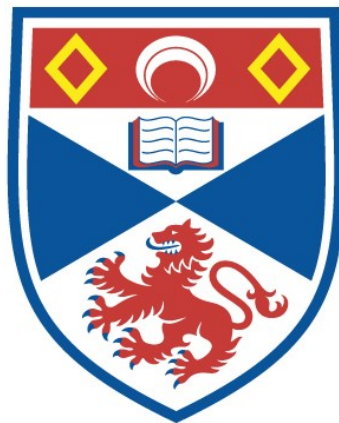# Theological learning as formation in holy love :
the lives and works of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen &
Alexander John Scott

Margaret McKerron

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Abstract

This dissertation investigates the lives and works of two underappreciated nineteenth-century Scottish theologians, Thomas Erskine of Linlathen (1788-1870) and Alexander John Scott (1805-1866). In their writings, theological engagements, and cultivation of communities of learning, Erskine and Scott claimed that the pursuit of 'knowledge of God' (and thus, theological learning) received its proper orientation when animated by the telos of *at·one·ment with God*, in holy love. Both men held that Christ's atonement was for the sake of creation's at·one·ment with God: ongoing, personal being-in-relationship with God that, much like a good friendship, transforms who and what we love, but also *how we know and are known*. I argue that their sometimes-countercultural enactment of at·one·ment retrieves an orientation towards theological learning (and an epistemology appropriate to it) that continues to be relevant for theological education today.

In Chapter 1, I provide an historical survey of Western theological education and assess how its objects, modes, and meanings have been circumscribed over the last two centuries. In Chapter 2, I outline Erskine's atonement theology and his schema of at·one·ment, noting his emphasis on the ontologically and epistemically constitutive nature of being-in-relationship with God. Because friendship is a critical metaphor here, in Chapter 3 I reappraise the fluid interplay of Erskine's poetics and practices of friendship, elucidating connections between relational theology and the communities of theological learning he cultivated. In Chapter 4, I reconstruct Scott's 'practical theological epistemology' based on writings around his trial before the General Assembly of 1831. In Chapter 5, I trace congruencies between Scott's emerging at·one·ment framework and his later educational involvements with women, working class men, and Nonconformists. In Chapter 6, I conclude by assessing how reorienting theological learning through a telos of *at·one·ment with God*, in holy love, helps to reframe contemporary dialogues about theological education.

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I, Margaret McKerron, do hereby certify that this thesis, submitted for the degree of PhD, which is approximately 80,000 words in length, has been written by me, and that it is the record of work carried out by me, or principally by myself in collaboration with others as acknowledged, and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for any degree. I confirm that any appendices included in my thesis contain only material permitted by the 'Assessment of Postgraduate Research Students' policy.

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Acknowledgements

I once described the work of a PhD as being like walking up switchbacks that wind back and forth up a steep mountain. Looking from the base of the mountain, ascending something that steep seems almost unfathomable. Switchbacks make the climb possible, but they are gruelling in their right. Much time (and energy) is expended going backward and forward, sometimes only making marginal upward progress. Each doctoral student has their own unique hill to climb, one that can be more or less steep. Each student has certain resources to climb it. Each turn reveals opportunities and obstacles that often cannot be predicted until they are encountered. What would be insurmountable on one's own is made possible with others—others who stand with you at the base of the mountain, who shepherd you through the necessary changes in direction, who provide companionship along the way, and who offer moments of respite in the long and sometimes weary journey to submission. I have been fortunate to have many such people in my life.

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[1] James Baldwin Brown (1856), quoted in J. Philip Newell, "A.J. Scott and His Circle" (Edinburgh, University of Edinburgh, 1981), 431.

In this context, I would also like to acknowledge my profound appreciation for Fiona Grant, who has counselled me through peaks and valleys of the dissertation process and helped me grow as a person in more ways than words can express; and Uli Guthrie, whose mentorship, friendship, and writing coaching has been formative throughout this process. I am also thankful for Professor Ross Hastings and Dr William Hyland. Not only did they oversee the thoughtful examination of this dissertation, but their enthusiasm for this kind of interdisciplinary work, the connections they drew out during my viva, and their keen interest in having it more widely read have been such an encouragement at the end of this journey.

One of the great joys of the doctoral process have been the companionship of other students. Working and praying with fellow doctoral candidate and now-professor Lucila Crena provided much-appreciated mutual support (even across an ocean!). Marjorie Gourlay, Sarah Moerman, and James Smoker have also been important companions along the way. Before the coronavirus pandemic, the Chalmers' Institute, led by Dave Redfern and others; the St Andrews Scriptorium, led by Dr Joy Clarkson; and the Virtual Writing Retreat, led by Cat Aitken each served as convivial groups of thoughtful scholars attempting to integrate head, hand, and heart in their studies. I am grateful to the family life that Dr Robyn Boeré, her husband Neil Stange, and their daughters India and Lilith have offered to me; and to Robyn, I owe especial gratitude for helping me find a path through the forest in the final weeks when I was having trouble seeing it for the trees. I would also like to express my gratitude for Lance Green. While a good friend throughout this project, he has been the platonic and metaphorical Beatrice to my Dante in the final months before submission: a symbol of divine grace for a weary pilgrim. I am indebted to him, both for his care and his conscientious proofreading of so many the chapters that follow. In this sense, I am also indebted to Flora Outram whose indomitable spirits and help with citations helped me take those final steps towards submission.

Of course, companionship on the way is not the sole purview of one's fellow scholars (though many are also scholarly friends!). I am indebted to the church communities that have provided spiritual homes during my studies: St Andrews Episcopal Church, St Andrews, under the rectorship of Revd Dr Trevor Hart; Cornerstone St Andrews, under the leadership of Revd Dr Jared Michelson; and most recently, Aberlour Parish Church, whose minister, Revd Andrew Kimmitt, has provided scholarly solidary and much-appreciated spiritual guidance and whose congregants have accompanied me week-to-week in these final two years. To the Redfern family—Dave, Michelle, Lucy, James, and Elizabeth—who organised weekly 'Tuesday Night Dinners' and to the regular 'Great British Bake-off crew' that gathered in their home, I am profoundly grateful for extending weekly warmth, respite, fellowship, and good cheer. I am also grateful to my neighbours in Aberlour, James & Kathryn Outram and Stewart & Hazel Rothnie, who have together provided stalwart support and diversion as the situation required. Alongside Earl, Trudy, and Daniel Coleman, I am indebted to Ceilidh Michaelson's contribution to the running of the house and cottage so that I could focus on finishing up the dissertation. Last but not least, I am profoundly grateful to Samuel Coleman who has been a continual support to me these last three years in more ways that I can count: in his faith in me, his grace for me in those moments where I could not be gracious to myself, and his willingness to drop everything to go on a whimsical adventure or to be a shoulder on which to cry. Thank you.

To these people and the countless more unnamed, I dedicate this dissertation with Erskine's prayer that 'our true notions may become true feelings, and that our orthodoxy and theology may become holy love and holy obedience.'[2]

<div align="right">Margaret Frances McKerron</div>

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[2] Thomas Erskine, *The Unconditional Freeness of the Gospel: In Three Essays.* (Edinburgh: Waugh and Innes, 1828), 225.

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'God is not only the wonderful destination
of your journey, but also your
companion along the way.'

Thomas Erskine of Linlathen[3]

i) A Story of Hope

In the early nineteenth century, there lived a Scottish laird named Thomas Erskine of Linlathen. One day, he visited a tenant farmer on a friend's estate.[4] As the story goes, so afraid of dying was this particular man that he refused to acknowledge that he was even ill. As Donald Dunslow describes the scene, Erskine lacked his usual discretion and

> upon being ushered into the sick man's room…immediately began speaking of death and of the need to be prepared for it. 'What do *you* know of death?' was the farmer's bitter retort. This led Erskine to retreat from the topic and to introduce 'country matters' into the conversation—planting, the soil, the weather, and the like. To this the farmer responded happily, and soon he and Erskine were talking like old friends.
> Sensing that he had won the farmer's trust, Erskine again broached the subject of death: 'I cannot leave here without telling you that you are indeed going to die. Are you prepared?' 'I'm sure you mean well, Sir,' was the reply, 'but how can I prepare? What can I do?' 'Well, let me ask you this: now that we are friends, and now that you are embarking upon a journey, would you like me to go with you?'
> The farmer looked puzzled. 'How can that be?' he asked. 'Apart from whether or not it *can* be,' replied Erskine, 'would you still like me to go with you?' 'Yes, I would. Definitely. You seem to be the kind of friend that wouldn't let anything bad happen to me.' 'I am glad you trust me. Yet I assure you that you can

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[3] Donald Winslow, *Thomas Erskine: Advocate for the Character of God* (London, UK: University Press of America, 1993), 4.

[4] This interaction was reported inAlexander Ewing, ed., "Some Further Letters of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen," in *Present-Day Papers on Prominent Questions in Theology*, Third Series (London: Daldy, Isbister & Co., 1871), 16–19. It is based on a recollection of Lady Matilda Maxwell of Pollock, who persuaded Erskine to accompany her to this particular tenant farmer's home.

trust God even more, for God is not only the wonderful destination of your journey but also your companion along the way.'[5]

Bishop Ewing adds:

> After this, [the farmer] saw Mr. Erskine almost daily until he died—[and] he rose from 'chancing' it with God to confiding it to Him, and finally passed out of life, not only having overcome the dread of death which had been so great a trial to him, but able to look forward to it with hope.[6]

Deathbed conversion scenes were a popular convention in Victorian literature.[7] To modern ears, they might sound passé: remnants of a Victorian earnestness that seems out of place in the twenty-first century. Yet, if carefully exegeted, common stories such as this one gesture towards a complicated and underexplored dynamic between personal relationships and theological learning—the subject of this dissertation.

If we take a closer look, for instance, we might notice at least three kinds of interplay between relationship and theological learning. First, friendship becomes the contextual bedrock for exploring difficult personal—and deeply theological—subjects. So long as Erskine remains an Other, he is *persona non grata*. Neither he nor the farmer can find any real footing for subjects like the isolation and loneliness of death, the fear of judgment and the character of God, and even the eschatological hope of the life to come. Not until they are described as 'talking like old friends' and the farmer tacitly acknowledges Erskine's claim of mutual friendship ('now that we are friends…') does real dialogue and meaningful theological learning occur.[8] Relationship changes how the farmer knows and lets himself be known; it informs the mode or manner in which he approaches theological learning.

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[5] Winslow, *Advocate*, 4.

[6] Ewing, "Some Further Letters of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen," 19.

[7] Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical* Conversion *Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 2–3. As Bruce Hindmarsh writes, holy death as 'the consummation of evangelical conversion'was a well-documented trope in later eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century English literature, the period in which this story most likely takes place. See alsoMary Riso, *The Narrative of the Good Death: The Evangelical Deathbed in Victorian England* (London: Routledge, 2016), 190–92.

[8] Erskine first identifies their developing relationship in terms of being 'friends.' While being wary of falsely implying causation, it is nevertheless notable that the dying farmer's receptivity is observed only after

Second, Erskine's friendship with the farmer also does theological work—a subject that D. Stephen Long laments is often understudied in the academy. 'Theology,' he reasons from Barth, 'is no rigid system with carefully ordered propositions based on an adequate method, but an endeavour to set forth the proper form and tone of God's address to creation in Christ.'[9] In the opening story, we see Erskine draw from the wellspring of the farmer's understandings of human friendship to reframe who God is and to reimagine the character of the relationship God offers to human beings. Strikingly, even the farmer's blossoming friendship with Erskine itself becomes an image or metaphor that gestures towards the realities of being-in-relationship with God, even as it does not contain them ('I am glad you trust me. Yet I assure you that you can trust God even more, for God is not only the wonderful destination of your journey but also your companion along the way'). If we understand theology along the same lines as Long, relationship here *does theology*.

Third, the fluid interplay of deepening relationship and theological learning witnesses to their symbiotic relationship. The farmer's deepening bond with Erskine transforms his own knowledge of God and God's character, which in turn transforms how the farmer relates to God. God goes from being an object of disbelief, disinterest, or distrust to being a living Being who *addresses* the farmer. From 'chancing' his life with God, he begins 'confiding it to Him'—a change that enables him to 'overcome the dread of death' and 'look forward to it with hope.'[10] Not only does the farmer *know* the God of holy love in a new way, but his life is transfigured by that knowledge. Theology and theological learning *inform* that truly transformative relationship—that close bond with God that reorders being-in-the-world and the hope of bringing all things into right relationship one

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he and Erskine are 'talking like old friends' and the claim of friendship is made by Erskine—and accepted by the farmer.

[9] D. Stephen Long, *Saving Karl Barth: Hans Urs von Balthasar's Preoccupation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 3.

[10] Ewing, "Some Further Letters of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen," 19.

with another in the fullness of time. If theological learning informs relationship, it is its *integration in relationship* and the reordering effect it has that gives it its full meaning.

Stories such as this one gesture towards *the place of relationship* at the heart of theology, not just as a context for learning but also as a profound means of revelation and revolution. They also, however, also prompt questions about what exactly constitutes theology and meaningful theological learning, how it is oriented and animated, and where and why it happens. These questions are also central to debates about the future of Western theological education, which serves as the backdrop for this dissertation.[11]

ii) An Unusual Beginning

Beginning a dissertation that is ultimately concerned with the future of theological education with an early nineteenth-century deathbed story from the Scottish Lowlands is an unusual choice—especially one that might read as patriarchal or paternalistic to the modern reader.[12] It would be more conventional to begin with genealogies that trace the evolution of theology and theological education with respect to the rise of the modern research university, or to outline its struggles within a secular and pluralistic cultural paradigm.[13] Or, more frequently now, it might be common to reappraise the future of theological education through the lens of the experiences and wisdom of historically

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[11] The particular focus of this dissertation is Western theological education. Unless otherwise noted, I will assume the Western context for the sake of concision, but that serves only to delimit scope not to suggest that theological education as it is conceived in the West is the only (or even the best) way to engage in theological pursuits.

[12] Ewing, "Some Further Letters of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen," 19. While there are paternalistic overtones to this story, particularly in the presumption of Erskine's first interaction with the farmer; however, it is worth noting that after Erskine's first visit, the farmer sent a message to Erskine asking 'to see that gentleman again' and it is reported that 'after this saw Mr. Erskine almost daily until he died.'

[13] Most of the scholars introduced in subsequent pages take one of these two approaches. For prototypical examples, see David H. Kelsey, *Between Athens and Berlin: The Theological Education Debate* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1993), which grew out of research conducted with the Association of Theological Schools' Issues Research Committee; and Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983).

marginalised or non-Western communities.[14] In this study, I take a different approach by placing two nineteenth-century Scottish theologians, Thomas Erskine of Linlathen (1788–1870) and Alexander John Scott (1805–1866), at the centre of our explorations of the issue.

Bringing such historical voices to the modern table is indeed a fraught enterprise, not least because of the sea of cultural differences that must be traversed. Terms and issues of debate, assumptions, participants, and institutions have changed dramatically in the two centuries. What two nineteenth-century Scotsmen can reasonably add to shape the future of theological education, therefore, will always be fragmentary. However, as theologian and educator Willie Jennings reminds us, 'we who journey in theological education—as teacher, as student, as administrator, or as committed graduate—often fail to realize that *we always and only work in the fragments,*' or 'creaturely pieces of memories and ideas and practices with which we work to attune our senses to the presence of God.'[15] Because we are finite creatures, 'the world is always too much for us to hold at once.'[16] So long as we are humble enough to recognise a fragment for a fragment—not to claim it as the whole truth when it only tells a part, to recognise its borders and edges—he maintains that we may in fact open up space for redemption, communion, and understanding.[17] 'God works with these fragments,' he avows, 'moving in the spaces between them to form communion with us.

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[14] For a generative bibliography on this subject, see Theological Education Between the Times, "Resources," *American Academy of Religion*, April 28, 2017, sec. Religious Studies News, https://rsn.aarweb.org/spotlight-on/theo-ed/between-the-times/resources. Of particular note are Rebecca S. Chopp, *Saving Work: Feminist Practices of Theological Education* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995) and Pui-lan Kwok, Cecilia González-Andrieu, and Hopkins, Dwight N., eds., *Teaching Global Theologies: Power and Praxis* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2015). Because of the historical focus of this dissertation and the fact that pedagogy is only a tangential subject of focus, I do not engage with these works but many of the communal and embodied approaches to theological learning commended by these works share commonalities with Erskine and Scott—a subject that I hope to engage further in future work.

[15] Willie J. Jennings, *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020), 16–17. Italics mine.

[16] Jennings, 34.

[17] Jennings, 34. Jennings insists that he is not exercising a reductionist and pluralistic relativism, nor advocating a 'chastenedagnosticism,' nor suggesting a constructivist ethic. Rather, he is making an argument for an epistemic humility that acknowledges the limits of our creatureliness.

The fragments facilitate communion.'[18] Of those 'creaturely pieces of memories and ideas and practices,' Erskine and Scott offer us one important one.[19] Far from being disconnected, taking the unusual approach of bringing them into modern conversations enables us to engage in reflexive contemplation and find communion in the spaces between our contemporary moment and theirs.

Indeed, Erskine and Scott are very well-positioned to open space for reimagining the future of theology and theological education today—precisely *because of* their historical situatedness. Like modern theologians and theological educators, both men were concerned with the objects, meanings, and modes that properly orient the pursuit of knowledge of God (and thus, theological learning). Yet their writings, theological endeavours, and cultivation of Christian communities of learning just precede the march of *Wissenschaftsideologie*—the German ideal of 'scholarly inquiry'—upon England's shores. *Wissenschaftsideologie*, with its counterpart in the nineteenth-century theological encyclopaedia, has since redefined the contours of the modern university and theological learning's place within its walls. Lenore O'Boyle suggests, however, that *Wissenschaft* only began to have real purchase in England in the late nineteenth century, in the latter part of Erskine's and Scott's lives or beyond. Vigorous efforts to raise higher education standards in England were certainly made earlier, but she argues, 'it would be mistaken to interpret this movement as expressing a commitment to scholarship on the German model.'[20] Unfortunately, her investigation predominantly focuses on Oxford and Cambridge and gives little heed to the newly-founded, progressive colleges that sprung up under the umbrella of the University of London: institutions like Owens College, Manchester, where

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[18] Jennings, 34.
[19] Jennings, 16–17.2023-01-16 4:35:00 PM
[20] Lenore O'Boyle, 'Learning for Its Own Sake: The German University as Nineteenth-Century Model', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 25, no. 1 (January 1983), 17.

Scott served as inaugural principal.[21] Nor does her analysis consider the Scottish university-mediated routes of influence. Nevertheless, her analysis of print media suggests that if the seeds of *Wissenschaft* had been planted in Erskine's and Scott's time, their fruit had not ripened. Because of the ways in which theological learning has since developed and been institutionalised since the nineteenth century—particularly in the modern university—looking back people like Erskine and Scott with the epistemic humility that Jennings commends opens new ways to look forward.

In fact, both Erskine and Scott had unusual standing with the institutions of their own day. While often near the heart of theological development in the nineteenth century, institutionally-speaking they were on the margins—the product and sometimes the result of their distinctive ways of approaching theological learning. Erskine, for instance, was something of an anomaly in Scotland: a lay theologian, neither ordained nor an educator in any formal sense. Formerly a trained barrister, he became a Scottish laird upon the death of his elder brother. Described by theologian Trevor Hart as 'one of the finest and most creative minds on the British theological scene in the early nineteenth century,'[22] Archdeacon of Westminster Vernon Storr credited Erskine with 'decisively [influencing] the course of theological developments in [the] early years of the nineteenth century'[23] while German theologian Otto Pfleiderer called Erskine's ideas 'the best contribution to dogmatics' made by Victorian British theologians.[24] More recently, Drummond and Bulloch identified Erskine as 'the most significant figure in Scottish theological thought in the quarter of a century preceding the Disruption – and perhaps in the nineteenth

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[21] O'Boyle, 16–17.

[22] Trevor Hart, *The Teaching Father: An Introduction to the Theology of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen*, The Devotional Library (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1993), 1.

[23] Vernon F. Storr, *The Development of English Theology in the Nineteenth Century 1800-1860* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1913).

[24] Otto Pfleiderer, *The Development of Theology in Germany since Kant and Its Progress in Great Britain since 1825*, 2nd ed. (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1893), 382.

century.'[25] Less explored in scholarship, but also worth critical attention, was his cultivation of informal theological communities of learning—both at his Scottish estate, Linlathen, and through his extensive and far-ranging correspondence. These communities challenged critical contemporary patterns of relationality, reconstituting belonging in new and unusual ways that I will explore further in Chapter 3.

Scott, once a probationer within the Church of Scotland, was stripped of his licence just three days after the famed nineteenth-century Scottish theologian, John MacLeod Campbell. Having refused to subscribe to the *Westminster Confession* upon doctrinal and epistemological grounds, Scott spent much of his remaining professional life establishing and fostering formal and semi-formal communities of learning for marginalised adult populations: working men, women, and those confessionally barred from pursuing studies at Oxbridge or Durham University. While not all these communities were explicitly dedicated to theological learning *as such*—Owens College, Manchester was certainly not— on some level, knowledge of God was an explicit or implicit intention of all these communities. Less studied than Erskine, Scott too has been credited as one of the 'forgotten prophets of the last century,'[26] forgotten in part because his later years were dedicated to his pioneering educational work and work developing the academic discipline of English literature.[27] More work needs to be done to trace Scott's influence through his vast circle of friends, who Kirstin Jeffrey Johnson notes included 'Erasmus Darwin, the

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[25] Andrew Drummond and James Bulloch, *The Scottish Church, 1688-1843: The Age of the Moderates* (Edinburgh: St Andrews Press, 1973), 194. For more on the influence of Scott, see Don Horrocks, *Laws of the Spiritual Order: Innovation and Reconstruction in the Soteriology of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen*, Studies in Evangelical History and Thought (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2004), 1–9; Robert Reid, "The Influence, Direct and Indirect, of the Writings of Erskine of Linlathen on Religious Thought in Scotland" (Edinburgh, University of Edinburgh, 1930).

[26] W. Garrett Horder, 'George MacDonald: A Nineteenth Century Seer', *Review of Reviews* 32 (October 1905), 359.

[27] For more on this subject, see Franklin E. Court, "F. D. Maurice, A. J. Scott, Comparative Philology, and the Transition to Arnold," in *Institutionalizing English Literature: The Culture and Politics of Literary Study, 1750-1900* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 85–118.

Reverend James Dunn, John Sterling, F. D. Maurice, Charles Kingsley, Francis Newman (Cardinal Newman's brother), Thackeray, Archdeacon Julius Hare, Karl Gützlaff (the missionary Gu! Shíl), Anthony Norris Groves (brother-in-law and mentor of George Müller), and William and Elizabeth Gaskell.'[28] Certainly, more well-recognised theologians Erskine, Maurice and MacLeod Campbell—as well as Scottish novelist George MacDonald—acknowledged substantial indebtedness to Scott for their own theological thought.[29] Because of their respective 'insider-outsider' tensions, Erskine and Scott have an unusual and often overlooked voice when it comes to conversations about the object, modes, and meaning of theological learning.

Of course, even if Erskine and Scott might be beneficial participants to have at our round table on the future of theological education, there is a second reason that it is unusual to foreground a pre-Victorian deathbed anecdote against the background of current debate: that is, whether *meaningful* theology or theological learning is happening here. Erskine was a lay theologian. While his education at the University of Edinburgh would have included theological classes, he was neither a minister nor a professor. The setting is intimate, personal, informal—hardly the usual abode for educational endeavours. Furthermore, although we do know that the farmer reached out to Erskine following this visit to reflect on their conversation and invite him to return to continue it, we do not know the precise content of the conversations that unfolded over the subsequent days—or how systematic, dogmatic, or didactic those conversations were. Erskine (or Scott) might have counted such personal scenes within the realm of theological education; however, we might be more reticent to adopt such permeable boundaries and prefer to restrict

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[28] Kirstin Jeffrey Johnson, "Rooted in All Its Story, More Is Meant than Meets the Ear: A Study of the Relational and Revelational Nature of George MacDonald's Mythopoeic Art" (PhD, St Andrews, University of St Andrews, 2011), 72.
[29] Newell, "Scott and His Circle," 430.

theological education to more formalised endeavours. Even asking whether 'meaningful' theology or theological learning is happening within this story is a loaded question, since such vastly different suppositions and values are attached to such words. One of the reasons for the unusual beginning to this dissertation, then, is to do in miniature what I hope it will do on a larger scale: namely, to bring to light some of the assumptions that we have about the objects, modes, and meanings that we believe orient theology, theological learning, and theological education today.

iii) Theology's Circumscription

While there are many useful genealogies of theology and theological learning, U.S. theologian Edward Farley's foundational work *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (1983) is particularly helpful for two reasons. First, he provides the conceptual framework of *theologia*—to which I will add more definition momentarily—to explain two poles (or pulls) within theological studies. By tracing these poles within *theologia* historically, we can use his work to situate Erskine and Scott's specific proposal for reorienting theological education within their own context and understand the specific challenges involved in retrieving their insights for the vastly different cultural and institutional landscape. Second, Farley's genealogical account illustrates how changes in academic culture have contributed to circumscribing the content, modes, and purposes of theological learning. David Kelsey and Gavin D'Costa, similarly, demonstrate that this narrowing trend continues to be codified institutionally in and through theology's unique entanglement with the modern university. Better recognising through these scholars how orientations towards theological learning are changing—and specifically, how the *telos* they envision is changing—clarifies why studying Erskine and Scott's theological endeavours remains a worthwhile and generative enterprise for reimagining theological learning today.

Farley's *Theologia* provides a historical and conceptual framework as well as language for naming the tensions involved in articulating the objects, modes, and meaning of theological learning. Drawing from the Greek *theologia*, Farley argues that theological learning has always contained within it two poles or pulls: (1) 'an actual, individual cognition of God and things related to God, a cognition which in most treatments attends faith and has eternal happiness as its final goal'; and (2) 'a discipline, a self-conscious scholarly enterprise of understanding.'[30] Historically, different approaches to holding both dimensions together have modified theology's form and intention; however, he argues that in the last two centuries the first dimension of theology has been almost entirely eclipsed and subsumed by the second dimension.

Farley describes the eclipse of this first dimension of theology as an example of *phenomenalism*, where 'the primary defining reality of the discipline has been replaced by the second-order phenomenal literary carrier.'[31] Of course, literary texts are vital touchstones for the Christian tradition. They can record divine revelation, root corporate identity, furnish the Christian imagination, change affections, galvanise action, tease out how all things hold together through God and in faith, and much more. In such cases, texts are grounded in and point beyond themselves towards something else: to God or to the experience of God, as their primary defining reality or region of function. Or, using the *theologia* framework, (2) scholarly textual engagement aims towards (1) cognition of God. Farley describes this orientation towards 'the literature of the field' as focusing 'not on the literature as an end in itself but through the literature on the fact, reality, subject matter,

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[30] Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 31.
[31] Farley, 144.

event.'[32] To reiterate, the primary fact or reality to which theological endeavours are oriented is God and experience of God.

In contrast, under a phenomenal approach to systematic theology, the *writings* of past or existing theologians themselves become the object to which theologians attend—with the primary reality to which those writings point largely bracketed. In this case, Farley contends that 'literature in itself cannot establish a field except in the *phenomenal* sense of an existing literature, and any literature can be the object of scholarly investigation.'[33] In other words, theological studies might come to refer to a thematic collection of writings on God and the nature of religious belief; its contents could just as easily be pursued by historians, literary critics, linguists, or philosophers. While this development '[opens] the various enterprises of [theological] teaching and interpretation to the full spectrum of resources and sciences available in the modern world,' Farley also maintains that 'the losses are serious.'[34] His particular concern is that the phenomenal approach cannot provide an adequate *ratio studiorum*—'a rationale for the unity, content, and divisions of theological study.'[35] By severing the connection with that which makes *a theological education theological*—i.e., the address of a self-disclosing God as the defining reality to which theological endeavours serve as one response—the discipline comes to name a cluster of relatively discrete sciences rather than a unified field of study with its own internal integrity.[36]

This 'Copernican revolution' in how theological endeavours are conceptualised, i.e., primarily as 'a self-conscious scholarly enterprise of understanding,' is the product of a number of historical and cultural factors.[37] Most commonly, scholars attribute the modern

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[32] Farley, 144.
[33] Farley, 144.
[34] Farley, 146.
[35] Farley, 12.
[36] Farley, 146.
[37] Farley, 31.

revolution in theological inquiry to two developments in late-eighteenth and early

nineteenth-century Germany: the rise of *Wissenschaftsideologie* manifested in the new, self-

consciously modern Humboldt University of Berlin; and Friedrich Schleiermacher's

proposed revisioning of theological study to ensure its place within it. Because Thomas

Howard, Zachary Purvis, Edward Farley, and others flesh out the remarkable relationship

between the emergence of *Wissenschaftsideologie*, theological encyclopaedia, and the modern

university so much more extensively than space permits here, we shall focus primarily on

the *outcomes* of these developments rather than their origins or development—providing

only the bare bones needed to situate Erskine, Scott, and the motivations behind *theologia*'s

circumscription.[38]

    Wissenschaftsideologie, as a post-Enlightenment and post-revolutionary system of

intellectual ideas and ideals, began in the late eighteenth century. It gained momentum and

international interest through its connection with the establishment of the University of

Berlin in 1810. While *Wissenschaft* has no exact English translation, it is often rendered as

'scholarly inquiry'—a translation that intimates its close connection with higher education.[39]

Two basic convictions undergird *Wissenschaftsideologie*. First, all true knowledge (or science,

in the medieval sense of *scientia*) coheres as an 'organic unity' characterised by 'a

fundamental interrelatedness and complementarity.'[40] While a given person might not

comprehend or realise the whole in practice, it is possible in principle—an assurance that

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[38] See Thomas A. Howard, 'Theology, Wissenschaft, and the Founding of the University of Berlin', in *Protestant Theology and the Making of the Modern German University* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 130–211; Zachary Purvis, 'Theology and the University in Nineteenth-Century Germany', in *Oxford Theology and Religion Monographs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Farley, *Theologia*. See also Gerard Loughlin, 'The University', in *Edinburgh Critical History of Nineteenth-Century Christian Theology*, ed. Daniel Whistler (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018); Zachary Purvis, "Education and Its Institutions," in *The Oxford Handbook of Nineteenth-Century Christian Thought*, ed. Joel D. S. Rasmussen, Judith Wolfe, and Johannes Zachhuber (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 305–22. We will return to this subject in Chapter 6.

[39] Howard, *Protestant Theology*, 139. Cf. OED: 'the systematic pursuit of knowledge, learning, and scholarship.'

