4 Theology Without Walls as open-field theology¹

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Although all theologies are perspectival, “hermeneutical theology” intends a meta-discourse about theological practices and their contexts in relation. Theology Without Walls (TWW) seeks simultaneously to coordinate discursive spaces with no theological limitations while at the same time tolerating no intrusions upon the natural “walls” of the inviolate mind, conscience, and body of every human being, of every theologian. I regard TWW as a hermeneutical space or field of discourse that explores twenty-first-century conditions of doing theology where Christian “religion” and particularly “denomination” (of institutions, creeds, and canons) was historically enlisted to define and to implement theological sovereignty over other connected institutions as government, particularly over the fields of law and science. This hermeneutical space “without walls” makes possible something like open-field theology (OFT) to indicate the constructive hermeneutical project of “theology” as a comprehensive, nonprescriptive association of theologians. TWW/OFT, in contrast to theological programs of “openness,” “process,” “naturalistic” or “traditional,” etc., presupposes only that theologians might find “theology as an open field” a helpful and ultimately fruitful way to do any kind of theology: apophatic or cataphatic, theist or atheist, exclusivist or pluralist. By contrast, historic theologies imagine, through cultural memory, nostalgia, and various “traditionalisms” and “fundamentalisms” a recovery of such sovereignty as best for faith and religious life. TWW would come to the aid of many theologians from such backgrounds (there are many parallels of sovereign theology throughout the “world religions”) who wish either to be free of such ambitions or at least wish to develop strategies of constructive theological engagement with contemporary theological conditions and trajectories. For some time TWW/OFT has been explored as a descriptive title, along with others such as “transreligious theology.” Here, OFT is offered as a way that respects the very problem of “religion” as an increasingly inadequate term for all the ways that humans devote themselves to the divine or to the ultimate and to one another, often expressed through rational and systematic constructions as “theology” in the broadest possible terms. In this context, any discursive handling of divine or ultimate topics – across spectra of affirmations

and denials – qualify as kinds of theology. The theological commitments of the present author include TWW/OFT as an advantageous way of pursuing those commitments, confessional and otherwise.

One impetus to TWW/OFT is that many theological traditionalists argue for some fundamental reestablishment of these historic sovereignties and theologically reimagined “historic norms.” This sovereign role of theology was, and for some still is, the canonically controlled mediation of divine revelation in the world. But such perspectives discount the long development of the principle of reform for theological flourishing that respects the irreducible diversity communities (denominations) of each of the religions. The reasons for hankering for sovereignty seem to be obvious, because government, law, and science are such powerful regulatory institutions that once included concepts of authority that included infallibility and absolute certitude of religious knowledge. But what happens when meta-discourses of science and law are forced to incorporate fallibility as essential to cognitive development and applied success? How are all theological practices to incorporate fallibility in their hermeneutical and conceptual models? TWW/OFT would propose theologies find their best environment in something like an open field of reflective anthropology where human perceptions and traditions of divinity and ultimacy can advance the work of those within traditions, as well as those who claim no religion.

The present author approaches its subject from the standpoint of a “lived theology” that is “ecumenically evangelical,” “comparative,” “Abrahamic,” “postcolonial,” and global in the pluralistic sense. TWW/OFT is open-ended and amenable to the challenge of rival interests and contrary opinions on the way to realizing benefits to any individual or collective theological endeavor. The very eclectic theological practices indicated in TWW/OFT are areas of serious exploration and learning for me. Each point of engagement in some way enriches the other and the “theological-self-in-community”: interactive exposure, rational interchange, and imaginative engagement can take place with one’s own tradition and in conversation with theologians of other or no traditions. I would add that the historical-theological frame of reference in this chapter is one aspect that TWW/OFT practitioners need to heed. Realizations as to the creative and influential futures of theology come by means of noticing how ancient TWW/OFT is. Trajectories in earlier theological movements provide us with plotlines that continue to contemporary construction.² Lived theology is more and more a matter of incorporating a spectrum of theological sources and goals. Hence, the hermeneutical desirability for a community field of discourse where multiple rationalities and theological priorities can find concourse, with no prescription for identifying “common ground,” let alone solving “common problems.” Within the religious liberty environments of the world, theology no longer provides a sovereign or regulative function for sociopolitical majorities through state-sponsored, privileged religions. Instead, the plural reality that began with the irreducible internal diversity of Christian theologies in the sixteenth century

is now giving way to the irreducible external diversity of religions, each with its own internal theological diversity. TWW/OFT proposes that “external” theological learning is incumbent upon all theologians who would speak intelligibly about their own theological practices but also those of proximate others. TWW/OFT provides the working space for that proximity.

