Introduction

During the final decade of the twentieth century, I was able to make a
series of contributions to what has now become a developing dialogue
between the study of theology and the practice of religious studies on
the one hand, and the social and human sciences (*les sciences humaines/die
Geisteswissenschaften*) on the other.[1] This book draws together widely dis-
tributed papers in journals and chapters in books which were associated
with that continuing dialogue. Taken as a whole, what follows embod-
ies a journey of religious, theological and intellectual exploration of the
cultural impact of the 'triumph of capitalism', and then an engagement
with the shifts in consciousness and changes in cultural practice associ-
ated with globalisation, the contested matrix of the modern/postmodern
condition, and the ongoing crisis and dissolution of main-line religious
traditions which were all characteristic concerns of religious reflection in
the late twentieth century. *Religion, Theology and the Human Sciences* affords
a wide-ranging interdisciplinary commentary upon aspects of the past
decade, and it looks into a future in which religion(s), spiritualities and
a migrating 'sacred' may well continue to undergo transmutation and
recomposition.

This book seeks an inner coherence that flows, not least, out of the
author's continuing quest to locate, investigate and critique the legiti-
macy of roles for religion and theology in the creation and sustenance
of sustainable human identities – and the 'future of the human' – in
a globalised, commodified and managerialised late modern world. Be-
yond such a basic interlinkage, the contents are arranged so as to enhance
and justify the sense that there is an underlying logic that informs what
might seem, at first sight, to be the extended chaos of fragmentation of
the postmodern – and increasingly post-human – condition. Whilst such

[1] See introduction to R. H. Roberts and J. M. M. Good (eds.), *The Recovery of Rhetoric: Persuasive
Discourse and Disciplinarity in the Human Sciences* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press,
1993).

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developments may seem to be haphazard networks, a rhizomic pattern lacking any obvious rational ordering or hierarchy, it is nonetheless possible through the combination of narrative diachronicity and the fullest possible conspectus of interdisciplinary synchronic analysis to discern the invasive patterns that both threaten – and seduce – humankind. On reflection, what has driven me forward is a quest to locate the transcendental conditions of what it is to be, and to become, fully human.

Thus understood, *Religion, Theology and the Human Sciences* traces a path from the immediate post-Second World War reassertion of comprehensive 'metanarratives' to be found in both systematic theology and in sociological 'grand theory', respectively, through their dissolution as aspects of what Daniel Bell called the end of the 'age of ideology', and into a new and fragmented era of reflexive postmodernisation. The latter 'condition' is characterised by an apparent loss of shared human universals, the proliferation of 'culture wars' and confrontation with the 'ends' of 'history', 'nature' and 'the human'. In such an overall setting, where the threat of chaos is normative, religion, quasi-religion and ambiguous new religiosities have gained an increased yet undoubtedly problematic social and cultural salience. Critical exploration of this zone of intermediacy is the central concern of this collection.

The contents of this collection are organised under three major headings. First, in part 1, 'Spirits of capitalism and the commodification of the soul', the collapse of Marxist socialism and the so-called 'End of History' are examined in relation to processes of near unrestrained expansion of invasive commodification and the global proliferation of managerialism that together generate new 'spirits' of triumphant capitalism, and threaten and stultify humankind. In part 2, 'Theology and power in the matrix of modernity/postmodernity', the impact of the managerial revolution from above imposed by resurgent capitalism upon theology, church polity and governance is reviewed in terms of categories drawn from Hegel's ambiguous conception of power, the modernity/postmodernity debate, and the contemporary fragmentation under postmodernising conditions of much 'grand theory' in the human and social sciences. This part concludes with a consideration of the internal responses of Christian theology to emergent social science. In part 3, 'Religion and social science: identity, globalisation, and the transmutations of the religious field', three distinct themes – the identity of 'Europe'; religion and globalisation; and the contemporary transmutations of the religious field – are explored as instances that will require the restructuring of relationships between theology and the study of religion

on the one hand, and the social and human sciences on the other. In part 4, 'Conclusion', the first three parts of the book are drawn together in the last chapter, 'Identity as vocation: the prospect for religion'.

