lord Gifford's will that best indicates the distance between MacIntyre and Gifford says that "the lecturers shall be under no restraint whatever in their treatment of their theme." MacIntyre characterizes this clause as Adam Gifford's "reckless generosity" and uses it to justify his being a Gifford lecturer.⁶ From MacIntyre's perspective, to "be under no restraint" is but an indication that we have lost the

4. MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions*, 9.

5. I cannot document this claim, but I make it on the presumption that MacIntyre is a follower of Aquinas on these matters. For example, in response to the question whether sacred doctrine is nobler than the other sciences, Aquinas notes that since sacred science is partly speculative and partly practical, it transcends all other speculative and practical sciences. Sacred science surpasses all other speculative sciences in matters of certitude because the other sciences derive their status from "the natural light of reason, which can err," whereas sacred science derives its certitude from the light of divine knowledge, which cannot be misled. The practical sciences are hierarchically ordered according to the purposes to which they are ordained. Since the purpose of sacred doctrine is eternal bliss, the purpose of every practical science gains its ultimate intelligibility from that end. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Westminster, Md.: Christian Classics, 1948) part 1, question 1, article 5. It may be objected that Aquinas in this article is not dealing with natural theology but with sacred doctrine. But to the extent that natural theology has an integral part in sacred doctrine, I think Aquinas would maintain that the knowledge of God's existence is more certain than what we can know from the other sciences.

A note about references to the *Summa*: hereafter I will offer only the numerals; thus the reference above would appear as 1.1.5. As those familiar with the *Summa* know, it is divided into three parts, and the second part is itself divided into two parts; furthermore, each article is divided into objections and replies to objections. Thus the reference 1-2.3.4.5 would be to the first part of the second part, question 3, article 4, reply to objection 5 (likewise, 2-2 indicates the second part of the second part).

6. MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions*, 30-31.

possibility of rational argument. Accordingly, MacIntyre traces the increasing incoherence of the modern university to the loss of religious tests for appointments to the professorate.⁷ MacIntyre attributes the success of the natural sciences in modern universities to their informal and unstated policy of limiting questions through exclusion. Thus the sciences continue to enjoy a confidence in their ability to tell us the way things are because scientific disciplines do not correspond to Lord Gifford's understanding of rational inquiry. In comparison to the sciences, moral and theological inquiry are now at a disadvantage because the ideological effect of Gifford-like accounts of rationality have relegated such subjects to private opinion.

However, just to the extent MacIntyre is concerned to keep faith with Gifford's will, he honors what I take to be Gifford's concern that those who give the Gifford Lectures should attempt to help us understand how any account of the moral life cannot be divorced from our understanding of the way things are. In Lord Gifford's words, the Gifford Lectures are dedicated to:

"Promoting, Advancing, Teaching, and Diffusing the Study of Natural Theology," in the widest sense of that term, in other words, "The Knowledge of God, the Infinite, the All, the First and Only Cause, the One and the Sole Substance, the Sole Being, the Sole Reality, and the Sole Existence, the Knowledge of His Nature and Attributes, the Knowledge of the Relations which men and the whole universe bear to Him, the Knowledge of the Nature and Foundation of Ethics or Morals, and of all Obligations and Duties thence arising."⁸

MacIntyre hopes that if Lord Gifford were alive today, he *might* be able to recognize as his own MacIntyre's attempt to provide a quite different account of moral rationality and its relation to natural theology.⁹ It is quite remarkable that, unlike MacIntyre, many Gifford lecturers have not thought it necessary to attend to the provisions of Gifford's bequest. I take this lack of attention to Gifford's will as a confirmation of MacIntyre's account of the philosophical developments over the cen-

7. *Ibid.*, 17–18. MacIntyre does not assume that such tests in themselves are sufficient to sustain rational argument; rather, such tests are effective only if they safeguard agreements that are themselves the result of hard won judgments that constitute a tradition. Such tests are no doubt subject to abuse and may be complicit in wholesale injustice against certain groups (thus the exclusion of Jews from the Scottish university), but the very naming of such injustice requires participation in a tradition that makes such tests at least a possibility. The last chapter of *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* is a wonderful account of the effects of the loss of such tests on the Scottish university.

8. "Lord Gifford's Will," in Stanley Jaki, *Lord Gifford and His Lectures: A Centenary Retrospective* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1986), 72–73.

9. MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions*, 25–26.

tury in which the Giffords have been given. In a world in which you can no longer trust your knowledge of how things are, it is unclear why you should keep trust with trusts.

I have called attention to MacIntyre's attempt to justify his Gifford Lectures as the Gifford Lectures because my arguments are even more foreign to the purpose of the Gifford Lectures than MacIntyre's. At the very least, MacIntyre shares with Gifford a profound commitment to philosophy as a master science.¹⁰ Yet I am a theologian. Even worse, I am a theologian who has been profoundly influenced by the work of another Gifford lecturer, Karl Barth. My problem becomes even more acute because I will try to convince you that Karl Barth is the great natural theologian of the Gifford Lectures—at least he is so if you remember that natural theology is the attempt to witness to the nongodforsakenness of the world even under the conditions of sin.¹¹

I am aware that this claim will strike many people as problematic at best, and some may even think such a claim borders on being intellectually dishonest. Indeed, I believe it might make Stanley Jaki apoplectic. In

10. I am not suggesting that Gifford would understand philosophy as a master science in the same manner that MacIntyre does, but rather that at least they share the Scottish commitment to philosophy as a way of life. It is not accidental that in the "Introduction" to *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, MacIntyre references the work of George Elder Davie for his wonderful accounts of the struggle to maintain philosophy as indispensable for the maintenance of the Scottish tradition (3). MacIntyre observes in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1988) that the title of professor of moral philosophy became central to those who sought to maintain a distinctively Scottish cultural tradition "just because the peculiar and distinctive principles of Scottish law, Scottish education, and Scottish theology depended for their survival on the elaboration of philosophical theories and theses which could underpin those principles and provide for their defense in public debate within Scotland as effectively as the Calvinist Aristotelianism of Baillie had done, but which had also come to terms with the philosophical debates of late seventeenth-century and early eighteenth-century modernity" (258). The hold of that tradition is wonderfully witnessed in Lord Gifford's life, particularly as we learn of his last years in John Gifford's "Recollections of a Brother," in Jaki, *Lord Gifford and His Lectures*, 77–99. John Gifford suggests that it may surprise his friends that Adam Gifford's "heart was never entirely with his profession"; rather, his first love was philosophical theology (95–98). But it is hard to see how anyone who had come through the Scottish educational system would have been surprised that such was the case.