One helpful starting point for TWW/OFT is the nearly undefinable word “religion,” from its Latin root “*religio*” (“to bind together”) and the consequent boundaries constructed by religious belief, practice, identity, and state sponsorship. Theology is a form of discourse that specializes in discerning complex conceptualities that would “bind together” the divine and the human, the human and the human, the human and the nonhuman. Whereas theologies’ deities are the transcendent, infinite being or real [p]³resence, all theology is human, from first to last a human enterprise. The very humanness of religions and their theologies subjects the history of human discourse on the divine with the problematic charge of anthropomorphizing and hypostatizing the infinite [m]ystery or being or existence.

Most of the participants currently in TWW/OFT are Western, mostly “Christian” in terms of theological traditions and their institutions of learning, quite “Western” in terms of sociopolitical models of human and communal ethics – insofar as the latter reflect theological reasoning. One of the most interesting and earliest of the boundary crossings of ancient Christian and Jewish theologies consisted of assertions against classical theologies of being and “supreme Being” and raises the issue of the divine as capable of novelty, rejecting the rejection of novelty according to its absolutely immutable “perfections.”⁴ Another boundary to be deconstructed in late antiquity (ca. fifth century BCE to the eighth century CE) was the Aristotelian categorization of the human female as ontologically inferior to the human male. Yet another dimension, still contested,⁵ is the reality of divine and human volition – human decision making and the reality of choice as over and against any model of determinism. Finally, the eschatological assertion that the cosmos is on a pathway of amelioration rather than sheer annihilation is afforded helpful space by TWW/OFT.

The history of sovereign theologies for the regulation of legal and scientific reasoning is a massive legacy of the Christianized Roman Empire that exercises continuous, if much diminished, influence in theology. This was the original context for “political theology” – a theology for the polity and often mirroring the polity of religious majorities. Similar trends are visible in many different religious contexts. Certainly, one of the most seriously limiting walls in the history of Christian theology was its polemical theologies aimed at bringing the highly diversified Christian, Jewish, and other religious theological movements of late antiquity into “catholic order” of “orthodox” insiders and heterodox outsiders. By the sixth century, very intentional boundaries barred “interrituality” in order to separate Christians from all Jewish ritual observances as asserted on pain of excommunication. Creating and attaching to every Jewish person and community the theologically

defined charge of “deicide” was certainly the nadir of the entire theological heritage of so-called “religious crimes” defined by Roman law on behalf of its *religio licita* (“legal religion”). What began with antiheretical (*contra haereticos*) literature for the early construction of anti-Jewish theology (tractates known as “*Contra Iudaios*”) was part of and yet distinct from the larger branch of polemical theology known as “*Contra Gentes (/Gentiles)*” – which included multiple tractates opposed to and condemning the religion of Islam. The religious monotheism adopted by Rome, as well as other polities, that constitutionally established Christianity endures into the twenty-first century.⁶ This heritage of sovereign theology (Yelle 2018), along with many other dimensions of the “world’s largest religion,” presents multiple ongoing barriers to critical and constructive theological practices.

Political, legal, and scientific boundaries not only define but also plague most theologies, internally and externally. Although the deities, anthropologies, and cosmologies of the religions betray striking differences, many of their hermeneutical moves, especially as each interacts with other religions and theologies, are quite similar, as comparative theology has shown. As a Hindu or Jewish scripture scholar works with a constellation of beliefs about the divine origin of a sacred text, the humanity of the reader/listener, and the relation between human cognition and its “divine” or “ultimate” referent, one must ask about the critical and constructive purpose of theology. Crucial to this assessment is the recognition of the radical resources that the history of theology can hint at. But these efforts are moot if the expansive and varied potentialities of theology are curtailed through the imposition of constrictive, even destructive, boundaries preventing genuinely liberative and life-enhancing theological construction.