[40] Howard, 139.

undergirds a robust research imperative. Second, its *modus operandi* is disinterestedness. Disinterestedness is a mode of engaging with a subject or activity that is not rooted in, characterised by, or undertaken for personal advantage or preferment. It often strives for impartiality, objectivity, and to be unbiased. In many respects, it is an opposite orientation towards learning as the one taken by Erskine in our earlier story.

Wissenschaftideologie was the German solution to Kant's indictment in the Enlightenment: 'man's inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another.'[41] Under the new system created around it, students were to be taught philosophy—in Schelling's words, that 'absolutely universal science'[42]—to obtain that crucial vision of the whole that had once been attested as the peculiar realm of theology, the now-dethroned 'queen of the sciences.' Whether theological study fit within this new intellectual paradigm was uncertain, if it did at all. As theologians sought to regain their footing in shifting cultural sands, many attempted to rearticulate the pursuit of theological knowledge as a scientific enterprise in the guise of *Wissenschaft*. Even today, Purvis writes:

> Discussion of theology's proper methods and parameters remains closely linked with the impassioned nineteenth-century debates over the status of theology as science or *Wissenschaft*—a rigorous, critical discipline deserving a seat at the modern university. Theology's institutionalization in the modern university and the need to classify it in an overall system of scientific knowledge, in fact, opened up the very quandaries that dominated the horizons of the new field.[43]

Defining these horizons became the work of a new theological genre: theological encyclopaedia, which attempted 'the discovery of a coherent pattern and rationale for various theological sciences (disciplines, faculties, areas of scholarship)' in light of *Wissenschaft* ideals.[44] Unlike encyclopaedias today, which organise their contents

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[41] Immanuel Kant, "What Is Enlightenment? (1784)" (Modern History Sourcebook, 1997), https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/kant-whatis.asp.

[42] Friedrich Schelling, "Vorlesungen," in *Die Idee Der Deuschen Universität. Die Fünf Grundschriften Aus Der Zeit Ihrer Neubegründung Durch Klassischen Idealismus Und Romantischen Realismus*, ed. Ernst Anrich (Darmstadt: H. Gentner, 1956), 6. See alsoHoward, *Protestant Theology*, 157.

[43] Purvis, "Nineteenth-Century Germany," 2.

[44] Farley, *Theologia*, 49, 73.

alphabetically, Howard notes that these works reflected 'the original meaning of the term 'encyclopaedia' (the circle of knowledge).' They 'sought to justify and delineate a particular branch of knowledge in relation to the whole.'[45] Of the numerous proposals published, Schleiermacher's programmatic statement on the future of theological learning—published as *Kurze Darstellung des theologischen Studiums* (1811; 2nd edn., 1830)—largely prevailed as the paradigmatic model for the future of theological education.

Schleiermacher reformulated theology as a 'positive science,' one whose 'parts join into a cohesive whole only through their common relation to a distinct mode of faith, a particular way of being conscious of God.'[46] Unlike pure sciences, positive sciences obtain their meaning from their practical application: in this case, Schleiermacher proposed preparing young men for ecclesiastical leadership. Purvis remarks that while practical theology was thus elevated to the 'queen of the theological sciences,' theological students, in their new guise as *Wissenschaftler*, were also encouraged to take an historical and critical stance towards their religious studies.[47] Students were taught new empirical skills to analyse given communities for their specific instantiation of Christianity among a 'plurality of ecclesial communities claiming to be "Christian."'[48] The escalating demand for a philosophical theology in line with the largely post-Kantian, idealistic philosophy of *Wissenschaft*, encouraged students to pursue a disinterested, 'near-Platonic "ideal" conception of Christianity.'[49] Institutionalised as branches of theology, these reworked approaches to practical, historical, and philosophical theology laid the groundwork for the phenomenon of *phenomenalism* that Farley identified earlier.

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[45] Howard, *Protestant Theology*, 201.

[46] Freidrich Schleiermacher, *Kurze Darstellung Des Theologischen Studiums Zum Behuf Einleitender Vorlesungen*, ed. Heinrich Scholz (Leipzig: Deichert, 1910), 325.

[47] Purvis, "Nineteenth-Century Germany," 149.

[48] Schleiermacher, *Kurze Darstellung Des Theologischen Studiums Zum Behuf Einleitender Vorlesungen*, 338–40.

[49] Purvis, "Nineteenth-Century Germany," 151.

Of course, the full historical picture is not straightforward: the unfolding of ideologies depends greatly upon how they are instantiated and institutionalised. Even self-consciously modern institutions are slow to change. By the end of the nineteenth century, however, the University of Berlin's model of higher education had garnered significant international esteem and acclaim. With respect to theological study, Farley contends that the consequences of the theological encyclopaedia movement were nothing short of revolution: 'it is not an exaggeration to say that it (or the mode of thinking behind it) is the most important event and the most radical departure from tradition in the history of the education of clergy.'[50] Whether Farley is justified in laying so much responsibility at the feet of one movement rather than taking into consideration other cultural pressures is debatable. Still, his attention to the fundamental shift in the modes of thinking about theological learning—and the ends to which it is oriented—is well-warranted. To borrow the language of Charles Taylor, Farley foregrounds *Wissenschaftideologie*'s contribution in precipitating a metamorphosis within the social imaginary of what theology *is*, what theology is *for*, and how theology should be *done*.

As we consider the outcomes of this movement more specifically, that word 'imaginary' is significant. Arguably more significant than the programmatic approach to theology's content and divisions Schleiermacher outlined was the change in the imagined horizons of theology. To recall Purvis, discussions about the nature of theology, its methods, and its place in the modern university continue to be formulated in large part in response to the imagined ideal of *Wissenschaft*. Indeed, when David Kelsey investigated the teloi organising theological education institutions in the 1980s and '90s, he entitled the fleshed-out version of his final report *Between Athens and Berlin: The Theological Education*

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[50] Farley, *Theologia*, 49.

Debate (1993).[51] There, he suggests that it is still useful to place philosophies of theology and theological education along a spectrum whose types are the Greek ideal of *paideia* (Athens) and the German ideal of *Wissenschaft* (Berlin). Admittedly, Kelsey presents ideal rather than strictly historical types, focusing on how he sees them imagined in the late twentieth century as 'models of excellence' within the context of modern higher education.[52] Still, usefully for bringing Erskine and Scott into modern theological education debates, his idealised types of *paideia* and *Wissenschaft* suggest two philosophies of pursuing theological learning—each with their own distinctive entailments for the objects, modes, and meanings of pursuing theological learning.

Like *Wissenschaft*, *paideia* is a notoriously difficult word to translate, except with respect to how it is realised.[53] Originally, it referred to the communal 'culturing' of young free men in the character virtues needed to serve the *polis*, or city-state. Learning involved an indirect process of pursuing knowledge of the Good. Ideally, it involved the whole of active and contemplative life including its physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and public dimensions. Though personal insofar as it was identity-forming and fostered self-knowledge, *paideia* was also considered to be a deeply communal process: pursued in and by communities of learning that involve teachers and students 'sharing the common goal of personally appropriating revealed wisdom'[54] and who are 'engaged in self-conscious cultural transactions with its host culture.'[55] Since Christianity's earliest days, theological educators have commended Christianised versions of *paideia*—sometimes with the *telos* of preparing a people fit for citizenship within the kingdom of God or cultivating a true humanity in the

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[51] Kelsey, *Between Athens*, vii.
[52] Kelsey, 12.
[53] Werner Jaeger, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture: Volume I. Archaic Greece: The Mind of Athens*, trans. Gilbert Highet, 2nd ed. (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), v.
[54] Kelsey, *Between Athens*, 21.
[55] Kelsey, 15.

image of God. Today, such models continue to be compelling to Christian theological educators because they offer a conceptual framework appropriate to theology's scope: the whole of creation, culture, and individual being-in-the-world fall within its purview.[56] At its heart, Christian *paideia* seeks synthesis: to bring all human understanding and experience into a coherent, ordered, and meaningful whole. Personal formation is essential not only to discern that whole, but also to participate in it.

Where *paideia* emphasises synthesis, *Wissenschaft* emphasises systematisation—a process involving detailed knowledge of the parts and their relationships that often demands highly specialised theoretical knowledge. As Kelsey notes, because its proponents are committed to 'reason's capacity to test and if necessary to correct any and all "intuitions,"'[57] they tend to be 'highly self-conscious about the methods that are used to establish the truth about whatever is under study.'[58] Indeed, the undergirding rationality is that 'only after critical testing do we have true "knowledge."'[59] Anything prior to that is a-rational, if not irrational. Learning, then, involves a much more direct process that moves 'from data to theory to application of theory to practice.'[60] Whereas practice is the soil of reflection in *paideia* and a critical part of the end to which personal formation is ordered, in the *Wissenschaft* framework it is the final movement of a largely cognitive process following disciplined inquiry and theoretical development. Indeed, commitments to disinterestedness veil or discourage such personal involvement—and often, the self-reflective or experiential models of learning that foster it. Whatever is personally involved is not strictly the business of the academy; rather, it is largely the business of the individual student who is responsible

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[56] Jens Zimmermann, *Humanism and Religion. A Call for the Renewal of Western Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 96. Of course, ideals of formation are not limited to *Christian* theological educators; as secular humanists demonstrate, formation can be articulated in secular terms.
[57] Kelsey, *Between Athens*, 14.
[58] Kelsey, 27.
[59] Kelsey, 27.
[60] Kelsey, 22.

for 'applying' her theoretical knowledge largely in her own place and time. Whether

intentionally or not, *Wissenschaft* therefore also fosters different patterns of relationship than

paideia. It favours a much more individualised exercise with a much smaller remit: to

contribute to the research agenda by expanding knowledge within a specific field of study.[61]

While such pursuits can be cooperative, *Wissenschaft*-informed intellectual systems tend to

support a more individualistic picture of research, at least at a systemic level.[62]

While some Christian theological educators are reticent to acknowledge the benefits

of *Wissenschaft*, Kelsey notes that it is 'a powerful weapon against the religious idolatry of

ideological captivity and distortion, both in efforts to understand theology's object and in

the practice of ministry.'[63] Moreover, as Farley noted earlier, *Wissenschaft*-inspired

educational systems open 'the various enterprises of [theological] teaching and

interpretation to the full spectrum of resources and sciences available in the modern

world.'[64] Along with the pressures of modern secularism and pluralism, these two benefits

have undoubtedly encouraged theological schools to reorient themselves within the frame

of *Wissenschaft*.[65] Gavin D'Costa, for example, suggests that theological education today

often 'resembles its secular counterpart—religious studies.'[66] For example, his study of the

published prospectuses or websites 'of the 23 English universities offering theology or

religious studies' found there was none which offered 'a single definition which

distinguishes between method in "theology" and "religious studies"' or affirmed 'that

theology is basically a confessional discipline involving an ecclesial context.'[67] Such studies

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[61] Kelsey, 23.

[62] Kelsey, 90.

[63] Kelsey, 91.

[64] Farley, *Theologia*, 146.

[65] Other major contributors have been secularisation and modern pluralism. For more on these, see Craig M. Gay, *The Way of the (Modern) World: Or, Why It's Tempting to Live As If God Doesn't Exist* (Grand Rapids & Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 1998).

[66] Gavin D'Costa, *Theology in the Public Square: Church, Academy, and Nation* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 38.

[67] D'Costa, 68.

suggest that *theologia* has indeed been circumscribed to its second dimension: 'a discipline, a self-conscious scholarly enterprise of understanding.'[68]

Although we would be remiss in failing to acknowledge the benefits of *Wissenschaft* for theological learning, its circumscription of *theologia* is also hugely significant. First, what qualifies theological learning as *theological* is transformed. Whereas theological learning is theocentrically determined under Christian *paideia*, Kelsey notes that it is ecclesiocentrically (or scholastically) determined under *Wissenschaft*. Inquiries are ordered not towards 'knowing God' but towards 'discovering as directly as possible the truth about the origin, effects, and essential nature of "Christian" phenomenon.' Especially in a seminary context, its significance for church leaders derives from its capacity to equip 'communities [to] nurture consciousness of God.'[69] In either case, the horizons or parameters of theological learning are constricted primarily to religious (or religious studies) contexts.

Second, in consequence, what theology is *for* is severely limited. Christian *paideia* endeavours to bring the whole of the scholar's active and contemplative life—and the wealth of human knowledge available through texts and practices—into a coherent, ordered, and meaningful whole through knowledge of God. As an advocate of this kind of expansive vision of theology's scope, for example, Scott writes, 'I know not with what religion has nothing to do. I know that the greater any subject of human thought is, the more intimately it concerns the well-being of men, the more religion has to do with it.'[70] While *Wissenschaft* approaches to theological studies might seek the same comprehensive scope Scott imagines, they neither ask for nor commend the level of personal involvement that is so formative to Christian *paideia*, proposing that doing so compromises research

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[68] Farley, *Theologia*, 31.
[69] Kelsey, *Between Athens*, 14, 24.
[70] Alexander John Scott, "Lecture III. Chartism," in *The Social Systems of the Present Day, Compared with Christianity (Two Lectures Delivered in Chadwell Street Chapel, Pentonville, 1841)*, Discourses (London and Cambridge: MacMillan & Co., 1866), 133.

purity. The theologian's responsibility is restricted to publishing 'results of critical inquiry that make original contributions to the fund of knowledge' and model academic excellence within a specialised field of study.[71]

Third, how theology is *done* is strictly confined. Under the Athens model, Kelsey avers, 'it is understood that [personal] appropriation does not come through direct instruction. Rather, it comes about indirectly by inquiry into other matters whose study is believed to capacitate persons to appropriate this wisdom for themselves.'[72] While texts and practices have a central focus in this model of education, it also nurtures other kinds of cultural interaction. Conversely, *Wissenschaft* usually favours the *phenomenal* approach in its sources and its artefacts. As Mark Jordan observes, the precedence of systematic and analytic theological genres esteemed by the *Wissenschaft* framework has led to 'a full range of genres and styles in theological writing' disappearing — genres like parables, embodied liturgies, fairy tales, spoken enigmas, letters, realistic hagiographies, and more.[73] Furthermore, because of its individual-centric incentives and consistent refusal to become entangled with the personal lives of its scholars, *Wissenschaft*-oriented intellectual approaches often either undermine the capacity for genuine communities of theological learning or minimise relationship as a mode of knowing. Yet, if, for example, U.S. theologian Willie Jennings is correct to suggest that 'God offers us an uncontrollable reconciliation, one that aims to re-create us, reforming us as those who enact gathering and who gesture communion with our very existence,' and if that theological education at its best participates in such reconciliation, then the patterns of relationality cultivated by

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[71] Kelsey, 25.
[72] Kelsey, 20.
[73] Mark D. Jordan, *Transforming Fire: Imagining Christian Teaching*, Theological Education Between the Times (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2021), 12.

Wissenschaft-style approaches to how theology is done might actually distort the relational *telos* for which theology aims.[74]

If studying Erskine and Scott's theological endeavours is to be a worthwhile and generative enterprise for reimagining theological learning, it must be done in dialogue with these critical voices in theological education debates today. Scholars who are troubled by pressures to circumscribe *theologia* to its self-conscious, scholarly dimension alone—and I count myself among them—offer several proposals outlining conditions under which *theologia* might flourish in the future. In large part, these proposals fall into three basic categories, with some overlap: (1) proposals that focus on the question, 'To *what* is theological learning oriented?' and that locate hope in reconfiguring theology in light of the objects to which its learners attends; (2) proposals that focus on the question, 'To what *end* is theological learning oriented?' and that locate hope in re-grounding theological studies in its purposes, goals, or functions; and (3) proposals that focus on the question, 'How should theology be *done*?' These proposals locate hope in (i) changing *formal* structures by expanding curricular representation or course offerings, or (ii) modifying *pedagogies* to elicit theology's more holistic claims of meaning and its distinctive anthropology. To map these different proposals—and later, Erskine and Scott against them—it is helpful to examine a theologian illustrative of each approach. Attentive to the *conditions* under which they propose theology and theological learning will flourish, I have chosen John Webster, Willie Jennings, and James K. A. Smith as representatives.

While certainly not comprehensive, Webster, Jennings, and Smith represent a range of backgrounds within the Western theological and theological education tradition who are (or have been) engaged in reimagining theological education within the framework of

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[74] Jennings, *After Whiteness*, 152.

something akin to Christian *theologia*. Each scholar, moreover, contributes to our specific area of focus: namely, 'practical theological epistemology,' which encompasses how Christian communities of learning comprehend knowledge of God, its nature, and its purpose; and the epistemic commitments and pedagogical practices birthed in consequence. Furthermore, each continues to be an influential voice shaping the future of theology and theological learning. Before his untimely death in 2016, John Webster was an Anglican priest; a well-respected scholar of Eberhard Jüngel and Karl Barth; and an esteemed systematic, historical, and moral theologian in his own right. While Jennings and Smith are U.S.-based, Webster spent his career in leading institutions in Canada, England, and Scotland. His proposal for a 'theological theology' in part inspired Gavin D'Costa's *Theology in the Public Square: Church, Academy, and Nation* (2005) and it is in the background of endeavours like Oliver Crisp et al.'s *Christianity and the Disciplines* (2012).[75] Webster offers insight into the formal conditions of theology and theological learning as a discipline.

Taking a wider view on the institution of theological education itself is U.S. theologian Willie Jennings. Formerly a Senior Associate Dean at Duke University Divinity School and now teaching at Yale Divinity School, Jennings has seen theological education from its ivory towers to its seedy underbelly. Ordained in the Baptist church, he has served as a professor and theological researcher; and, through his deanship, as a mediator between faculty, administration, staff, and students. Jennings is also a respected educational consultant, often sought out for his expertise in graduate teacher training, race, and ethnicity by institutions like the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) and the Wabash Centre for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion. As a Senior Fellow of the

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[75] D'Costa, *Theology in the Public Square: Church, Academy, and Nation*; Oliver Crisp et al., eds., *Christianity and the Disciplines: The Transformation of the University* (London: T&T Clark, 2012). See also Zachary Fischer, *Preparing the Way for a Theological Theology: John Webster's Theological Principles and Their Development* (Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 2020).

'Theological Education Between the Times' research project, Jennings is among the vanguard of theologians re-imagining the cultural ecology of theological education for the immediate and next future.[76]

Whereas Jennings reimagines the culture of theological education at an institutional level, James K.A. Smith explores the 'theological education' of culture outside the institution—e.g., the cultural liturgies that aim us towards particular ultimate desires.[77] A Canadian-American philosopher in the charismatic Reformed tradition, Smith comfortably inhabits the spaces between the academy and the public—translating philosophical and theological ideas for 'thoughtful Christians' and Christian educators both within and beyond academic walls. His *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (2009) made waves in the American evangelical world for exposing the limitations of strictly cognitive approaches to theological education. He advocates for an educational future of theological formation based on a renewed Christian anthropology of desire and shaped by holistic Christian pedagogical practices.

By appreciating where Smith, Jennings, and Webster locate the hope of theological learning—and recognizing the borders and edges of the fragments they offer, to borrow Jennings' metaphor—we can find critical understanding and communion in the spaces between their voices. For example, like Erskine and Scott, in their own way each of these scholars situates the hope for theological learning on new patterns of relationality.

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[76] D'Costa, *Theology in the Public Square: Church, Academy, and Nation.*
[77] Willie J. Jennings, "Curriculum Vitae: Willie Jennings," 2002, https://divinity.yale.edu/faculty-and-research/yds-faculty/willie-james-jennings.

iv) Three Invitations for Reform

John Webster's Theological Theology

When Webster gave his inaugural lecture, 'Theological Theology,' at Christ Church in the University of Oxford (1997), he teased the audience that he was going to take full advantage of the opportunity of 'provoking the kind of disturbance of usual business which the recently arrived are permitted to make' to 'devote attention to the task of clarifying what the discipline of Christian theology is about.'[78] Webster's focus then—as it continued to be—was the *discipline* of Christian theology, particularly as practiced in the modern (research) university. In this lecture specifically, Webster raises the concern that 'alienated in modernity from its proper habits of thought, Christian theology has internalized prevailing methodological orthodoxy and the anthropology upon which it is built, and so found it difficult to talk of its own nature and activities in theological terms.'[79] Two issues of relationship with the wider academy were at stake: first, the need to articulate theology's distinctiveness in the face of mounting pressures to dissolve theology into its cognate disciplines, e.g., religious studies, history, linguistics, etc.; and second, the need to distinguish how theology might 'contribute in a lively way to the conversations of the academy' through the resources of its own traditions.[80]

To respond to these concerns, Webster appealed to two interrelated convictions derived from the little-known sixteenth-century Swiss theologian Johannes Wolleb.[81] First, 'the being of God is not simply an hypothesis into which theology enquires, but rather is the reality which actively constitutes and delimits the field of theological activity.' Second,

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[78] John Webster, "Theological Theology," in *Confessing God: Essays in Christian Dogmatics II* (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 11.

[79] John Webster, *Theological Theology: An Inaugural Lecture Delivered Before the University of Oxford on 27 October 1997* (Kiribati: Clarendon Press, 1998), 25.

[80] Webster, "Theological Theology," 29.

[81] Johannes Woleb is sometimes rendered John Wollebius in English translation.

'that "object" to which the theologian's gaze is directed is inalienably *subject*'—that is, not some*thing* that is a passive object of enquiry but some*one* whose self-presence actively addresses us in and through our enquiries. Webster submitted that theology is properly oriented when it is 'oriented to this active presence, and its enquiries are both materially and formally determined, borne along and corrected by that presence.' Strikingly, he argued that being recalibrated to 'the eschatological self-presence of God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit' (the object of theology) must precede any attempt to address epistemological and anthropological concerns endemic to theological study.[82] Only then will these concerns receive the 'roots and astonishment'[83] that are required for theological enquiry to participate 'a contrary—eschatological—mode of intellectual life, taking its rise in God's disruption of the world.'[84] Only then, too, will theologians have something distinctively meaningful to contribute to conversations within the broader academy.

In subsequent years, Webster became discontented with the combative tone and excessively eschatological emphasis of 'Theological Theology.'[85] As his theological centre of gravity shifted towards 'a more robust and expansive account of Trinity, creation, and redemption,'[86] Davidson notes that he increasingly emphasised theology's place within 'the gospel of the entire outworking of the Triune God's free and loving resolve to have fellowship with his creatures.'[87] What remained consistent was his conviction that the 'the object of Christian theology is twofold: God the Holy Trinity and all other things relative to God.'[88] As Webster explains, 'theology is a comprehensive science, a science of

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[82] Webster, "Theological Theology," 26.

[83] Ivor J. Davidson, "Introduction," in *The Culture of Theology*, by John Webster, ed. Ivor J. Davidson and Alden C. McCray (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 19.

[84] Webster, "Theological Theology," 25.

[85] Davidson, 77.

[86] Davidson, 77.

[87] Davidson, 78–79.

[88] John Webster, "What Makes Theology Theological?," in *Journal of Analytic Theology,* vol. 3 (St Andrews: Journal of Analytic Theology, 2015), 1.

everything. But it is not a science of everything about everything, but rather a science of God and all other things under the aspect of createdness. It considers creatures not absolutely, but relatively, as caused and as caused causes, as realities which live and move and have their being in God.'[89] God is known only insofar as he discloses himself in 'a movement of love' that extends 'intelligent fellowship with rational creatures, taking the initiative to set aside and overcome our incapacity, reluctance, and resistance.'[90] Before we can ask 'To what *end* is theological learning oriented?' then, Webster insists we must learn to ask 'To *what* (or *whom*) is theological learning oriented?'

Webster is not alone in recognising the methodological significance of how the objects of theology are understood. As Trevor Hart notes, T.F. Torrance 'reminds us repeatedly that in all properly scientific and objective procedure it is the nature of the particular object itself which must prescribe the relevant mode of knowing, and thus the form and the content of whatever knowledge arises.[91] Jewish theologian Martin Buber further reminds us that our relationship to a person or thing (e.g., God) in part influences how that entity reveals itself to us and calls us into different kinds of relational being. An 'I-It' relationship objectivises a thing or person to put it to some use or to 'compare [it] with objects, assign [it] a place in an order of objects, and describe and analyse [it] objectively,' relations that limit that thing or person's capacity to address us.[92] The 'I-It' relation neither involves the same modes of knowing nor calls forth the same 'I' as in an 'I-You' relationship. In the latter case, the other is comprehended as a dynamic subject; the address is mutual and 'spoken…with one's whole being.'[93] Though Buber's explanation of

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[89] Webster, 19.
[90] Webster, 20–21.
[91] Trevor Hart, *Between the Image and the Word: Theological Engagements with Imagination, Language, and Literature*, Ashgate Studies in Theology, Imagination and the Arts (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 25.
[92] Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kauffman (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1970), 84.
[93] Buber, 62.

these relational modes merits further attention, the relevant point here is that questions of *to what* (or better, *whom*) theology attends are not incidental. Rather, as Webster insists, they are foundational in understanding the God who addresses us as *subject* and in understanding of theology, which is fundamentally a response to that address.

Curiously, such personal-relational (and thus, properly epistemic) implications of God's Being *as subject* receive relatively little elucidation in the works that Webster devotes most specifically to the pursuit of theological knowledge. This lacuna with respect to *modes of knowing* might have any number of causes. Perhaps Webster was uncomfortable with the contingency of revelation implied by epistemic accounts of revelation like Buber, which, in the absence of careful pneumatological considerations, might minimise God's primacy in self-disclosure and his active role in making knowledge of himself possible to regenerate minds.[94] Perhaps so committed was Webster to establishing the theological 'first principles' upon which the discipline could be safely built over against cultural vicissitudes that he deemed such considerations of secondary importance.[95] Or perhaps such concerns did not register within the more cognitive-rationalist anthropology that his philosophical theology here exemplifies. As we saw earlier, for example, Webster pictures God as extending 'intelligent fellowship with rational creatures.'[96] Whatever the case may be, the result tends to be a rather formal and idealist picture of the possibility of theological learning, which situates the future of theology *qua* theology in reframing its essential rationality—albeit a process made possible only by the gracious self-disclosure of God.

Webster's proposal is consistent with Paul Williams' principle that 'our politics (how we should live together) rests on our epistemology (what we think can be known) which is undergirded by our ontology (what we think exists) which is finally a function of

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[94] Webster, "Theology Theological," 18.
[95] Webster, 19.
[96] Webster, 21.

our theology (our view of ultimate reality).[97] Certainly, ordering theological significance in this way affords the reality-defining place to God as the ultimate point of reference and meaning. Yet, as Webster acknowledges but largely leaves underdeveloped, an opposite movement is also relevant to theological knowing. How we live together frames how (and what) we know, which calls forth particular modes of existence in ourselves and in the counterparts to which we attend; these realities, in turn, shape how we view (and interact with) ultimate reality. We need both theology and theological learning to flourish. Where Webster focuses on how theology percolates down into practice, Jennings contrastingly calls attention to the ways that practice provokes certain theologies and modes of theological learning—especially shaping our imagination of the *end* to which theology is oriented.

Willie Jennings's Hermeneutic Space of Belonging

Jennings' genre-bending *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging* (2020) offers an unusual assessment of the Western education system in general, and theological education in particular. Drawing from his rich experience in combination with wider historical and sociological studies, Jennings proposes that the primary problem facing theology is not a problem of curriculum or methodology or pedagogy, but rather a problem of *relationality*—specifically, a disordered state of relations or relationships within its communities of learning that materially and formally disorients the character, constitution, and particularly the *ends* of theological learning. Like many other educators, Jennings maintains that formation 'is the shining goal of all education, especially theological education.'[98]

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[97] Paul Williams, "Lord of the Sciences: Christianity and the Modern World" (Christian Thought and Culture, Vancouver: Regent College, 2013).
[98] Jennings, *After Whiteness*, 4.

Formation chases *after* a particular vision of the good life—an image that captures our heart, orients our actions, and affects how we weigh our decisions.

Drawing from his wide-ranging experience in the academy as well as wider historical and sociological studies, Jennings argues the Western education system is constituted to *seek after whiteness*. That is, he claims 'there is an image of an educated person that propels the curricular, pedagogical, and formational energies of Western education, and especially theological education. That image is of a white self-sufficient man, his self-sufficiency defined by possession, control, and mastery.'[99] By using the term *whiteness*, Jennings clarifies that he 'does not refer to people of European descent, but to a way of being in the world and seeing the world that forms cognitive and affective structures able to seduce people into its habitation and its meaning making.'[100] He argues that whiteness, in this paradigmatic sense, is the unacknowledged *telos* that animates much of Western education—it supplies the objects, modes, and meanings that the educated person is taught to esteem; and the mould into which she consciously or unconsciously aspires to fit.

To illustrate his point, one area Jennings explores is critique.[101] Critique is an important part of discerning truth; and, as Erskine and Scott reiterate, truth is a requisite condition for genuine communion. Often, however, critique within the modern research university context does not aim for communion as an ultimate *telos*, but as a distinction for its own sake. Specifically, critique certifies the scholar's (or her subject matter's) place in a

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[99] Jennings, 6.

[100] Jennings is aware that terms like 'whiteness' will be a non-starter for some people, who will dismiss his constructive-reflective account as another exercise in identity politics or become preoccupied with whether such genealogies are sufficiently nuanced to parcel out responsibility for our modern educational predicament. Such questions are vitally important and are burdens that scholars within the larger ecosystem of Western education should carry. However, Jennings submits that such concerns can sometimesderail the train of thought before equally (if not more) important conversations, such as the groaning of the academy under the weight of a paradigm that 'distorts identity and strangles the possibilities of dense life together.' Jennings, 9.

[101] Space does not permit us to explore a second area of Jennings' critique of Western education: namely, the critique of *paideia* in its historical construction's colonialist logic. See Jennings, 106.

hierarchy of mastery. Jennings reflects, 'I have known too many scholars who have fallen into an abyss of critique or concealment against critique, moving through the academy in constant shadowboxing, throwing punches at anyone and everyone, bobbing and weaving, bracing for the impact of words that will surely sting.'[102] As Jennings outlines, the most obvious consequence concerns the character of the communities of learning such critical habits foster; however, as Erskine and Scott also remind us, communities of learning shape who and what is studied. Therefore, their own character also materially affects the form and content of theological pursuits.