11. In the "Introduction" to the new edition of *Marxism and Christianity* (London: Duckworth, 1995), MacIntyre explains that Christianity had become problematic for him due to his mistaken assumption that the terms in which theology was to be understood were those provided by Karl Barth. "But what Barth's theology proved unable to provide was any practically adequate account of the moral life, and, although I should have known better, I mistakenly took what is a defect in Barth's theology to be a defect in Christianity as such. This judgment seemed to be confirmed by the platitudinous emptiness of liberal Christian moralizing in which the positions of secular liberalism reappeared in various religious guises. And this liberalism, the moral and political counterpart and expression of developing capitalism, I rejected just as I had done in 1953 and for the same reasons" (xx). Although I am sympathetic to MacIntyre's criticism of Barth, I hope to show that Barth's

his overview of the Gifford lecturers, Jaki treats most of the lecturers with respect. He even praises antitheistic Gifford lecturers such as Dewey and Ayer for “touching off a hunger for something more solid and elevated on the part of judicious readers.”¹² Jaki shows no such respect for Barth, whom he characterizes as “alone among Christian Gifford lecturers in inveighing against natural theology. He and his followers seem to be strangely myopic to a facet of the much heralded onset of a post-Christian age through the alleged complete secularization of the Western mind.”¹³ The only thing positive Jaki can say about Barth is that he serves as a witness “to the reluctance of most Christian theologians to cut their moorings from reason, for fear of undercutting their very credibility.”¹⁴

Jaki was equally unimpressed by the lectures given by Reinhold Niebuhr. He notes that from the “viewpoint of philosophy” there is little significance to be gathered from Niebuhr’s lectures. “The ‘Christian’ interpretation which Niebuhr tried to give to the nature and destiny of man was deprived of philosophical foundations and breadth by the short shrift given in his Barthian neo-orthodoxy to metaphysics and epistemology.”¹⁵ However much it may seem from the “viewpoint of philosophy” that Niebuhr is a Barthian, it will be the burden of my lectures to show that the difference between Niebuhr and Barth is exactly the difference between a theology that has given up on its ability to tell us the way the world is and a theology that confidently and unapologetically proclaims the way things are—a distinction that is unintelligible if the God Christians worship does not exist.

Like MacIntyre, I hope that in spite of my distance from Lord Gifford’s theological convictions, he might recognize what I try to do in these lectures as a trustworthy attempt to keep faith with the provisions of his will.¹⁶ Although I lack MacIntyre’s brilliance and learning, I am going to try to do in these lectures something like what he did in *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*. In those lectures, MacIntyre told the philosophical story since the endowment of the Gifford Lectures. I am going to try

theology has resources that provide for the development of a more adequate ethic. I owe the phrase “nongodforsakenness of the world” to Joe Mangina.

12. Jaki, *Lord Gifford and His Lectures*, 39.

13. *Ibid.* Jaki’s criticism of Barth was voiced earlier by Brand Blanshard, when he was giving the Gifford Lectures at St. Andrews in 1952. His criticism of Barth was reported in *The Scotsman* (April 9, 1952), which occasioned a fascinating exchange of letters between Blanshard and T. F. Torrance. I will discuss their exchange later.

14. *Ibid.*

15. *Ibid.*, 26.

16. In “Recollections of a Brother,” John Gifford reports that Adam Gifford admired Spinoza but denied that he was a pantheist, marking the distinction thus: “Spinoza holds that everything is God. I hold that God is everything; if I were to assume a name descriptive of my belief, I should be called a Theopanist.” Jaki, *Lord Gifford and His Lectures*, 98. I confess that I take this to be a case of a “rose by any other name is still a rose.”

to tell the theological story. By so doing, I hope to show, like MacIntyre, that Lord Gifford was right to think that the truthfulness of our theological convictions is inseparable from questions of how we are to live.

I hope it will be evident not only from the form but from the substance of these lectures that I have learned much from MacIntyre. I should make clear, however, that as much as I would like to use MacIntyre to support the position I develop, to do so would be unfair. MacIntyre and I differ, and not simply due to my pacifism (though that is not unrelated). Rather, we differ in our understandings of the relationship between philosophy and theology. For example, in response to the suggestion that his most recent philosophical positions conceal a reassertion of Christianity, MacIntyre declares:

It is false, both biographically and with respect to the structure of my beliefs. What I now believe philosophically I came to believe very largely before I reacknowledged the truth of Catholic Christianity. And I was only able to respond to the teachings of the Church because I had already learned from Aristotelianism both the nature of the mistakes involved in my earlier rejection of Christianity, and how to understand aright the relation of philosophical argument to theological inquiry. My philosophy, like that of many other Aristotelians, is theistic; but it is as secular in its content as any other.¹⁷

I have no stake in denying that philosophy has a history that can be told in a manner that separates the work of philosophy from theology, or that philosophy as a discipline, particularly in the modern university, has its own canons of excellence. Nor do I think that philosophy has no other purpose than to be a handmaid to theology. Yet the strong distinction MacIntyre maintains between philosophy and theology—such that philosophy represents a secular discipline—does justice neither to

17. Alasdair MacIntyre, "An interview with Giovanna Borradori," in *The MacIntyre Reader*, ed. Kelvin Knight (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 265–266. MacIntyre gave this interview in 1991. In the new "Introduction" to *Marxism and Christianity*, MacIntyre explains that what he discovered in Aristotle was how any account of rationality requires an articulation of the embodiment of concepts presupposed by practices, as well as how "such concepts themselves need to be understood in terms of their functioning within just those same modes of practice." Having adopted this Aristotelian standpoint, MacIntyre discovered "that I had thereby discarded philosophical assumptions that had been at the root of my difficulties with substantive Christian orthodoxy. And the removal of these barriers was one, even if only one, necessary stage in my coming to acknowledge the truth of the biblical Christianity of the Catholic church." MacIntyre notes that he also came to understand better that in spite of much that was right about official Catholic condemnations of Marxism, Catholic theologians failed to see that Marx was right to focus on the close relationship of theory to practice. Marxists rightly see that any type of theory, whether scientific or theological or political, when divorced from the practical contexts in which it is at home, becomes too easily a free-floating body of thought

the complex relationship between philosophy and theology in Aquinas, the thinker MacIntyre most admires, nor to MacIntyre's own historicist commitments.¹⁸

I do not think that to be valid, philosophy—or any other science—must be shown to “depend” on our knowledge of God. Aquinas certainly did not construe the relationship between theology and the other sciences in this way:

The principles of other sciences either are evident and cannot be proved, or are proved by natural reason through some other science. But the knowledge proper to this science comes through revelation, and not through natural reason. Therefore it has no concern to prove the principles of the other sciences, but only to judge them. Whatsoever is found in other sciences contrary to any truth of this science, must be condemned as false: “Destroying counsels and every height that exalted itself against the knowledge of God.” (2 Cor. 10:4-5)¹⁹

Bruce Marshall observes that Aquinas did not think that we can or should deduce what we ought to believe about medicine or architecture

that is apt to be transformed into an ideology. “So when Catholic theology is in good order, its peculiar work is to assist in making intelligible in a variety of contexts of practice what the church teaches authoritatively as the Word of God revealed to it and to the world.” According to MacIntyre, when theology does not subordinate itself to that teaching it cannot help but become one more set of religious opinions. Such opinions may be interesting, but they function quite differently from theology in service to the church (xxviii–xxix). It will become obvious that I share MacIntyre's understanding of practice, but exactly because I do, I find it hard to understand why he seems to make such a sharp distinction between the work of theology and the work of philosophy.

18. MacIntyre's strong claim for the independence of philosophy from theology is all the more puzzling in that it seems to put him on the side of Scotus. In *Three Rival Versions*, he criticizes Scotus who, in contrast to Aquinas, set the stage for the autonomy of philosophy (155–156). Nor does MacIntyre explain what he means by “secular,” but I take him to mean no more than “not revelation.” Yet such a view of the secular, which is surely to be distinguished from any views that would defend the self-sufficiency of the secular, is not innocent. My worry is that MacIntyre's understanding of the secular may be analogous to some of the neo-Scholastic accounts of nature that resulted in making grace little more than an “add-on.”