“Revelation,” legal and scientific walls, and OFT

The history of every theology begins with a revelation claim of some sort – the deity has conveyed its presence through some natural mediation, usually oracular or prophetic, the presence of the divine, and the divine word and image. Conveying “divine revelation” and epistemologies that included “revelation claims” correlates very closely with transcendent philosophical claims of illumination and higher-order perceptions and knowledges. Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave”⁷ is a kind of narrative theology of revelation and revelatory experience. In Scripture, “prophets” narratives, via multiple genres but all metaphorically and stylistically rich, have become “inscripturated” forms of the immediately revealed word and image. Revealed word and image, regarded as captured in sacred scriptures and ritual objects, required constant interpretation in reinterpretation in successive generations of believing communities. The history of “modern theology” of the last five centuries globally displays hermeneutical and even substantive learning and borrowing across religious and cultural boundaries. One of the attractions of comparative theology is to trace whatever can be detected

of these commonalities, however they have made themselves apparent – in my case, particularly in monotheisms and messianisms in the Abrahamic and non-Abrahamic religions and their theologies. Time and again, however, the larger and more complex theological systems are found to have reified claims of a complete and perfect revelation, a revelatory “deposit” in sacred histories inseparable from the sacred texts and objects themselves, preserved by a perfect community. In Western Christian traditions, these sacred histories come most often by means of an “originalist” hermeneutic: reconstructions of the original revelatory events and first-generation community, or “medievalist” or other authoritative “scholastic” hermeneutic – reconstructions of a golden age of religious achievement in every aspect of communal life. Each of these traditions is distinguished by strategies of “repristination”: theology as an exercise in recovery of a “pristine” religious condition of communication and practice. Theology becomes an exercise as much in historical imagination as one of engaging theologically one’s own audience in real time.

In many ways, theology as a “science” (*scientia* as in “way of knowledge”) reflects an ancient oracular or mystical dimension as well as the knowledge of law. Whether theorizing based upon experimental insight regarding “natural law” or “human law” on the way toward the “rule of law,” the penchant for believing in the authoritative perception of an idea or argument for some exclusive claim stems from the ancient monotheism that refuses to relativize truth claims that regulate nature or human beings. With scriptures, especially in view of earlier predictions and later “fulfillments” often relayed through obscure texts, every word of the text could potentially contain truths to be distilled into authoritative propositions, whether legal or scientific. The stakes became exceedingly high early on. Internally, the texts and their adherents established bodies of knowledge and tests for “good law” and “good science.” As early as Origen in the third and Augustine in the fourth to fifth centuries, appeal against naïve interpretations of, say, the creation narratives of Genesis were already rather well argued.

Ancient scriptures are *sui generis* – they are neither law nor science nor a broad range of literary conventions. Although their genres were very familiar to their original audiences, their purposive and traditional receptions were always distinct. Often, the scriptures are *sui generis* in relation to one another. The conception of Christianity as a sect of Judaism and Islam as inseparable from both unites their scriptures in a unique fashion and gives much credence to the Abrahamic studies projects that have emerged in recent years, tapping into centuries of “Abrahamic” reasoning among the three. When we consider non-Abrahamic scriptures and their traditions, particularly in ethics, there is much commonality and probably cross-fertilization. There is much overlap in the way in which they reason theologically, liturgically, ethically, scientifically, and juridically – particularly through the massive migration of scriptures and methods of interpretation since the eighteenth century. But their status as revelation, and therefore

sacred, bridges the immanent and transcendent worlds and brings their audiences into binding relationships that they would not otherwise express. Their texts and their genius are such that they produce an unabated history of interpretation and application. Theological literature in the last 50 years has burgeoned in forms and complexity. This is reason enough to suggest that theology might best be done according to an “open field” principle. Their potential has proven to be almost unlimited, and although they provide no more detail than fundamental distinctions for law (protecting persons but not defining virtue) and science (the intelligibility of the cosmos), their greater aid is narrating the mixed bag that is human life and behavior.