To understand the dynamics at play, Jennings points to two effects of critical approaches that focus on critique (primarily) as a performative means of demonstrating mastery. First, 'a form of surveillance that aims at control' is inculcated. The need for such surveillance presents the scholar with a difficult task: either she must narrow the scope of her field to minimise potential assaults, *or* she must adopt something akin to a God's eye view that attempts to see all and anticipate all.[103] Throughout a scholar's career, whether as student or faculty, evaluations are structured in such a way as to reward individual-centred, product-focused outcomes: coursework exercises, tenure, funding decisions.[104] In a paradigm where hierarchies of belonging are based predominantly on the production of scholarly products vis-à-vis colleagues, epistemic hubris can mask doubt, uncertainty, or not-knowing. Even sharing—whether on a personal or professional level—may become a carefully calculated process of exchange.[105]

Second, in consequence, scholars are formed in ways that minimise vulnerabilities (and vulnerability). 'Guided by a rationality freed from communal obligation except at the

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[102] Jennings, 118.
[103] Jennings, 118.
[104] Jennings, 117–18.
[105] Jennings, 133.

level of volition,' Jennings claims that scholars and students learn to 'perform a relationality woven first and foremost in utility and aiming at profit. Exchange networks need not be personal, need not be communal, need not be storied, need not suggest long-term obligation or relationship, need not even require names or identities.'[106] When theological education inhabits this paradigm, it refuses what Jennings calls 'a deeper reality of entanglement.' We are always and already beings whose lifeworlds and communities extend beyond our theological institutions, he insists.[107] Yet, much of theological education in the modern university asks students to 'bracket out' such lifeworlds: the work of reconciling the fragments of experience and culture through theological witness is often seen as secondary to the 'real business' of theological science. Not only does this approach ask students to lay aside the unanswered questions that may have brought them to pursue theological studies, but it also circumscribes the role of theology and theological learning in witnessing in its institutions and through its pursuits to the outworking of creation's reconciliation in Christ and through the Holy Spirit. While this might not be problematic to all theological educators, it should be troubling to those who are Christian. As Jennings argues, we cannot merely ask, 'To *what* (or *whom*) is theological learning oriented?' Rather, we must ask 'To what *end* is theological learning oriented?'—and learn to discern when the ends being purposed are inconsistent or even antithetical to the character of God and his redemptive purposes.

For Jennings, that 'central purpose of theological education [is] to give witness to God's embrace of the creature and the desire of God to make embrace the vocation of creatures that have yielded to the Spirit.'[108] In other words, theological education has its proper bearings when it witnesses to (and participates in) God's ongoing work for

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[106] Jennings, 144.
[107] Jennings, 112.
[108] Jennings, 143.

reconciliation in Christ and through the Spirit—a reconciliation 'that aims to re-create us, reforming us as those who enact gathering and who gesture communion with our very existence.'[109] Jennings' language of embrace and his endeavours to resituate theological education within 'the erotic power of God to gather together' present strong contrasts to the *Wissenschaft* ideal of disinterested scholarship or the kinds of self-sufficient mastery he associates with the academic idealisation of whiteness.[110] Insofar as it conceives of itself within this densely relational paradigm, Jennings opines that 'theological education could mark a new path for Western education, one that builds a vision of education that cultivates the new belonging that this world longs to inhabit.'[111]

Although both Webster and Jennings share a commitment to God redefining the categories of (theological) learning, situating hope for theological education within the academy on cultivating new belonging is quite a different endeavour than situating that hope on re-articulating theology's activities in distinctively theological terms.[112] The objects, modes, and meanings of doing theology that Jennings advocates the educated person embody through their theological endeavours are more obviously personal, relational, and communal; and his anthropology much more focused on the question of desire. Perhaps one of Jennings' most striking contributions to debates about the future of theological education is the compelling picture he paints of what learning *could be* if it is done in image of the character of reconciliation God offers creation through Christ. That phrase 'in image of' is an important one. While Jennings does suggest that theological education is best

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[109] Jennings, 143.
[110] Jennings, 152.
[111] Jennings, 154.
[112] Willie J. Jennings, *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020), 124, 129; Webster, "Theology Theological," 20–21. Among these commonalities are commitments to the primacy of God's self-disclosure in constitutingtheological endeavours and their possibility; the belief that theological education properly participates in 'the overturning that is the turning of the world right-side up by God' through Christ and in the Spirit; and that fellowship (or communion) with his creatures is the *telos* to which God's redemptive activities aim.

understood within 'the erotic power of God to gather together,' he does not spend

significant time on the question of where personal, ongoing, reconciling relationship *with*

God fits into the picture of reconstituting belonging as the 'hermeneutical starting place' of

theological learning.[113] Moreover, his proposal for reconstituting belonging in *After*

Whiteness could be enriched and rooted more deeply by fleshing out in additional

theological terms upon which such relational reconstitution is possible, e.g., by meditating

on the significance of Christ's atonement for reconstituting belonging. Still, as I will

explore in Chapter 6, recasting divine love through a feminist reading of Eros equips him

to paint that compelling image of theological learning as a response to God's loving

address—an address that is personal, particular, and operates not just upon what we think

but upon what we desire. In this latter respect, Jennings shares some commonalities with

James K. A. Smith, whose books *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural*

Formation (2009), *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (2013), and *You are What You*

Love (2016) reconsider learning, and theological learning, in light of a Christian

anthropology of desire.

James K. A. Smith

Of the three representatives of different proposals for the future of theological

education, James K.A. Smith is the only one who is a philosopher rather than a theologian

by profession. Along with his later works, *Desiring the Kingdom* is dedicated to re-evaluating

how Christian communities of learning conceive knowledge of God, and the pedagogical

practices conceived in consequence. Smith's work draws from the Christian theological and

Continental philosophical traditions to call into question the predominance of cognitive-

rationalist anthropology in Western educational paradigms. His work is geared towards

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[113] Jennings, *After Whiteness*, 10.

Christian educational contexts in general, but also towards Christian universities in particular. Despite the rich resources within the theological tradition and recent philosophical insights into how our being-in-the-world is ordered, Smith argues that too many Christian educational contexts continue to function within a distorted 'set of assumptions about the nature of nature of human persons'—a philosophical anthropology that also shapes the objects, modes, and meanings of theological learning.[114]

Specifically, Smith notes that when human beings are conceptualised as 'thinking things,' Christian communities of learning tend to conceptualise theological learning in terms of inculcating a particular 'worldview'—or system of Christian beliefs and doctrines.[115] He claims that this cognitive-centric paradigm of learning has two significant, negative correlates for theological learning. First, as an educational paradigm, it is riddled with pedagogical blind spots. For example, it is blind to the body and embodied practices as modes or loci of knowledge, whether such practices are sacred (e.g., participating in the sacraments of the church, its liturgies, and its embodied modes of worship) or secular (e.g., going shopping or attending a football match). Its pedagogical horizons, therefore, are quite narrow—a critique that we also saw in reference to Kelsey's paradigmatic model of Berlin versus Athens. Second, Smith argues, 'it fails to provide any account of or place for the centrality of Christian worship as integral to the task of Christian formation.'[116] As theologians like Augustine make clear, what we think does not always have the final say in how we engage in the world: the will is often more a function of desire than cognition. Desire is formed in worship—whether what we worship (or esteem or adore) is sacred or secular in nature.

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[114] James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*, Cultural Liturgies (Grand Rapids: BakerAcademic, 2009), 37.
[115] Smith, 64.
[116] Smith, 65.

Over against a rationalist-cognitivist paradigm that conceives of human beings as 'thinking things,' James K. A. Smith argues that human beings are better understood as 'worshippers'—that is, 'desiring agents and liturgical animals whose primary mode of *intending* the world is love, which in turn shapes the imagination' and motivates action.[117] With this change in the anthropological centre of gravity, he argues there are two correlates for theological learning. First, what we think we love and what we *do* love are both relevant categories for theological exploration. The pedagogical horizons are therefore much wider: habits, tacit understandings, personal experience, and self-reflection find a place within the domain of theological inquiry and activity. Such a paradigm better befits human beings conceived as '*embodied* actors,' in contrast to merely 'thinking things.'[118] Second, foregrounding worship also helps us better appreciate how what we think is influenced by what 'we love "above all," that to which we pledge our allegiance, that to which we are devoted in a way that overrules other concerns and interests.'[119] This emphasis is important insofar as theology is conceived of as formational. As the tagline to *You are What You Love* reflects, 'You are what you love. But you may not love what you think.' In other words, when human beings primarily are conceptualised as 'thinking things,' the gaps between what we *think* we love and what we *do* love in practice (theory-practice gap) and between what we *think* and what we *love* (cognitive-affective gap) are often overlooked.[120] Both contribute to the fragmentation of theological learning and diminish its formative capacities. Even as we ask, 'to *what* (or *whom*) is theological learning oriented?' and 'to what

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[117] Smith, 37. For more on this argument, see James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works*, Cultural Liturgies (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013); James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016).

[118] Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 37.

[119] Smith, 87.

[120] See also my more substantial treatment of this subject: Margaret McKerron, "What's Love Got To Do With It?," *Transpositions*, May 10, 2017, http://www.transpositions.co.uk/whats-love-got-to-do-with-it/.

end is theological learning oriented?', then, Smith insists we must also bear in mind the concomitant question, 'how should theology be *done*?'

If theology is a function of what we love (and particularly, what are our ultimate loves), then understanding how these fundamental loves are formed becomes crucial. According to Smith, the key question is 'how our love/desire is shaped and directed by material, embodied practices.'[121] What we need, he argues, is cultural exegesis that better understands that practices and habits are formed, at least in part, by our practices as embodied agents in the world. His core thesis, introduced in *Desiring the Kingdom* but animating the whole series, is 'that liturgies—whether 'sacred' or 'secular'—shape and constitute our identities by forming our most fundamental desires and our most basic attunement to the world'.[122] When theological learning as more attentive to these rich cultural and pedagogical practices, both in its reflective modes and its own practices, it can provide an antithesis or counter-formation to the de-humanising or disordering pressures within our contemporary educational paradigm. Thus, theological education can form 'a certain kind of people whose hearts and passions are aimed at the kingdom of God.'[123] As with the Athens model, liturgical, pedagogical, and cultural practices and institutions thus come into focus in meaningful ways: these are the sites where love is practiced, formed, and counter-formed.

Insofar as Smith articulates education as a process of love formation, he largely focuses on *what* we do as contributing to the form and content of theological learning. Yet, he largely assumes the 'kingdom of God' as a theological category, one of the common pitfalls of reappropriating *paideia* for one's Christian educational paradigm. As both Hauerwas and Jennings remind us, if theological learning is not to become a mere

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[121] Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 37.
[122] Smith, 25.
[123] Smith, 18.

legitimating agent of the state or particular cultural paradigms, then we must be very

intentional in elucidating the character of the kingdom of God and the patterns of

relationship it invites between the times: that is, as people rooted in what Christ has already

done to establish the kingdom of God on earth and anticipating the realisation of his reign

that is to come in the fullness of time.[124] In attending to practices, Smith largely leaves the

who question untouched, e.g., how *who* we love contributes to how we are attuned to the

world, whether that is Christ Jesus or a beloved teacher who brings us into newfound

relationships of care for the world in which we dwell. Given that the two great

commandments direct us about *whom* we are to love, it is curious that Smith's latter book is

still titled, *You Are What You Love* and not *You Are Who You Love*. That said, foregrounding

the formative role of liturgies (or orienting practices) within theological institutions is vital.

As we saw with Jennings' cultural exegesis of critique, we must pay closer attention to how

'our most fundamental desires and our most basic attunement to the world' are formed

through such repeated, reordering practices.[125]

Webster, Jennings, and Smith are all committed to attuning theological learning to

the presence of God in their own distinctive ways. In Webster's case, attuning theological

learning to the presence of God as subject redefines the *discipline* of theological studies, in

both senses: first, as a branch of knowledge whose defining reality and object is the active,

living God and whose remit, resources, and methodologies are prescribed in relation to

that ultimate reality; and second, as a formative practice that orders thinking and behaviour

through its studies and spiritual practices. In Jennings' case, attuning theological learning to

the presence of God redefines the hermeneutical spaces within which theological

endeavours occur—ensuring that theological education is reoriented by and towards

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[124] Stanley Hauerwas, *The State of the University: Academic Knowledges and the Knowledge of God* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 200; Jennings, *After Whiteness*, 17.

[125] Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 25.

relationships that bear witness to God's reconciling embrace. Only in light of this *telos* of reconciliation is theology oriented to its true *telos* and does it receive its true objects, modes, and meanings. Finally, in Smith's case, attuning theological learning to the presence of God requires that we attend more closely to the formative role of practices in shaping our ultimate loves, including the love of God. Whether consciously or subconsciously, such loves order our being-in-the-world—informing what we choose to study, what we consider valuable, whose voices we regard as important, and so much more.

How these three scholars approach theology and theological learning provides critical parameters for bringing Erskine and Scott into contemporary dialogues. Furthermore, Webster, Jennings, and Smith have each expressed the hope that their proposals would be generative: serving to invite scholars into the imaginative process of reforming theology and pushing back against the circumscription of its horizons within the modern university. In an important sense, this dissertation responds to these invitations by bringing Erskine and Scott to the table—not as comprehensive solutions to the problems that plague theological education today, but as voices that occupy the spaces between these scholars, provide some theological tools relevant to their proposals, and gesture towards a vision of theology and theological learning that better embraces the active agency of God in reordering all things. While we will return to Webster, Jennings, and Smith in the final chapter, we turn now to Erskine and Scott.

v) A Thread to Follow

Among the commitments that animate Erskine and Scott's theological endeavours—whether in their writings or their cultivation of communities of learning—is the thesis that *the pursuit of knowledge of God receives its proper orientation (its correct object, modes, and meanings) when animated by the telos of at·one·ment with God, in holy love*. This thesis must be

carefully parsed; for, using such technical language to signal clusters of interrelated conviction belies its theological richness. Fleshing out this thesis—understanding its historical and personal context, its theological and epistemic terms of implications, and locating it within contemporary conversations—is central to my purpose in the larger dissertation. However, for now, to orient us to their terms and the larger project, a skeletal outline must suffice.

First, the subject with which Erskine and Scott are concerned as represented in this thesis is *the pursuit of knowledge of God*. As we have seen with Farley and D'Costa, less obvious sometimes today is the connection between knowledge of God and theological learning. So inextricable has the university become with the concept of theology that it is almost impossible today to speak of theological learning *except* within the frame of formal learning—if not at the university, then the seminary. Say 'theological learning,' and the images called to mind are predominantly lecture halls and libraries. Erskine and Scott did not share these institutional assumptions. For both men, pursuing knowledge of God *is* the business of theological learning. Theological learning, however, is not necessarily (only) the business of higher education or other formal institutions. 'Knowledge of God,' while still having implications for theological learning as instantiated institutionally better orients us to Erskine and Scott's broader interests; it also prevents us from foreclosing our imagination about the purposes and homes of theological learning. It also reminds us that Erskine and Scott's interest is in knowledge *of God*, rather than strictly knowledge of persons who (claim to) have knowledge of God and a systematic development of their thought consistent with phenomenalism. Such second-order historical and systematic knowledge is an invaluable asset to knowledge of God as a whole, not least in its capacity

to enrich and correct our understanding of who God is and how we relate to him.[126] For Erskine and Scott, however, such theological learning is always *for* the sake of *knowing* the God whose presence stands behind it.

The phrase that follows, 'at·one·ment with God, in holy love,' is admittedly peculiar. While in some senses its two components represent two halves of the same coin, I shall treat it one half at a time. The first half—*at·one·ment with God*—is another way of referring to union with God in Christ and through the Holy Spirit. Union with God often has a distinctly eschatological accent, where stress is placed upon the mystical consummation of a perfect union between Christ and his followers at the end of time. For Erskine and Scott, we live between the times: in light of the reconciling reality of Christ's atonement and the gift of the Spirit that together enable us already to enter into genuine relationship with God; but also, in the knowledge that the fullness of that transforming relationship (like the fullness of the kingdom of God) has not yet been fully realised. If not quite homonymous, my use of the term at·one·ment is nevertheless intended to call to mind a kind of *attunement* to God through our being-in-relationship with him. Both being-in-relationship and attunement are terms borrowed from Heideggerian thought and intimate the existential implications that Erskine and Scott register in thinking about union with God—that is, that such a dynamic bond with God reorients our ways of being in the world and understanding it. Much like a good friendship (a metaphor that will be explored further in Chapter 3), an intimate bond with God transforms who we are and what we love. Crucially, in the process, such being-in-relationship with God *also* transforms how we know and are known—a point to bear in mind as we consider the full breadth of modes and meanings appropriate to theological learning.

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[126] Kelsey, *Between Athens*, 90–91.

While at·one·ment with God hardly rolls off the tongue, it has certain connotative advantages over the more familiar language of union with God when presenting Erskine and Scott's theology. In particular, it foregrounds one of the core convictions that animate their respective corpuses: namely, that *atonement is for at·one·ment.* That is, Christ's *atonement* for the sins of the world is undertaken for the sake of creation's reconciled *at·one·ment with God*—and through at·one·ment with God, *at·one·ment with one another.* Understanding the Atonement in terms of its capacity to reunite is not new. After all, William Tyndale coined or appropriated the word 'atonement' in his translation of both Hebrew *kipur* (e.g. Levitius 16) and Greek *katallagé* (e.g. 2 Cor 5:18) precisely to refer to an act or event that enables people to be 'at-one' with God and one another.[127] Historically, Scott suggests that having 'gone out of harmony with the presiding will of the Creator, there necessarily arose a want of harmony between the parts of the spiritual and intellectual creation itself.' In contrast, 'with [a] heart set upon God—on that which was in harmony with the entire plan of God—there could be no interference between man and man, between creature and creature, in the pursuit of what they desired.'[128] What is needed for creation's reconciliation, for its flourishing, is restoration to God. Not just any restoration, though. 'How intimately!' writes Scott: 'The words expressing that intimacy of union are not to be lightly spoken…Scripture speaks of those who "dwell in God," and have "God dwelling in them."'[129] With its visual likeness to *atonement*, at·one·ment keeps Christ's sacrificial work on the cross firmly in view—not an historical event lost to the sands of time, but a historical reality whose implications we are still called to work out as we conceive our relationships and institutional structures. For Erskine and Scott, keeping Jesus' death on

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[127] See Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Literature: An Anthology* (New York: Wiley, 2001), 5.
[128] Alexander John Scott, "On Schism," in *Discourses* (London and Cambridge: MacMillan & Co., 1866), 232.
[129] Scott, 233–34.

the cross at the forefront of our minds also reminds us that death is the culmination of our ways of being in the world if left to our own devices, particularly when we aim towards the self-sufficient mastery to which Jennings calls our attention. Yet, the cross also reminds us of where ultimate hope is: in communion with a God who was 'in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, not imputing to them their sins' and who 'hath placed in us the word of reconciliation.'[130] For Scott, as for Erskine, any hope of turning an upside-down world right-side up issues from Christ's atonement on the cross—and God's character as *holy love* revealed in it.

God's character as *holy love* is a cornerstone principle for both men's theological epistemology: by knowing *about* God's character as holy love, one could come to *know* God 'as a son knows his father, as a friend knows a friend.'[131] While the specific term 'holy love' appears more frequently in Erskine's theological writings, it haunts Scott's thought-world and undergirds his cultivation of communities of learning. Both men recognised that all too often God's love is divorced from God's holiness. Either divine love is interpreted in such a way that it diminishes or compromises holiness, or divine holiness is stressed such that abhorrence of sin dictates the terms and conditions of love. As Erskine notes, neither option offers genuine assurance to the sinner. Confidence for the believer cannot be found in diminishing or excusing sin. Rather, it is found in the lengths to which God goes to heal the 'disease of the soul' wrought by sin—a commitment of God in Christ even unto death.[132] Because of God's holiness fulfilled in Christ Jesus, we can trust God's loving desire for reconciliation with the whole of creation. Holiness is *for* love, for healing and

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[130] 2 Cor. 5:19; to keep consistent with Scott and Erskine's translations, all biblical verses will be cited in the King James Version unless otherwise noted.

[131] Alexander John Scott, "On Revelation (1837)," in *Discourses* (London and Cambridge: MacMillan & Co., 1866), 45.

[132] 1 John 4:19.

reorganising our ways of being in the world such that they cultivate shalom. This, too, is the character of love to which we humans are called.

If such an excursus on holy love seems like a departure from theological learning, it is not. The Apostle John writes, 'We love him, because he first loved us'—and indeed, Erskine and Scott believed that we learn best how to love *at all* because he first loved us. We take as our cue the character of his holy love. Much like the way a good friendship attunes us differently to the world around us, being-in-relationship with God transforms how we attend to the world, who we come to love, and even who we consider ourselves to be. Of course, God is not a friend in any usual sense; he breaks open our categories and reorganises them. But the point remains: *relationship with God frames how we know and are known*. For Erskine and Scott, then, the pursuit of knowledge of God receives its proper orientation (its correct object, modes, and meanings) when animated by the telos of at·one·ment with God, in holy love. Chapters 2-3 explore this thesis in Erskine's thought and practice; Chapter 4-5, in Scott's.

Specifically, in Chapter 2, I situate Erskine within his historical context, register his developing theological concerns about contemporaneous interpretations of the doctrine of atonement, and reconstruct his alternative 'atonement schema'—one that centred the telos of Christ's atonement upon at·one·ment with God. Here, the metaphor of friendship becomes an important way of conceiving what at·one·ment with God entails. In Chapter 3, therefore, I consider the poetics and practices of friendship in Erskine's theological endeavours, and especially the informal communities of learning he cultivated in his home and in his correspondence, an underexplored subject in existing literature about theological learning. Of particular interest for my purposes is how friendship as a metaphor for *at·one·ment with God, in holy love* provides Erskine a vital epistemic frame of reference for

theological learning, one that helps him reframe in distinctively theological terms what pursuing knowledge of God *means* and what (and whom) it is *for*.

Erskine and Scott belonged to different but overlapping religious and literary communities, rooted primarily in the Reformed Protestant tradition and extending across Scotland and England. Particularly in the first half of the nineteenth century, both men were troubled by ecclesial and doctrinal interpretations that recast the nature of religious belief and its purpose. As they addressed perceived misconceptions in their respective communities, both men came to distinguish two kinds of knowing that furnish knowledge of God: 'knowing *about* God' and '*knowing* God.' Each kind of knowing involves a different relationship (or attunement) to what is known; each involves a different commitment of oneself to know and let oneself be known. Each kind of knowing also has its own objects, modes, and meaning. Caught between post-Enlightenment rationalism, rising Evangelical doctrinal emphases, and uncompromising markers of confessional belonging, Erskine and Scott worried that knowledge *about* God was reorganising 'knowledge of God' in its own image—and, in the process, diminishing what it means to do theology.

Having considered Erskine's response to this cultural-theological milieu, in Chapter 4, I turn to Scott and the formative impact of his trial as a licentiate before the Church of Scotland's General Assembly of 1831. Although his path was different from Erskine, the telos of *at·one·ment with God, in holy love* also becomes a vital theological and epistemic frame of reference for Scott—one that helped him, too, to reframe what pursuing knowledge of God *means* and what (and whom) it is *for* in distinctively theological terms. In his later career, Scott became an important educationist in England. In Chapter 5, I assess the congruencies and conflicts between the character of the communities of learning he cultivated and his commitment to the principle that *knowledge of God is for the sake of at·one·ment with God, in holy love.*

Like Erskine, Scott was intentional about cultivating informal communities of learning through hospitality extended in and through his Woolwich, London, and Manchester residences. However, because Newell has already provided excellent foundational work on the nature and composition of these informal communities, which has since been admirably supplemented by Jeffrey Johnson, my treatment of Scott will focus specifically on the character of his involvement in extending semi-formal and formal higher educational opportunities to marginalised groups: the working class, women, and those excluded from Oxbridge and Durham because of confessional requirements. In the absence of more explicit statements of his intentions, I cannot make the strong claim that the sometimes-countercultural character of these communities is attributable to Scott's distinctive theological emphasis on *at·one·ment with God, in holy love*. However, the degree of congruence between his theological word and deed, even in the face of sometimes significant opposing pressures, is suggestive. By analysing Erskine's and Scott's theological endeavours, then, I begin to identify the kinds of resources and limitations such a theology—and such an orientation to theological learning—might provide as we reimagine the future of theological education.

With these suggestions in hand, in Chapter 6, I bring Erskine and Scott into dialogue with Webster, Jennings, and Smith to elucidate their values (and their limitations) in modern educational paradigms. Although the specifics of Erskine and Scott's own communities of theological learning cannot be reproduced strictly today, I show that their thesis that knowledge of God is for the sake of at·one·ment with God, in holy love—and that theology is rightly oriented when it is ordered to that end—still has merit. In a concluding section, then, I briefly explore two contemporary theological endeavours that are consonant with some of the insights elicited through the study of Erskine and Scott, endeavours that embody hope for the future of theological education.

To begin, I turn to Erskine as he stands on the cusp of a sea of change for

theological learning in the post-Enlightenment world of England and Scotland.

Chapter 2: Knowing God: Erskine and The Unconditional Freeness of the Gospel

i)   Erskine's At·one·ment Schema
ii) In Criticism and Praise of Erskine's Schema

A true knowledge of God is necessary to a true love of God,
as it is only a true love of God that can produce conformity to
the true will of God in the creature.

Thomas Erskine, *Unconditional Freeness*, 1828[133]

Thomas Erskine of Linlathen was born in 1788, the product of a union of two very different lineages. On his maternal side, he was the grandson of Mrs. Graham of Airth. A friend of Bonnie Prince Charlie,[134] she was described as 'an Episcopalian, and a Jacobite of the highest and purist type' by biographer William Hanna. He notes, she 'refused to pray for the Georges.'[135] On his paternal side, he was the nephew of Dr John Erskine, the esteemed Church of Scotland divine. He was also the great-grandson of Colonel John Erskine of Carnock, who had contrived to bring William of Orange to English shores, thus disrupting the Stuart dynasty, and indirectly providing Jacobites their later cause.[136] Perhaps growing up within this loving, earnest, and mixed context lent to Erskine's lifelong pursuit of the unity of truth, beauty, and moral goodness beyond the pale of denominational or political persuasion. Certainly, in an age plagued by dogmatism and party sentiment, Erskine's cultivation of cross-denominational, cross-political, and even cross-class relationships is as striking as his theological endeavours to locate where genuine (not just superficial) harmony lies—whether harmony of revelation, harmony within the person

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[133] Erskine, *Unconditional Freeness*, 1828, 222.

[134] Hart, *Teaching Father*, 8.

[135] William Hanna, ed., *Letters of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen: From 1800 till 1840.* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1877), 8. The 'Georges' in this case refer to the Hanoverian kings George I (1714-1727) and George II (1727-1760).

[136] William Hanna, ed., *Letters of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen: From 1840 till 1870* (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1877), 1, 3. Dr John Erskine served as the leader of the popular or Evangelical party of Scotland and was a friend of Jonathan Edwards.

herself, or harmony across different peoples.[137] Increasingly, Erskine believed that knowledge of God—when pursued with the telos of at·one·ment with God—had a vital role to play in recognising and manifesting the underlying order of reality.

Following the untimely death of his elder brother James in 1816 and his subsequent inheritance of the Linlathen estate, Erskine began to explore the role of knowledge of God in faith and salvation in earnest. In quick succession, he published *Remarks on the Internal Evidence for the Truth of Revealed Religion* (1820) and *Essay on Faith* (1822), as well as introductory essays to new editions of both *The Works of the Rev. John Gambold* (1822) and Richard Baxter's *The Saint's Everlasting Rest* (1824).[138] Horrocks observes, 'Erskine's early work was positively received as an important contribution to Christian apologetics.'[139] The first two works were especially popular in Britain, with nine and five editions published respectively over Erskine's lifetime. Even John Henry Newman cited Erskine as a 'source of his ideas on the Atonement,' though historian Roderick Strange notes the then Church-of-England-theologian disagreed on his construction of human beings' rationality.[140] Erskine's works were also warmly received abroad. On the Continent, both *Internal Evidence* and *Essay* were translated into French and *Internal Evidence* was translated into German. In the United States, Henderson writes that the same 'created an epoch' in New England.[141]

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[137] The composition of this circle is explored in Chapter 4.

[138] C. J. Podmore, "Gambold, John (1711–1771), Bishop of the Moravian Church," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online*, September 23, 2004, https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/10324. The Reverend John Gambold (1711-1771) was an Anglican clergymen and bishop of the Moravian Church. Once a close friend and confidant of Charles and John Wesley, he is responsible for translating many of Zinzendorf's addresses into English. Richard Baxter (1615-1691) was an English puritan minister, devotional writer, and controversialist. See N. H. Keeble, "Baxter, Richard (1615–1691), Ejected Minister and Religious Writer," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online*, October 8, 2009, https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/1734.

[139] Don Horrocks, *Laws of the Spiritual Order: Innovation and Reconstruction in the Soteriology of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2004), 132.

[140] Roderick Strange, *Newman and the Gospel of Christ* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 98–99.

[141] For example, see Thomas Erskine, *Réflexions Sur l'évidence Intrinsèque de La Vérité Du Christianisme*, 4th ed. (Paris and Strasbourg: Treuttel et Würtz, 1822); Thomas Erskine, *Essai Sur La Foi* (Paris: H. Servier, 1826); Henry F. Henderson, *Erskine of Linlathen: Selections and Biography* (Edinburgh and London: Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier, 1899), 32.

By the time that Erskine's *Unconditional Freeness* was published in 1828, however, popular opinion was shifting. In 1831, just three years later, the Church of Scotland would go on to depose John MacLeod Campbell and strip Alexander John Scott of his licence to preach for disseminating theological interpretations that bore a strikingly similar character.[142] Tensions were high and orthodoxy tightly policed. While Erskine's earlier publications had been mostly uncontroversial, *Unconditional Freeness* received more critical notice because of his direct confrontation of prevailing Calvinist interpretations of justification by faith and limited atonement. In 1828, the same year *Unconditional Freeness* was published, a concerned 'Minister of the Church of Scotland' penned a public letter redressing Erskine's work.[143] In 1830, a further public censuring an unidentified friend for their sympathy for Erskine's views was published in Dundee as an extended pamphlet designed for easy circulation.[144] In 1831, the same year that *Unconditional Freeness* was republished to a larger distribution, the Glasgow-based Methodist circuit minister Thomas Bridgman published his own refutation of the treatise.[145] Particularly within the Reformed tradition, Erskine was no longer counted as being securely within the orthodox fold.

Despite such criticisms and that fact that it is not a systematic theological or epistemological treatise in a modern sense, *Unconditional Freeness* offers a valuable window into Erskine's theological epistemology. Specifically, when carefully elucidated, it makes clear how Erskine comprehended knowledge of God in terms of the ultimate telos of

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[142] J. Philip Newell, "Scott, Alexander John [Sandy] (1805-1866), Theological Dissident and Educationist," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/24859; Michael Jinkins, "Campbell, John McLeod (1800–1872), Church of Scotland Minister and Theologian," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/4527.