In the remainder of this introduction the contents are developed more fully with a view to giving emphasis to the integrative themes that embody the decline and renewal of paradigms. The title of part 1, 'Spirits of Capitalism and the Commodification of the Soul', reflects the interface of declining traditions, both Christian and Marxist, with a modernity driven by economic forces now seemingly freed from any fundamental critique. In the first chapter Francis Fukuyama's forceful promulgation of the idea of the 'End of History' is taken up and represented, despite its contentious character and acknowledged weaknesses, as a bid to create an ideology of global management fit for a new world order in which both religion and socialism have been superseded. Fukuyama's assertion that capitalist liberal democracy constitutes the ultimate political system, beyond which there is no conceivable alternative capable of providing such a broad range of benefits, both economic and societal, contains within it the implication that social evolution has reached its terminus. Thus all that is now required is the regularisation, the 'normalisation' of the world in ways which incorporate and express this finality. However ill founded Fukuyama's historical predictions concerning a peaceful transition to post-communism may have proved, there are elements of validity in his scheme: this is a coded, quasi-mythologised vision for a fully managerialised world. Liberal democracy is thus understood as a unilinear, progressive and comprehensive view of history; but it furnishes a deficient polity in ways which require correction and supplementation. There are, according to Fukuyama, deeper, largely suppressed human needs which were lost in both socialism and Christianity. For Fukuyama, it is Hegel and Nietzsche who best articulate these neglected requirements. At an analogous point of transition in the 'first postmodernity' of Weimar culture,[2] Spengler reverted to these ancestral dialectics in a spirit of pessimism, setting them within the framework of a cyclical evolutionary 'morphology' of world history that could function as a post-Christian surrogate for theodicy in explanation of the defeat of Germany. In 1990, Fukuyama once again attempted both to close and to close off the circle of Christianity and socialism, by subsuming each under the category of slave morality. In this first chapter Hegel's dialectic of Lord and Bondsman (*Herr und Knecht*) emerges for the first of a number of times in this book

[2] See 'Barth and the Eschatology of Weimar', in R. H. Roberts, *A Theology on its Way?: Essays on Karl Barth* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1992), ch. 6.

as the subliminal logic, the cultural unconscious, of a triumphant and globalised capitalist culture.[3]

Having begun with the 'End of History', chapter 2 contains a socio-rhetorical examination of the rise and fall of 'enterprise culture' in Britain, taking the twenty-year period since the election of the Conservative government of 1979 as an exemplary episode which exerted an influence that extended far beyond the confines of the United Kingdom. Within this setting, 'hard' and 'soft' regimes for the social order were increasingly apparent, boundaries between different spheres of society were blurred and the initially strident hegemonic discourse of the New Right passed into a pervasive managerialism now advocated indiscriminately by both the political Left and the political Right. A 'routinisation of charisma' on the level of economic culture has been increasingly and ever more intimately bound up with religious change as new 'spirits' of capitalist renewal have emerged. The resultant cultural contradictions in which religion(s), spiritualities and religiosities all feature are traced through the ethnography that informs this book. Since 1997, the Blairite 'Third Way' has combined the endorsement of religious values seen in the revival of a version of religious socialism with yet further attempts to return to a contemporary equivalent of 'Victorian values', and the extension of an internalised factory discipline across society. This process is associated with the relentless destruction of what Harold Perkin once called 'professional society'.[4] Central to the visions of the Conservative 'New Britain' and the New Labour 'Cool Britannia' has been the gradual ascendency of a managerial *dirigiste* elite, and thus the implementation of the 'triumph of capitalism' by means of the largely silent managerialist bureaucratisation of society. A managerialist modernity is then explored as it has impacted way beyond the confines of business and commerce.

Consistent with this theme, chapter 3 contains a contextualised ethnographic study of a pioneering international conference in which, at the very apogee of Conservative Thatcherite self-confidence, the spiritual and quasi-religious ambitions of a large group of elite management consultants were expressed and enacted as transformative myth and ritual. Given 'hard' and 'soft' styles of management corresponding to the Thatcherite dichotomy between the disciplinary 'law' and an enterprise 'gospel' of freedom, these change-master consultants were acting out the

[3] For a brief survey in support of this contention, see R. H. Roberts, 'The Reception of Hegel's Parable of the Lord and Bondsman', *New Comparison*, 5 (1988), 23–9. See also Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Methuen, 1981).