I am aware that MacIntyre's “historicism” is not easily characterized. See, for example, Robert Stern's, “MacIntyre and Historicism,” in *After MacIntyre: Critical Perspectives on the Work of Alasdair MacIntyre*, ed. John Horton and Susan Mendus (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 146–160. In his response to Stern, MacIntyre expresses appreciation for Stern's constructive defense of his work, but contrary to Stern, he does not believe his historicism requires elimination of the place of truth as part of any inquiry. In this context, I wish only to question whether a history of philosophy as a self-justifying activity is, on MacIntyre's own grounds, possible. Such a history of philosophy seems to be the result of the professionalization of philosophy in the modern university, which has led to the kind of specialization against which MacIntyre's whole project is advanced.

19. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1.1.6.2.

from the articles of faith. The reasons we have for holding the vast majority of our beliefs need not be derived from the basic principles of the faith. Yet, according to Marshall, exactly because Aquinas presupposes Aristotle's understanding of science "as a set of interpreted sentences tied in logically tight ways to other interpreted sentences which are themselves either proven or beyond proof and doubt alike," Aquinas rightly maintained that *sacra doctrina* could and must stand in judgment on the other sciences.²⁰

I am not suggesting that MacIntyre disagrees with Aquinas's claim that *sacra doctrina* can and must judge the other sciences, including philosophy. Indeed, I assume that MacIntyre believes his statements about the secular character of philosophy are but restatements of Aquinas' own views. Yet if theology (which is not the same as *sacra doctrina*) can stand in judgment of philosophy, then the relation between philosophy and theology is at least more complex than MacIntyre's stated views suggest.²¹ My disagreements with MacIntyre may appear to be simply a quibble, but at stake is the very status of theological knowledge. The strong distinction MacIntyre seems to make between philosophy and theology threatens to underwrite the modern presumption that in com-

20. Bruce Marshall, "Faith and Reason Reconsidered: Aquinas and Luther on Deciding What Is True," *The Thomist* 63 (1999): 18–19. Marshall says the practices of medicine and architecture do not need theological justification, but he does not say that about philosophy. It would be a mistake to make too much of this point, but at the very least I think the absence of philosophy suggests that what philosophers do, which can be done independent of theology, often appears to be more similar to theology than to medicine and architecture. It is my own view, however, that medicine and architecture are determinative philosophical disciplines, or at least entail philosophical questions, which suggests that it is important for theologians to attend to them as disciplines that often raise theological questions.

In a fascinating footnote, Marshall argues that Aquinas thought that the *principia per se nota* are subject to theological judgment just to the extent that we can decide whether we have a principle known only in itself or by seeing whether the belief in question is consistent with the articles of faith. I am indebted to Marshall for the illuminating account of Aquinas he has developed not only in the quite remarkable series of articles he has published over the years, but now in his book *Trinity and Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

Alfred Freddoso develops an account of the relation of philosophy to theology that I find quite compatible with my own views in his essay "Two Roles for Catholic Philosophers," in *Recovering Nature: Essays in Natural Philosophy, Ethics, and Metaphysics in Honor of Ralph McInerny*, ed. Thomas Hibbs and John O'Callaghan (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 229–252.

21. Perhaps the point I am trying to make can be put more clearly in terms of MacIntyre's understanding of the virtues. For example, in his *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* (Chicago: Open Court, 1999), MacIntyre observes that Aquinas treats *misericordia* as one of the effects of charity, and since charity is a theological virtue, "an incautious reader might suppose that Aquinas does not recognize it as a secular virtue. But this would be a mistake. Charity in the form of *misericordia* is recognizably at work in

parison to our other beliefs about the way things are, theology cannot help but be question-begging.²²

For example, Aquinas's characterization of the knowledge that is proper to theology—that is, knowledge that “comes through revelation”—seems to name for many today a knowledge that is incapable of rational defense. Yet Aquinas assumes the opposite. For Aquinas, knowledge attained by “natural reason” is not more certain than that attained by revelation; “natural” and “revelation” do not name epistemological alternatives.²³ Thus, those who attempt in the name of Aquinas to develop a “natural theology”—that is, a philosophical defense of “theism” as a propaedeutic for any further “confessional” claims one might want to make—are engaged in an enterprise that Aquinas would not recognize. I do not assume that MacIntyre's understanding of the rela-

the secular world and the authorities whom Aquinas cites on its nature, and whose disagreements he aspires to resolve, include Sallust and Cicero as well as Augustine. *Misericordia* then has its place in the catalogue of the virtues, independently of its theological grounding” (124). Though accurate, MacIntyre's point here fails to attend to Aquinas's claim that charity is the form of the virtues just to the extent that without charity, *misericordia* will be disordered, if it is not, as all the virtues require, properly ordered to its proper end. Of course, Christians expect to discover the virtues in our non-Christian brothers and sisters. Moreover, in this time when we are all “wayfarers,” the embodiment of the virtues in the lives of Christians cannot help but be disordered. But the difference between those who are Christians and those who are not is that Christians have been made part of God's economy sufficiently to locate for one another the disordered character of our lives. So we cannot assume that the *misericordia* made possible by God's grace, although certainly analogous to the pity we find characteristic of others, is the “same” virtue, since every virtue is determined by its relation to the other virtues.

22. The crucial issue for many people today, of course, is not whether theology can tell you anything about the way the world is, but whether any discipline, and in particular philosophy, can pretend to tell us anything about the way the world is. In these lectures, I do not pretend to do justice to the technical philosophical issues required for any close arguments in defense of how some propositions, particularly as they are considered in relation to other propositions, can tell us something about the way things are. I do think, however, that the arguments I will develop are defensible. See, for example, Grady Scott Davis's defense of Yoder's understanding of theology in the light of James Gustafson's challenge: “Tradition and Truth in Christian Ethics: John Yoder and the Bases of Biblical Realism,” in *The Wisdom of the Cross*, 278–305. At the very least, I hope the argument I am trying to make is sufficient to show that the contrast between “theology based on reason alone” and “revealed theology” is a false alternative just to the extent that “reason” draws on the conceptual resources that are given to it through traditions of inquiry. Accordingly, there is no contrast that can be drawn between theology that is “natural” and theology that is “something else.” I am indebted to Michael Quirk for helping me see better how the contrast between revealed and natural theology is implicated in questionable epistemological assumptions.

23. As I will indicate below, it is, of course, from MacIntyre that I learned not to read Aquinas as an “epistemologist.” Fortunately, the history of medieval philosophy that has been shaped by the presumption that medieval theologians maintained a sharp distinction between faith and reason (where those categories are assumed to name epistemologi-

tionship between theology and philosophy is implicated in such a misunderstanding of Aquinas, but I fear that his views may give aid and comfort to those who assume that theology is beyond reason.

On the Unnatural Nature of Natural Theology

Lord Gifford expressed the wish for “the lectures to treat their subject as a strictly natural science, the greatest of all possible sciences, indeed, in one sense, the only science, that of Infinite Being, without reference to or reliance upon any supposed special exceptional or so-called miraculous revelation.”²⁴ Given what I have said so far, it should be clear that I do not agree with Lord Gifford’s understanding of natural theology. Lord Gifford had every reason to think that his understanding of natural theology was unexceptional; but in fact his understanding of natural theology as a necessary prolegomenon to test the rationality of theology proper was a rather recent development.