[143] James Buchanan, *A Letter to Thomas Erskine, Esq., Advocate, Containing Remarks on His Late Work, Entitled "The Unconditional Freeness of the Gospel." By a Minister of the Church of Scotland.* (Edinburgh: John Lindsay & Co., 1828), http://books.google.com/books?id=wp5dAAAAcAAJ.

[144] Thomas Erskine, *A Letter to a Friend on Universal Pardon as Advanced by T. Erskine, Esq. and Others.* (Dundee: James Adam, 1830), http://books.google.com/books?id=_JxdAAAAcAAJ.

[145] Thomas Bridgman, *The Theory of Universal Pardon, as Maintained by Thomas Erskine, Esq. in a Work Entitled, "The Unconditional Freeness of the Gospel".* (Glasgow & Edinburgh: John Niven & Son, 1831).

at·one·ment with God (and thereby, creation). Other discourses, such as *The Brazen Serpent* (1831) or *Doctrine of Election* (1837), explore elements of Erskine's atonement theology in a more focused manner, but lack the same density of epistemic considerations as *Unconditional Freeness*. Additionally, whereas Erskine refused to republish some of his earlier works without substantial revision in the last decade of his life, the same was not true for this particular work. According to a note by his editor dated 20 May 1870, having reread the work towards the end of his life, Erskine 'became satisfied as to the substantial harmony between his later thoughts and the teaching which is embodied in its pages.'[146] For both these reasons, *Unconditional Freeness* serves as an appropriate case study for reconstructing Erskine's perspectives on theological learning: its objects, modes, and meanings—and the theological epistemology appropriate to it. In section (i), I will reconstruct the relationship between Christ's atonement and creation's at·one·ment with God in Erskine's theology and provide a schema that articulates several of its key moments and movements. In section (ii), I will explore Nicholas Needham's critique of Erskine's reliance upon naturalistic and psychological terms of reference. By contextualising Needham's concerns historically and within Erskine's larger schema, I will argue that their force is mitigated. On balance, I will argue that Erskine's schema offers an insightful way of articulating the relationship between knowing *about* God and *knowing* God—something that could help recover Farley's sense of *theologia* and frame the importance of tacit and relational modes of knowing.

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[146] Editor, "Preface: Note," in *The Unconditional Freeness of the Gospel*, by Thomas Erskine (Pickerington: Beloved Publishing, 2016), 1.

i) Erskine's At·one·ment Schema

Erskine declares, 'the doctrine of atonement to be the great subject of revelation.'
God, he affirmed, 'is represented as delighting in it, as being glorified by it, [and as being
most fully manifested by it. All other doctrines radiate from this as their centre.'[147] Yet,
despite the centrality of the doctrine to his thought, commentators note its confusing
presentation within Erskine's theological corpus. Donald Winslow, for example, criticises
the Laird of Linlathen for being able to articulate where he disagreed with others' view of
the atonement, but less able to 'articulate his own view with any clarity or consistency.' He
attributes this perceived fault to his overlapping use of metaphor, his exegetical reliance
upon specific passages in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, and his 'relative
unfamiliarity with the history and development of atonement theory.'[148] Certainly, the
conceptual categories through which Erskine elucidated the significance of this doctrine do
not map neatly onto conventional models of the atonement found in systematic theology
today.[149] Because at·one·ment with God is the telos that animates and orients in Erskine's
schema of theological learning, and at·one·ment is integrally bound up with Christ's
atonement, it is important to clarify these relationships. To help understand the
significance of Christ's atonement within Erskine's theology, I have created a schema that
articulates critical ontological and epistemic stages that together constitute the interplay
between the realities of Christ's atonement and the potentialities of personal at·one·ment

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[147] Thomas Erskine, *Remarks on the Internal Evidence for the Truth of Revealed Religion*, 5th ed.
(Edinburgh: Waugh and Innes, 1821), 86.
[148] Winslow, *Advocate*, 86.
[149] As Horrocks notes, that 'does not mean that [Erskine] dispensed with the traditional
terminology; he simply attached new notions to it. In effect, Erskine held his innovative scheme together by
redefining, reconciling, link or conflating traditional theological doctrinal concepts,' often 'into existential
categories.'Horrocks, *Laws of the Spiritual Order: Innovation and Reconstruction in the Soteriology of Thomas Erskine of
Linlathen*, 109.

Christ's
Atonement

Towards
at·one·ment
in holy love

Knowing
about
God

Spirit-
Enabled

Participation

Personal
Appropriation

Knowing God
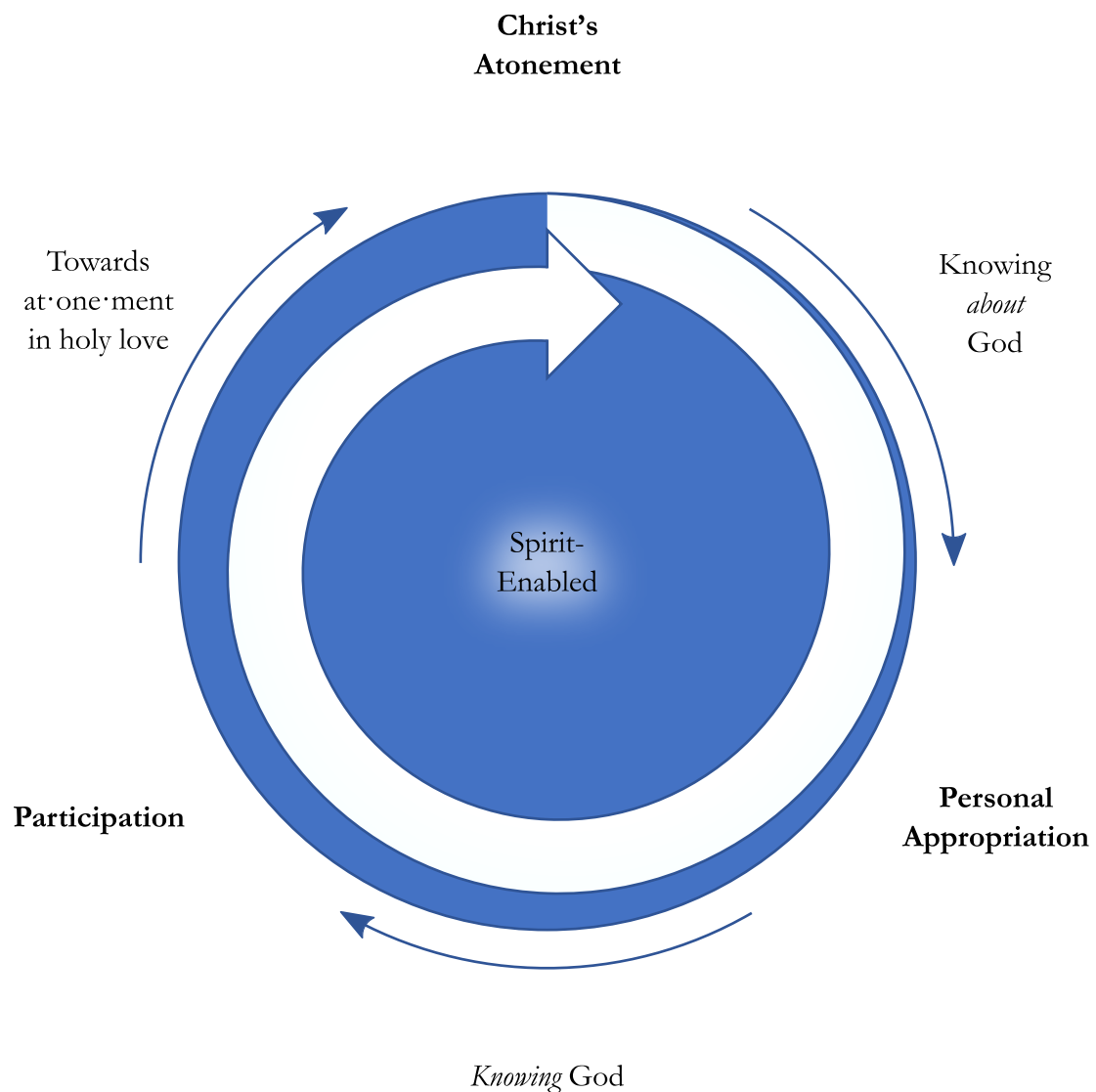
Figure 1. Representation of at·one·ment schema. (Illustration by author.)

with God (and thereby, at·one·ment with the whole of creation). This general schema is represented in figure 1.

It is helpful to have a picture of the whole as we look at each of the parts in isolation lest they be misunderstood. In fact, this schema helps situate three potential misunderstandings which I will explore in further detail in section (ii).

For Erskine, Christ's atonement ('Christ's atonement') is the crowning revelation of the triune God and God's enduring character of holy love. Father and Son, in the Spirit,

share an absolute commitment to cosmic reconciliation (or at·one·ment with creation). Such cosmic reconciliation has both ontological and juridical dimensions. It is effected through the saving act of the atonement wherein Christ, who in his person took on fallen humanity, procures a universal pardon. This saving and reconciling act results in a fundamental transformation in God's relationship to the whole of fallen creation that is ontologically prior to and independent of persons' belief or even their repentance. Though independent of belief, these ontological-juridical realities of Christ's atonement—and especially the character of God's holy love and God's commitment to effecting reconciliation with creation—are nevertheless *conducive* to belief once persons know *about* them. The dynamic here is much the same as a budding friendship: knowing *about* another person provides some degree of assurance of our standing within the relationship, her trustworthiness, and the trustworthiness of the relationship. In this sense, knowing *about* God facilitates individuals' personal appropriation of the 'truths of the atonement,' including the pardon procured in Christ and the fundamental transformation it represents between God and creation.

When such realities are no longer truths in abstract but accepted as truths *for me*, Erskine argues that there is a fundamental transformation and expansion of my relation to God and God's Being ('Personal Appropriation'). As persons' participation in the relationship deepens, it becomes ever more constitutive of their being-in-the-world. Such ongoing, dynamic being-in-relationship with the God effects a gradual transformation: a transformation *towards* at·one·ment with God, in holy love. Such fundamental transformation is effected by being loved by God and abiding in that love; and it manifests in expanding and extending persons' holy love of God and love of God's beloved creation ('Participation'). As they become attuned through the Spirit, persons experience—albeit metaphorically—the realities of Christ's life and death more personally, something that

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awakens both the sense of sin's malignity and persons' longing to draw ever nearer to the God of holy love. Each of the moments and movements within his schema are premised on the Holy Spirit's equipping and enabling work of the Holy Spirit, without whom nothing is possible—a subject that will be explored in more detail momentarily.

To summarise, then, Christ's atonement is undertaken *for the sake of* creation's at·one·ment with God, in holy love—an at·one·ment that unfolds gradually *through* responsive, abiding being-in-relationship with God. Such relationship transforms who and what we love—and thus, how we *know* and let ourselves *be known*. For Erskine, theological learning at its best is animated by at·one·ment with God. In other words, knowing *about* God is always for the sake of *knowing* God, of being-in-relationship with God and participating fully in the holy love of God. In this sense, at·one·ment with God actually reorients the objects, meanings, and modes of pursuing knowledge of God, a subject I will explore further in the next chapter. For now, however, we are equipped to consider each of these moments—and how they contribute to Erskine's distinctive proposal for orienting theological learning—in more detail.

Christ's Atonement

Reflecting on the first great commandment to 'love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind,'[150] Erskine asks, 'Who…is this God whom we are called on thus to love?' To answer that, he points his audience to the atonement in which he argues we are given 'a pledge and specimen of the richness and the holiness of divine love.'[151] In this act of cosmic reconciliation, Christ is 'at one' with the Father in the Spirit: in his person, sharing a commitment of heart and mind and body to

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[150] Matthew 22:37b.
[151] Erskine, *Unconditional Freeness*, 1828, 46.

submitting to the condemnation of sin for the sake of the salvation of the world.[152] Erskine stresses, *this* is the character of the God with whom we have to do: the God of holy love. God's holy love unites 'an infinite abhorrence towards sin, [with] an infinite love towards the sinner,' which is manifested in the profound lengths that God goes to heal sinners from the rifts caused and perpetuated by sin.[153] Because so much of Erskine's theological framework depends on this doctrine of holy love, it is important to clarify its dynamics.

Too often, God's love is divorced from God's holiness. Either divine love is interpreted in such a way that it diminishes or compromises holiness, *or* divine holiness is stressed such that abhorrence of sin dictates the terms and conditions of love. According to Erskine, neither can be correct. The first offers no genuine assurance to the sinner. 'There can be no peace for a moral being which does not rest on the foundations of moral truth,' he declares. In fact, 'there can be no way of giving true peace to the sinner, except by making God's abhorrence of sin the very ground of the sinner's hope.'[154] Because Christ is 'the image of the invisible God' and 'by him were all things created' and have their constitution, confidence cannot be found in diminishing or excusing sin.[155] Rather, it is found in the lengths to which God goes to heal the 'disease of the soul' wrought by sin—a commitment of God even unto death.[156] Erskine observes, 'the forgiving love of God being manifested through the atonement, declares itself to be a consuming fire to evil, and thus no heart which does not sympathize with the threatened destruction of evil, can possibly embrace cordially, or enjoy fully, the forgiveness of the gospel.'[157] Yet, it is the *forgiving love of God* that declares itself—the intention of holiness is *for* love. The divine

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[152] Hart, *Teaching Father*, 38.
[153] Erskine, *Unconditional Freeness*, 1828, 18.
[154] Erskine, 106.
[155] Colossians 1:15-17.
[156] Erskine, *Unconditional Freeness*, 1828, 18.
[157] Erskine, 174.

commitment to treating sin offers the only prospect of 'refuge from sin, and from weakness, and from earthly desires, and from the assaults of that spiritual enemy.'[158] Divorcing God's love and holiness, in this first sense, fails to realise an important truth: one cannot become insensible to God's holiness without also becoming insensible to the magnitude of God's love—or the deep need and longing to become rightly related to God and the world. As Erskine writes, 'heaven and happiness, and salvation are all summed up in Holy love,—and it was to produce Holy love, that the atonement of Christ was proclaimed.'[159]

Christ's atonement, indeed, manifests the lengths to which God goes to heal the 'disease of the soul' wrought by sin—a commitment of God in Christ even unto death.[160] Crucial for Erskine, and controversial for his critics, was the doctrine of universal pardon. Whereas some proponents of substitutionary atonement might explicitly or implicitly interpret Christ's atoning work as being primarily *for* propitiation or expiation, Erskine understood such propitiation in terms of the larger objective of at·one·ment between God and creation. He argues that the effect of Christ's atoning work on the cross was the extension of a universal pardon, 'without condition and without exception.'[161] In *Unconditional Freeness*, he states, 'the universal repeal of the sentence of exclusion, on the ground of the death of Christ, as the substitute of sinners, is the message conveyed from God to man through the gospel.'[162] Because in Christ the ontological and juridical aspects of the atonement are held together, this pardon is indeed universally 'good news' for sinners.

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[158] Erskine, 108.
[159] Erskine, 54.
[160] Erskine, 18.
[161] Erskine, 25.
[162] Erskine, 62.

As Hart observes, 'atonement, for Erskine, is no mere legal transaction of a death for a life, or for many lives. Rather, it is the actual reconciliation of human existence with God, a reconciliation made concrete in human flesh in the incarnate Son.'[163] For Erskine, then,

> it is *supremely* here [i.e., in Christ's atonement] that we must insist upon this [oneness in heart and will and mind and purpose between the Father and the Son], since it is in the 'unity of being' between this man and God, a unity which is sealed in the concurrence of Christ's human will with the divine judgment, and his submission to death, that the at-one-ment between God and man is wrought.[164]

From an ontological perspective, the pardon is efficacious because of the ontological relationship between the person of Christ and fallen humanity. In *Doctrine of Election*, Erskine writes that God sent '*His own Son* into the condition and nature of the sinner, to help him out of that evil condition, and to cure the disease of his nature.'[165] In his resurrection, then, Christ bore with him 'the human flesh made clean, and holy, and immortal; and he became a fountain-head of spiritual life, united with the human nature, from which a rill flowed to every one of the race.'[166] Erskine frames this ontological reconstitution in terms of the metaphor of Christ's headship.

Headship has at least two connotative dimensions, both of which Erskine puts into service (sometimes simultaneously).[167] One dimension is administrative headship, which can be illustrated by the head teacher who represents and acts on behalf of their constituent teachers. While belonging to her fellow teachers *as* a teacher themselves, the actions she takes within that role effect change and have consequences for those whom she represents. The other dimension, more common in Erskine's work, is the image of

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[163] Hart, *Teaching Father*, 38–39.
[164] Hart, 38–39.
[165] Thomas Erskine, *The Doctrine of Election, and Its Connection with the General Tenor of Christianity; Illustrated from Many Parts of Scripture, and Especially from the Epistle to the Romans*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1878), 365–67.
[166] Erskine, 365–67.
[167] It is notable that Donald Winslow rebukes Erskine on this kind of behaviour. See Winslow, *Advocate*, 86–87.

corporal headship. Not only is the head integrally united to the body, but it is also that which gives direction and coherency to each of its corporal members. For Erskine, 'Christ came into our flesh after it had fallen under the condemnation of death, and through his fulfilment of righteousness under these conditions he has overcome death and nullified the condemnation.'[168] In consequence of the incarnation, human beings no longer stand under the 'condemned Head'[169] of Adam, but 'all of us stand under the righteous Head' of Christ.[170] Crucially, he clarifies, 'this [standing] does not refer to character but to condition; we are put into Christ's standing that we may receive his spirit and his character,' and thus 'livingly to reproduce [it] by the indwelling of the Spirit.'[171] Insofar Christ assumed and redeemed fallen humanity, Erskine reasons that he procures a full pardon for all humankind, not just repentant sinners. In this sense, the reality-redefining character of the atonement is not altered by the state of one's personal sensibilities. Erskine summarises,

> It appears to me that this view of pardon, as being a manifestation of the divine character in Christ Jesus, altogether independent of man's belief or unbelief, is a view much fitted to draw the soul from self to God, and thus to sanctify it, at the same time that it gives it peace; because it presents to it a ground of hope, entirely out of itself, which remains unchanged and unaffected by the fluctuating feelings of man's heart; and because that ground is the holy God. It is not a pardon distinct from God, but it is the holy God manifesting himself in a pardon.[172]

In this manner, he differentiates the 'objective' reality of divine pardon from the 'subjective' response to its meaning. Significantly, however, though independent of belief, these realities are nevertheless *conducive* to belief. As noted earlier, in the atonement, we see 'the union of an infinite abhorrence towards sin, and an infinite love towards the sinner.'[173] The picture of such immense love, he believes is compelling.

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[168] Thomas Erskine, *The Spiritual Order, and Other Papers: Selected from the Manuscripts of the Late Thomas Erskine of Linlathen* (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1871), 162–63.

[169] Erskine, 163.

[170] Thomas Erskine, *The Brazen Serpent; or, Life Coming Through Death*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Waugh and Innes, 1831), 54.

[171] Erskine, *The Spiritual Order*, 163.

[172] Erskine, *Unconditional Freeness*, 1828, 168.

[173] Erskine, 18.

Of course, the picture can only be compelling insofar as people know *about* it—something Erskine reiterates. In *Unconditional Freeness*, for example, Erskine reasons, 'although the exclusion is done away [in Christ's atonement], man will yet keep at a distance from God, until he knows who God is, and what need he has of God, and that he will be made welcome by God; and whilst he continues at a distance from God, he continues unsaved. It is faith in the atonement, and in what it signifies, that heals the spiritual disease, that saves the soul.'[174] Or, as he affirms later in the same work, 'the whole use of the gospel is that the holy love of God may be introduced into man's heart, and work there its own likeness. But the gospel cannot enter the heart without being believed, and here is the whole use of faith.'[175] Because the fine line that Erskine is walking here is ultimately a line in the sand for some commentators, it is important to clarify exactly what he *is* and *is not* saying here. To begin with the latter, Erskine is *not* proposing that human knowledge about God can substitute for the preparative or enlightening work of the Spirit, a point that I will explore further momentarily. What he *is* saying is that knowledge about God can contribute to preparing the way and making straight the path *for the Lord*—that is, within the larger economy of salvation, theological learning is one way in which humans can co-operate with the Spirit to prepare the way for that all-meaningful, all-embracing, all-transforming personal relationship with God. For Erskine, insofar as human beings can participate in this preparatory work at all—i.e., insofar as theological learning contributes to any transformation in a person's relationship with God—it is *because of* the work that God *has already undertaken* juridically and ontologically in Christ's atonement and in gift of the Spirit. In Christ and in the Spirit, the fundamental reality has changed; or as Erskine states simply, 'the way is open.'[176]

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174 Erskine, 62.
175 Erskine, 170.
176 Erskine, Unconditional Freeness, 63.

Of course, not all will pass through that opening, at least in their lifetime.[177] For

Erskine, this is 'the great mystery in religion.' He observes, 'one heart is made to hear the

voice of God, and learns from that teaching voice…[and] another reads the Bible, and

hears sermons, and goes through the forms of prayer, and seems even to long after

spiritual religion; and yet he continues a stranger to spiritual communion with God.'[178]

Whatever functions theological learning performs, then, it cannot replace the work of the

Holy Spirit in bringing a person to God. Indeed, 'the very disposition to ask [for the Holy

Spirit] is His own gift.'[179] Keeping this proviso firmly in mind, then, Erskine suggests that

the pursuit of knowledge about God can perform two cooperative functions within the

larger economy of Spirit-led salvation. Theological learning can contribute to revealing

something about the nature of God and God's relationship with the world—including the

ontological-juridical implications of God's agency in the atonement; and it can help people

to recognize the character of that agency *as* holy love. In this sense, rather than doctrines

being a mere repository of 'beliefs held and taught by the Church,'[180] Erskine argues that

they can become 'expressions of the character of the omnipotent Creator.'[181] They can act

as 'lights merely to guide us to God' and 'channels through which that spirit [of God]

ought to be received in the heart.'[182] Indeed, Erskine contends that

> a true knowledge of God is necessary to a true love of God, as it is only a true love
> of God that can produce conformity to the true will of God in the creature. The
> evil, then, of taking up a wrong doctrine, or a wrong view of a doctrine, does not lie
> in this—that God punishes a man for not believing one thing more than another;
> but in this—that it interferes with the great purpose of revelation, viz., that the love

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[177] As Hart notes, 'during the course of his life, however, Erskine developed a deep conviction that the divine love was so great, and the Gospel such good news, that in the final reckoning none would fail to respond in faith, no matter how long God might have to wait for this to happen…even after the person's physical death.'Hart, *Teaching Father*, 30. While there are intimations of this position in earlier works, it is not represented in *Unconditional Freeness*.

[178] Erskine, *Unconditional Freeness*, 1828, 63.

[179] Erskine, 63.

[180] Oxford English Dictionary, 'Doctrine,' *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, 2017).

[181] Erskine, *Unconditional Freeness*, 1828, 79.

[182] Erskine, 195.

of God, and the Christ of God, may abide in the heart of man, conforming his mind and will to the mind and will of God.[183]

As Erskine notes, 'it is quite possible to love a God, who after all may not be the true God, but a mere idol of the imagination.'[184] Crucially, then, theological knowledge *about* God does not matter any less when pursued in view to and in light of the relationship God offers in Christ and through the Spirit; in fact, it matters more. It matters *more* because it can contribute to how persons commit themselves, both to God and to the world in which they dwell.[185]

In addition to enriching a person's relationship with God and safeguarding against idolatry, knowing *about* God can chronologically precede *knowing* God. As noted above, Erskine reasons, 'although the exclusion is done away [in Christ's atonement], man will yet keep at a distance from God, until he knows who God is, and what need he has of God, and that he will be made welcome by God.'[186] Knowing about God—and about the realities God has effected in Christ's atonement and through the gift of Spirit—then can provide the assurance needed to appropriate the truth of those universal realities *personally*. In part, philosopher-scientist Michael Polanyi's framework of conviviality explains the *epistemic importance* of realising that God's character of holy love manifest in Christ's atonement.

Personal Appropriation

In his magnum opus, *Personal Knowledge*, Polanyi proposes that formation is a process of mimetic exercise, wherein an individual imitates someone (or some group of people) with whom he or she would like to be affiliated. While such acts of affiliation may

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[183] Erskine, 222.
[184] Erskine, 230.
[185] Erskine, 222.
[186] Erskine, 170.

be unconscious or a-critical, he claims that they are always grounded in what he calls

human beings' 'primordial desire for conviviality.'[187] Conviviality is not a common word

today, but its Latin roots derive from the sense of persons or environments full 'with life or

living.' Imagine the kind of sociable environments that cultivate a healthy sense of

belonging, which draw people out of their shells, and into the fullness of belonging to life

shared together.[188] Even muted, ordinary, day-to-day expressions—such as when people

share greetings at the supermarket till—cultivate a sense of conviviality that serves peoples'

basic emotional needs and capacities.[189] Conviviality, Polanyi insists, plays a significant

epistemic role in facilitating 'real communication on an inarticulate level'[190] because of the

kinds of 'tacit personal interactions' that it enables.[191] The offer of good fellowship or

companionship encourages persons to participate in joint activities, to share the same

physical or emotional space. In Polanyi's more technical terms, the 'diffuse emotional

conviviality [that is thereby cultivated] merges into…the transmission of specific

experiences,'[192] such as the sharing of memories, personal joys or sorrows, the stuff of life

that makes life together meaningful. With time, such sharing engenders sympathetic

responses and enkindles 'interpersonal coincidence of tacit judgements.'[193] Thus, trust is

formed: trust that enables 'a passionate pouring of oneself into untried forms of

existence,'[194] apprenticeship to a community and culture,[195] and the transmission of 'social

lore from one generation to the other.'[196]

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[187] Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1958), 222.
[188] Oxford English Dictionary, 'Conviviality,' *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, 2017).
[189] Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*, 223.
[190] Polanyi, 219.
[191] Polanyi, 222.
[192] Polanyi, 217.
[193] Polanyi, 217.
[194] Polanyi, 221.
[195] Polanyi, 220.
[196] Polanyi, 225.

In short, conviviality cultivates formative personal commitment.

Of course, Polanyi's account contributes to explaining the epistemic dimension of recognising the reconciliation effected in Christ's atonement and the character of holy love. On its own, of course, it is incomplete: it neither accounts for the work of the Spirit (its terms are purely naturalistic) nor the differences between limited and imperfect human conviviality and the unlimited and perfect holy love of God. I will explore the significance of this difference further in the next chapter.

Though limited by its specifically epistemic terms of reference, what Polanyi's framework *does* do is suggest how receiving (or personally appropriating) the good news of the reconciliation effected in Christ and through the atonement might foster an *openness to knowing God in new ways* within a person, and concomitantly expanding her relation to God and God's Being—and as I will argue, her relation to the whole world through that constitutive, participative being-in-relationship with God.

Participation

'Being-in-relationship with God' is shorthand for several related ideas. The 'being-in' foregrounds the ontological-existential character of this relationship. In simple terms, being involved or participating in this relationship establishes and orders how human beings attend to and engage with the surrounding world—i.e., it is ontologically constitutive of their being-in-the-world. The 'relationship' element is more complicated, because the character of how two or more persons or things are connected can be so diverse. Depending on the nature of their relation, there may also be a referential dynamic: what involves one person or thing in the relationship may have relevance for the other. In this specific case, the nature of the 'relationship' is critical. While I will explore the character of this relationship in detail later, what is important for now is that this

relationship is eminently personal and constituted by holy love. It is *personal*, in the sense that it involves the particular person *as* herself—i.e., as one who commits herself in particular ways to the world in which she finds herself and the peculiar network of relationships that constitute it. Such commitments have bodily, cognitive, and spiritual dimensions. It is also constituted by *holy love*. To recall, the holy love of God is 'the love of God which passeth knowledge,' the love 'with which God so loved the world as to give His only begotten Son as an atonement for its sins.'[197] According to Erskine, the fruit of believing in this love personally, of being rooted and abiding in this love, is responsive holy love *to* God: the love of God and neighbour in ways that are grounded in God's own holy character. As Erskine affirms in *Spiritual Order*, this 'principle of love—a living love, the opposite of selfishness—is the only power which can enable me to be inwardly what I feel I ought to be, and to give free and spontaneous submission to all the demands of my consciousness; yet love is a power I cannot create or command within myself, which must come to me, if at all from some outward source.'[198] He writes further,

> [God] has so constituted me that the conscious recognition of this dependence is absolutely necessary to the rightness of all my moral and spiritual doings, not by an arbitrary appointment nor as a mere homage due to Him, but because this dependence is the great reality through the recognition of which I am brought into the conscious and continual apprehension of that love of God from which all my love must be derived.[199]

Thus, at·one·ment with God, in holy love, is the fruit of being-in-relationship with God; and it is the condition upon which at·one·ment with creation, in holy love, is made possible.

From the perspective of theological learning, such participative being-in-relationship with God is epistemically significant: insofar as being-in-relationship with God

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[197] Erskine, *Unconditional Freeness*, 1828, 18.
[198] Erskine, *The Spiritual Order*, 31.
[199] Erskine, 32.

affects who and what a person loves, it also affects how she attends to (and *intends*) the

world. Furthermore, Erskine maintains that as being-in-relationship with God deepens, so

too does *knowing* God. And *knowing* God, in turn, animates the further pursuit of

knowledge *about* God—knowledge that can enrich and deepen that relationship. As I will

explore further through the metaphor of friendship in the next chapter, such thus

relationship reframes the objects, modes, and meanings of pursuing knowledge of God.