[4] Harold Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society: England since 1880* (London: Routledge, 1989).

role of 'organisational shamans' in that they deployed psycho-spiritual techniques with a view to reaching and changing those parts of individuals and organisations that other human resource methods fail to reach, thereby effecting deep-seated individual and corporate identity-change. First-hand involvement in management training and continuing field research in the borderlands of psychotherapy and spirituality make it apparent that this is not uncontroversial territory. Whenever the core identity of an individual (or group of individuals) is to be regarded as a fluid resource adaptable to the demands of culture change within organisations, then important ethical issues arise for those who still believe in an individual's 'right to identity'. Such a 'right' as regards the individual has been neglected at a time when the 'right to manage' has come to comprise what Lady Thatcher once described as the task of changing the 'soul' of a nation. Whilst reflection upon 'communitarian rights' has received much attention, the defence of the 'rights' of the neglected individual has become increasingly exposed to the expert application of the power of social construction in human resources management.

In the first three chapters of this book, three different locations of the 'triumph' of resurgent capitalism are touched upon in cumulative succession: the putative 'End of History', the British 'enterprise culture', and the ambition of the transformatory management consultants who facilitate the psycho-spiritual transmutation of organisational dinosaurs in need of rapid evolution. Building on this foundation, chapter 4 contains a long and detailed analysis of the imposition of managerialism upon British universities, which, paradoxically, appear to have lacked any distinctive leadership 'charisma' and therefore provide a remarkable example of consistent bureaucratic 'routinisation'. In terms rendered classic by Braverman, the 'degradation' of academic labour has proved an essential step in a subtle and all-embracing imposition of the neo-Fordist 'ownership' of non-consensual change, a veritable *Gleichschaltung*. This has been achieved through the internal regulation of the self and the introduction and instrumental imposition of approved (as opposed to contested) discourses, a process prefigured with prescience by George Orwell. The staged and progressive aggregation of the university sector into perceived national requirements has involved the virtual elimination of any traditional 'idea of the university' and its replacement by 'mass higher education'. These developments corroborate the analysis of religious change and signal a forcible 'end' of both tradition-bearing and sustained creative dissension as valued societal tasks: a banal societal unison displaces a spontaneous yet appropriately facilitated cultural

polyphony. Again, the implications for human identity are such as to demand a theological and religious response; indeed, no other forms of discourse would appear to have sufficient purchase upon the dimensions of ultimacy that arise once 'capitalism has triumphed' – and become ineluctably entrenched.

In part 2, 'Theology and power in the matrix of modernity/ postmodernity', the locus of the argument shifts from a contextualised examination of the renewed capitalist revolution to recent Christian theology, and, more specifically, to ecclesiology as a key area of controversy. Whereas twenty years ago 'ecclesiology' was a relatively neglected area of theological concern, it has now moved from the periphery to the core as religious organisations like churches have become increasingly self-aware embodiments of alternative resolutions of the modernity/postmodernity matrix. The opening chapter of part 2 contains a long and controversial critique (inspired by Hegel, George Steiner and Leonardo Boff) of post-Second World War Anglican theology, and by wider implication, of main-line Western Latin theology as a whole. Central to the chapter is a deconstructive critique of the English Anglican theology that has in recent years prepared the ground for and facilitated the rapid and largely uncritical managerialisation of main-line established Christianity. Through the deployment of the resources drawn from liberation theology, these Anglican preoccupations with 'authority' and its translation into the exercise of 'real power' are represented as an ecclesial strategy in which archaic patterns of master–slave relationships are reproduced. A decade ago, this chapter controversially predicted a theological 'celebration of power': this is now seen in the 'executive church' and the extension within the Body of Christ of a managerialist 'performance culture'. The reimported managerial 'mission' of the Church of England is seen in its dedication to the efficient delivery of a religious 'product' and the 'moulding' of the people through the rendering of 'Quality' liturgical 'services'.

Throughout part 2, these and other developments are questioned as to their capacity for sustaining and enhancing basic religious functions in a late modern and ever more thoroughly commodified society, in which there are diminishing opportunities for encounters with any sense of a transcendent 'other' that might challenge the prescribed limits of experience. Chapter 6 builds upon the historical and theological foundations laid in part 1 and contains a critique of the 'executive', 'Quality' and 'performance culture' characteristic of the ecclesiological managerialism that is currently being implemented in largely unreflective ways within