Externally, however, once an ecclesial ruling in law or science had become “incorrigible” according to institutional claims of historical authority and unreformability, rejecting extra-theological criteria resulted in retrograde “science” or no science at all. In this and other ways, the problem of an account of revelation as supplying the purest distillation of truth about God and the world, and the resulting history of interpretation and its errors, sometimes of the worst sort, plague the history of theology. Even worse is the conceit of correcting, if not eliminating, other revelation claims and theologies. In virtually all the major Christian traditions, the commitments to compatibility between the Graeco-Roman and biblical cosmologies always leaves the neutral reader with a sense that the exercise is more one of apologetics than a theological reasoning that follows an unbiased path.

One of the greatest points of reference for Christian theologians in general is undoubtedly the theology of Vatican II and constructive engagement with it. The council adopted of the doctrine of religious liberty⁸ – that without freedom from all religious sovereignties, the necessary exercise of the liberty of conscience and deep persuasion in faith is undermined and the necessary condition of religious decision making by each human being is blocked. These ideas were rooted in the ideas of the early American theologian, Roger Williams, and updated by the Jesuit theologian, John Courtney Murray. The historic shock over precisely this canon from Vatican II, qualifying definitively as “development of doctrine” (Newman 1845), becomes a fascinating movement of theological *aggiornamento* – a theological “opening,” a key trajectory toward TWW/OFT. Parallel to this opening were a series of papal addresses to the United Nations at least once during the papacy of each pope since 1948. The speeches have reflected a theology opening a field of learning beyond the confines of tradition and institution, seeking to embrace new insights without contradicting tradition and institution. John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Francis I have each in their own way kept Vatican II as their frame of reference (United Nations Headquarters 2015). Most importantly, all the Christian denominations were regarded as “instruments of salvation,” despite the claim to being “the one true church,” an inclusive statement long in coming but definitive (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 2007).⁹ The multiple religious “ends” of the theologies among the many human communities make impossible any conflating or reducing of

the diversity of necessary or ultimate doctrines among the religions. What we see from the Roman Catholic example of theological development is its own gradual moving to a place where boundaries and open spaces are quite compatible, even “normative.”

The earliest expressions of theological openness within communal boundaries is quite ancient. The fascinating history of the Hellenization of Judaism through the first translation of any scripture signaled an intentional engagement with Greek culture and cosmology after the sixth century BCE – something which had already happened in Babylon and the Jewish Persian academies that would develop there. Due largely to Christian persecution, Medieval (Masoretic) Judaism attempted to consign Hellenistic Judaism and its traditions to heresy, apostasy, and oblivion. Indeed, it will require the first critical edition of the Tanakh (Hebrew Bible), which is currently in production, to reveal crucial knowledge about its textual traditions in times where, even among the strictest Jewish communities such as Qumran, Tanakh and Septuagint were read side by side. Although the Athenian Academy had long abandoned the theologies of Plato and Aristotle, their arguments are revived by Hellenistic Judaism and Christianity in marshalling precedents for their perceived monotheisms considered entirely compatible with the biblical accounts of the divine being – especially the *locus classicus* of the Bible, Exodus 3:14, the self-determining, noncontingent deity, the “I am that I am.” The great advancement and problem is that the meanings captured in the Greek translation are highly constructive extrapolations of the Hebrew/Aramaic texts. Scripture translation is a constructive and comparative theological process in itself. One telling example is the radical extraction of Christological “facts” from highly metaphorical gospel narratives. By the end of the seventh century, virtually nothing from the “life of Jesus” remained in the ontological paradigm of “divine and human” in the two-natures doctrine. Doctrinal theology is utterly rooted in this tradition and is difficult to reconcile with narrative gospel interpretation. TWW/OFT provides an open field that yields new possibilities for reconciling doctrine with neglected narratives.