Indeed, in Erskine's estimation, the ontological primacy of this relationship reorients the

whole enterprise of theological learning so that it intends (or aims at) the relational

at·one·ment with God, in holy love; and thus, at·one·ment with creation.

ii) In Criticism and Praise of Erskine's Schema

One of the advantages that spelling out Erskine's atonement/at·one·ment schema

in the manner that I have undertaken above is that it provides a framework for articulating

the ways in which he believes theological learning can be misoriented *as well as* where his

commentators have found fault Erskine. As a wise professor once said to me, 'sometimes

our greatest strengths are also our greatest weaknesses.'[200] Such an aphorism certainly holds

true of Erskine, particularly with respect to his emphasis upon the efficacy and necessity of

personally appropriating the universal truth that Christ's atonement had manifested:

namely, 'that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their

trespasses unto them; and that committed unto us the word of reconciliation.'[201] For the

perception that his view of pardon undercut the propitiatory value and foregrounded

God's revealed will in the atonement, Erskine has been censured as a Socinian;[202] for

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[200] This wise professor was Mary Ruth Wilkinson of Regent College, Vancouver, BC.
[201] 2 Corinthians 5:19.
[202] McGrath, *Christian Literature: An Anthology*, 47. McGrath writes that Socinious shifted 'the emphasis to the prophetic office, by which Christ revealed the will of God to man.' For one example of this criticism, see A Robertson, *A Vindication of "The Religion of the Land" from Misrepresentation; and an Exposure of the*

rejecting predestination and suggesting that a person's free response to God's salvific actions was integral to the salvific process, he has been accused as being an Arminian.[203] Relatedly, and perhaps most significantly with respect to my specific interest in theological learning—and developing an epistemology appropriate to it—he has been accused of conceptualising faith (and thus, at·one·ment with God) primarily in rational or psychological terms without due reverence or appreciation for the work of the Holy Spirit. If true, this is a serious failing and could present a significant reason *not* to retrieve Erskine's orientation towards theological learning. While there are some deficiencies on this account that should be rectified before any attempts at retrieval, I will argue that on balance Erskine's 'at·one·ment orientation' to theological learning is worth bringing into modern conversations about the *telos* of pursuing knowledge of God. The reasons for this position will become even more clear once the insights of the next chapter are incorporated.

The Sandeman-Psychological Charge

In the theological controversy that attended Erskine's early works, Donald Horrocks notes that one of the charges laid against Erskine's schema was that he 'presents a defective view of the orthodox doctrine of Christian regeneration, reducing it to an overwhelmingly natural process which largely dispenses with the Holy Spirit.'[204] Among Erskine's contemporary interlocutors raising this charge, Horrocks names Methodist theologian Richard Watson; Free Church of Scotland minister and professor, J. S. Candlish;

Absurd Pretensions of the Gareloch Enthusiasts [i.e. Thomas Erskine and His Followers]. In a Letter to Thomas Erskine (Edinburgh: Whyte & Co., 1830), 105–6.

[203] For two examples of his contemporaries making this charge, see J. A. Haldane, *Observations on Universal Pardon, the Extent of the Atonement, and Personal Assurance of Salvation* (Edinburgh: W. Whyte, 1831), 56; Andrew Thomson, *Sermons on Various Subjects* (Edinburgh: William Whyte and Co., 1829), 317–27. See also Horrocks, *Laws of the Spiritual Order: Innovation and Reconstruction in the Soteriology of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen*, 283–84.

[204] Horrocks, *Laws of the Spriitual Order*, 144.

and Catholic convert John Henry Newman.[205] More recently, Nicholas Needham levies a similar charge in his doctoral work, 'Thomas Erskine of Linlathen: His life and Theology, 1788 – 1837.' Reflecting upon how Erskine conceptualises belief, Needham criticises Erskine for manifesting 'a Sandemanian concept of saving faith as mental assent'—a concept which he points out 'easily lends itself to a highly psychological approach to salvation' and a 'tendency to regard individual salvation in natural, psychological terms.'[206] More moderate in his criticism is J. S. Candlish, who generally applauds Erskine's argument 'that the doctrines of the gospel, on the one hand, exhibit the character of God in the fullest harmony with the dictates of reason and conscience, and on the other hand, tend by their natural influence when believed, to mould the human character into accordance with that of God.'[207] Although such arguments may be 'studied with advantage,' Candlish suggests

> the gospel is too much regarded simply as a manifestation of the true character of God, which, if only believed and understood, tends of itself to impart peace and holiness to men; and while the necessity of the enlightening work of the Spirit, in order to the perception of the truth, is not ignored, much less denied, it is hardly allowed its due wight and influence…while the main impression produced by the argument as a whole, is the power of truth to commend itself to the understanding and conscience.[208]

As he notes, this might suffice for 'a secondary and collateral argument for Christianity,' but it certainly is insufficient for a primary one.[209] Greater attention must be paid to the role of spiritual discernment if one is to guard against a naturalistic conception of at·one·ment with God. Without wishing to diminish these concerns, it is important to

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[205] Horrocks, 144.

[206] Nicholas Richard Needham, "Thomas Erskine of Linlathen: His Life and Theology 1788 - 1837" (Edinburgh, University of Edinburgh, 1987), 61.

[207] James S. Candlish, "Thomas Erskine of Linlathen," *British and Foreign Evangelical Review* 12, no. 83 (January 1873): 113.

[208] Candlish, 113.

[209] Candlish, 113. It should be noted that Candlish's critique is specifically levied at Erskine's earlier work *Remarks*; however, the theological schema and logic represented in that work is largely the same as the one represented in *Unconditional Freeness*. Here, Candlish cites 1 Corinthians 2:14.

understand Erskine's arguments within the historical context and polemics of his age. Properly contextualised historically and within his larger schema of atonement/at·one·ment, these specific accusations lose some, though not all, of their force.

The Nature of Gospel and Its Epistemic Concomitants in Erskine's Context

In *Unconditional Freeness*, Erskine provides some much-needed context for how pursuits of knowledge (and thus, theological learning) were being oriented—or in his estimation, misoriented—in the early nineteenth century. Particularly useful in this context is his elucidation of epistemic categories of belief rooted in divergent positions on what the 'good news' of the gospel entails. After mapping the areas of contention with respect to the doctrine of justification by faith in the first essay of *Unconditional Freeness*, Erskine turns his attention in the third essay to exegesis of various scriptural passages associated with the nature of justification, salvation, and religious belief. Of these, his treatment of Acts 16.31, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved and thy house' is the most extensive. It is referenced seven times, with two longer commentaries on its (mis)interpretation.[210]

In the Biblical narrative, this injunction occurs during Paul's and Silas' imprisonment in Macedonia. Although an earthquake made prisonbreak possible, the two men chose not to grasp unexpected freedom. Their decision to stay prompted the shaken prison guard to ask, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?'[211] In Erskine's estimation Paul's and Silas' response to 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved' was being treated as a considered 'a statement of the gospel' in his own time.[212] The logic followed that 'to believe

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[210] It should be noted that the 'thy house' portion of the verse is conspicuously absent from Erskine's exegesis of this verse. It does not appear anywhere in his discourses.

[211] Acts 16:30.

[212] Erskine, *Unconditional Freeness*, 1828, 187.

the gospel is to "believe that those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ shall be saved.'"[213] Erskine disputed the verse's primacy as a statement of the gospel as well as the interpretation of 'belief' and 'believing' advancing under its banner.

Instead, Erskine contends that 'the gospel is not "he that believeth shall be saved," but "God gave his Son to be a propitiation for the sins of the whole world.'"[214] He takes issue with this first representation of the 'good news' for two reasons. First, and most basically, there is a problem of emphasis. The former statement of the gospel suggests a certain primacy to human agency in salvation ('the act of belief') rather than divine agency ('the gift of the Son'); and relative to the latter, 'he that believeth shall be saved' lends itself more easily to envisioning salvation in terms of what it is *from* rather than what it is *for*. By thus relocating the 'good news', the door is open to distortion. Second, and more pertinent to the issue of developing an appropriate theological epistemology, Erskine protests the way that 'belief' or 'believing' is being developed as an epistemic category. How the injunction to 'Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved' is handled in the environing culture he likens to a 'nostrum' or a 'magical amulet' that confers protection or confidence upon the one who holds it.[215] To 'hold'—with its connotations of possessing or grasping or keeping an object still—is an apt metaphor for the way in which Erskine observes persons approaching the nature of belief. He writes,

> when [persons] wish to confirm their assurance of salvation, they will look to the accuracy, or to the unquestioning submission, of their faith,—and they will endeavour to persuade themselves, that, seeing they believe accurately and unhesitatingly, surely God will give them eternal life… And if they find misgivings in their minds they will endeavour to take comfort and encouragement from the reflection, that as they have not doubted the Christian doctrines, so they must be within the pale of that covenant which promises all things to faith.[216]

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[213] Erskine, 189.
[214] Erskine, 190.
[215] Erskine, 184.
[216] Erskine, 154–55.

According to this framework, belief takes as its primary object 'the Christian doctrines'—and, by extension, those who authoritatively expound them. To be accounted faithful is to believe Christian doctrine 'accurately and unhesitatingly'—two qualities, which though they might seem different, in fact represent similar epistemic postures.

If faith is conceived as 'an intelligent assent to the propositions of Christian doctrines'[217] with the understanding that 'God punishes a man for not believing one thing more than another,' then holding an accurate set of beliefs is imperative.[218] Erskine observes, 'It is a question which I have often heard asked,—"do you think that the belief of such or such a doctrine, or of such and such a doctrine is essential to salvation?"'.[219] Here, religious belief—and indeed, faith—are functions of a particular kind of knowledge of God, which, following A. J. Scott, might be called 'knowledge *about* God'.[220] Representations of God in scripture, doctrine, and the historical witness of the church together comprise the 'body of knowledge' that has God as its subject matter.[221] As Erskine notes in his own context, belief in the God represented in the doctrines may attend knowledge about God—but not necessarily. He observes, 'We may have an atheistical knowledge of God and of Christianity…that is, we may receive its doctrines, without receiving the God of the doctrines,—just as the philosophers of this world receive the doctrines of natural science, without thinking of or receiving the God of nature'.[222] With earlier roots in scholasticism, this kind of theology intends a rationally coherent system within which deductive reasoning from general principles is given pride of place. In this

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[217] Erskine, 6.
[218] Erskine, 222.
[219] Erskine, 222.
[220] In *Hints for Meditation on Acquaintance with God*, Scott distinguishes between 'knowing *about* God' and '*knowing* God', which similarly gets to the heart of the two sorts of 'knowledge of God' Erskine characterises. Erskine uses similar language in describing how a blind man may 'know about' material light, without experiencing it. Erskine, 196.
[221] Erskine, 6.
[222] Erskine, 194.

context, knowledge of God is approached as 'a science', without necessitating personal reference to their divine source.[223]

A similar dynamic characterises the moral dimension of Christianity. If faith is conceived for all intents and purposes as 'unhesitating obedience,' then knowledge of (and submission to) the divine imperatives is critical. Once again, what is foregrounded is a particular kind of knowledge *about* God—a knowledge of the moral claims derived from representations of God in scripture, doctrine, and the historical witness of the church.[224] Surprisingly, this moral emphasis can take two different courses. Under the prevailing force of the Enlightenment, knowledge of the divine imperatives may be abstracted to create a Christian 'moral system'. In this case, the objective is to create a morally coherent system in which the correct action in each circumstance can be deduced from Christian-derived, universal moral principles. Or knowledge of God may be approached as 'a science', again without necessitating personal reference to their divine source.[225] Under the rising tide of pietistic influences in early nineteenth-century Britain, with their inflection on personal holiness and piety, salvation was more closely bound together with submissive obedience. Such obedience might take the form of an 'act of man's mind,'[226] the 'meritorious submission of his reason to the authority of God,'[227] or the performance of religious or moral duties in accordance with dictates of scripture and tradition. Regardless, what concerned Erskine—and what he notes time and time again—is that obedience is too often urged amongst his contemporaries 'as *an evidence* of the reality of faith' irrespective of personal understanding.[228] All too often, faith becomes synonymous with 'prostration of

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[223] Erskine, 195.
[224] Erskine, 126.
[225] Erskine, 195.
[226] Erskine, 46.
[227] Erskine, 148.
[228] Erskine, 170.

reason before divine authority, or a gulping down of unintelligible obscurities'[229] or the 'external form of an action' without reference to 'the moral spring from which it flows', i.e., 'the influence of holy love to God.'[230] In either case, a great degree of 'practical atheism' is permissible—that is, a living as if (a living) God does not exist.[231]

The problem associated with these conceptualisations of knowledge of God is twofold. Erskine's first and foremost concern is soteriological—that is, that the kind of knowledge about God and the modes by which such knowledge is pursued do not lead to salvation. Whereas some people draw security from the belief that 'they have not doubted the Christian doctrines, so they must be within the pale of that covenant which promises all things to faith,' Erskine refuses such comfort.[232] Knowledge about God—whether in its rationalist or moralistic guise—might masquerade as *the only meaningful knowledge of God*; however, pursued as an end in itself, it does not save. Second, then, for Erskine, is the matter of putting 'first things first'—that is, being oriented by the correct telos or object in one's thought and practice. C. S. Lewis writes, 'Put first things first and we get second things thrown in: put second things first and we lose *both* first and second things.'[233] According to the Scottish laird, the 'first thing' of Christianity—that which orients and gives everything else its relative place and significance—is being-in-relationship with God ('Participation,' in the schema above).

For Erskine, 'being-in-relationship' is the 'first thing' of Christianity—that which orients and gives everything else its relative place and significance. With this telos, second things such as doctrine or moral responsibility find their proper function, importance, and

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[229] Erskine, 6.

[230] Erskine, 32.

[231] Craig Gay defines practical atheism as 'the assumption that even if God exists he is largely irrelevant to the real business of life.' Gay, *(Modern) World*, 2.

[232] Erskine, *Unconditional Freeness*, 1828, 156.

[233] Clive Staples Lewis, "Letter of 23 April 1951," in *Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis*, ed. Walter Hooper, vol. 3 (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2009), 111.

significance. In contrast, 'without the sense of His living reality, and the sentiment of relation to Him,' Erskine contends, 'there is no religion, and Christianity becomes a mere set of notions.'[234] Because this can easily be misunderstood, it is important to register what Erskine *is not* saying here, as much as what he *is* saying with respect to knowledge of God—and we can do that by looking specifically at how he treats doctrine. Erskine *is not* saying that because being-in-relationship with God is the 'first thing' of Christianity it is the *only* thing that matters epistemically or that it is *chronologically* first. Neither Erskine's writings nor his own lifelong theological pursuits at his estate of Linlathen suggest the anti-intellectualism sometimes associated with radical emphases on personal relationship with God. Indeed, his published work is animated by careful engagements with scripture and other theologians. As I will show in the next chapter, personal correspondence reveals an indefatigable interest in diverse sources of knowledge about God and the cultivation of a community of theological learning across Britain and continental Europe. Knowing *about* God is clearly important to Erskine. To reiterate, though, such knowledge is never to be pursued as *an end in itself*, but always in view to and in light of the gospel message: namely, that 'God gave his Son to be a propitiation for the sins of the whole world'[235] and was thus 'in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing unto them their trespasses.'[236] In other words, what Erskine *is* saying is that knowing about God is always *for* knowing God—knowing God personally as the one who pursues reconciled relationship with creation even unto the Cross.

As Baker and Green perceptively observe, 'the metaphors concerning the character of God that are accorded privilege in atonement theology lead easily and naturally to the

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[234] Erskine, *Unconditional Freeness*, 1828, 79.
[235] Erskine appears to be paraphrasing 1 John 4:10, 'Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, *and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins*'and 1 John 2:2, 'And [Jesus Christ] is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the *sins of the whole world*'. Erskine cites this paraphrase.
[236] 2 Corinthians 5:19.

incarnation of those characteristics in human relationships—that is, among those whose vocation is to reflect the divine image.'[237] Further, the metaphors accorded privilege in framing the character of God in atonement theology are intimately connected with the incarnation of their virtues in theological epistemologies—particularly, in how human beings know and let themselves be known. Again, I will return to this principle when I explore the metaphor of friendship in the next chapter. For Erskine, one of the besetting sins of his theological generation was the promulgation of the false metaphor of God as an 'offended governor and condemning judge.'[238]

Erskine maintains that such a punitive image of God's judgeship contributes to misorienting and circumscribing the pursuit of knowledge of God (and thus, theological learning). Using the terms of the schema articulated above, persons are thwarted in making the transition from knowing *about* God to *knowing* God when they do not (or cannot seem to) personally appropriate the truth of their newfound standing in Christ. The image of God as judge has a long history, both within scripture and tradition—and Erskine is not shy about drawing upon it himself.[239] However, in the early nineteenth century, the tone of this image was shifting. Geoffrey Rowell, who has studied this period extensively, contends that 'there were few issues which figured more prominently in the nineteenth-century theological debate than those of the everlasting punishment of the wicked and the immortality of the soul.'[240] Hell-fire preaching rivetted Victorians, not only in Evangelical pulpits but across denominations. Coupled with the reality of an immortal soul, the fear of everlasting punishment might be used to deter immoral or anti-social behaviour.[241] Fear

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[237] Mark Baker and Joel Green, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary Contexts* (Westmount: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 115.

[238] Erskine, *Unconditional Freeness*, 1828, 27.

[239] For instances within *Unconditional Freeness*, see Erskine, 95.

[240] Geoffrey Rowell, *Hell and the Victorians: A Study of the Nineteenth-Century Theological Controversies Concerning Eternal Punishment and the Future Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), 1, https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198266389.001.0001.

[241] Rowell, 1–2.

could motivate conversion, evangelical activism, obedience to ecclesiastical authority, and—as we have seen—earnest disputes about the nature of orthodox belief. As the Secularist jingle mocked, 'If you and God should disagree / on questions of theologee / you're damned to all eternity / poor, blind, worm!'[242] Jesting aside, a confluence of emphases created conditions in which retributive justice was the dominant attribute of God's character in the broader social imaginary: dogmatism intensified, penal substitution laboured as the dominant atonement metaphor amongst the growing Evangelical movement,[243] and pre-millenarian minorities became more voluble in proclaiming the imminent arrival of the Day of Judgement.[244] These emphases on God's holy justice were concomitant with a developing cultural agitation, which focused attention on concerns of public order.

Whereas the belief in ordered progress through Enlightenment reason and technological advance blossomed in the mid- to late-eighteenth century, the admixture of anticipation and apprehension was rapidly changing by the turn of the century. On the home front, rapid urban migration combined with laissez-faire economic policies created a housing and sanitation crisis,[245] depressed working wages,[246] and underscored skyrocketing mortality rates.[247] On the Continent, the French experiment in 'liberty, equality, and fraternity' descended into the Terror of the 1790s and the Napoleonic Wars (1803–1815). According to church historians Drummond and Bulloch, once-curious Scottish onlookers gradually 'saw that "the revolution" meant anarchy in government and atheism in religion;

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[242] Moncure Daniel Conway, *Autobiography, Memories and Experiences of Moncure Daniel Conway.* (London: Cassell, 1904), 322. Cited in Rowell, *Hell and the Victorians*, 2.
[243] David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2003), 15.
[244] Bebbington, 82.
[245] Rowell, *Hell and the Victorians*, 12.
[246] Richard Tames, *Economy and Society in 19th Century Britain* (London and New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2013), 97.
[247] Eric J. Evans, *The Forging of Modern State: Early Industrial Britain* (Edinburgh: Pearson Education Limited, 2001), 197.

they abhorred the one and had second thoughts about the other.'[248] In the social imaginary of those in power, practiced religion was increasingly understood as inseparable from moral and political order. The experiment in Enlightenment rationalism had failed; what was needed was a renewed religious sensibility.[249] Antinomianism—the doctrine that holds that God's dispensation of grace frees Christians from the need for or obligation to the law—therefore became an especially sensitive area.[250] In fact, Hill writes that life was increasingly seen as an 'arena of moral trial'—'an ethical obstacle course on which men are tempted, tested, and ultimately sorted into saints and sinners in readiness for the Day of Judgement'.[251] While faith in and gratitude for Christ's substitution on the cross might be fostered—and even a sense of God's mercy—the uncompromising overtones of retributive justice, wrath, and punishment were unmistakeable.

Erskine abhorred this vision of God. Significantly, he writes to Scott, 'what an immense change would be made in the conscious personal religion of men, as well as in their theology, by understanding that they were made to be educated, not to be tried; and therefore that trial is in order to education, not education in order to trial.'[252] The emphasis on education is important here. Education is a *formative* process. At its best, it involves the growth and development of a person's heart, mind, and spirit. Crucially, it is a process that necessarily involves personal commitment on the part of both teacher and student if learning is to occur. Such commitment is impossible without trust.

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[248] Drummond and Bulloch, *Scottish Church*, 149.

[249] Drummond and Bulloch, 149. In practice, this sensibility was still very much built on the foundations of eighteenth-century natural theology. See Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1795-1865* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 8.

[250] F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, eds., "Antinomianism," in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780192802903.001.0001/acref-9780192802903-e-354.

[251] Hilton, *Age of Atonement*, 6.

[252] Thomas Erskine, "302. To the Rev. Alex. J. Scott. 11th Feb. 1864," in *Letters of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen: From 1840 till 1870*, ed. William Hanna (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1877), 146–47.

In this broader historical and epistemic context, Erskine's polemical stress upon individuals' personal appropriation of theological truths—and the longing to cultivate hermeneutic spaces conductive to such yielding—is much more understandable. As Needham notes, there *is* a significant psychological dimension within Erskine's schema, which can be misleading when it is polemically foregrounded and the enlightening and regenerative work of the Holy Spirit backgrounded. Backgrounds, of course, are not without their place: if 'all the world's a stage,' the Holy Spirit provides the setting and context that makes actors' activities coherent.[253] Still, this image is insufficient to comprehend the dynamism, agency, and equipping power of the Spirit. In this sense, it is better to stress—perhaps more strongly than Erskine himself did—that progressing from knowledge *about* God to personal appropriation to *knowing* God is first and fundamentally the mysterious and gracious work of a God who desires to let himself be known. Insofar as theological learning participates within the economy of salvation, it is always enabled by and co-operative with the essential work of the Spirit. Perhaps, to adapt the lyrics of a popular Phil Spector song, Erskine's scheme is somewhat naïve in suggesting that 'to know Him is to love Him.'

On the other hand, there is something deeply *right* about Erskine's recognition that core relationships *do* frame fundamental loves and ways of attending to (and intending) the world—an argument that I will make in more detail in the next chapter. Nowhere should that be truer than being-in-relationship with God, but there are many potential stumbling blocks along the way. Not least of these stumbling blocks is a person's image of God—and here, theological learning can be a channel through which the Holy Spirit works to draw persons ever nearer to God. Needham criticises Erskine for having an overly deterministic

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[253] William Shakespeare, *As You Like It, A Comedy*, ed. J. P. Kemble (London: S. Gosnel, 1810), 34.

or mechanistic view of this dimension (i.e., that Erskine reduces conversion to a mere 'human emotional mechanism'), but such a critique is difficult to sustain within the overarching emphasis in Erskine's schema on being-in-relationship with God, of being formed in and by the holy love of God. If there is a weakness in Erskine's doctrine, perhaps it is his failure to account for the other matters that compete for our affections and shape our fundamental loves.

Certainly, Needham's criticism underappreciates the virtues of Erskine's emphasis upon *God's* redemptive agency in Christ and through the Spirit. While Christ's atonement is significant in terms of manifesting the character of God, it also represents an ontological reconstitution of humanity in Christ. These two dimensions must be held together to avoid unfounded confidence on the one hand, and mechanistic understandings of Christ's atonement and its implications on the other. Erskine walks a fine line here—a line that his polemic might lead the less conscientious to cross. Candlish's earlier caution here is warranted.

For all that though, Erskine's 'at·one·ment schema' (and the theological epistemology he articulates alongside it) still have much to offer to contemporary discussions about how theological education might be, or should be, oriented. First, his schematisation of the relationship between *knowing* God and knowing *about* God provides a framework for rearticulating the two poles (or pulls) involved in theological knowing that together comprise *theologia* in Farley's scheme: the personal and relational knowledge of God, and the disciplined activity of theological studies. Erskine's schema illustrates how knowing *about* God might chronologically proceed *knowing* God. It also shows how knowledge *about* God obtains more expansive objects, modes, and meanings in light of being-in-relationship with God (or of, *knowing* God). In this sense, Erskine can contribute to a recovery of *theologia*. Second, Erskine's schema also helps better foreground the

significance of tacit and relational modes of knowing that are often underappreciated in modern forms of theological studies.

Indeed, such appreciation for the theological value of relational modes of knowing might help account for Erskine's conspicuous silence in the last thirty years of his life. This is certainly the view of Hart, who argues that 'Erskine felt that much more was to be gained by persuading individual minds of the truth of his own interpretation of Christianity, than by disseminating these views abroad in popular format' as he had in his earlier years.[254] Yet, William Hanna, Erskine's biographer, comments that if

> in consequence of his retirement into private life and abstinence from authorship [in the latter three decades of his life], the sphere of his influence in one way became narrower, in another it became at once wider and deeper […] A far more varied sphere of intercourse and correspondence opened up to him, especially with some remarkable men of the highest literary ability.[255]

In the next chapter then, I will consider more closely the theological import of Erskine's relational poetics and practices, particularly through the metaphor of God as friend.

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[254] Hart, *Teaching Father*, 13.
[255] Hanna, *Letters of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen: From 1840 till 1870*, ed. William Hanna (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1877), 2.

Chapter 3: 'The Root of All Other Friendships': Mapping Divine and Human Friendship in Erskine's Thought and Practice

i) Back to the Bedside: The Appeal of Friendship
ii) The place of the Poetic in (Theological) Learning
iii) Polanyi's Framework of Tacit Knowledge
iv) Mapping Landscapes of Human Friendship
v) The Metaphor of God as Friend

> *Let us cultivate that only friendship which we can cultivate here,*
> *a friendship with that Friend who sticketh closer than any created friend,*
> *even with Him who loved us and gave Himself for us…*
> *Ay, this is the friendship that is worth having,*
> *and it is the root of all other friendships.*

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Erskine, letter dated 1826[256]

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i) Back to the Bedside: The Appeal of Friendship

In the beginning of this dissertation, I opened with a simple story of Erskine attending the bedside of a farmer close to death to elucidate the complicated and underexplored dynamic between personal relationship and theological learning. Not only did the budding friendship between the two men provide the contextual bedrock for pursuing theological matters in the personal mode explored in the last chapter, but their relationship itself became a metaphor for the character of being-in-relationship with God. Through this metaphor and indwelling the realities it consolidates, the ontological aspect of the farmer's being-in-relationship with God was transformed: in his final days, his being in the world was reordered as he began 'confiding' his life to God. While he had known *about* God (or thought he did) before, in the last days he came to *know* God. Both Erskine's poetics and practices of friendship comprise an underdeveloped but significant element of his theological endeavours, especially influencing how he conceptualises being-in-

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[256] Thomas Erskine, "31. To Miss C. Erskine. 2 April 1826," in *Letters of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen: From 1800 till 1840*, ed. William Hanna (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1877), 72.

relationship with God and the impact such being-in-relationship has upon who and what a person loves. For Erskine, at·one·ment with the God of holy love is the fruit of abiding in Christ through the Spirit. Being-in-relationship is another way to talk about that abiding, one that highlights the reality-defining character of that personal relationship. But friendship is another way of communicating about being-in-relationship with God, one that has both values and limitations because of its metaphorical nature. In this chapter, I argue the fluid interplay of poetics and practices of friendship represented in Erskine's theological writings and his cultivation of convivial communities of learning (1) enable Erskine to communicate the character of at·one·ment with God; and (2) help expand the horizons of theological learning by suggesting new objects, modes, and meanings for its activities.

Metaphor (or the poetic image) holds a contested place within theological studies today, in part because of the impact that positivism has had on our very linguistic categories and how we conceptualise knowledge more broadly. To understand the poetic image of friendship in Erskine, we need to reconsider what is meant by a poetic image. In the first section, therefore, I will trace some of the reasons for the loss of metaphoric language in forms of (theological) knowing and some ways that metaphor can be helpful in framing our theological ideas and activities. As the deathbed story reveals, integral to the image of God as friend is a sense of both likeness and unlikeness ('I am glad you trust me. Yet I assure you that you can trust God even more, for God is not only the wonderful destination of your journey but also your companion along the way'). Mirroring this dynamic, the second section outlines the horizons of human friendship, insofar as Erskine understood it, through a close analysis of his own practices of friendship: particularly, the composition of his friendships, their bonds, and the roles and expectations that informed their shape and character. Understanding these terms of reference prepares the way for the

final section, which explores how Erskine's metaphor of God as friend helps to reframe the objects, modes, and meanings of theological learning.

ii) The Place of the Poetic in (Theological) Learning

Certain things stand out to the modern reader of Erskine's corpus. From a theological point-of-view, one of the most striking things may be how frequently (and nonchalantly) he uses poetic images. For some commentators, this comfort with the poetic has proved frustrating.[257] Erskine was certainly not a systematic theologian in the modern sense of the world. He never attempted an organised, self-consistent presentation of *about* God's nature, attributes, and ongoing relation to the universe. Instead, his published work is more topical or thematic: exploring the nature of divine and human will, the need for assurance, or the significance of Christianity for the pressing questions of the day.[258] Nonetheless, his theological understanding, practice, and devotion *was* profoundly 'systematic' in a different sense. Like Scott, for Erskine the whole of life—thought, word, and deed—is unified and coherent because it is rooted in the living, triune God. Both in his essence and in his creative acts, God is consistent and coherent. As the root and author of creation, he is the living principle which not only makes possible creation's ordering but also its redemption.[259]

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[257] Donald Winslow, for example, criticises the 'highly intuitive, often fanciful, and engagingly metaphorical' images that 'Erskine employed to represent his views.' Winslow, *Advocate*, 87.

[258] The titles of Erskine works are indicative. Amongst Erskine's writings are *Remarks on the Internal Evidence for the Truth of Revealed Religion* (1820), *Unconditional Freeness of the Gospel* (1828), *The Brazen Serpent, or Life Coming Through Death* (1831), and *The Doctrine of Election* (1837) and others.

[259] From Erskine, see especially the use of root imagery in Erskine, "Difficulties as to the Freedom of the Gospel"; Erskine, *The Brazen Serpent; or, Life Coming Through Death*, 4–7. From Scott, see especially the author's language in Alexander John Scott, "Lecture I. The Kingdom of Christ," in *The Social Systems of the Present Day, Compared with Christianity (Two Lectures Delivered in Chadwell Street Chapel, Pentonville, 1841)*, Discourses (London and Cambridge: MacMillan & Co., 1866), 59–97.; see also, Scott, "Divine Will" and Scott, "On Revelation (1837)."

Reading Erskine's corpus, as I noted in the last chapter, he evidences a dual purpose. He uses theological discourses and his personal correspondence to teach others *about* the significance of God's nature and relation to creation. However, he also attempts to remove the false theological barriers and distortions that drive a person into spiritual wilderness *in order that* he or she might become acquainted with God. It is important to get this straight. Whatever transformation notional or doctrinal reformation his writings might encourage, Erskine believes it pales in comparison to the transforming character of personal relationship with the living God. As Erskine says, 'the doctrines of Christianity are necessary as the declarations of the character of the omniscient Creator; but without the sense of His living reality there can be no religion, and Christianity becomes a mere set of notions.'[260] Without the presence of God guiding the way, Erskine believes humans will inevitably stray into theological, cultural, or spiritual wildernesses.