main-line English Anglican Christianity. Looked at from the standpoint
of organisation and ritual theory, these top-down 'reforms' fundamen-
tally endanger humane and emancipatory religious functions, and will,
without appropriate constraints, subvert the fragile integrity of 'vocation'
(personal, professional and religious) in an increasingly atomised surveil-
lance society. The discourse of 'accountability' as justification of man-
agerial change and de-professionalisation is interrogated. This is so not
least because the human right to an identity grounded in transcendence
is once more under threat. The remainder of this chapter reviews the
range of strategies open to committed reflection on the part of a church,
in this latter instance the Church of Scotland, that might take seriously
the implications of the modern–postmodern debate, the resurgence of
religion and the contemporary proliferation of alternative religiosities.
At the centre of attention is the reality of a religious 'market-place' in
which instrumental spiritualities and religiosities compete to provide spir-
itual services for a de-traditionalised and insecure population. Popular
culture ingests and commodifies religious symbols and quasi-shamanic
practices. The dilemmas and possibilities confronting main-line religion
are outlined and evaluated. These dilemmas are not unique to Christian
traditions, and can be seen as shared to a qualified extent by other non-
Christian traditions in advanced industrial societies in which complex
interactions between de- and retraditionalisation may be detected.

Part 2 is brought to a close with chapter 7, which contains a selec-
tive consideration of internal Christian theological responses to the rise
of social science. This chapter turns to the formal theological tradition
in order to discover how it has handled the impact of the growth of
the human and social sciences. The disjunction between theology and
the social sciences is outlined and on this foundation there then follow
analyses of five representative strategies of encounter exemplified in the
work of leading twentieth-century Christian theologians. The dangers
and limitations of such encounters are explored and related to the in-
creased salience of religion in the world system and to the twofold 'deaths'
of 'God' and of 'man' propounded by Nietzsche. These are treated as
the prelude to re-engagement with the 'enigma of identity', in which
a reflexive striving for 'transcendence' is not an obsolete, but a central
concern.

Chapter 7 also includes a critical response to the work of John Milbank,
whose *Theology and Social Theory* has provided the intellectual basis for the
renewal movement within Christian theology known as 'radical ortho-
doxy'. This school asserts the necessity of a systemic disjunction between

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'theology' (the cultural-linguistic practice of a neo-Augustinian Church)
and a 'heretical' and deviant 'social theory' that comprises the social and
human sciences in their entirety. In this scenario, individuals are faced
with what amounts to an unmediated, criterionless choice between a so-
phisticated 'radical orthodox' quasi-fundamentalism – and the 'heretical'
project of modernity itself. The 'radical orthodox' strategy relaunches
the contents of theological tradition in a way similar to that undertaken
by Karl Barth in the mid twentieth century. Understood as response to
the erosive and invasive late modernity outlined in this book, Milbank's
magisterial project brings with it a number of extremely problematic
consequences: not least it repeats in a repristinated Anglo-Catholic form
a quasi-Barthian recapitulation of tradition-in-isolation, but does so as
a dialectical nihilism lacking even the residual and surrogate temporal
ontology of Barth.[5] In an even more questionable way, when Milbank
depicts the human and social sciences as 'heretical' and spurns the use
of those socio-theoretical tools, he risks blinding the eyes and cutting off
the hands without which it is impossible responsibly to make the con-
dition of humankind visible – and thus to change it. Theological and
ecclesial 'practice' thereby loses its exploratory and healing touch with
regard to the much-threatened ecologies of 'nature', human community
and 'the human' itself. This chapter marks a turning-point from explo-
ration and critique towards epistemic reconstruction precipitated, not
least, by the drastic reappraisal of identity.[6] All in all, the second part
of *Religion, Theology and the Human Sciences* consists in an extended critique
of contemporary abuses of theological power.

    In part 3, 'Religion and social science: globalisation, identity and
the transmutation of the religious field', there are three chapters which
deal with identity and the shifting epistemic base of ideas of 'Europe',
globalisation and religion, and the contemporary recomposition of the
religious field, respectively. In chapter 8, I draw indirectly upon my expe-
rience as holder of the Chair of Divinity in an ancient university set within
a Scotland heading towards devolution. Awareness of the consolidation
of Europe as political entity, and of the continuing and controversial in-
tegration of Britain in 1992 and later, impelled an examination in some
depth and detail of the kinds of image of 'Europe' that might serve as

[5] See Roberts, *A Theology on its Way?*, ch. 1.
[6] I am acutely aware of the importance of the issues raised by gender in relation to identity and
intend to address this in future work. Meanwhile, see R. H. Roberts, 'The Chthonic Imperative:
Gender, Religion and the Battle for the Earth', in Joanne Pearson, Richard Roberts and Geoffrey
Samuel (eds.), *Nature Religion Today: Paganism in the Modern World* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University
Press, 1998), pp. 57–73.