For example, though Aquinas’s *Prima Pars* of the *Summa* is often identified as “natural theology,” Aquinas never so described his work. George Hendry observes that it is seldom noticed that the so-called proofs for the existence of God were perfected at a time when the existence of God was barely questioned. Calling attention to what he calls Aquinas’s “little coda” that ends each of the five ways—“and this everyone understands to be God”—Hendry notes that the problem in the time of Aquinas “was not really to persuade people to believe in God, but to help them to relate their belief in God to the nature and conditions of the world and to see that their belief in God and their understanding of the world mutually illumine each other.”²⁵

cal alternatives) is increasingly being called into question. For example, see John Inglis, “Philosophical Autonomy and the Historiography of Medieval Philosophy,” *British Journal of the History of Philosophy* 5, no. 1 (1997): 21–53; *Spheres of Philosophical Inquiry and the Historiography of Medieval Philosophy* (Leiden: Brill, 1998). Inglis rightly argues that none of the great medieval theologians—for example, Aquinas, Scotus, or Ockham—maintained a strict distinction between philosophy (reason) and theology (faith). According to Inglis, they simply had no interest in speculative inquiry into human understanding for its own sake. Calling attention to Aquinas’s *De Veritate*, Inglis observes in his article that Aquinas explores questions of human understanding only as a way to show how “human self-understanding is *analogous* to divine self-understanding because when human beings reflect on their own intellectual activity, they analogously represent the self-referential understanding of God” (46). MacIntyre would seem to agree with Inglis’s account, which makes all the more puzzling his strict distinction between philosophy and theology. I am indebted to Professor Terry Tilley for calling my attention to Inglis’s important work.

24. “Lord Gifford’s Will,” 74.

25. George Hendry, *Theology of Nature* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1980), 14. The “little coda” is, of course, found in *Summa Theologica*, 1.2.3. Cornelius Ernst, O.P., de-

In a similar fashion Nicholas Wolterstorff argues that

the medieval project of natural theology was profoundly different from the Enlightenment project of evidentialist apologetics. It had different goals, presupposed different convictions, and was evoked by a different situation. It is true that some of the same arguments occur in both projects; they migrate from the one to the other. But our recognition of the identity of the émigré must not blind us to the fact that he has migrated from one “world” to another.²⁶

Wolterstorff characterizes “evidentialist apologetics” as the frame of mind that assumes that unless one has good reasons for one’s theistic beliefs, one ought to give them up. According to Wolterstorff, evidentialists hold that “belief is assumed guilty until it proves its innocence by evidence.”²⁷ Locke, according to Wolterstorff, is the great representative of the evidentialist perspective just to the extent that Locke sought to defeat Enthusiasm by shifting the burden of proof to those who claimed certainty. Locke thought it important to defeat Enthusiasm because from his perspective the Enthusiasts were socially pernicious. According to Locke, not only did the Enthusiasts threaten social disruption, but they put forward an account of religion that violated one’s dignity as a human being.²⁸ Locke sought to defeat the Enthusiasts by developing what Wolterstorff characterizes as a foundationalist theory of justified belief, that is, the theory that a belief can be a rational belief only if it is grounded in certitude, whether immediately or mediately.

Wolterstorff argues that this kind of foundationalist project makes sense only in our modern situation. Without religious and moral pluralism, foundationalism would lack social urgency or relevance. The secularization of society is therefore the breeding ground for the attempt to develop foundationalist epistemologies and for the correlative fear that if we surrender the assumption that our beliefs can be grounded, then

scribes what Aquinas was doing with the “proofs” in this way: “Our ordinary contexts for ‘God’ (prayer, ritual, even swearing) are ways of life and behavior which are discriminated from ways of life and behavior which are tacitly identified as everyday and which count to make the language which belongs to them ‘literal.’ The point of the five ways was to show how one might go on speaking of ‘God’ in the ordinary world.” See *Multiple Echo: Explorations in Theology*, ed. Fergus Kerr, O.P., and Timothy Radcliffe, O.P. (London: Dalton, Longman, and Todd, 1979), 74.

26. Nicholas Wolterstorff, “The Migration of the Theistic Arguments: From Natural Theology to Evidentialist Apologetics,” in *Rationality, Religious Belief, and Moral Commitment: New Essays in the Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Robert Audi and William Wainwright (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 39.

27. *Ibid.*, 38.

28. *Ibid.*, 43. By “Enthusiasm” Locke meant forms of Christianity that were based in the emotions rather than in reason.

“anything goes.” As Wolterstorff puts it: “Foundationalism or antinomianism: that gaunt *either/or* has seemed obviously true to most reflective modern intellectuals. The alternative to grounding is thought to be arbitrary dogmatism.”²⁹

The alternative between foundationalism or antinomianism simply did not exist for Aquinas. In MacIntyre’s terms, Aquinas was not an “epistemologist.”³⁰ Rather, what we now call Aquinas’s natural theology was intrinsic to his understanding of Aristotelian science and how such a science must proceed if we are to avoid making God but another item among the things in the world.³¹ God, the creator of all that is, cannot be—as the evidentialist enterprise assumes—part of the metaphysical furniture of the universe. In the words of John of Damascus: “God does not belong to the class of existing things, not that God has not existence but that God is above all things, no even above existence itself.”³²

Aquinas’s account of our natural knowledge of God is an exploration of the implication that the divine essence cannot be a genus because of the very way in which essence is found in God. As Joseph Bobik puts the matter, for Aquinas “*what God is* is Existence, i.e., the Divine Essence is Existence.”³³ Accordingly God can be known only through effects, which means that our knowledge of God is not just accidentally analogical but necessarily so. As Aquinas puts it: “Although we cannot know

29. Ibid., 55. Wolterstorff observes that one of the striking facts about the Enlightenment mentality is that though science no more fits the foundationalist canons than does religion, many people continue to assume that something about science makes Christianity problematic.

30. MacIntyre notes that in *Aeterni Patris*, epistemological questions are never raised; as a result Leo XIII remained true to Aquinas. That was not the case, however, with those who responded to *Aeterni Patris*. Too often they followed Kleutgen, whose revival of Thomism was done in Kantian terms. “And in so doing they doomed Thomism to the fate of all philosophies which give priority to epistemological questions: the indefinite multiplication of disagreement. There are just too many alternative ways to begin.” *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, 75.

31. Eugene Rogers has helped us see how Aquinas used Aristotle’s “scientia”; see *Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth: Sacred Doctrine and the Natural Knowledge of God* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1995), 17–70.

32. Quoted in William Placher, *Domestication of Transcendence: How Modern Thinking about God Went Wrong* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1996), 10.

33. Joseph Bobik, *Aquinas on Being and Essence: A Translation and Interpretation* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1965), 215. Bobik’s work on Aquinas is as important as it is unknown; unfortunately, his work has been ignored. Aquinas repeats his argument in the *Summa Theologica*, 1.3.4: “Since in God there is no potentiality, it follows that in Him essence does not differ from existence. Therefore His essence is His existence. Just as that which has fire, but is not itself fire, is on fire by participation; so that which has existence but is not existence, is a being by participation. But God is His own essence; if, therefore, He is not His own existence he will be not essential, but participated being. He will not therefore be the first being—which is absurd. Therefore God is His own existence, and not merely His own essence.”

in what consists the essence of God, nevertheless in this science we make use of His effects, either of nature or of grace, in place of a definition, in regard to whatever is treated of in this science concerning God; even as in some philosophical sciences we demonstrate something about a cause from its effect, by taking the effect in place of a definition of the cause."³⁴

From Aquinas's perspective, if we could have the kind of evidence of God the evidentialist desires, then we would have evidence that the God Christians worship does not exist. But one may well ask: If this account of Aquinas is right, what are we to make of the arguments for the existence of God in Question Two of the *Prima Pars*? The answer is simple, given Aquinas's understanding of science and how such science contributes to our happiness as creatures of a good God.³⁵