By attending so carefully to *how* Erskine communicates about God in their published works as I do, it would be easy to interpret his theological endeavours as primarily a conceptual exercise. What really matters, then, is what a person *thinks or believes* about God and God's relationship to the world. But to pursue right thinking apart from right relationship is putting 'second things first,' and it would have provoked the Laird of Linlathen's ire. Of course, as I noted last chapter, personal relationship with God does not replace intellectual work either. To appreciate the breadth and depth of God's revelation requires all of a person's faculties, and that all these faculties are calibrated through continual, living relationship with God. To appraise Erskine's theological contributions appropriately, the modes of knowing *from* which he pointed *to* God (and relationship with

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[260] Thomas Erskine, *The Unconditional Freeness of the Gospel*, 2016th ed. (Pickerington, Ohio: Beloved Publishing, 2016).

him) demand careful attention. Poetic modes of knowing, such as metaphor, are pivotal in his theological prose.

Trevor Hart represents metaphors as peculiar modes of address 'designed to indicate some level of similitude apprehended in a relation characterised otherwise by non-identity and dissimilarity between two things or circumstances.'[261] By organising (or re-organising) how one phenomenon is conceived or experienced in terms of another phenomenon, successful metaphors facilitate an event of revelation. Although I will commend the virtues of metaphor as a mode of knowing especially well-fitted to studying the living, triune God in the next section, it is a contested position. Theologians still dispute the place of the poetic in theological discourse, in part because the ideals of scientific rationalism and positivism have so permeated its practices and so shaped how it conceives its activities. Because appreciating the theological import of metaphor affects how we appraise the theological import of Erskine's poetics and practices of friendship, it is important to account for the loss of metaphorical forms of (theological) knowing.

Between Erskine's time and our own, there has been a significant shift in the social imaginary about what constitutes 'real knowledge,' and the modes of knowing are appropriate to it. Metaphor's dissipation from all 'serious' Western intellectual endeavours has been spurred onward by a diffuse, cultural phenomenon which I will call 'scientific rationalism'. An epistemic paradigm, scientific rationalism is a set of beliefs, values, and practices clustered around a core (if implicit) belief: in Charles Taylor's words, that 'natural science is not just one road to truth, but is the paradigm of all roads.'[262] In the scientific rationalist paradigm, scientific modes of knowing exist in contradistinction to personal and

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[261] Hart, *Between the Image*, 21.
[262] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: The Belnap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 556.

poetic modes of knowing, with the former prized the only *real* way of gaining epistemic access to reality.

As I will demonstrate, dislocating and minimising personal and poetic modes of knowing greatly alters the character and prospect of theological study, even casting doubt upon its viability as a discipline. Although scientific rationalism continues to shape the social imaginary, closer inspection reveals its deficiencies as a coherent, epistemological framework. Even in its paradigmatic field of natural science and mathematics, it encounters major difficulties. Second, then, I will demonstrate metaphor's inextricable role not just in communication *about* scientific ideas and principles, but also in the discovery and ongoing elucidation of these ideas and principles. If metaphor is found to be essential in the discipline most idealised for being emancipated from the poetic, then perhaps the use of metaphor needs to be reappraised (and if appropriate, recovered) in other areas of study as well. Third, then, I will suggest an appropriate understanding of metaphor is actually a *more* fitting mode of knowing for God (with more safeguards) than other linguistic paradigm. With this preliminary groundwork covered, then, we may turn to evaluate Erskine's metaphor of God as friend.

The Influence of Scientific Rationalism

Despite being integral to human thought and practice, metaphor's role in *theological endeavours* is often overlooked. This range of responses can undoubtedly be attributed to several factors within and outside the field. However, one significant and overarching issue is the permeation of 'scientific rationalism' into the modern social imaginary generally, and into the theological discipline specifically. According to Charles Taylor, the belief that 'natural science is not just one road to truth, but is the paradigm of all roads' is the

dominant (if implicit) epistemological stance in the Western world.[263] This belief is the core

assumption of scientific rationalism. Like other kinds of rationalism, scientific rationalists

maintain that only particular beliefs are 'rational' or reasonable.[264] These 'rational' beliefs

include specific positions about what constitutes reality (ontology), what can be known

(epistemology), and how one therefore should engage in the world (ethics).

On one hand, what is most 'real' to the scientific rationalist is whatever is accessible

to—and whatever is revealed by—empirical observation, positivistic methods, and

technological application.[265] Whatever can be defined, counted, measured, controlled, and

repeated has higher ontological status than whatever cannot.[266] Because as Taylor notes

'truth is confirmed by instrumental efficacy,' pursuing knowledge requires ever-increasing

technical and methodological precision.[267] Here, austere, impersonal reason is prized for

safeguarding 'factual observation' against the compromising prejudices and historical-

cultural realities of embodied observers.[268] On the other hand, what is most 'real' to the

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[263] Taylor, 556.

[264] For more on these three kinds of rationalism, see Chapter 1 of Colin Gunton, *The Actuality of the Atonement* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), 1–25.

[265] Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York & London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1977). Here, I agree with Heidegger that modern science and technology are not only mutually dependent, but that the latter in a fundamental sense *precedes* the former in framing not only how the world discloses itself to the scientist but also how the scientist herself attends to the world. Technical rationality, therefore, is significant in scientific rationalism as I understand it.

[266] Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilization* (London: Routledge & Sons, 1934), 46–47. Mumford's classic threefold characterisation of the physical sciences' method is still apt today. These include: 'First: the elimination of qualities, and the reduction of the complex to the simple by paying attention only to those aspects of events which could be weighed, measured, or counted, and to the particular kind of space-time sequence that could be controlled and repeated – or, as in astronomy, whose repetition could be predicted. Second: concentration upon the outer world, and the elimination or neutralization of the observer as respects the data with which he works. Third, isolation: limitation of the field: specialization of interest and subdivision of labor. In short, what the physical sciences call the world is not the total object of common human experience: it is just those aspects of this experience that lend themselves to accurate factual observation and to generalized statements.'

As Craig Gay observes, 'Technical rationality can only approach such questions by means of concepts like feasibility, effectiveness, and/or efficiency. But these concepts miss the whole point of the question; for what if the goodness of certain practices—say, of motherhood or friendship—turns out to have very little to do with efficiency or effectiveness understood technically? And if technical rationality has difficulty evaluating specific practices, it has even more trouble trying to make sense of life as a whole.' Gay, *(Modern) World*, 106.

[267] Taylor, *Secular Age*, 113.

[268] Taylor, 566.

scientific rationalist is whatever is universal, i.e., whatever is independent of the individual's personal commitment (impersonal), subjectivity (objective), body (abstracted, disembodied), or the vagaries of time and tide (eternal).

In this paradigm, language acts like a sieve: it filters specific and accurate observation down into generalised statements, laws, and abstracted patterns that can be cognised and manipulated. To represent the world accurately—and ideally, unequivocally— words must operate as instruments that 'comprehend' (or encompass) an aspect of reality. Words dismantle, fix, and re-present the world. In the Western intellectual tradition, Jüngel contends that the dominant paradigm of truth has conceived of truth 'as the correspondence of the judgments of the mind (*intellectus*) with actuality (*res*), as *adaequatio intellectus et rei* (correspondence of the human mind to the thing).'[269] To achieve such a correspondence, precision of language is essential. Ironically, for an intellectual framework that prides itself on attending to the world 'out there', the mind remains the critical terminus.[270]

In fact, for all the pretense of eliminating or neutralising observers, scientific rationalism is remarkably anthropocentric. As Trigg observes, 'it begins with the experience of individuals' and 'what is beyond the reach of human beings can be safely dismissed.'[271] The ideals of disengaged, 'scientific' reason are nevertheless burgeoning in the social (and academic) imaginary.[272] It is not simply important schools within philosophy or theology

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[269] Eberhard Jüngel, "Metaphorical Truth: Reflections on Theological Metaphor as a Contribution to a Hermeneutics of Narrative Theology," in *Theological Essays*, trans. John B. Webster (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1989), 17.

[270] Gay, *(Modern) World*, 101. On this subject, Gay writes, 'Perhaps the most telling indicator of the radically anthropocentric drift of modern technological self-understanding is the disconnection of language itself from nature. Language is no longer held to correspond to nature, but is instead believed to be constitutive of it…an increasing number of contemporary theorists suggest that we can actually change the nature of reality simply by speaking it differently. The emphasis upon the absolutely creative use of words has been extended to the point that it has all but shattered the connection between language and the world.'

[271] Roger Trigg, *Rationality & Science: Can Science Explain Everything?* (Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1993), 17.

[272] Taylor, *Secular Age*, 285.

that have responded by adopting principles of scientific rationalism. Rather, its principles have permeated approaches in everything from pedagogy, to funding and advancement, to academic writing, to the preoccupation with methodology across all disciplines. Much good has come from these changes: after all, human beings attend with greater care to the things that they can name and measure. The problem presents itself because scientific rationalism fails to acknowledge its appropriate limits.

There are two conceits associated with scientific rationalism. The first conceit is that 'scientific' modes of knowing are the *only real* way of gaining epistemic access to reality. This paradigm's perceived efficacy in the natural sciences has added to its perceived moral superiority ('capable of winnowing out the distortions of personal prejudice') creates pressure to extend its application further afield.[273] To confuse truth with the operations of scientific rationalism, however, is—as Triggs asserts—'to make the enormous metaphysical assumption that the reality to which sciences has access is the whole of reality.'[274] Often, 'poetic' modes of knowing are believed to exist in contradistinction to 'scientific' modes. Poetic modes operate through and play with the partial nature of our understanding; their playground is the perspectival, the meaning inherent in a word or image, the urgency of the image, the 'bringing-forth' of reality through the imagination. The language of 'play' is intentional here. In the intellectual paradigm of scientific rationalism, play lacks work's respectability. It is superfluous to the 'real business' of life; it exists in a separate sphere from it. The second conceit of scientific rationalism has three parts: (1) that scientific modes of knowing are polarised from personal and poetic modes of knowing, (2) that each

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[273] Trigg, *Rationality & Science*, 60.
[274] Trigg, 60.

obtain to their own distinctive epistemic sphere, and (3) that these modes and spheres are hierarchically ordered, such that the scientific is to be esteemed above the poetic.[275]

Metaphor in Science

Despite idealised pictures of 'scientific' modes of knowing seeming indefatigable in the social imaginary, it is doubtful whether it is true to the actual practice of science—or whether scientific rationalism is viable as an intellectual paradigm at all. More recent sociological and historical research suggests that the development of natural and human science is inextricably bound up with the use of poetic modes of knowing such as metaphor and analogy. Al-Zahrani's work on Darwin, for instance, reveals that the choice of the metaphor of 'natural selection' was not the 'higgledly-piggledy' affair criticised by Herschel and repudiated by Wallace.[276] Rather, Al-Zahrani argues that natural selection is an example of what Boyd calls a theory-constitutive metaphor. According to Boyd, theory-constitutive metaphors are acts of linguistic catachresis 'used to introduce theoretical terminology where none previously existed'[277] and 'accomplish the task of accommodation of language to the causal structures of the world.'[278] Defending his choice of the term, Darwin attributes the rapid comprehension of his theory and its successful uptake to people being able to 'group & understand many scattered facts' through metaphor.[279] Examples of poetic modes of knowing being used in science to reimagine and

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[275] I call these principles of scientific rationalism 'conceits', because a closer look at the history of science and developments in epistemology and neuroscience reveal that the polarisation of scientific and poetic modes of knowing is only possible on the basis of a deficient epistemology: one which diminishes and devalues acts of poesis and imagination.

[276] Abdulsalam Al-Zahrani, "Darwin's Metaphors Revisited: Conceptual Metaphors, Conceptual Blends, and Idealized Cognitive Models in the Theory of Evolution," *Metaphor and Symbol* 23, no. 1 (December 25, 2007): 55, https://doi.org/10.1080/10926480701723607.

[277] Richard Boyd, "Metaphor and Theory Change: What Is 'Metaphor' a Metaphor For?," in *Metaphor and Thought*, ed. Andrew Ortony, 2d ed. (Cambridge, New York, & Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 482.

[278] Boyd, 483.

[279] Robert M. Young, "Darwin's Metaphor: Does Nature Select?," *The Monist* 55, no. 3 (July 1, 1971): 478, https://doi.org/10.5840/monist197155322. Cited in Al-Zahrani, "Darwin's Metaphors," 55.

communicate how the world works abound, but so too do examples of poetic modes precipitating scientific or mathematical discovery.[280] Imagination, in other words, is no stranger to science—and its favoured invitations are poetic modes of knowing such as metaphor and analogy.

Thus, the two conceits of scientific rationalism—i.e., that scientific modes of knowing are the only *real* way of gaining epistemic access to reality and that they operate separately from and superior to poetic modes of knowing—are just that: conceits. Even when we consider the natural sciences, the paragon of scientific rationalism, we find poetic modes of knowing are critical for gaining epistemic access to reality. They do not in opposition to or in isolation from scientific modes of knowing, but in conjunction with them: in theory development, in discovery, and in description and communication. Indeed, poetic modes may even *precede* and frame how their scientific counterparts (e.g., experimental design and formal analysis) are deployed.

Metaphor in Theology

The effects of minimising (or eliminating) personal and poetic modes of knowing are (or should be) felt even more strongly in theology than in science. Here, the loss of metaphorical forms of understanding calls into question theology's viability, challenging not only its *sources of revelation* but also the *theological process*. Sources of revelation such as prophecy, metaphor, myth, and parables as well as the lived experiences of particular individuals and nations—which are as important as or more important than precepts, laws, and abstract principles—are personal and poetic. Under the scientific rationalist paradigm,

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[280] For contemporary examples of metaphor in mathematics, see: Jean Paul Van Bendegem, "Analogy and Metaphor as Essential Tools for the Working Mathematician," in *Metaphor and Analogy in the Sciences*, Origins: Studies in the Sources of Scientific Creativity (Dordrecht: Springer Science & Business Media, 2013), vii, 244. See also Kepler, "Paralipomena," 92; Gérard Simon, "Analogies and Metaphors in Kepler," in *Metaphor and Analogy in the Sciences*, ed. Fernand Hallyn, Origins: Studies in the Sources of Scientific Creativity (Dordrecht: Springer Science & Business Media, 2000), 82.

the 'scandal of the incarnation' is truly scandalous. Not only is the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ unrepeatable and embedded in a particular time and place, but his teachings make full use of the poetic in addition to (if not in favour of) the precept. Time, too, takes on a different character with the 'already' and 'not yet' both being realities with which human beings must contend in ways not fully understood. None of these realities of revelation fit well within the scientific rationalism's paradigm. But scientific rationalism also challenges theological processes or methodologies of learning and discovery. Personal commitment and relationship (discipleship), enacted parables and lived theology, and metaphors and stories that are embedded historically and culturally are inherently problematic in an intellectual paradigm that venerates the impersonal, objective, abstract, and eternal. Under a scientific rationalist paradigm, unless poetic modes of knowing such as metaphors, myths, parables, etc. cease to be what they are—that is, unless their significance is spelled out in more straightforward or 'literal' language—they cannot be true or meaningful (i.e., useful).

In theology, one way in which the scientific rationalist paradigm manifests itself is in the tacit assumption that no subject deserves more specificity and precision of language than language about God. One must be almost 'scientific' in one's language to avoid overreaching inevitable and appropriate epistemic limits. In other words, one must embody the ideals of precision, comprehensive or thoroughness, and methodological rigour inspired by (and most pre-emptively demonstrated in) the natural sciences. Poetic modes of knowing, such as metaphor, are partial and particular, imagistic and imprecise, and therefore ill-equipped to serve purpose. To use metaphor in theological endeavours is to compromise on truth. As Gunton observes, under this (mis)understanding of metaphor,

'unless it ceases to be metaphor, it cannot tell the truth.'[281] A closer inspection of metaphor—as one poetic mode of revelation central in biblical teaching—provides a window both into the deficiencies of scientific rationalism as well as a much richer, critical epistemological framework: one in which 'poetic' and 'scientific' find their appropriate role and are inextricable from revealing—and encountering—the God pre-eminently revealed in the person of Jesus Christ.

Chief among metaphor's characteristics is that metaphor is *indirect*. While Cohen writes that 'indirectness is not alone sufficient to distinguish metaphors from other non-standard uses of language,' it is nevertheless is the most commonly recognized characteristic of metaphor.[282] Etymologically, metaphor entails 'a "carrying across" or transference from one point to another.'[283] Implicit in this conception is the idea of a *gap* that must be bridged. More so than other linguistic operations, with metaphor, the listener is conscious of being confronted with a gap—whether that gap is ontological, conceptual, experiential, linguistic, or a combination thereof. According to Ricoeur, the transition from orientation to disorientation is necessary in order for a third to follow: reorientation.[284] When a speaker introduces a novel metaphor, McFague contends that 'within the *continuity* of primary and secondary language there must be genuine *separation*, for the purpose of the secondary language is *interpretation* in order to return us to the *event* that primary language seeks to express.'[285] The gap that interrupts normal course of thought, creating new space for something to be reframed or revealed. Navigating metaphor's orientation-disorientation-reorientation dynamic calls for more personal commitment from

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[281] Gunton, *Actuality*, 30.

[282] Ted Cohen, "Metaphor," in *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics*, ed. Jerrold Levinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, September 2, 2009), https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199279456.003.0020.

[283] John T. Kirby, "Aristotle on Metaphor," *The American Journal of Philology* 118, no. 4 (1997): 532.

[284] Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: The Creation of Meaning in Language*, trans. Robert Czerny, Kathleen McLaughlin, and John Costello (London & New York: Routledge, 2003).

[285] Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (London: SCM Press, 1983), 119.

listeners than other linguistic forms; as Polanyi notes, metaphor addresses hearers and asks

them to bring 'all those inchoate experiences in our own lives that are related to the two

parts of a metaphor' to bear upon their understanding.[286] Because of these qualities,

metaphors are particularly excellent *heuristic* aids, or modes of addressing a listener such

that she is enabled to discover or learn something for herself.[287] Because metaphor is

indirect, those who use metaphors must be even more attentive to their listener's social

imaginary and the contextual concomitants surrounding the metaphor, for it will be from

these wellsprings that she will draw to discover new patterns of meaning. Metaphors are

accordingly exercises in empathy.

Far from being suspect, this indirectness or obliqueness is advantageous in

theological contexts in three important ways. First, metaphors can provide an interruption.

Metaphors are the semicolons of language: even as semicolons join together related but

independent clauses, they commend a pause before proceeding from one to the other.

Theological metaphor can likewise give us pause to recollect the due reverence with which

we dare to speak of the things of God; and to remember that God's thoughts are not our

thoughts, nor are his ways our ways.[288] Other linguistic modes lack the invitation to

humility occasioned by metaphor's indirectness—especially, as we have seen, when

underwritten by a scientific rationalist paradigm, where meanings can quickly become

overdetermined. Second, metaphors are advantageous modes of knowing in theological

learning because they are *already* constituted—better than many other kinds of direct

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[286] Micheal Polanyi and Harry Prosch, *Meaning* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 79.

[287] For this same reason, metaphors (or poetic images) bring the pleasure of discovery. To adapt T. S. Eliot, they are means of exploring 'and at the end of all our exploring' they help us 'to arrive where we started / and know the place for the first time.' T. S. Eliot, "Four Quartets – Extract," in *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (Online: Faber, 1974), https://poetryarchive.org/poem/four-quartets-extract/.

[288] Isaiah 55:8.

speech—to help navigate significant ontological, conceptual, experiential, and linguistic gaps.

In the theological sphere, Trevor Hart—an Erskine scholar and a theologian in his own right—offers particularly helpful insights into the poetic image's power to transform theological understanding. He suggests such power consists in its capacity to facilitate a 'mysterious and fluid interplay' between two images or concepts without assimilating or subsuming one into another.[289] Within the poetic image or metaphor, there is both a statement of affirmation and simultaneously a whispered negation which may be more or less audible depending on how different the two terms are. McFague's paraphrase of Ricoeur, 'it is, *and it is not!*' classically depicts this dynamic.[290] So long as this tension remains unresolved, Hart observes 'the juxtapositions of like and unlike transform our understanding of all terms in the relationship.'[291] There are two implications of Hart's argument. First, poetic images—insofar as they do maintain both likeness and unlikeness—offer a possible way of communicating about (and potentially to) God, without entirely subsuming God's divine otherness within human categories. Second, as Hart writes, poetic images have the power 'to transform and renew the vulgate, [by] the breaking open of our terms on the rock of divine otherness [and] compelling constant reconsideration and re-evaluation of their familiar meanings.'[292] Because Polanyi's framework of 'person knowledge' clarifies both these *movements of metaphor* and the *continuity of this movement* with the inherent structures of tacit knowing, his work helps to clarify the dynamics between Erskine's poetics and practices of friendship—that is, how the use of metaphor helps expand our relation to being. It is therefore worth taking the time for a brief excursus into

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[289] Hart, *Between the Image*, 25. Ricoeur, *Rule of Metaphor*, 224.
[290] McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, 13. Ricoeur, *Rule of Metaphor*, 224.
[291] Hart, *Between the Image*, 25.
[292] Hart, 25.

his epistemological framework before considering Erskine's specific understanding of the horizons of human friendship.

iii) Polanyi's Framework of Tacit Knowledge

As Polanyi articulates in his epistemological work on personal knowledge, any attempts to articulate explicitly the particulars of our knowledge and their relationship always leave unspecified a residue of tacit (or implicit) knowledge. Polanyi's epistemological insights are helpful in articulate the need and value of the kinds of tacit and relational knowledge so intrinsic to Erskine's theological endeavours, both in terms of the horizons of theological learning in general but also the tacit-experiential dimension of relational metaphors in particular.[293] He helps bridge the conceptual and experiential dimensions of our knowing, enabling us to understand the value of Erskine's emphasis on tacit and relational knowledge—and the vital importance of appreciating its vital role in the process of theological learning.

In *The Tacit Dimension* (1966) and *Knowing and Being* (1969)*,* Polanyi outlines two kinds of awareness involved in the process of learning. He argues that both kinds of awareness are essential to comprehensive knowledge; however, each entails a different mode of personal commitment from the would-be knower and has a particular directionality in which it relates particulars and wholes. To comprehend these two kinds of knowledge, it is useful to have an illustration. In *Truckers*, a children's novel by Terry Pratchett, there is a humorous story relating to driving that relies upon the distinction that Polanyi develops.[294] In the story, readers meet a dwindling tribe of gnomes with plans to

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[293] It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to give a full representation of the logic of Polanyi's framework of personal knowledge. For more, see Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*; Michael Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966); Michael Polanyi, "The Logic of Tacit Inference (1864)," in *Knowing and Being* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 138–58.
[294] Polanyi, "The Logic of Tacit Inference (1864)," 144.

relocate from a soon-to-be-demolished box store, their home for generations. They decide to steal a lorry from the dock; to that end, they locate a copy of 'The High Way Code' in the shop's bookstore. Its cover professes that its contents will teach you 'all you need to know to drive.'[295] Having diligently read through the book—learning the meaning of unfamiliar words as they go—the gnomes prepare to leave their home. Despite earlier confidence that the codebook would be their comprehensive resource, as the moment of their departure approaches their intrepid leader Masklin begins to express some private doubts that the book will provide all they need to know. 'Somehow I get the feeling that it might not be as simple as that,' he foresees.[296]

Many adventures and near accidents ensue as the characters come to grips with the complex realities of driving—realities, as they soon realise, that involve much more involved integrations of information, skills, and bodily coordination than their selected manual indicated. It is an absurd example, but it illustrates the two kinds of awareness that Polanyi seeks to do justice to within his epistemological system: both explicit articulations of knowledge (The High Way Code) and the tacit knowing that emerges from 'indwelling' the particulars (the awareness of other vehicles, road conditions, speed, etc. that subconsciously are integrated into the comprehensive act of driving). For Polanyi, examples such as driving a vehicle illustrate two principles: first, that we can *know* how to do some practice without necessarily knowing how to articulate it—or even necessarily *being able* to articulate it;[297] and second, and relatedly, 'we can know more than we can tell.'[298] That is even when we attempt to integrate the many particulars of our knowledge explicitly (e.g., when we teach another person how to shift gears), there is always a residue

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[295] Terry Pratchett, *Truckers* (London: Corgi Books, 2015), 170.
[296] Pratchett, 176.
[297] Polanyi, "The Logic of Tacit Inference (1864)," 140–41.140-141.
[298] Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension*, 4.

of implicit knowledge that remains unarticulated. According to Polanyi, 'specifiability remains incomplete in two ways. First, there is always a residue of particulars left unspecified; and second, even when particulars can be identified, isolation changes their appearance.'[299] To understand what he means, it is important to understand tacit knowledge's asymmetrical bidirectionality.

On the one hand, tacit knowing involves attending *from* the particulars (or we might say, *through* them) to the object or objective of our attention. In this direction, we are subsidiarily aware of these particulars insofar as they together point us to a comprehensive act or entity that integrates them and is the object of our focal awareness.[300] To return to the earlier example, the phenomenon of concentrating on getting to the grocery store (focal awareness) and wondering halfway there how we had the wherewithal to get as far as we have is the product of tacit integration of the data provided by our subsidiary awareness. During these acts of integration, Polanyi argues that we attend to the *joint meaning* of particulars, a fact that can impede the ability to articulate in explicit terms the particulars that together constitute the comprehensive act or entity (i.e., getting to the grocery story).[301] For example, we are aware of the car in front of us insofar as it determines the speed at which we may drive, but we might not recall its make or model. Not only do the particulars *appear* differently to us (their phenomenal aspect), but they also *mean* something different (their semantic aspect) to us through their integrated relation to the comprehensive act.

On the other hand, knowing can involve attending *from* a comprehensive entity or act *to* the particulars of which we would normally only be subsidiarily aware. Giving

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[299] Michael Polanyi, "Knowing and Being," in *Knowing and Being* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 125.

[300] Polanyi, "The Logic of Tacit Inference (1864)," 141.

[301] Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension*, 18.

directions to the grocery store to an out-of-town visitor is an example. It requires an explicit integration that orders and articulates the particular names or sights marking each stage of the journey. Here, the semantic aspect is different. For example, if we lose track of the number of lefts and rights, we might have to imagine making the journey ourselves ('indwelling') to find where we left off again.[302] For Polanyi, examples like this one—which involve indwelling the particulars to relocate their place or significance—illustrate the fact that the *meaning* of particulars properly derives from their joint relation to a comprehensive whole.

Polanyi argues that the movement of metaphor in language takes advantage of these fundamental structures of tacit knowing. Specifically, metaphors provide clues that facilitate tacit knowing by helping to organise the particulars of which we are subsidiarily aware. In the language of metaphor scholars Lakoff and Johnson, metaphors provide the *frame* that brings some object or phenomenon into *focus*. While metaphors can facilitate tacit integration, they can also disrupt it. When the 'unlikeness' between the two terms is significant enough, they disrupt the normal flow of thought. In this manner, metaphors *also* gesture us backwards: attending from the second term of metaphor (e.g., 'friend' in 'God as friend') to the particulars that might bear upon the joint meaning of the terms brought together through the metaphor (e.g., personal experiences of friendship, literary instantiations, etc.). This oscillation might happen almost immediately, or it might require some more conscious effort ('No, that's not quite right yet'). When these particulars are reintegrated and the meaning of the metaphor does 'click,' both our language and our relation to being can be enriched.[303] The 'can' qualifier is significant. Language is full of

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[302] Polanyi notes that in fact there are two acts of indwelling involved in these kinds of interactions: in addition to the one giving directions, the one receiving direction also 'tries to correlate these moves by seeking to dwell in them from outside.' Polanyi, 30.

[303] Scholars debate the how metaphors *click*. Such considerations are beyond the scope of this dissertation.

dead metaphors (indeed, 'dead metaphor' *is itself* a dead metaphor!). But as scholars note, even dead metaphors can be revived when we attend more focally to the specific likenesses and unlikenesses of the terms that it seeks to unite.[304] Metaphor's ability both to communicate and to transform meaning and relations of being in this manner make it particularly useful in theological pursuits.

To reiterate, metaphors or poetic images, as Hart observes so poetically, have the power 'to transform and renew the vulgate, [by] the breaking open of our terms on the rock of divine otherness [and] compelling constant reconsideration and re-evaluation of their familiar meanings.'[305] To do justice to theological significance of the fluid interplay between Erskine's poetics and practices of friendship, then, begins with understanding the 'familiar meanings' of friendship through his own practices. To be clear, in doing so, I am subscribing to Hart's affirmation that 'an account of religious and theological engagements cast in terms of the categories of the imaginative is entirely compatible with an appeal to the dynamics of revelation, having to do chiefly with the questions about the forms our knowing takes and must take, and not its ultimate source or epistemic warrant.[306] That ultimate source is God alone—and partly in this sense, Erskine calls friendship with God '*the root of all other friendships.*'

iv) Mapping Landscapes of Human Friendship

Although Erskine played an integral role in cultivating a web of friendships linking nineteenth-century men and women across the political and theological spectrum in Britain

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[304] The acknowledgements section of this dissertation illustrate something of this dynamic, insofar as I take a familiar metaphor (a large task as a mountain to be climbed) and glean new meanings and further metaphors for recognising and communicating the experience of being a doctoral student (e.g., the back-and-forth dynamic of intellectual pursuits, the unique burdens that students carry throughout their course of studies, etc.).

[305] Hart, *Between the Image*, 25.

[306] Hart, 41.

and the Continent, few have mapped out the significance of friendship in how he

articulates his theological beliefs. Hart, and to a lesser extent Horrocks, focus primarily on

the nature and significance of the presence of images of fatherhood and brotherhood in

Erskine's work—a reasonable emphasis given that these images figure so much more

prominently in his theological discourses.[307] Although her primary focus is not Erskine,

Jeffrey Johnson helpfully explores the relationship between both Erskine's and Scott's

broader relational theology and relational practice, as she assesses their influence on

nineteenth-century novelist George MacDonald.[308] Focusing on friendship more narrowly,

Winslow identifies 'God's enduring friendship for the whole of human race [as] a central

and abiding theme in Erskine's thought.' Erskine, he writes, consciously emphasized God's

friendship to mitigate unhelpful neuroses he perceived to be fostered by more prominent

views of God as wrathful judge, whose 'favour needs to be earned, and whose salvific

mercy was limited to the elect.' However, Winslow does not develop this specific insight

further, focusing his attention on broader categories of character and personal knowledge

of God.[309] Specific appeals to meanings of 'friendship' within Erskine's writings are not

considered in any depth. Admittedly, familial images of fatherhood and brotherhood are

more common in both Erskine and Scott's writings. Yet, friendship is a comparatively

uncharted territory and deserves further exploration—both because it is an image to which

Erskine appeals on multiple occasions to articulate theological doctrines and because

understanding its theological significance may also yield insight into why cultivating

friendship was considered so important in his own life. Drawing from both his thought

and practice, therefore, this section endeavours to map the major contours of Erskine's

articulated and tacit understandings of 'friendship.'