symbolic and ideological points of integration at a time of renewed na-
tional consciousness. This chapter tackles these questions in such a way
as to make them the framework for consideration of the reconstrual of
'divinity' within the Scottish and wider context, where 'Europe' presents
itself as an alternative to 'Britain' or the United Kingdom as point of
political attachment and identity. Originally presented as an inaugural
lecture, the chapter is historical in orientation and affords a Foucaultian
archaeology and comparative typology of the 'souls of Europe'. Under-
stood as a quest for a viable new *episteme* for theology or 'divinity', this
project was essentially optimistic, but for me it proved (as was the case
with regard to chapter 6) to be an approach informed with insufficient
awareness of the powers of social construction operative in a decaying
tradition.

Whereas chapter 8 looked outwards into the limited universality
of 'Europe' from the standpoint of the local identities of a renascent
Scotland, chapter 9 develops the hypothesis that contemporary global
and globalised religion as exemplified in the Chicago Parliament of the
World's Religions of 1993 may be regarded as a resource which is central
rather than marginal to current human concerns in a threatened world.
Continuing my move from disembedded theological reflection to con-
textualised ethnography, a short personal narrative first gives some sense
of what happened at the Parliament, and how this appeared to affect
those present. Then, as a means of conveying the vast scale of the meet-
ing, a brief content analysis and interpretation of the programme shows
how (within certain limits) practical collaboration between highly diverse
participants was made possible. On this basis three insights are drawn
from contemporary sociology that facilitate an assessment and evalua-
tion of the Parliament as emancipatory event. These are world system
and globalisation theory, socio-cultural differentiation in an 'economy
of signs and space', and the search for 'meta-theory' in the 'condition of
postmodernity', which taken together allow for a positive evaluation of
the salience of religion(s) and of spiritual-body practices. The implica-
tions of this analysis and interpretation are then drawn out in ways which
support the proposal that religion can be understood as a differentiated
global resource, an ambiguous yet dynamic form of 'cultural capital' of
vital import in an era of postmaterialist value-formation. Consequently,
the globalised religion represented by the 1993 Parliament of the World's
Religions may have considerable implications for the study of contem-
porary religion and forms of religiosity. In this scenario, religion returns
from the theoretical and cultural periphery (a marginalisation promoted

by traditional secularisation theory) and comes closer to the core issues of the present. This interpretation reinforces Immanuel Wallerstein's 'Kairos' theme in world system theory: globalisation may embody threats but it also affords unrivalled positive opportunities.

The cumulative effect of this book is intended to promote the well-grounded impression that the intimate interface between religion, culture and society is best explored not by the measurement of declining religiosity but by fresh investigation of key zones of affinity and interconnection. Whilst much of the material educed in order to justify what distinguished sociologists of religion regard (with varying degrees of pessimism) as the inevitable decline of religion relies upon stratigraphic and statistical analysis of mainline religious observance, this provides an incomplete and misleading account of the present situation.[7] In the penultimate and concluding chapters the argument moves decisively beyond the confines of the now markedly traditional orthodoxies of the secularisation model towards a remapping of the religious field.

In chapter 10 the reconfiguration of the religious field is mapped on the basis of a consideration of time, virtual and cyborg cultures and gender. New axes have appeared that extend from super-biological female cyborg supremacism, in which prosthetic enhancement would appear to free women from both biological determination and social construction, to the near essentialist 'chthonic imperative' and 'the return of the Goddess' in some variants of gendered spirituality. Correspondingly, male corporeality becomes problematic when it wanders apparently lost in a new world of female empowerment. In his cybernovel *Neuromancer* William Gibson represents the attainment of full embodiment as a salvific event, and his hero Case may even be understood in quasi-Christological terms: this a version of the '*kenosis* of masculinity' that contrasts with the '*plerosis* of womankind'. The dialectics of embodiment (initiated in second- and third-wave feminism) provide a source on the basis of which it is possible to outline a gendered typology of contemporary religiosities within the overall paradigm of a post-secular 'return of religion'. Here the creative manipulation of virtual reality and outright primordial regression coexist as extreme alternatives open to adepts active in different sectors of the field.

In a modern/postmodern world dis/order the quest for identity becomes a predominant concern. In pre-modernity the impact of humankind upon nature was relatively moderate, and whilst it would be

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7 See Roy Wallis and Steve Bruce, 'Secularization: The Orthodox Model', in Steve Bruce (ed.), *Religion and Modernization* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 8–30.