TWW/OFT in some ways has been a descriptive rather than a constructive hermeneutical exercise. As an American project TWW/OFT begins with Protestant and Catholic theologians as constructive educators and takes stock of the ever-expanding diversity of theological schools and approaches. It then encompasses theological interactions with the historical churches: Catholic, Orthodox, Oriental, African, and contacts with the quarter billion Christians of new churches and movements with no denominational connections at all. In all, the salvation history narratives of scripture and the normative creeds arising from particular theologies of modernity up to our moment follow traditional patterns but also construct new pathways. Theology is primarily expository, responding to “revelation” or “knowledge of the ultimate,” correcting or rendering more persuasive inherited theological statements or pioneering new ones and, finally, channeling these insights in

multiple contexts of learning and faith practices. Theology grounds the constant pursuit of human and planetary flourishing but ultimately articulates human hopes and visions of redemption, even when cosmology is understood from a religious naturalism perspective, agnostically or even atheistically. TWW can encompass even a theology of religious atheism. “There is no God” or “The God of religion is nonexistent” can be heard theologically according to the personal confession of God as unknown, unknowable, or unexperienced, or critically as inescapably tied to violence – although one wonders if “religious entanglements” were somehow genetically removed, any appreciable decrease in human violence would result.

Theology when it fully flowers is a divine or ultimate cosmological narrative or model: Creator–creation; God–world–humanity; continuum (with or without a beginning). Communication in such forms, even the naturalistic with no deity, is theological and speculative, following, for example, apophatic or cataphatic hermeneutical trajectories: one is characteristic of the unknowability of God and the other of the divinity of all things. What is important is the comprehensibility of all theological discourses (even atheistic theologies) in OFT. In the apophatic direction, by the end of the first millennium of Christian theology, the best theologians had concluded that the being of God and its infinite attributes, “God of God,” were unknowable, because what can be known is entirely determined by the characteristics of human cognition. From the apophatic angle, the unknowability of God could cover the widest possible range of agnostic or atheistic modeling. Indeed, there is little difference between the speculative knowledge claim of God’s nonexistence and the apophatic cognitive impossibility of knowing the being of the God that is known by revelation. From the cataphatic angle, however, theology follows the affirmations of its diverse traditions and trajectories, but in common context where the diversity that was once, at most, intrareligious is now interreligious, due to the global nearness of every theologian to every other.

We can now see “perfect being theology” from a new hermeneutical perspective. Based in part upon mathematical ideals, the perfect being was subjected to “infinity modelling” with regard to divine (fore)knowledge (as “exhaustive”), eternal existence, ultimacy as “source” of all things, “perfection” as a moral quality, and desperate strategies for grounding ethics and law, as well as the coherence and intelligibility of the universe – explanatory of the derivation of all things. These ideals are also reflected in naturalistic models as “grand unified theory” agendas – some kind of “system” that gives integration or unity to everything. Perfect Being Theology in any system begins with a certain perfection of either the law of noncontradiction or even tautology (the most “perfect” formulation) and extrapolates from there. Historically, various “perfect” forms, numbers, or proportionalities become nodes of reasoning about the [p]erfect “exhaustively,” as in divine foreknowledge. The implied qualifier “at least” is constantly begging the question of the models of divinity – even the Platonic or Hindu originals.

Either the systems of perfection beg questions as to the narratives of revelation where such models are not offered or the patent inappropriateness of the models to begin with, trying to generate a model that is implied by near-infinite multiplications of physical conditions in some cosmologies founded upon replicating behaviors in the quantum world. Given the complexity of the quantum world, even the catchphrase, “infinite in all directions” doesn’t catch, doesn’t capture a set of coordinates by which a satisfactory model of the infinite perfections of divinity can be represented. Atheism protests the models of the divine being – none even approach being satisfactory from their starting points, let alone their *teloi*, or “ends.” Perfect being as infinite being becomes “optative” – an “if-only” plea for the knowledge of infinite being identical to the models of revelation. Acknowledging the inadequacy of models of the divine being does not remove the warrant for affirming the infinite reality of Anselm’s “that than which nothing greater can be thought,” but it reminds us this concept is a contentless placeholder for the infinite existent and real ultimacy, yet unknowable as such by finite knowers, however reflective of the divine being of revelation they may be, yet always not reflective of [the] being that is nothing other than infinite.