For Aquinas, the best order of human learning is the order of existence. But this does not mean, as is often presumed this side of modernity, that Aquinas begins with as minimal account of God as possible in order to then "add" thicker theological descriptions. The *Summa* is, as Timothy L. Smith argues, trinitarian from beginning to end. Aquinas's ordering principle, *ordo rerum*, does not require that he must first establish God's existence by philosophical argument in order then to make claims about God's trinitarian nature. Rather,

the unity of this science, *sacra doctrina*, demands that all remain under or within the *ratio* of being divinely "revealable." As Thomas attempts to find a rational basis for some of those beliefs, he is pursuing a deeper under-

34. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1.1.7.1. Aquinas's understanding of rationality was nicely exemplified in an exchange of letters in the *New York Review of Books* 46, no. 3 (February 18, 1999) concerning the rationality of Thomas Kuhn's understanding of science. A philosopher of science, Alex Levine, wrote protesting an article by Steven Weinberg that seemed to suggest that Kuhn's account of the history of science made science an irrational process. In response, Levine, I think rightly, argued that that was not Kuhn's view because the very claim that science is irrational would depend on a prior account of rationality. "But for Kuhn, ever the scientist, our best hope of understanding what rationality is resides in the study of *paradigm cases* of rational activity. Since science is the best such case, the claim that science is irrational is, for him, not only objectionable, it is downright incoherent" (49). I suspect that Professor Levine might think theology is irrational, but his account of Kuhn's understanding of rationality follows the same logic as Aquinas's claim that sacred doctrine is more noble than the other sciences (*Summa Theologica*, 1.1.5). The presumption in our times that theology is at a disadvantage in comparison to science for helping us understand the way things are is at least partly due to deficient accounts of the activity of science.

35. Wolterstorff rightly argues that for Aquinas the exploration of our natural knowledge of God is part of the believer's desire to, as Aquinas puts it, "think out and take to heart whatever reasons he can find in support thereof." Of course not every believer has the time or inclination to follow this path, but that some do is a good thing. To demonstrate some of the things we "unseeingly took on faith, so that now we 'see' them to be true, that is a step toward felicity." Wolterstorff, "Migration of the Theistic Arguments," 71.

standing with the belief that the object of faith is intelligible in itself if not to us in this life. The reasoning upon the faith will typically but not exclusively involve the manifestation of that faith where reason cannot attain of its own accord. Revelation, however, provides the more certain and complete knowledge. The argument from authority never gives up its place to rational argument, though rational argument may be employed where the authority of revelation is retained. As one commentator puts it, the whole of the first 43 questions of ST 1 are "a single and unified treatise of revealed theology called 'De Deo.'" The argument from authority, that is, from the authority of revelation, always reigns as the more certain and complete.³⁶

For Aquinas, arguments from revelation carry more authority, but we are creatures created to desire God, which means that God is implicated in desires as fundamental as satisfying hunger and as complex as the longing for friendship. Thus, even without revelation, we all have some intimations of God. But Aquinas says that to pursue these intimations solely through reason is not sufficient:

The truth about God such as reason could discover would only be known by a few, and that after a long time, and with the admixture of many errors. Whereas man's whole salvation, which is in God, depends upon the knowledge of the truth. Therefore, in order that the salvation of men might be brought about more fitly and more surely, it was necessary that they should be taught divine truths by divine revelation. It was therefore necessary that, besides philosophical science built up by reason there should be a sacred science learned through revelation.³⁷

The existence of God, then, which can be known by natural reason, is rightly understood as a preamble to the articles of faith, but "preamble" does not mean that the truthfulness of the articles of faith must await for such preambles to be established before their truth can be known.³⁸ Indeed, Aquinas even doubts whether unbelievers can be said to believe in "a God," since Christians understand such belief in relation to the act of faith. "For they do not believe that God exists under the conditions that faith determines; hence they do not truly believe in a God, since, as the Philosopher observes (Metaphysics, 9, 22) 'to know simple things defectively is not to know them at all.'"³⁹

36. Timothy L. Smith, "Thomas Aquinas's *De Deo*: Setting the Record Straight on His Theological Method," *Sapientia* 53, no. 203 (1998): 135–136.

37. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1.1.

38. For Aquinas's discussion of the so-called proofs as preambles, see *Summa Theologica*, 1.2.2.1.

39. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2-2.2.2.3. Indeed, Aquinas explicitly notes that the Platonists said that there is one supreme god, the cause of all things, yet this did not prevent them from worshipping heavenly bodies and demons. According to Aquinas, "natural the-

This brief account of Aquinas's understanding of the status of our natural knowledge of God does not do justice to the complexity of his understanding of the status such knowledge has for Christian theology. I will take up these matters in much greater detail when I turn to Barth. I have sought at this stage simply to raise some questions about Lord Gifford's assumption, an assumption widely shared, that something called "natural theology" is a given that can clearly be distinguished from theology proper. I intend to show that Christian theologians' acceptance of Lord Gifford's account of natural theology is one of the reasons that Christian theology in our time suffers from the pathos of false humility.

What Happened to Make Natural Theology Seem So Natural?

If I am right that Lord Gifford's understanding of natural theology is anything but natural, the question remains: What happened so that anyone who thinks otherwise now seems to bear the burden of proof? The shorthand answer is something called "modernity," whose agent is identified as "The Enlightenment." Behind these developments lies (what Protestants call) the Reformation—which is often credited with creating, at least for Europe, the "problem of pluralism." That problem, as Wolterstorff notes, set the agenda for Locke and the many followers of Locke who try to secure a peace between the warring religions, insuring that we share something in common more determinative than our particularistic convictions about God. Equally important, if not more so for the development of natural theology, has been the rise of science and, in particular, the social sciences correlative to the development of capitalist political economies, for which God can appear only as an "externality."⁴⁰

I do not pretend to have the erudition or insight to make the connections necessary to tell the full story that has made natural theology seem so natural for us. The argument I develop in these lectures will betray the influence of those like MacIntyre, Milbank, and Funkenstein, who have helped us understand better the world that inhabits us.⁴¹ In

ology" is to be associated both with those who maintain that the whole world, by which they mean the world-soul, is to be worshiped and with the views of the Platonists. From Aquinas's perspective, such "natural theology" is but a form of idolatry. *Summa Theologica*, 2-2.94.1. I am indebted to Russell Hittinger for reminding me of Aquinas's understanding of idolatry.

40. This way of putting the matter obviously reflects my debt to the argument John Milbank develops in *Theology and Social Theory*.

41. The difficulty of putting it all together (so to speak) can be illustrated by simply asking how one can understand the similarities and differences between MacIntyre's,

what ways I get the history of these developments right is best tested in the light of the overall story I tell. It is important, however, that I make clear that I do not assume my account of modernity is necessarily one of declension. Though I admire and am attracted to many of the movements and figures we associate with what we call the Middle Ages, I do not assume the latter to be some golden age from which modernity names a fall.

My reasons for not making the story of our time the story of “the fall” are theological. The gospel, the good news Christians have been given, the good news that we believe is embodied in the church, is not “at home” in this world. The assumption that the Middle Ages represents a time when Christians “got it right” not only does an injustice to the complexity of the times and places so named, but also betrays the gospel requirement that even in a world that understands itself to be Christian, faithful witness is no less required for the truth that is Christ to be known. When Christianity is tempted to become a civilizational religion in a manner that makes witness secondary to knowing the truth about God, Christians lose the skills necessary to make known to themselves and others how what we believe is true to the way things are. The very attempt to tell the story of modernity as one of decline from a genuinely Christian world ironically underwrites the assumption that the story that Christianity *is* inseparable from the story of Western culture.