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[307] Hart, *Teaching Father*, 19–22.
[308] Jeffrey Johnson, "Rooted in All Its Story," 55–59.
[309] Winslow, *Advocate*, 4.

Imagining how Erskine understood 'friendship' is no easy task for scholars today. Not only have class, racial and gender boundaries been remoulded, but technology and the realities of modern economy have refashioned patterns of everyday life and social availability.[310] Yet, if we are to appreciate the interplay of the poetic image of 'friend' in his theological endeavours, some comprehension of the unique shape and significance of the phenomenon of 'friendship' as he understood it is needed. Bringing together historical studies with close primary text analysis, therefore, this section adapts Michael Williams' five-levelled methodology to map the major contours of Erskine's articulated and tacit understandings of friendship, as revealed in his thought and practice.[311]

Who may be called a friend?

Erskine's correspondence suggests that whatever claiming a person as a friend entailed, it was not mutually exclusive with other claims of relationship (e.g., familial relationship). To his cousin Miss Rachel Erskine, he addresses his letters 'my own friend whom I love.'[312] Closer to home, Erskine describes his elder brother as 'the kindest of friends and brothers merely mortal.'[313] His beloved mentor, Dr. Charles Stuart, he remembers as 'a friend, and a father, and a guide.'[314] In this particular respect, the lay theologian harmonized with his surrounding culture. Brodie and Caine, for instance,

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[310] To take just one example, most people in the modern Western world no longer engage in the regular—and ritualised—practices of visiting one another in each other's homes. Often, people are more likely to meet together at a café or public space, than to spend time together in each other's homes.

[311] Michael Williams, "The Dichotomy Between Faith and Action: Towards a Model for 'Doing Theology'," in *The Foundations of Pastoral Studies and Practical Theology*, by Paul Ballard (Cardiff: Board of Studies for Pastoral Studies, Faculty of Theology, University College, 1986), 49. With their associated questions, Williams' original levels of experiential interpretation are as follows: "(1) The metaphorical level – what basic metaphors and stories are being used? (2) The obligational level – what principles of obligation are being used? (3) The tendency/need level – what human needs operate? (4) The situational level – how is the context described? (5) The rule/role level – what rules/roles are being used in concrete action?"

[312] Thomas Erskine, "58. To Miss Rachel Erskine. 9 November 1828," in *Letters of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen: From 1800 till 1840*, ed. William Hanna (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1877), 146.

[313] Thomas Erskine, "Letter to Mrs. Burnett of Kemley. 2 September 1816," in *Letters of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen: From 1800 till 1840*, ed. William Hanna (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1877), 20.

[314] Thomas Erskine, "32. To Miss Stuart. 14 June 1826," in *Letters of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen: From 1800 till 1840*, ed. William Hanna (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1877), 73.

observe affection and companionship in familial relationships were idealized and familial language was used 'to designate the strength and intimacy of particularly close friendships.'[315] Vis-à-vis trends in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century fiction warning against friendships that transgressed class or religious boundaries, Erskine appears markedly more open.[316] Using his correspondence as an indication, Erskine formed relationships he described in terms of friendship across class borders,[317] gendered spheres,[318] national boundaries,[319] and religious affiliations.[320]

Given Erskine's keen interest in theological matters and the religious dogmatism of his day, one might expect confessional boundaries or common religious commitments to circumscribe his circle of friends. Certainly, Erskine enjoyed friendships with those who occupied similar positions along the theological spectrum. John MacLeod Campbell, A. J. Scott, and Alexandre Vinet are just three of many examples. Yet, anecdotal evidence shared by those intimately acquainted with Erskine suggests religious difference did not preclude a person from his circle of friends. The improbable rapport between Erskine and essayist and historian Thomas Carlyle provides one case study. Reflecting specifically upon the

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[315] Marc Brodie and Barbara Caine, "Class, Sex and Friendship: The Long Nineteenth Century," in *Friendship: A History*, ed. Barbara Caine (London & New York: Routledge, 2014), 223–24.Brodie and Caine, 223-4.

[316] Brodie and Caine, 236–37.

[317] Thomas Erskine, "225. To Mr. G. Galloway. June 1848," in *Letters of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen: From 1840 till 1870*, ed. William Hanna (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1877), 61.

[318] Besides corresponding with his sisters and female cousins, Erskine corresponded on multiple occasions with Madame de Broglie, Madame de Stael, Madame Vernet, Mrs. Russell Gurney, Mrs. Rich, Mrs. Scott, Lady Augusta, and Miss Julia Wedgwood.

[319] Cf. Arthur Stanley, Dean of Westminster (1864-1881) remarks that "in all the varying Scottish communions [Erskine] had those who counted his friendship one of their chief privileges; and not only there, and in the hearts of loving friends in England, but far away with Catholic Frenchmen in Normandy, and in the bright religious society in which he had dwelt in former days by the distant shores of Geneva, his memory was long cherished." Arthur Penrhyn Stanley, *Lectures on the History of the Church of Scotland, Delivered in Edinburgh in 1872* (London: J. Murray, 1872), 161.

[320] Cf. Erskine, "Letter from Mrs. Stirling to Mrs Burnett. 10 January 1850," 294–95, describing their circles: "We see Plymouth Brethren, Irvingites, Roman Catholics, Puseyites, and Evangelicals. We see much to admire and love in all, and much to weep over also."

Erskine-Carlyle friendship, Henry Montague Butler—then Master of Trinity College,

Cambridge—observes:

> There is, to my mind, a peculiar mystery, as well as a peculiar sacredness, in the friendships of two good men, one of whom is most profoundly and almost passionately Christian [i.e., Erskine], and the other either not a Christian at all, or, if so, far removed from some of the most commanding and what his friend would consider fundamental, fastnesses of the Christian creed [i.e., Carlyle].[321]

'Many of the holiest men of the last two centuries,' Butler continues, 'could hardly have

been intimate friends of Carlyle. Hardly William Wilberforce; certainly not William Cowper

or John Keble.'[322] Whether the Master's remarks bear a degree of rhetorical flourish or not,

it remains true that the religious doubter Carlyle found his heartfelt reception from Erskine

and Scott—revealed in both word and deed—incredible given their philosophical and

religious differences.[323] Marvelling about the two Scotsmen and their circle to his mother in

1838, Carlyle writes:

> The best class of all whom I have seen this year are the class of religious people; certain of whom very strangely have taken a kind of affection for me, in spite of my contradictions towards them! It teaches me again that the best of this class is the best one will find in any class whatsoever.[324]

To declare that the 'best of this class [i.e., religious people]' as 'the best one will find in any

class whatsoever' is rather a remarkable commendation coming from someone as vocally

suspicious of religion as Carlyle. His sense of their affection 'in spite of my contradictions

towards them' and the lifelong friendships that followed show that—at least for Erskine

and Scott—being-in-friendship did not preclude having discordant religious beliefs.

Because friends were not necessarily confessionally bound, the context of friendship might

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[321] Henry Montagu Butler, "Thomas Erskine of Linlathen," in *Ten Great and Good Men: Lectures* (London: Edward Arnold, 1909), 306, https://archive.org/details/tengreatgoodmenl00butluoft.

[322] Butler, 306.

[323] Jeffrey Johnson, "Rooted in All Its Story," 73–74. Based upon critical archival work, Jeffrey Johnson observes, "Carlyle marvelled that Scott and Erskine included him in their circles, invited him to join them on their European trips, and gave much time to helping him with his manuscripts."

[324] Thomas Carlyle, "To Margaret A. Carlyle, 30 March 1838," March 30, 1838, 10:52-57, Carlyle Letters Online, https://carlyleletters.dukeupress.edu.

even be an appropriate—even *the* appropriate—setting for engaging, rather than disengaging, with difference.

How are friends bound together?

Manifold are the bonds of friendship. Aristotle, for instance, classified friendship into three categories, depending on whether 'friends' were bound together by utility, pleasure, or virtue.[325] Although Erskine clearly considered many diverse people 'friends', it likewise does not necessarily follow that the term signified the same thing in all cases. Nevertheless, his writings indicate that certain bonds—even if manifested differently in different relationships—are commonly associated with being united together in a friendship relationship. The bond of affection, already demonstrated in Carlyle's case but redolant also in Erskine's letters, is one example. Mutual trust is another. Whereas trust in other kinds of interpersonal relationships might be granted based on external qualifications or biology, friends are ideally united by mutually and freely-given trust. As the case of the dying farmer demonstrates, cultivating mutual trust did not necessarily demand social or intellectual equality, or even equality of trust.[326] It did, however, take time and it required discerning—not just in words, but in deeds—another's true character and ultimate motivations. Thus, in *Remarks*, Erskine observes:

> When the history of a man's life is presented to us, we naturally theorize upon it; and, from a comparison of the different facts contained in it, we arrive at a conviction that a man is actuated by ambition, avarice, benevolence, or some other principle… In this manner we arrange the characters with which we are acquainted under certain classes.[327]

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[325] Even in the case of the farmer, where the duration of their "friendship" is so brief, Erskine does not immediately receive the farmer's trust. He must retreat and take the time to prove himself trustworthy. Cultivating trust is a matter of give-and-take.

[326] Trust is fostered in the give-and-take of relationship.

[327] Thomas Erskine, *Remarks on the Internal Evidence for the Truth of Revealed Religion: And an Essay on Faith* (Edinburgh: Waugh and Innes, 1821), 8.

Benevolence, revealed especially in their self-sacrifice for others, is particularly important in discerning another person's trustworthiness.[328] As such knowledge of the other deepens, so too grows the bond of trust—a bond which unites friends even when separated. Erskine claims, 'we anticipate the conduct of our friends when they come to be placed in certain circumstances.'[329] Furthermore, if another person offers an account that diverges 'considerably from or is directly opposed to that view [of our friend's character],' he asserts that 'we refuse our immediate belief, and wait for further evidence' that either reconciles their actions within the horizons of our understanding or further demands those horizons be revised.[330] Critically, therefore, in the context of friendship knowledge of and trust in the character of one's friends (especially their benevolence towards their friends) is one of the basic intentionalities orienting belief and behaviour.

Likely because Erskine believed such trust was best encouraged by sharing quality time in one another's company, he urged Mrs. Burnett to come to his estate Linlathen that his sisters might 'get acquainted with M. and C. Relations', he asserts, 'should cultivate each other's friendship, and meeting is essential for that.'[331] More generally, records suggest that Erskine and his sister Mrs. Stirling used Linlathen and their residence in Edinburgh to

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[328] In *Remarks*, for example, Erskine reaches for an anecdote from the history of Alexander the Great and his friend, the physician Philip of Acarnania. In the laird's retelling, the king's advisor Parmenio shares suspicions that Philip has been bribed by traitors to poison a restorative draught intended for the king. However, the king's 'conviction of his friend's integrity was…sufficient by itself to overcome the suspicions of Parmenio.' Drinking the draught, the king's health was restored and his trust vindicated. On its own, the story testifies to how belief and behaviour are oriented by trusting the benevolence of a friend. Erskine, however, pushes the example a step further by layering a hypothetical situation on the original story. Suppose that the king did in fact detect something noxious in his cup, i.e., some evidence existed which could support Parmenio's suspicions. Even in that case, Erskine reasons, '[the king's] confidence in his friend would have only led him to the conclusion, that this cup was not really prepared by him, but that some traitor, unobserved by him, had infused a poisonous ingredient in it.' Erskine, 150.

[329] Erskine, 8.

[330] Erskine, 9. Conversely, he reasons, 'If an intimate and judicious friend of Julius Caesar had retired to some distant corner of the world, before the commencement of the political career of that wonderful man, and had received an accurate history of every circumstance of his conduct…[the friend] would certainly have believed it' because it corresponded with his knowledge of Caesar's character and the objects of his ambition and of the ways suitable for accomplishing those particular objects. Erskine, 10.

[331] Thomas Erskine, "197. To Mrs Burnett, 1 October 1842," in *Letters of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen: From 1840 till 1870*, ed. William Hanna (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1877), 30.

bring together diverse acquaintances through shared hospitality, refuge, and dialogue. Amongst the guests, Principal of the United College (St Andrews) John Campbell Shairp recalls many people who 'could not sympathise with [Erskine] in his deeper interests.'[332] Judging from Erskine's correspondence alone, notable entries in his 'visitor book' included such varied company as Reformed Scottish theologian MacLeod Campbell, Church of England theologian and reformer Frederick Denison Maurice, oft-controversial liberalizing theologian Professor Benjamin Jowett, Bishop Alexander Ewing of the Scottish Episcopal Church, Broad Churchman and Dean of Westminster (1864-1881) Arthur Stanley, staunch Calvinist Monsieur Gaussen of the Company of Pastors in Geneva, architect of the Church of Scotland Disruption Thomas Chalmers, Principal of the United College (St Andrews) John Campbell Shairp, Church of England priest and social reformer Charles Kingsley, Independent minister and Scottish novelist George MacDonald, English writer John Brown, English novelist and biographer Frances Julia Wedgwood, members of the aristocracy including Lord Samuel Rutherford and Lady Augusta, and female figures including Mrs. Rich, Mrs. Batten, and Mrs. Russell Gurney.[333] In addition to ad hoc invitations, Hanna refers to 'autumn receptions' hosted almost annually for twenty years or so, starting in 1847 in which various members of this social circle made the pilgrimmage to Linlathen.[334]

Shairp's recollections of his first visit to the estate in 1854 evoke the conversational atmosphere of Linlathen, where along with the Linlathen library that 'his friends knew so

[332] John Campbell Shairp, "Reminiscences by Principal Shairp," in *Letters of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen: From 1840 till 1870*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1877), 367.

[333] William Hanna's two, edited volumes of Erskine's correspondence together comprise over 800 pages of letters and personal reflections. For further information on each of these specific relationships, see Hanna, *Letters of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen: From 1800 till 1840* and Hanna, *Letters of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen: From 1840 till 1870*.

[334] Hanna, *Letters of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen: From 1840 till 1870*, 56. Erskine writes, 'I have given up the idea of sorting people—Mingle, mingle, mingle / mingle as they may. I leave it to the master of the music to arrange them.' Thomas Erskine, "219. To the Rev. J. M'Leod Campbell. 11 August 1847," in *Letters of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen: From 1840 till 1870*, ed. William Hanna (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1877), 47.

well,' discussions were invited 'in walks after dark up and down the corridor, or, when the weather allowed, in walks about the grounds.'[335] In her journals, Wedgwood records that theological dialogue was not isolated from life lived together or constrained to formal settings at Linlathen. Rather, companionable contemplation might occur in 'quiet fields and the shadow of waving trees' or equally in the more intimate company 'of a dinner party, [with] the inappropriate accompaniment of clattering plates.'[336] Fellowship at the table or evenings spent in the library facilitated a more intimate—and perhaps slightly more well-rounded—self-disclosure. Indeed, while accepting hospitality at the hands of Erskine and his sister never guaranteed the ties of mutual friendship would grow, it prepared suitable conditions for friendships to take root.

Crucially, Shairp recalls that whether guests' interests lay in literature, or classics, or even sporting, the lay theologian sought 'some bond of sympathy with them' and his 'bright and sympathetic remarks drew out the stores even of the most reserved.'[337] Not being personally acquainted with Erskine upon his first visit to Linlathen in 1854, Shairp recalls:

> The one thing that first struck me at the time was his entire openness of mind, his readiness to hear whatever could be urged against his own deepest convictions, the willingness with which he welcomed any difficulties felt by others, and the candour with which he answered them from his own experience and storehouse of reflection. He exemplified that text which he often quoted "The heart of the righteous man studieth to answer."[338]

Certainly, Erskine's readiness to recommend his own understandings *and* honestly acknowledge their limitations suggests that the bonds of sympathy Erskine sought to cultivate were motivated by his deep longing for genuine fellowship in which the spirit of

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[335] Shairp, "Reminiscences by Principal Shairp," 352.
[336] Julia Wedgwood, "Thomas Erskine of Linlathen," in *Nineteenth Century Teachers and Other Essays* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1909), 72, https://archive.org/details/nineteenthcentu00wedg.
[337] Shairp, "Reminiscences by Principal Shairp," 367.
[338] Shairp, 352.

truth might be pursued, communicated, and held together.[339] Significantly, Julia Wedgwood reflected 'there were many…whom he loved—not in the same degree, but with the same kind of enduring, imperishable love—and the bond of a common humanity was so strong with him that it did not seem to need *preference* in order to bring out much of what we generally suppose the result of personal friendship.' Even those who could not oblige 'his demand for spiritual sympathy' were held in fond fellowship.[340] At Linlathen, therefore, Erskine created a hospitable space, rare in its age, where beliefs and meanings could be turned over, scrutinized, and contemplated *together*, without either the public pressure to 'toe the party line' or the private fear of fracturing relationships. Shairp observes:

> …commonly the statement of any view, very unlike that which [religious thinkers] have been accustomed to hold, shocks them; and younger inquirers, seeing that they are thought impious or give pain, cease to reveal their thoughts, and intercourse is at an end. With Mr. Erskine it was just the reverse of this. His whole manner and spirit elicited confidence from younger men. No thought ever occurred to them which, if they were serious about it, they need have hesitated to tell him. And it would seldom be that they did not find in his replies something either really helpful, or at least well worth their pondering.[341]

While Shairp may incline towards eulogizing the Scotsman, Wedgwood's remembrances in *Nineteenth Century Teachers and Other Essays* (1909) following their five-year friendship perhaps show more ambivalence. She remembers so unwavering was his theological fascination and so great was his will to communicate that he sometimes provoked 'amusement at the quaint inappropriateness of the occasion chosen [to disturb] the hearer's attention,' even prompting on one occasion 'the hearer's confession that the sympathy, which had at first been abundant, was exhausted by incessant repetition.'[342] Yet even in this case, Wedgwood considers Erskine's good-humoured response an expression of his 'moral

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[339] For a representative example, see Thomas Erskine, "60. To Miss Rachel Erskine, 26 December 1828," in *Letters of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen: From 1800 till 1840*, ed. William Hanna (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1877), 148.
[340] Wedgwood, "Thomas Erskine of Linlathen," 76.
[341] Shairp, "Reminiscences by Principal Shairp," 353.
[342] Wedgwood, "Thomas Erskine of Linlathen," 72–73.

beauty,' a beauty she believed attracted 'a bond with many whom this demand [of spiritual sympathy], of itself, would have repelled.'[343]

For Erskine, spiritual sympathy was the deepest bond that could unite two people in friendship, something which he often characterised in terms of a shared love of God. While separated from his cousin Miss Rachel Erskine, for instance, the Scottish laird reflected that the Alps—as imposing a physical barrier as they represent—cannot break their spiritual bond, rooted in the love of the Father. He writes:

> As I look at them, I feel that they rise between me and my native land, and all the friends that I have in the world. Their immense forms, covered with snow, seem to forbid all intercourse; but that they cannot do, nothing but God can do that. I am perhaps at this moment thinking of the same thing with you, and is there not a perpetual spiritual intercourse between those who trust in the same Saviour, who love the same Father?[344]

For the Scotsman, shared love of God not only binds together friends separated by geographical distance, but also those separated by death or by personal dissimilarities ('I do not wonder at any degree of friendship between Jeannie and Lady M., for friendship is a thing of the heart, and it may exist amidst many dissimilarities when there is so strong an agreement, as there is between them, in love to God.').[345] He even inquires about a 'young sufferer,' of whom he remarks 'though I have never seen her to my knowledge, yet my expectation of her society through eternity gives me a feeling of tried acquaintanceship.'[346] For Erskine, sympathy of heart—and specifically, sympathy with the heart of God—is the ultimate bond of friendship. While the subject of the love of God will be discussed more extensively in part (iii), what is important here is to realise that it is a bond of friendship realised in action.

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[343] Wedgwood, 76. One must also remember that this lecture was published almost thirty years after their friendship ended with Erskine's death in 1870.

[344] Thomas Erskine, "39. To Miss Rachel Erskine. 8 November 1826," in *Letters of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen: From 1800 till 1840*, ed. William Hanna (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1877), 88.

[345] Thomas Erskine, "46. Too Miss Rachel Erskine. 2 May 1827," in *Letters of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen: From 1800 till 1840*, ed. William Hanna (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1877), 112–17.

[346] Erskine, "31. To Miss C. Erskine. 2 April 1826," 73.

What roles and expectations are associated with being friends?

Erskine often spoke of friendship as a gift from God, but it was a gift with certain associated obligations. Friendships were often occasions for blessing and thanksgiving, especially as friends opportuned spiritual growth. Reflecting on his circle of friends on the Continent, Erskine penned, 'God gave [Madame Vernet's] friendship to me as a gift which I hope to bless him for throughout eternity.'[347] Of Madame de Broglie, whom Wedgwood identified as one of Erskine's two closest friends,[348] Erskine reflected that 'she has been a witness to me for God, a voice crying in the union with God'[349] Similarly, in Scotland, he wrote to Miss Stuart after the death of her father, Dr. Charles Stuart:

> I have to bless God for my acquaintance with him…The intercourse which I had with him was a continual incitement to me in the search after God, and I regard it as one of the talents of which I will have to give an account; and I now feel how negligent I was in the use of it. I did not know a human being on this earth on whose faithful and affectionate friendship I more confidently relied…[350]

Others, in turn, recognise the Scottish laird for his contributions to their growth in the knowledge and love of God. Whilst staying as a guest at Erskine's residence in Edinburgh in 1861, Bishop Ewing confessed to his brother, 'I learn more from [Erskine's] conversations than from all the books I read…His abiding attitude of soul is that of one who is ever listening and saying, "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth."'[351] Scott similarly observed, 'everything that reminds me of you reminds me of God.'[352] Although the outpouring of emotion for one's friends is a noted phenomenon in the last half of the

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[347] Erskine, "197. To Mrs Burnett, 1 October 1842."

[348] While this assessment is debatable, her identification nevertheless speaks to the intimacy of their friendship.

[349] Thomas Erskine, "157. To the Rev. John MacLeod Campbell. 17 October 1838," in *Letters of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen: From 1800 till 1840*, ed. William Hanna (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1877), 333.

[350] Erskine, "32. To Miss Stuart. 14 June 1826."

[351] Ewing, "Letter to His Brother, February 1861," February 1861, cited in Alexander J. Ross, *Memoir of Alexander Ewing, Bishop of Argyll and the Isles* (London: Daldy, Isbister & Co., 1877), 311.

[352] Wedgwood, "Thomas Erskine of Linlathen," 74.

nineteenth century and into the Victorian period,[353] consistent witness—even after twenty-eight years and across the Atlantic ocean in one case—signifies that Erskine understood the role of spiritual witness or mentor was clearly one possible (and significant) role of a friend given by God.[354]

While Principal Shairp notes how vital Erskine's sympathetic friendship with many young inquirers was, Linlathen was not a new Eden nor did the nicknamed 'Saint Erskine' always offer perfect spiritual sympathy.[355] Following his friend M. Gaussen's visit from Geneva in the summer of 1832, and their 'lively discussions,' Erskine laments,

> …although I have had much enjoyment in meeting you once more in this world, yet I have also suffered much, chiefly because I am sensible that in witnessing for God's truth to you, I often sinned against the law of love and meekness and patience. May the Lord forgive the sin, and mercifully overrule, so that it may not act in your mind as a reason against any truth which you heard from me.[356]

From today's perspective, where friendship is so often synonymous with unconditional agreement and support, it is noteworthy that Erskine does not apologise for *disagreeing* with his friend. Far from disengaging from potentially difficult territory, he uses the remainder of the letter to rearticulate their differences frankly and he endeavours once again to persuade his Calvinist friend of his understanding. The lay theologian does demonstrate, however, a grave sensibility that the *manner* in which he communicates claims of truth significantly impacts how open another is to receiving them—and acknowledges his responsibility to embody in his own practices the 'laws of love and meekness and patience' he protests. Given he considers himself bound to these laws—universal laws—it is

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[353] Brodie and Caine, "Class, Sex and Friendship: The Long Nineteenth Century," 197.

[354] Mr. Wilder of New York recalls, 'the happy hours my family and myself have been privileged in [his] agreeable company, [and] the edification which we have so often…derived from [his] able expositions of Scripture under our roof in Paris.' Thomas Erskine, "13. To Dr. Charles Stuart. 10 March 1823," in *Letters of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen: From 1800 till 1840*, ed. William Hanna (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1877), 46.

[355] Athanase Laurent Charles Coquerel, *Lettres Méthodistes* (Paris: A. Cherbuliez, 1833), 241.

[356] Thomas Erskine, "77. To Monsieur Gaussen. 7 December 1832," in *Letters of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen* (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1884), 187.

reasonable to assume that Linlathen's sympathetic—and yet, still frank and honest—

atmosphere was not incidental, but intentional. Fostered through hospitality, such

friendship offered a mode relating to one another in which disagreements could be

explored fruitfully—and if not resolved, even upheld—*within* the context of relationship,

rather without it.

Principal Shairp recalls one striking incident in which Erskine was almost certainly

embodying the primacy of relationship. While walking in Edinburgh, Shairp recalls

watching the Scottish laird engage 'very cordially with a distinguished ecclesiastical leader

of the time, who was well known to disagree with him, and strongly to disapprove of his

views.' Remarking upon Erskine's friendliness later, Erskine reportedly smiled and replied,

'He tries to cut me, but I never allow him. I always walk in before him, and make him

shake hands.'[357] If the character of Erskine's efforts at Linlathen are taken seriously, then

Erskine's attempt to make his opponent 'shake hands' should not be read as provocative,

so much as an insistence on the primacy of relationship. Theological disagreement need

not preclude friendship or loving one another. On the flip side of the same coin, although

Erskine desired his friends' sympathy, he abhorred any notion that mutual relationship

entailed an obligation of mutual agreement. On an occasion of disagreement with his

cousin Miss Rachel Erskine about the nature of the atonement, he explains:

> I feel a great demand for sympathy from those I love, just because I love them, and
> because that love gives their sympathy a value to me beyond the things themselves
> in which I ask their sympathy. But it is not so here. The thing in which I ask your
> sympathy is far dearer to me than any human sympathy; and I long for your
> sympathy, merely because I think I hold the truth, and I wish you to hold it also.[358]

Whether the issue was a theological position (Miss Rachel Erskine) or a personal

disposition (Mr. Gaussen), Erskine regarded sympathetic allegiance—while desired and

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[357] Shairp, "Reminiscences by Principal Shairp," 373.

[358] Thomas Erskine, "6. To Miss Rachel Erskine, 26 December 1828," in *Letters of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen: From 1800 till 1840*, ed. William Hanna (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1877), 148.

desirable in the role of a friend—was ultimately owed first and foremost to God. Here, we see the primary obligation of at·one·ment with God, in holy love. Committing one's sympathy to God did not diminish, but rather reframed and increased the sympathetic role obliged in friendship.

Erskine's letters are redolent with letters of sympathy for his friends and acquaintances, whether joyfully celebrating their marriages or the birth of their children, or offering his compassionate consolation in disappointment or bereavement. For instance, upon receiving Vinet's letter expressing his conscientious difficulties in retaining his post in the midst of erupting theological controversy over some of his publications, Erskine writes:

> …So utterly unhelpful did I feel myself, that I did not like even to answer you, but thought that, like Job's friends on their first meeting him, I should sit silent beside you. But though I cannot give you any light or strength to tide and sustain you, I can give you a brother's sympathy, and I can present your burden along with my own on Him who has said, 'Cast your burden on the Lord, and He will sustain you.[359]

Participating in the joys and sorrows sympathetically is no empty gesture. Rather, it expands and enriches Erskine's worlds of involvements. Sometimes, as in the case of bereavements, such sympathetic identification with others is costly. One thing that quickly becomes clear is the way that these experiences—both shared joys and sorrows—convey him back to God, whether in praise or in the spiritual consolation that comes from drawing nearer to the God who is holy love. Such exercises of sympathetic holy love, then, not only enrich his human friendships, but also act as channels to deeper being-in-relationship with God, and at·one·ment with God.

In undertaking this survey of the 'familiar meanings' of friendship for Erskine— including the composition, bonds, and expectations of divine friendship—I have already intimated some of the commonalities and differences between human and divine

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[359] Thomas Erskine, "213. To M. Vinet. 28 December 1844," in *Letters of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen: From 1840 till 1870*, ed. William Hanna (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1877), 47–49.

friendship with Erskine's imaginary (e.g., where allegiance is pledged). Likewise, I have suggested some of dynamics that characterise the interplay between the character of involvements entailed by human and divine friendship. For example, there is a common imperative for sympathy of heart, but there is an asymmetry that characterises that commitment. Both ontologically and ethically, Erskine suggests being attuned to God and God's holy love, rooted in being-in-relations with God, manifests (and must manifest) in the character of our relations to others. Of course, if Polanyi's epistemological framework of tacit knowledge is correct, then much of the implicit knowledge comprehended in Erskine's practices of friendship remains unspecified in such analytical surveys. Nevertheless, such close attention to Erskine's practices of friendship is worthwhile for two reasons. First, it helps us to understand the frame through which Erskine brings being-in-relationship with God into focus. Second, it clarifies how 'the rock of divine otherness' compels the 'constant reconsideration and re-evaluation' and the composition, bonds, and expectations of our human friendships—a dynamic that certainly plays out in Erskine's practices of cultivating friendships and convivial communities of learning.

v) The Metaphor of God as Friend

Turning from this frame to focus more specifically upon Erskine's writings, we can see the metaphor of friendship used in five ways: (1) to discuss the natural processes and conditions through which one person becomes perceived by another to be a friend; (2) to speak of the kinds of interpretation belonging to 'knowing' a friend; (3) to suggest how friendship impacts how a person attends to the world around them; and (4) to articulate how friendship influences what (or whom) a person ultimately loves. The metaphor of friendship comes together, though, for Erskine in (5) conceptualising how being-in-friendship with God becomes the interpretive lens through which other ideas,

relationships, and situations are interpreted, and the practical consequences for a person's being-in-the-world. Being-in-friendship, then, is one integral (though partial) means of conceptually and existentially framing being-in-relationship with God and how such relationship is connected to at·one·ment with God.