“Open-field” and theological trajectories

Hermeneutical theology that would foster the open field of theological practice asks no questions of pluralism, inclusivism, or exclusivism, because technically, it would only provide warrant for their coexistence within the same field. TWW/OFT places theological communities in some kind of coexistence in theological space. Theological commitments other than hermeneutical privilege some particular religious aspect, even purported general or pluralistic ones: traditional, confessional, ecumenical, mystical, “religious belonging,” naturalist, “the Real,” etc. Each is better pursued in something of a “democratic,” “universal,” “level playing field”-based hermeneutical theological community than being performed on separated (“separatist”) bases. Even exclusivist theologies are better formulated under the conditions of TWW/OFT.

What is the range or register of “open field” in terms of theology? There are perspectives that offer something that are similar: “open and relational theology” or “open theology”; “process” and “naturalistic” models of [g]od or the [r]eal or naturalist/materialist models. The point about “field” is that it pursues a kind of “level playing field” approach to what are historically rival exclusivisms in religious doctrine and practice. But such a “field” approach, while not only removing the possibility of privilege and ranking among the theologies and a-theologies, is much more about discursive and hermeneutical conditions of the freedom of inquiry, reconstructing and reframing theologies through encounter, inclusive of the “postconfessional,” “postreligious,” “postsecular” world. By orienting theology according to field of inquiry rather than a particular tradition that has

opened its boundaries or a model of God in relation, TWW can do its work theologically as an anthropological exercise of many related disciplines and perspectives.

Post-Constantinian, postdenominational and postconfessional trends in theology already present in the nineteenth century were represented by some of the greatest modern theological minds: Søren Kierkegaard and Franz Overbeck can be seen as on the way to Bonhoeffer's "religion-less Christianity." The institutional dominance of theology, let alone institutions of government, law, or science, are replaced by theological engagement and dimensionality for a "lived theology" in the context of multiple voices and irreducible diversity. Most moderate to liberal academic thinking has been gesturing toward TWW for some time. The student is free to pursue relatively unbounded inquiry apart from those courses of study leading to ordination. Theologies in the developing world are especially needful of TWW/OFT because so many new movements do not have any connections to creedal denominations. Missional theology must respond more and more to "insider movements" which syncretically absorb Christian orientations within non-Christian communities, often with highly expressive forms of spirituality. Indeed, "spirituality" has become part of the taxonomy of human wellness and flourishing, no matter how secular or postreligious the context.

At the same time, hyper-politicization can be detected in branches of Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist communities. The already massively stressed "ultra-orthodox" subgroups vie in their claims for infallibility in knowledge and perfection in practice. It is sometimes difficult to locate the boundary between a zealotry that begets religious violence and a zealotry that foreswears it. Examples include American evangelical theologians with no theological critique of the new nationalism and racism in its midst, Al Azhar University of Cairo refusing to condemn the teaching of ISIS, Modi of India refusing to condemn Hindutva ideology, Aung San Suu Kyi refusing to condemn her government's genocide of the Muslim Rohingya in Rakhine, and even China's absolutist president Xi refusing to acknowledge the massive internment camps for Muslims. These and many similar examples reflect the aggressive and often violent instrumentalization of religion.

Through the previous century, theological schools moved toward shedding strict denominational boundaries (although in Germany, Catholic and Protestant PhD students are not allowed cross-denominational supervisors). These predominantly Christian institutions have accommodated different kinds of Christian identity and constructed new forms centered on ethics and critical biblical studies decoupled from creedal controls in the interest of contextual understanding and innovative applications.

One of the highest levels of literacy is religious, for example, being able to perceive theological meanings across the range of literatures and the arts – scripture or commentary, classic or contemporary theology; ethics;

liturgy; music, visual and other performative arts. Theologizing is a capacity among readers and writers to communicate about the divine/human referents in religious discourse and to discern assertions and arguments with focused religious intention and advocacy. Indeed, to be a theologian without walls implies a capacity to make informed theological judgements outside, although not necessarily antithetical to, any particular religion or denomination. TWW grapples with the best of the heritage through comparative practice and multiple religious interactions, involving dialogue, composition, and literacy. Student and faculty expectations and formulations are already reflecting this postconfessional reality.