I have earned what I hope is a well deserved reputation for attacking modernity, but in some ways modernity is an appropriate protest against Christian presumption.⁴² The protest against God in the name

Milbank's, and Funkenstein's accounts of the transition to modernity. [With the latter reference, I am referring to Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986)]. Charles Taylor's *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989) must also be taken into account in order to try to get some understanding of where we are.

42. Some people may think my attacks on modernity lack a complex view of the reality “modernity” seeks to name, but I am ready to take that risk. Too often, attempts to characterize modernity die the death of countless qualifications. I am, however, not without allies in support of my understanding of modernity. For example, Matthew Bagger, in his *Religious Experience, Justification, and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), argues that “the rise of human self-assertion following the breakdown of the medieval world-view captures the central features of modern thought and culture. Modernity represents the outcome of a dialectic motivated by contradictions within medieval theology. Self-assertion requires that humans give to themselves the standards of thought and action rather than seeking them from an external source, like God” (212). Bagger's view is significant because he thinks this is a good development that is now so completely entrenched in the institutions of modernity that it has become “irrational” to believe in God.

Bagger's argument is admirable for its epistemological humility—that is, all he claims is that this is the way it is for those of us who share the common features of modern life.

of humanity was and continues to be a tragic and misguided, but perhaps necessary, attempt to humble Christians whose lives have been constituted by a pride incompatible with the humility that should come from the worship of a crucified God. One of the forms of the price we pay for that protest is called natural theology.

A detailed account of how natural theology came to seem so natural would certainly include the story Michael Buckley tells in his magisterial book *At the Origins of Modern Atheism*.⁴³ Just as Milbank rightly reminds us at the beginning of *Theology and Social Theory* that once there was no “secular,” so Buckley reminds us that once there was no atheism with the correlative demand to develop a response called natural theology.⁴⁴ Buckley is surely right that the great curiosity of our time is how the issue of Christianity versus atheism became a purely philosophical one. I think he is also right to suggest that this curiosity has everything to do with developments in Christian theology in which it was assumed that the reality of God must be secured on grounds separate from Christology.⁴⁵ According to Buckley, Leonard Lessius and Marin Mersenne prepared the way for deism (and the atheism only deism could produce) in an attempt to develop an apologetic strategy that assumed a Stoic conception of a mechanistic universe in which a god was still necessary to the extent some comprehensive principle is necessary for such a world.⁴⁶

There is a great dispute about how to explain this development of an account of the universe in which God has no place, as well as about who is to be blamed for it. If what I have argued concerning Aquinas’s understanding of our natural knowledge of God is correct, then I think Buckley is wrong to suggest that Aquinas is the culprit. Buckley alleges that Aquinas began the *Summa* assuming he must develop philosophically a doctrine of the one God.⁴⁷ Following David Burrell, Milbank

Of course, one of the reasons I admire Bagger’s atheism is that he makes clear why I must contend that the argument I am making in this book cannot be divorced from a politics and an ethics. For example, Bagger observes that we have no epistemological or metaphysical guarantee that epistemic values could not change, thereby making possible supernatural explanations that might once again become rationally acceptable. Bagger, however, is quick to note that “such a turn of events defies the imagination” (227). I hope to show, if not convince Bagger and those who share his position, that Barth has helped us see what a Christian “defiance” must look like—a defiance, for example, that denies that Bagger’s distinction between the natural and the supernatural makes sense.

43. Michael Buckley, S.J. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

44. I am referring to the opening line of the first chapter of *Theology and Social Theory*, 9.

45. Buckley, *At the Origins of Modern Atheism*, 47.

46. *Ibid.*, 37–66.

47. *Ibid.*, 66. Buckley is no doubt right to suggest that some read and continue to read Aquinas in this fashion. But such a reading requires a studied inattention to the first question of the *Prima Pars*. Nicholas Lash has rightly challenged Buckley’s reading of Aquinas;

rightly argues that Aquinas's understanding of analogy and his correlative understanding of the creature's participation in God mean that Aquinas's philosophical analysis is always in service to his theology.⁴⁸ According to Milbank, it was John Duns Scotus, not Aquinas, who set theology on the path that culminated in Lessius, just to the extent that Scotus distinguished metaphysics as a philosophical science concerning being from theology as a science concerning God. As a result, being was understood univocally because Scotus argued that to insure our knowledge of God, existence must be an attribute of God as well as of God's creatures. Milbank argues that to understand existence in this way leaves no room for an analogical relationship between God and God's creation, nor between one creature and another, and thus fails to account for the only difference that matters, namely, that between God and God's creation. On Milbank's reading, Scotus prepared the way for the nihilism that comes to full flower in modernity.⁴⁹

Others, following the trail that led to Descartes, think the problems that currently confront us began with Cardinal Cajetan's assumption

see "When Did the Theologians Lose Interest in Theology," in *Theology and Dialogue: Essays in Conversation with George Lindbeck*, ed. Bruce Marshall (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 131–147.

48. Milbank refers to David Burrell's *Analogy and Philosophical Language* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), 95–119. Burrell's work over the years has been a wonderful development of the argument he began in this book.

49. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 302–306. Milbank's arguments have been developed further by Catherine Pickstock in *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consumption of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 122–125; see also, Phillip Blond, "Introduction" to *Post-Secular Philosophy: Between Philosophy and Theology*, ed. Phillip Blond (London: Routledge, 1998), 3–9. I confess that I have not done the hard work necessary to confirm or criticize these accounts of Scotus's alleged "mistakes." Fergus Kerr at least makes clear that the story is much more complex; see "Why Medievalists Should Talk to Theologians," *New Blackfriars* 80, nos. 941 and 942 (July/August): 369–375. Kerr rightly suggests that Scotus's understanding of predication is more complex than either Milbank or Pickstock suggests. Also, the story Inglis tells in *Spheres of Philosophical Inquiry and the Historiography of Medieval Philosophy*, particularly his critique of the alleged dichotomy between reason and revelation in the Middle Ages, rightly makes the gross generalization about the difference between Aquinas, Scotus, and Ockham problematic. In his appreciative but critical review of Pickstock's *After Writing*, David B. Hart echoes Kerr's worry. In particular, Hart suggests that Pickstock's reading of Scotus is wrong because Scotus had no universal ontology. Rather Scotus, in the Franciscan-Augustinian tradition, understood being as the "coincidence of the transcendentals in God's utterly transcendent *esse verum*." So, according to Hart, Scotus did not elevate being over God or assume that God and creatures *are* in the same way. See David B. Hart, "Review Essay: Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing*," *Pro Ecclesia* 9, no. 3 (summer, 2000): 367–372. The quotation can be found on page 370. Perhaps more important, Hart raises issue with Pickstock's assumption that Plato is an alternative to Derrida, noting that both represent regimes of power that attempt to police the flow of time. I am indebted to my colleague and friend David Aers for trying to keep me straight on these issues.