If we look closely at the twenty-first-century developments and those just prior, we see the final retreat of a dogmatic world where the common property of the Abrahamic tradition's best legacies can be accessed, weighed, and applied in new forms and venues, such as comparative scripture/theological study across the interreligious frontiers. A crucial development is the "postmetaphysical" trend in modern theology – but this must be understood in a precise way. Theological texts are also texts of metaphysics. But the characteristic of "objective science" going back to the axial age (fifth century BCE) of prophets, scriptures, and sages are the constructions of cosmology based political systems. The origins of the meta-narrative are both humanistic and scientific. Indeed, the best way to read natural theology and speculations of "natural religion" (from Spinoza to Hick) is as some primal religion – an ancient idea.

We need to take seriously postdenominational yet postsecular trends to recognize how new expressions of theology are arising through nontraditional avenues of scripture study and spirituality. Why this deference to scriptures? They represent the inspired sources of sources. Theologically, there are many "sources," and one can certainly begin from the history of a tradition or a critical or reductionistic, even atheistic response, because a-theology is still dealing with the transcendent/ultimate category of reflection. What is characteristic across the board is the distancing from "religious authority" as institutionalized through fellow human mediation. The "without walls" of this theology is the resistance to any connection between spiritual truths and any appropriation by political, historical, and cultural authorities to justify privilege or exclusion. In their place, an unbounded/unwalled theological conversation has broken upon us and our world of many human and nonhuman lives.

Although early twenty-first-century developments in Western religiousness are marked by a "postsecular" trend, this is matched by a "postreligious" trend as well. Both terms require vagueness and wide applicability to be serviceable as well as linked together. Indeed, in a postdogmatic age – dogma meaning the religious bases in legal reasoning that once sustained the protection of religious institutions through the legislation and execution of religious laws and the punishment of religious crimes – this world of religious law no longer exists among Christians and Jews and many Muslims; persons of many other large religions are moving in this direction.

The import of “confession-less” Christian theology as a key trajectory behind TWW/OFT correlates with the “subjective turn” in the history of theology. Earlier models of God in many, if not all, of these traditions had to be replaced, for example, divine presence with divine “design,” divine subjectivity and activity in some form of “relational” model of [g]od. The by-product has been personal individuation and identity formation.

TWW/OFT responds to the gradual abandonment of sovereign religion and the recognition of irreducible multiplicity. Boundaries there always will be, but these are, more than ever, the boundaries of voluntary association (e.g., denominations of religions, local communities, often connected but not wholly defining any “religion”) and ultimately the inviolability of the individual person, religious or not. Indeed, in the radical period of the Reformation and ever after, a particular gospel verse and its interpretation as “church” was programmatically condemned by the traditionalists: “wherever two or more are gathered in my name” (Mt 18:20). Today, two or more in community is a “church” or spiritual community of any religion and yet not at all. Such community is not discounted by a wide variety of theological reasoners. There is a sense in which the multiplication of communities is finally a diversification down to the individual theologian, hopefully in conversation and constructive productivity, if nowhere else than in a TWW/OFT hermeneutical space.

Notes

- 1 TWW/OFT.
- 2 One immensely helpful comparative historical treatment: Stroumsa (2016).
- 3 The use of [] (e.g., [B]eing) in this chapter is meant to convey the alternating capital/lowercase letter depending upon use: the varying registers in theological discourse for such terms.
- 4 Otherwise known as “eternity of the world” cosmology and its consistent rejection by the vast majority of Abrahamic theologians; e.g., Philoponus, Maimonides, Avicenna, Bonaventure, and Aquinas.
- 5 Brilliantly debated by Hannah Arendt in her posthumously published *Willing* (1978).
- 6 Some 16 countries have constitutionally established national Christian churches, or “Christianity”: Argentina, Armenia, Tuvalu, Tonga, Costa Rica, Kingdom of Denmark, England, Greece, Georgia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Malta, Monaco, Vatican City, Papua New Guinea, and Zambia.
- 7 *Republic*, 514a – 520a.
- 8 Not to mention its theology of religions.
- 9 It includes a very clear affirmation of Vatican II as normative.

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