that the doctrine of analogy was just that, a doctrine, which required something like Scotus's account of being.⁵⁰ It is then Francisco Suarez who is usually blamed for compounding Cajetan's error by attempting to defend an attributive account of analogy to insure our knowledge of God.⁵¹ MacIntyre thinks Suarez's distortion of Aquinas is even more fundamental to the extent that Suarez presents Aquinas's work as a finished system that makes Aquinas's indebtedness to his sources an accidental feature of his position. As a result, Suarez makes possible an interpretation of Aquinas as an epistemologist, so that it appears that Aquinas is trying to present a finished "system." Joseph Kleutgen's Kantian recovery of Aquinas made this interpretation of Aquinas all the more persuasive, just to the extent that Suarez thinks "the mind in apprehending necessary truths about possible essences apprehends what may, but need not, exist." This cannot help, according to MacIntyre, but lead to Descartes' assumption that some foundation is necessary to secure the transition from our apprehensions of essence to judgments of particular existence.⁵²

For the argument I make in these lectures, it is not necessary for me to take sides in these debates about "when it was done and who did it." Although I am sure that ideas matter and that it may take centuries for the results of a mistaken idea to bear fruit, I remain suspicious of attempts to lay the birth of modernity at the door of Scotus or Suarez. That we live in an age in which the church is but another voluntary agency and theology, at best, one subject among others in the curriculum of universities is the result not just of mistakes in the thirteenth century but of the effect of innovations such as the clock that intellectuals (exactly because we are intellectuals) are prone to discount. (Of course, I am aware that clocks are also the result of ideas.)⁵³

50. I learned this criticism of Cajetan first from David Burrell in his *Analogy and Philosophical Language*, 9–20.

51. William Placher provides a useful overview of these developments in *The Domestication of Transcendence*, 71–87. It is often assumed that Ockham is behind the developments associated later with Suarez. However, David Aers argues that Ockham's God is not a God of arbitrary power, as is often said. Aers notes, for example, that in *Quodlibetal Questions* Ockham says that God "is an absolutely perfect being and consequently he moves things intelligently and rationally." See David Aers, *Faith, Ethics, and Church: Writing in England, 1360–1409* (Woodbridge, England: D. S. Brewer, 2000), 9–12.

52. MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, 73–76. The story of the influence of Suarez cannot be confined to Catholic theology. John Platt tells a fascinating story of Suarez's influence on the development of natural theology in Protestant thought; see *Reformed Thought and Scholasticism: The Arguments for the Existence of God in Dutch Theology, 1575–1650* (Leiden: Brill, 1982). In a fascinating chapter, Platt traces the development of natural theology among the Calvinists to an abridgment of Calvin's *Institutes* that gave some Calvinist theologians warrant to develop a more robust natural theology than Calvin would have thought possible.

53. By calling attention to the development of the clock, I mean to suggest that how time was understood changed once time could be measured "exactly," and that this change

What interests me about these debates is what they suggest about how certain metaphysical developments led to what I can call only the epistemological overcoming of theology.⁵⁴ That “overcoming” I take to be a correlative of the temptation to cast Christianity as a truth separable from truthful witness—a temptation always present in attempts to make Christianity at home in the world. At least one name for this temptation is “Constantinianism.” As a result of the attempt to make Christianity anyone’s fate, the truth that is God is assumed to be available to anyone, without moral transformation and spiritual guidance.

Such a view stands in marked contrast to Aquinas’s contention that the truth about God that reason can discover comes mixed with many errors. Aquinas says the same thing about our knowledge of the natural law, because some propositions are evident only to the wise. That is why in matters of our knowledge of God and our knowledge of God’s law, we need training from one another. The *Summa* was Aquinas’s attempt to provide an aid for such training, but for it properly to do its work we must submit to schooling by all of it, which means the *Summa* must be read as a theological, not a philosophical, text.⁵⁵

contributed to the eventual marginalization of the church. Jacques Le Goff observes that only with the organization of commercial networks in the twelfth century did time become an object of exact measurement. First, the merchant communes acquired the right to have bells marking the day differently from the monastery. This development was the forerunner of the manufacture of more accurate clocks that signaled that the unit of labor would be the hour rather than the day. According to Le Goff, this change separated the time in which the merchant worked professionally from the time in which the merchant lived religiously. Le Goff suggests that the church, at least for a while, was able to keep the times together by prohibiting usury, just to the extent that the prohibition depended on the presumption that time could not be sold since time was a gift held in common. Increasingly, however, the clock undercut the presumption that time is a common good not to be bought or sold. See Jacques Le Goff, *Time, Work, and Culture in the Middle Ages*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1977), 29–52. Joel Kaye makes matters even more complex with his account of the interrelated developments of a money economy and the quantitative measurement necessary for developments in science; see *Economy and Nature in the Fourteenth Century: Money, Market Exchange, and the Emergence of Scientific Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). I am indebted to David Aers for calling Le Goff’s and Kaye’s work to my attention.

54. I am obviously playing with the title of John Milbank’s chapter “Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics” in his *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 36–54.

55. For Aquinas’s account of natural law, see *Summa Theologica*, 1-2.94.1, and 95.1. Aquinas is equally insistent in his *Summa Contra Gentiles* that “even though God has inserted into the minds of men a natural appetite for knowledge,” only those who are willing to undergo the labor of inquiry have such knowledge rightly. Moreover, to “undergo” such labor requires direction from the wise because it is from the wise that we learn the proper order of studies of which metaphysics is the last part. *Summa Contra Gentiles* 1.4, trans. Anton Pegis (New York: Image Books, 1955). For this understanding of the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I am much indebted to Thomas Hibbs, *Dialectic and Narrative in Aquinas: An Interpretation of the Summa Contra Gentiles* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1995).

I am not suggesting that metaphysical questions are irrelevant for the display of the truthfulness of theological claims. Indeed I am quite sympathetic to Étienne Gilson's account of the transformation in metaphysics occasioned by Aquinas. Gilson notes that the supreme thought of Aristotle could not be "He who is," that is, it could not give existence because the world of Aristotle was not a created world. I think Gilson is right to suggest that the true metaphysical revolution was achieved by Aquinas, who understood that all the problems concerning being had to be translated from the language of essences into that of existences.⁵⁶ The problem is not that kind of metaphysical testing but is, rather, when metaphysics becomes an attempt to secure the truth of Christian convictions in a manner that makes the content of those convictions secondary. Such a project, I fear, has been legitimated for some time in the name of natural theology and, accordingly, has found its natural home in the Gifford Lectures.

Varieties of Theological Work

The suggestion that the Gifford Lectures represent a metaphysical or, more exactly, an epistemological overcoming of theology may seem an odd way to characterize them. Many of the scholars that have given the lectures have thought metaphysics to be at least as doubtful an enterprise as theology. Buckley identifies the source of this suspicion of metaphysics:

Descartes had begun with ideas and established god as a guarantor of nature. Newton had begun with the phenomena of nature and established god as a force by which the phenomena were structured so that they could interact. In both systems, god entered as a causal necessity. In both physics, god gave movement or design to nature. Diderot had eliminated this inferred necessity by positing movement not as an effect upon matter, but as an effect of matter. Matter was reflexively responsible for its own movement.⁵⁷

After Diderot, any theistic affirmation required an inversion in the understanding of everything in the universe: Nature was now a self-enclosed causal nexus requiring no explanation beyond itself. Such a view of nature was Kant's inheritance, and his response became the mode for most Christian theology after him. Under Kant's influence, Christian theologians simply left the natural world to science and turned to the only place left in which language about God might make sense, that is, to the human—and not just to the human, but to what makes the human

56. Étienne Gilson, *God and Philosophy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941), 66–67.

57. Buckley, *At the Origins of Modern Atheism*, 277.

“moral.” Kant became the exemplary Protestant theologian, and *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone* became the great text in Protestant moral theology.⁵⁸ In the words of George Hendry: “When Kant gave priority to the ethical over the natural as the gateway to God, he provided a city of refuge to which harassed theologians fled from their philosophical and scientific pursuers in increasing numbers in the nineteenth century.”⁵⁹

That city of refuge took many forms inhabited by names such as Ritschl, Schleiermacher, and Troeltsch; but each in his own way underwrote the presumption that there is no alternative to Kant’s “solution.” That is the story I tell in these Gifford Lectures. In short, I want to show that the very social and intellectual habits that shaped Lord Gifford’s understanding of natural theology left Christian theologians devoid of the resources needed to demonstrate that theological claims are necessary for our knowledge of the way things are and for the kind of life we must live to acquire such knowledge.

No Gifford lecturer better exemplifies this conundrum than that figure who for many people continues to represent the greatest, or at least the most famous, Gifford lecturer: William James. In a world in which theology could no longer pretend to tell us anything significant about the way things are, James attempted, without leaving the world of science, to show how religious experience might at least tell us something about ourselves.

I begin these lectures with James partly because he has such interesting things to say that help us understand the challenges facing Christian theology. Indeed, his pragmatism is not entirely without interest for helping Christians understand how they must live if they are to make clear for Christians and non-Christians alike the way things are. Yet I also begin with James because he provides the necessary background for my account of Reinhold Niebuhr. Next to James, Niebuhr is *the* Gifford lecturer (at least in the United States), and he is often thought to stand in marked contrast to James. Niebuhr allegedly challenged the humanism James represented. I will argue, however, that Niebuhr’s account of Christianity stands in continuity with James’s understanding of religion, and that this continuity indicates why Niebuhr’s way of trying to do Christian theology cannot help but be misguided.

Niebuhr provides an opportunity to develop more fully a theme I can only suggest with James, namely, how the truth-fulfilling conditions of Christian speech have been compromised in the interest of developing an ethic for Christians in liberal social orders. Niebuhr had no use for the kind of metaphysics attributed to Scotus and Suarez, but Niebuhr as-

58. Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, trans., with an introduction and notes, Theodore Greene and Hoyt Hudson (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960).

59. Hendry, *Theology of Nature*, 15.

sumed that the truth of Christianity consisted in the confirmation of universal and timeless myths about the human condition that made Christianity available to anyone without witness. So conceived, Christianity became a “truth” for the sustaining of social orders in the West. In an odd way, James and Niebuhr offer accounts of religion and Christianity, respectively, that make the existence of the church accidental to Christianity. My criticism of Niebuhr will allow me to begin to develop the argument that any attempt to provide an account of how Christian theological claims can tell us the way things are requires a correlative politics. In theological terms, such a politics is called “church.”

Often when you are telling a story it is wise to keep your audience in suspense about how the story will end. However, my ending is so counterintuitive that I should at least warn you how the story will come out. As I have intimated, I will argue that the great natural theologian of the Gifford Lectures is Karl Barth, for Barth, in contrast to James and Niebuhr, provides a robust theological description of existence. The *Church Dogmatics*, as I read it, is a massive theological metaphysics that provides an alternative to the world in which Lord Gifford’s understanding of natural theology seems reasonable.

Moreover, I will argue that Barth—in a way not unlike Aquinas—rightly assumes that the vindication of such a theological program is to be found in the way Christians must and should live. Barth’s language for how we “must live” is witness. For Barth, witness is intrinsic for any understanding of what it means to hold that Christian convictions are true to the way things are. Accordingly, Barth kept faith with Lord Gifford’s trust just to the extent that he provided the account necessary to understand how our knowledge of God and the way we should live are inextricably bound together. It remains an open question whether or not Barth’s ecclesiology is sufficient to sustain the witness that he thought was intrinsic to Christianity.

As I tell this story, I hope it will become clear that it is an argument. There is a presumption in modernity that an argument is something different than a story. Thus, I must show why my argument—that is, why any Christian account of the way things are requires a full doctrine of God—cannot help but take the form of a narrative. Of course, James, Niebuhr, and Barth represent lives and positions so large that no single set of lectures could hope to do justice to any one of them. That I propose to give an account of each of them as well as how they need to be understood in relation to one another not only indicates that my account of their lives and work is selective, but also illuminates how and why the truth of theological claims is inseparable from lives well lived.⁶⁰

60. I should like to think a useful comparison could be made between the argument I am making in these lectures and that made by Steven Shapin in *A Social History of Truth*:

Each of these figures needs to be understood in light of the other because, for example, Barth's quite extraordinary accomplishment can be appreciated more fully in the light of James's work. I am certainly not suggesting that Barth was a closet pragmatist. Such a claim not only would be unfair to Barth, but would be, as I hope to show, a mistaken account of pragmatism. If pragmatism names a theory that must be applied, then clearly it is not the pragmatism James thought worthy of defense.⁶¹ Rather, I hope to show that James's understanding of truth helps us appreciate why Barth's way of doing theology should command the attention even of those who may think the entrance fee to Barth's world is too high.

I decided to deal not only with the works of James, Niebuhr, and Barth but also with their lives because in lectures that argue that lives matter, I could hardly afford to ignore the lives of William James, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Karl Barth. The lives of each of these larger-than-life figures are intrinsic to my argument because I think they represent, for all their individuality, admirable alternatives that cannot help but be in tension.

Overly simple though my portrait may be, William James represents for me the paradigmatic philosophical life to the extent that philosophy for James was not just another subject in the university but a passion, a way of life; James was committed to the criticism of criticism for the sake of living well.⁶² Alternatively, Reinhold Niebuhr's life was a political life in which all convictions were tested in terms of their significance for sustaining the democratic enterprise. In contrast, Barth's convictions were tested by their ability to sustain service to God. For Barth, all that is—what we know and what we do—was finally determined by this service. Few people could better represent the demands of a life committed to theology than Karl Barth.

Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.) Shapin shows how the development of seventeenth-century science depended on the trust between gentleman. Therefore, it was impossible to separate the truth, for example, of what was being learned about icebergs from the trustworthiness of the one investigating icebergs. Shapin's account, like mine, is meant to suggest that how and what we know may challenge what we have learned from trustworthy agents. Such a challenge will also involve, as Shapin puts it, the ineradicable interdependence of "people-knowledge" and "thing-knowledge." I am sure Shapin is right to insist that all knowledge entails moral presumption, and in particular trust, but my emphasis on the necessity of witness for the knowledge of God is not simply Shapin's point in a different key. "Witness" names a quite particular form of life determined by a quite different content than "science."

61. John Patrick Diggins fails to understand this most basic of points about pragmatism in his otherwise quite wonderful book, *The Promise of Pragmatism: Modernism and the Crisis of Knowledge and Authority* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

62. I am indebted to my friend Michael Quirk for this understanding of what a philosophical life entails. He attributes such a view to Dewey, though I think that may be giving Dewey too much credit.

Of course the lives of James, Niebuhr, and Barth are “messier” and more ambiguous than these characterizations.⁶³ Yet I think my descriptions of their lives are useful insofar as they help us see that the issues at stake in the Gifford Lectures are not just “intellectual” but are about the very character of our lives. To the extent I am able to sustain that claim, I trust that Lord Gifford would find that my lectures fulfill the purpose of his endowment.

63. To say that philosophy, politics, and theology name lives is my way of indicating how these designations name moral possibilities of a way of life. Such lives, in a manner similar to MacIntyre’s account of “characters,” are objects of regard by some significant segment of a culture. For MacIntyre’s account of “characters,” see *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2d ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1984), 27–31.