In this final meaning, the insights of the first four are gathered up and applied beyond their origin to another context. So, for example, if the poetic image of friend is used to frame God, then understanding *(1) those processes and conditions through which one person becomes perceived by another to be a friend* might be helpful in reimagining how being-in-relationship with God is cultivated, or the relational significance of divine action in the world represented in the witness of scripture. Similarly, *(2) the study of interpretation belonging to 'knowing' a friend* might help us reimagine what it means to know God, i.e., in the intimate, personal way in which we know a friend. If a person *knows* God 'as a friend knows a friend,' we might also be interested in understanding (3) *how that friendship impacts how a person attends to the world around them.* In other words, we might wonder, how might being-in-friendship with God reshape how we attend to and participate in the world around us? Or even transform *(4) what (or whom) we love*? This final meaning of friendship, therefore, is concerned with the transformative, practical consequences of reimagining being-in-relationship with God *through* categories of human friendship. Equally, however, it is concerned with lived implications of reimagining being-in-relationship with other human beings *through* categories of divine friendship. Because I have already suggested some of these dynamics in the last section, I will spend more time here on the human-to-divine direction. Fully mapping Erskine's 'hermeneutics of friendship' would take more space than is available here; however, I will present a sampling that illustrates how the image of friend might enrich the objects, modes, and meanings of theological learning.

One of the most critical functions that the poetic image of friendship—and the relation to God's Being it invites—plays is providing insight into how being-in-relationship with God might develop by learning certain things *about* God, and so foster the kinds of personal commitment involved in *knowing* God. Reasoning from familiar experience of friendship Erskine draws attention to Scripture as a true narrative of God's character in action throughout history. Among other things, he stresses that Jesus was a friend: he gathered the disciples together, taught them, ate with them, and wept with them in their affliction. Furthermore, the Pharisees comment that Jesus is 'a friend of publicans and sinners' suggests no-one was beyond the scope of his offered friendship.[360] At least twice, Jesus was criticized for breaking bread with such people: at the home of Matthew and of Zacchaeus, both tax collectors.[361] Using three incidents exegete one another, Erskine proposes that Christ's relationship with sinners was motivated by his holy and loving longing for their healing and restoration. Erskine proposes, 'when the Jews…reproached Christ as a friend of publicans and sinners, Jesus answered them that his business was with the sinners: "the whole needed not a physician, but they that were sick", and "that he came to seek and to save that which was lost."'[362] Admittedly, Erskine is engaging in some fancy exegetical footwork here. After all, it is the Pharisees who give Christ the appellation 'a friend of sinners.' In the New Testament, the only time Jesus names followers as 'friends' is when he uses the term for his disciples.[363] Still, the overall thrust of Erskine's exegesis seems accurate: Jesus was motivated to pursue relationship with even the most sinful and marginalized of human beings.

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[360] Matt 11:10; Luke 7:34.
[361] Matthew 9:12; Mark 2:17 and Luke 5:13; Luke 19:10.
[362] Erskine, *Remarks on the Internal Evidence for the Truth of Revealed Religion*, 124.
[363] For example, see John 15.

Erskine's exegesis also suggests that persons can come to know God and His character in ways somewhat analogous to the ways that we come to know human beings and their characters: particularly, by reasoning from their historical responses to situations to the commitments that might undergird them. The more intimately we know how a friend's character has operated in the past, the greater our present faith in how that character will manifest itself in future situations. Trust is grounded in faith. If I believe that the past actions of a person are motivated by their fundamentally benevolent character, I have some degree of confidence that her future actions will likewise be characterised by benevolence. Similarly, knowing that God pursues relationship with even the most sinful persons, fosters trust in God and God's character of holy love. For Erskine, as I detailed in the last chapter, this is supremely true in the commitment that God manifests in the atonement, the saving work that in Christ effects a fundamental transformation in God's relationship to the whole of fallen humanity.

Even more clearly than past acts of forgiveness, such as providing the brazen serpent to the Israelites, God's holy love is made evident in Christ's sacrifice on the cross. In *The Brazen Serpent*, Erskine argues that the former acts:

> …told that there was a love…which had forgiven sin, and which was using the affliction which man had brought upon himself, as the instruments of fitting him for a better state, a resurrection life. But it could tell nothing of the breadth and length and depth and height [of that love]…But now, in the incarnation, in the word made flesh, our eyes have seen and our hands touched the word of life. *It is like trusting the friendship of a man who has already sacrificed health and life and fortune for us, in comparison of trusting the friendship of one who says that he is ready to do those things.*[364]

In this respect, trust in Christ is 'substantiated' in a sense unlike any other human friendship: such is its reality that it also becomes—to borrow the word of Scott 'the realizing enjoyment of things hoped for.'[365] Moreover, as Erskine notes, 'God commendeth

[364] Erskine, *The Brazen Serpent; or, Life Coming Through Death*, 95. Italics mine.
[365] Scott, "Divine Will," 19.

his love to us, in that whilst we were enemies, he gave his Son for us.[366] If trusting involves

our being vulnerable to betrayal, Erskine could well argue, then how can we not trust the

man who sacrificed for us even when we betrayed him and gave him every reason to betray

us? If trust involves our thinking well of others, how can we not think well of him who

prayed for our benefit even as we condemned him to die? If trusting involves our being

optimistic that someone will be competent, how can we not be optimistic when he

sacrificed 'life and health and fortune for us'? If trusting involves being optimistic that the

trustee will have benevolent motives for acting, how can we not trust the one whose

embodied love and care remained resolute in the face of the most intimate of betrayals?

His position is that Christ can be trusted—trusted as we could imagine trusting a friend

who had sacrificed all but love on our behalf when we were enemies.

To reiterate and adapt Hart's argument above, then, Erskine believes that casting

being-in-relationship with God in terms of the categories of the poetic of friendship 'is

compatible with an appeal to the dynamics of revelation having to do chiefly with the

questions about the forms our knowing takes and must take, and not [their] ultimate source

or epistemic warrant.'[367] In this epistemic respect, the metaphor of friendship can be

helpful in reframing theological learning—and its objects, modes, and meanings—in ways

that compatible with the pursuit and enjoyment of being-in-relationship with God, of

deepening at·one·ment with God in holy love. As Erskine summarises in *Unconditional*

Freeness,

> 'This is life eternal to know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou
> has sent,'—that is, to know God as revealed in Christ,—to know him in his relation
> to sinners…it is a living principle then, and not a mere notion; it is a participation
> in the life of God; it is an indwelling of the Spirit of God. He is the fountain of
> eternal life, and there is no other fountain...Life eternal does not consist in knowing

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[366] Erskine, *Unconditional Freeness*, 1828, 118–19.
[367] Hart, *Between the Image*, 41.

that there is a God and there is a Saviour, but in knowing God and in knowing the Saviour, as a child knows his father, as a friend knows his friend.[368]

How similar orientations to theological learning—and its epistemic concomitants—manifest in Erskine's friend, Alexander John Scott, is the subject to which I will next turn our attention.

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[368] Erskine, *Unconditional Freeness*, 1828, 193–94.

Chapter 4: Knowing God: A. J. Scott's Appearance Before the Church of Scotland's General Assembly of 1831

i)   The General Assembly of 1831
ii) The Nature of Doctrinal Controversy
iii) Constitution of an Epistemic Community

God would have all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth,
in testimony whereof Christ gave himself a ransom for all men.

A. J. Scott, *Resignation Letter*, 1830[369]

i) The General Assembly of 1831

On the 27th of May 1831, the Church of Scotland's General Assembly definitively stripped Alexander John Scott of his licence to preach.[370] That action marked the culmination of an irreconcilable theological conflict that had spanned over one year, two presbyteries, and two countries. It began unremarkably. In January 1830, Scott, then a probationer licensed to preach by the Presbytery of Paisley, was called by the Scots Church in Woolwich to be their minister—a precursor to becoming ordained.[371] Travelling the short distance from there to London in March 1830, he began his ordination trials.[372] While fractures started to show in April, it was not until October of the same year that Scott resigned his application citing his conscientious objections to parts of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (*Confession*).[373] When he nonetheless took up office in Woolwich after the kirk issued a second call in January 1831, Scott was pressed by the Church of Scotland (Church) to travel to Paisley to defend himself, his convictions, and his licence to preach.[374] There, in early May, the body that had first granted his licence also became the first to

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[369] Scott's full resignation netter dated 19 October 1830 is transcribed in Newell, "Scott and His Circle," 142.
[370] Newell, 128.
[371] Newell, 79.
[372] Newell, 108.
[373] Newell, 115.
[374] Newell, 119.

withdraw it.[375] When Scott appealed its decision at the General Assembly later that month, the highest ecclesiastical court within the Church, he lost and was rebuked.[376]

While ultimately unsuccessful, Scott's appeal before the General Assembly in May 1831 is instructive with respect to his developing theological epistemology in two aspects. Doctrinally, Scott presents his most succinct objection to the *Confession*'s doctrinal position on limited atonement, addressing the subject with a directness not found in his more thematic and practical published discourses. In differentiating his position, moreover, he presents an alternative account of atonement—one that endeavours to uphold divine intention that Christ's satisfaction be universally sufficient and efficacious, without necessitating universal salvation. Christ's atonement is *for* at·one·ment, in both objective and personal senses elucidated in the next section. Briefly, first, Christ's atonement is the *objective means* by which reconciliation between God and humanity is effected in Christ. By objective, I mean that the actions taken by God to achieve reconciliation between himself and creation are free and unconditioned by human influence, agency, or belief. Being thus reconciled, God restores the possibility for persons to be-in-relationship with him—and for their hearts to grow attuned to the heart of God (at·one·ment). Second, Christ's atonement provides the objective grounds upon which persons may 'come unto the truth'—that is, encounter the truth of God's commitment to the 'salvation of all men' and apprehend its personal address to themselves. Knowing this truth *personally* makes all the difference. It provides the assurance for pursuing being-in-relationship with God, apart from which at·one·ment with God is impossible. Arguably, the doctrinal outworking of the atonement Scott began here forms the theological foundation for his later public and

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[375] Newell, 120.

[376] For a full account, see 'The General Assembly of 1831, and the Scott-Irving Divide' inNewell, 126–75.

private endeavours to continue elucidating the social, political, and ecclesiastical implications of reconciled at·one·ment with God.

In the second section of this chapter, I examine the two theological touchstones to which Scott repeatedly turned in his endeavours to make known the will of God: 1 Timothy 2.4–6 and Christ's fulfilment of the two great commandments. In addition to noting the points of conflict between Scott's theological presentation and that of the *Confession* with respect to extent of the atonement, I give especial attention to their *epistemic entailments*—i.e., the implications of each theological presentation for how knowledge of God is understood, approached, and validated. I observe that, from an epistemological perspective, Scott's specific doctrinal objections are not the only aspect of his case that were revealing. So, too, was the method by which he argued for them. In the third section, therefore, I explore the reasons for and response to Scott's petition to be tried not by confessional standards but by the 'word of God' alone.[377]

What emerges from Scott's encounter with the General Assembly are two distinct visions of what might constitute the *epistemic community* of the Church—that is, that space created within and by the Church, its institutions, and its members in which knowledge of God is pursued and accountability to the claims of that knowledge is practiced. I explore this further in the third section of this chapter. Scott was concerned that the then-elevated status of the *Confession* was undermining the pursuit of the truths of God: pre-emptively restricting avenues of theological exploration, unintentionally fostering a culture of nominal assent, and effectively barring dissenting officeholders from the epistemic community of the Church without offering any space to examine the legitimacy of their convictions. While I explore Scott's philosophy of theological education further later, this case study is a

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[377] "Case of Mr Scott - Heresy. 28 May 1831," *Caledonian Mercury*, May 28, 1831.

significant early window into several emphases that continued to orient Scott's theological thought and practice—not the least of which is what constitutes an epistemic community. Arguably, it is here that the seeds of Scott's commitment to educational initiatives for the whole of society—irrespective of confession, or class, or even gender—began.

ii) The Nature of the Doctrinal Controversy

When Scott appeared before the General Assembly on the 27th of May 1831, it was the height of what Hilton calls the Age of Atonement—a period of intense, popular interest in the doctrine of atonement among the British upper and middle classes, roughly corresponding to the first half of the nineteenth century.[378] Scott outlined three objections against the *Confession* that day—namely, its presentation of the scope of Christ's atonement, its identification of the Lord's Day and the Sabbath, and its representation of the efficacy of the laying on of hands during ordination. However, it was his objections against the *Confession*'s presentation of the atonement that carried the most personal weight and garnered the most public interest.[379] Personally, Scott affirmed that Christ's atonement made genuine relationship with God possible for *all* human beings—both objectively and subjectively. On this basis alone, he believed, rested salvation and the promise of right relationship within the whole kingdom of God. Publicly, however, comprehending the

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[378] Hilton, *Age of Atonement*, 3. Boyd Hilton christens the first half of the nineteenth century 'The Age of Atonement,' for the way in which this particular Christian doctrine became a focus among the British upper and middle classes where it often operated as a hinge between religious, economic, social, and political spheres of thought and practice.

[379] Of these three objections, the first is not a subject present in Scott's contemporaneous publication; however, a decade later, he alludes to Jesus' own 'Sabbath-breaking' as an argument against legalism and for cultivating discernment of the heart of God. Scott, "On Schism," 240. The second objection—that 'the Presbytery, bythe laying on of hands, could communicate to him, or any Christian officer, the keys of the kingdom of heaven, or that they could have the power to retain or to remit sins, to shut up the kingdom of heaven from sinners, and open it to penitent Christians'—is treated with some detail in Groves' *Journal*. "Case of Mr Scott - Heresy. 28 May 1831." See also, Alexander John Scott, "Introduction," in *Journal of a Residence at Bagdad, During the Years 1830 and 1831.*, by Anthony Norris Groves (James Nisbet, 1832), v–xv.

scope and significance of the atonement in this way was not only controversial, but controverted the *Confession*'s presentation of limited atonement and divine election. Scott's trial before the General Assembly marked the culmination of two years' conflict with the Church on the subject—a period in which Scott developed and articulated the pieces of argumentation that together imaged an alternative theology of the atonement. Ultimately, this work provided the theological foundation upon which his subsequent social, political, and educational endeavours were premised. After re-evaluating the historical and theological significance of Scott's trial vis-à-vis the doctrine of atonement, I reconstruct the logic of 'the will of God revealed in Christ as holy love' that persuaded the young probationer to maintain—over against the *Confession*—that the efficacy of Christ's atonement was not limited to the elect.[380]

While disavowing any sensationalist intentions during his two-year conflict with the Church, Scott's own notable pivots—and the controversial cast of persons who appeared in supporting roles—set the stage for several critical encounters with ecclesial authorities. Not only had a dispute about the nature of Christ's humanity early in his ordination trials precipitated a two-day debate in April 1830, with a special committee convened to investigate the matter,[381] but Scott then took the unusual step of withdrawing his candidacy on pain of conscience on the very day that the Presbytery of London met and might otherwise have confirmed it.[382] Scott, moreover, resigned a first call to 'the Scotch Church in Woolwich' in October 1830,[383] only to accept a second call to the same church three months later after learning that the church deeds required only that the individual holding

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[380] Scott, "Divine Will," 23.
[381] Newell, "Scott and His Circle," 85–87. In July 1830 the Presbytery of Paisley produced a statement regarding Christ's humanity to which Scott agreed. Newell notes, 'Scott's orthodoxy on this particular doctrine was never again called into question.' Newell, 88.
[382] Newell, "Scott and His Circle," 107.
[383] Newell, 115. See also A. J Scott, "Letter to the Editor. 10 May 1831," *Greenock Advertiser*, May 10, 1831.

office possess a licence to preach.[384] Keen as public appetite was for theological

controversy, such episodes could not but attract the attention of a partisan press, who

tracked Scott's trials as they progressed from England to Scotland.[385] Four times Scott

rearticulated his conscientious objections to the *Confession* before various parties in the

Church: when he withdrew his candidacy before the Presbytery of London (12 October

1830),[386] when he resigned his call to the Woolwich church to the same body (19 October

1830),[387] when he defended his licensure before the Presbytery of Paisley (4 May 1831),[388]

and finally, when he appealed their decision that he had voluntarily forfeited it to the

General Assembly (27 May 1831).[389]

Despite the interest garnered at the time, Scott's appeal before the General

Assembly has received scant treatment in historical theological literature in large part

because of its near coincidence with trials of two more prominent ordained persons who

also belonged to Scott's circle—John McLeod Campbell (1831) and Edward Irving (1833).

Scott was affiliated with the former's 'Rowite' circle, having been invited to preach in

McLeod Campbell's kirk just after his licensing in October 1827 and again the following

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[384] Newell, "Scott and His Circle," 119. See also"The Scotch Presbytery. 31 January 1831," *The World*, January 31, 1831.

[385] Newell, "Scott and His Circle," 87. Newell ascribes Scott's prolonged illness in 1830 to 'the pressure of controversy,' fuelled by a hostile (and anonymous) corresponding 'Member of the Church of Scotland' who propagated significant distortions of Scott's positions and actions. For English press coverage of Scott's first call to his appearance at the General Assembly, see 'The Scots' Presbytery, London', *The World*, 26 April 1830; 'A Member of the Scots Presbytery of London, Letters to the Editor', *The World*, 3 May 1830; 'A Member of the Church of Scotland, Letters to the Editor, in Relation to the Scots Presbytery, London', *The World*, 5 May 1830; 'The Scots' Presbytery, London', *The World*, 21 June 1830; W. Newland, 'Secession of Mr. Scott from the Church of Scotland', *The World*, 18 October 1830; W. Newland, 'Letter to the Editor in Relation to the Scots Church, Woolwich', *The World*, 15 November 1830; 'The Scotch Presbytery', *The World*, 31 January 1831; "The Scots Presbytery, London. 8 May 1830," *The Times*, May 8, 1830. For Scottish coverage, see 'Married - A. J. Scott and Ann Ker', *Greenock Advertiser*, 17 December 1830; 'The Scots Presbytery, London', *Greenock Advertiser*, 22 October 1830; 'Presbytery of Paisley', *Greenock Advertiser*, 6 May 1831; A. J Scott, 'Letter to the Editor', *Greenock Advertiser*, 10 May 1831; "Case of Mr Scott - Heresy. 28 May 1831." For later recollections of this period, see 'Scots' Church, Woolwich', *The Woolwich Advertiser*, 24 August 1839; J. M. Campbell, "Professor Scott and Mrs. Oliphant's Life of Edward Irving: A Letter to the Editor. 3 June 1862," *The Daily News*, June 3, 1862.

[386] Newell, "Scott and His Circle," 107. See also "The Scots Presbytery, London. 22 October 1830."

[387] Newell, "Scott and His Circle," 115. See also A. J Scott, "Letter to the Editor. 10 May 1831."

[388] Newell, "Scott and His Circle," 121. See also A. J Scott, "Letter to the Editor. 10 May 1831."

[389] Newell, "Scott and His Circle," 128. See also "Case of Mr Scott - Heresy. 28 May 1831."

summer.[390] Although dissimilar to Irving both in personality and in certain key theological

commitments, Scott had also served as his assistant in London from the autumn of 1828

through to his ordination trials.[391] Not only was Irving a vocal supporter of the younger

man, but he was also instrumental in persuading Scott to accept the calls to Woolwich.[392]

Scott was the most junior of the three and not ordained, which may explain why he more

often figures more as an addendum to their lives and famed clashes with the Church.[393]

Still, we should not underestimate the significance of his place in this circle or the

significance of his case. Reminiscing about the friendship shared between Erskine, Scott,

Irving, and himself in this early period, McLeod Campbell later maintained that Scott

'stood highest in our thoughts, considering him intellectually, and was also felt by us to be

deeply under the power of that love of truth and devoted faithfulness to conviction which

we all sought to cherish.'[394] Furthermore, Newell notes that although 'the Seceders in the

18th century had questioned the *Confession*'s chapter concerning the Civil Magistrate,' until

Scott's trial 'no really determined attack had been made on any central tenet of the

Confession.'[395] McLeod Campbell's trial before the same General Assembly—just three days

before Scott's own—may be more well known, but it was also less audacious. Whereas he

endeavoured to show that his doctrinal convictions about the atonement were in fact

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[390] Newell, "Scott and His Circle," 47.See John McLeod Campbell, *Memorials of John McLeod Campbell*, ed. Donald Campbell (London: Macmillan, 1877), 42–43. According to Newell, Scott initially met McLeod Campbell in September 1827. For the rest of their lives, they maintained a close friendship. Newell, "Scott and His Circle," 38. See J. M. Campbell, *Reminiscences and Reflections* (London: Macmillan, 1873), 27.

[391] Newell, "Scott and His Circle," 51.SeeMargaret Oliphant, *The Life of Edward Irving, Minister of the National Scotch Church, London*, vol. 2 (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1862), 27.

[392] Newell, "Scott and His Circle," 119. Scott claims Irving's argument that 'I ought not to anticipate the actual decision of the Church, to assume myself cut off from her communion, by an act of my own, without her express sentence' was persuasive in his final decision to accept the second call from the Woolwich Church. See A. J. Scott, "A Letter to the Editor. 26 May 1862," *The Daily News*, May 26, 1862.

[393] For example, see Donald MacLeod, "The Significance of the Westminster Confession," in *The History of Scottish Theology*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 11.

[394] Newell, "Scott and His Circle," 47. See Campbell, "Professor Scott and Mrs. Oliphant's Life of Edward Irving: A Letter to the Editor. 3 June 1862."

[395] Newell, "Scott and His Circle," 130–31.

reconcilable with the *Confession*,[396] Scott held no such illusions, as he had publicly maintained since October 1830.[397]

Behind the specific doctrinal objections raised by Scott was a question about the *divine intention or will*—and especially, how it concerned the sufficiency and efficacy of the satisfaction obtained through Christ's self-sacrificial death on the cross. In the nineteenth century, this issue was frequently couched in terms of 'limited' versus 'universal atonement'—terms that Muller maintains often muddle more than they clarify. As he notes, 'atonement' is an English word that does not map neatly onto the categories employed in the sixteenth and seventeenth-century theological debates by participants such as Calvin (1509–1564) or delegates at the Synod of Dort (1618–1619). Their categories included: the sufficiency of Christ's *satisfactio* (satisfaction), its *efficacia* (efficacy, sometimes efficiency), and its *applicatio* (application, sometimes apprehension).[398] Atonement, conversely, has a dual theological meaning. On the one hand, it may refer to the expiation or propitiation associated with the objective events of Christ's incarnation, sufferings, and self-sacrificial death ('Christ's atonement' or 'the Atonement'). On the other hand, it may refer to the 'reconciliation between God and humanity effected in Christ' ('at·one·ment').[399] Further complicating the matter, inflection may be placed upon this reconciliation as a *product* of Christ's atonement ('we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son')[400] or as

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[396] MacLeod, "Westminster Confession," 10. He notes, 'Campbell was asked by a friend whether he could "sign the Confession now?" His answer was unequivocal: "No. The Assembly was right. Our doctrine and the Confession are incompatible." This friend was A. J. Scott, whose later recollections summarise the difference: 'So I had admitted, but I also asked which was true.' Newell, "Scott and His Circle," 142. See Scott, "A Letter to the Editor. 26 May 1862."

[397] Newell, "Scott and His Circle," 107. See Newland, "Secession of Mr. Scott from the Church of Scotland. 18 October 1830."

[398] Richard A. Muller, *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition: On the Work of Christ and the Order of Salvation* (Grand Rapid: Baker Academic, 2012), 57, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/st-andrews/detail.action?docID=5247349.

[399] Muller, 56.

[400] Romans 5:10a.

an ongoing, transforming *process* made possible in Christ and through the Spirit.[401] Scott's

later public and private educational endeavours witness to a lifelong interest in elucidating

the promise of at·one·ment with God.[402] For at·one·ment with God to be a real possibility

for each and every person—the foundational principle upon which Scott's later social,

political, and ecclesiological endeavours are dependent—depends upon the *efficacy* of

Christ's satisfaction in the Atonement not being limited, or at least not limited by God.[403]

Grappling with this logic—and with the belief that God desired reconciliation with

the whole of his creation—increasingly put Scott at odds with the *Confession*'s doctrinal

positions on divine election and satisfaction. John Calvin, to whom the creators of the

Confession owed no small theological debt, generally subscribed to the scholastic formula of

satisfaction, *sufficienter pro omnibus, efficienter pro electis*: essentially, 'Christ suffered sufficiently

for the whole world, but efficiently only for the elect.'[404] To illuminate this position, Muller

uses a monetary metaphor: Christ's sacrifice or expiation was sufficient to pay the wages of

sin for the whole world. That fact, however, did not necessarily entail that that payment be

distributed (or referred) to each and every person.[405] Rather, Muller writes, 'Calvin assumed

that Christ's work, albeit sufficient payment for the sins of the world and for securing the

salvation of all human beings in even a thousand worlds, is *by divine intention* effective for

the elect only.'[406] According to James Torrance, later Calvinists such as John Owen

developed the implications of Calvin's atonement theology in ways the earlier theologian

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[401] To borrow N. T. Wright's 'already/not yet' language, Christ's atonement has *already* effected reconciliation between God and humanity, but the consequences of such an act are not yet fully realised or apparent; rather, they are still in process and will not be fully worked out until the new creation.

[402] These endeavours will be examined in further depth in Chapter 5.

[403] In other words, unless Christ efficaciously atones foreach and every person through the Atonement—unless the effect of the Atonement is *referred* to each and every person—being-in-relationship with God and at·one·ment with God, its fruit, is impossible.

[404] Muller, *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition*, 65.

[405] Muller, 67.

[406] MacLeod, "Westminster Confession," 2.

may no longer have recognised or necessarily affirmed.[407] Yet, this fundamental view of the scope and merit of Christ's satisfaction remain at the core of the doctrine of limited atonement—and it is in this limited sense that the term will be used here. The doctrine of universal atonement is its converse: it argues that the grace of Christ's satisfaction was sufficient and effectual by divine intention for all human beings.

Scott believed that subscribing to the *Confession* required him to endorse the doctrine of limited atonement—something he was unwilling to do. Although most scholars agree with this conclusion, MacLeod submits that 'there is room for debate whether [limited atonement] is present in the *Confession* at all.' His argument rests not on the content of the *Confession*, but rather its conception and its later reception. Not only did the Westminster Assembly, which conceived the *Confession*, include representation from a large contingent of Hypothetical Universalists, but later Scottish Hypothetical Universalists were also ready to apply to it in support of their own theological convictions. The issue, therefore, may not be as cut-and-dry as is often suggested. Even MacLeod concedes, however, that the doctrine is probably present.[408] The *Confession*, after all, states that 'God did, from all eternity, decree to justify all the elect' (11.6); no-one is 'redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect' (3.6); and that 'to all those for whom Christ hath purchased redemption, He doth certainly and effectually apply and communicate the same' through the Holy Spirit (8.8).[409] It is difficult to reconcile how these articles could indicate anything other than a doctrinal postulation of limited atonement.

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[407] James B. Torrance, "The Incarnation and 'Limited Atonement,'" *The Evangelical Quarterly* 55 (1983): 83–84.

[408] MacLeod, "Westminster Confession," 2.

[409] *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1995). Note: MacLeod cites the latter two articles as justification for his belief that the *Confession* probably does present a doctrine of limited atonement.

In fact, Scott cited these three specific articles of the *Confession* in the letter to the Presbytery of London outlining his reasons for returning his first call to the church in Woolwich in October 1830. He writes:

> Not believing that I could, consistent with truth, sign as a confession of my faith, a statement in which it is asserted that 'none are redeemed by Christ but the elect only', (Westminster Confession ch.3, sect.6); or that 'to all those for whom he hath purchased redemption he doth certainly and effectually communicate the same', (ch. 8; sect. 8) implying that he died for their sins only (ch. 11, sect.4); seeing that God would have all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth, in testimony whereof Christ gave himself a ransom for all men…I may not accept ordination, while my signing the Westminster Confession is made the condition of my receiving it.[410]

While easily overlooked, the theological touchstone here is the paraphrase of 1 Timothy 2.3-6: 'God would have all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth, in testimony whereof Christ gave himself a ransom for all men.'[411] Standing before the General Assembly seven months later, Scott again appealed to this verse.[412] The contextual implication is clear: if it is the divine will that *all men* be saved and Christ's gracious sacrifice is sufficient satisfaction for the sins of the whole world, it is unreasonable to suppose that the divine will is *also* responsible for limiting the efficacy of Christ's sufficient satisfaction.

According to the press, Scott stated before the General Assembly that 'he would have proved [these convictions] to be truth from the Word of God'; however, he was never afforded the chance.[413] Having offended the court by petitioning to be tried by the 'word of God alone,' it became evident that his case would not be heard on any other theological ground than the *Confession* itself. He therefore concluded his address without further developing the scriptural grounds for his doctrinal objections.[414]

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[410] Newell, "Scott and His Circle," 115. See also A. J Scott, "Letter to the Editor. 10 May 1831."

[411] 1 Timothy 2:3-6 records, 'For [supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks for all men] is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.'

[412] "Case of Mr Scott - Heresy. 28 May 1831."

[413] Newell, "Scott and His Circle," 139. See also "Case of Mr Scott - Heresy. 28 May 1831."

[414] Newell, "Scott and His Circle," 139. See also "Case of Mr Scott - Heresy. 28 May 1831."

From an historical theological perspective, this missed opportunity is unfortunate. Nevertheless, much can still be gleaned about Scott's theological convictions from his trial—not least of which is the strength of these convictions. Compared to his thematic and moral discourses, Scott is more direct in his engagement with the *Confession*'s doctrinal positions. Admittedly, these remarks are skeletal—essentially, little more than a précis of the letter quoted above—but they gesture towards lines of argument that might be used to reconstruct Scott's abandoned case for universal atonement. To flesh these lines of argument out—and ultimately, to understand the theological foundation undergirding Scott's later practical endeavours—we must turn to his contemporaneous publications. These include *On the Divine Will*, published in September 1830, the month before Scott withdrew his application for ordination; *Hints for Meditation on Acquaintance with God* (1830); and his introduction and notes to Anthony Groves' *Journal of a Residence at Bagdad* (1831).

From these publications, it is clear that Scott did not believe that the efficacy of Christ's sufficient satisfaction was limited by divine intention. Only in Groves' *Journal* does Scott discuss limited atonement by name; however, the conclusions he reached in *Hints* and *Divine Will* on the nature of divine intention and how it is discerned furnish ample material with which to mount opposition to the doctrine of limited atonement.[415] In *Divine Will*, for instance, Scott notes a distinction between 'the will of God' and 'the decrees of God' that he employs to oppose the schema of salvation propounded by many of his Calvinist contemporaries.[416] Persons are saved—or so the prevailing logic went—if and only if God wills them to be. Not all persons are saved. Therefore, it is not God's will that all persons be saved. While not for a moment suggesting that a person can be saved *apart from* God's willing it, Scott was also loath to deduce divine intention (limited efficacy of satisfaction)

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[415] See Note C in Anthony Norris Groves, *Journal of a Residence at Bagdad, During the Years 1830 and 1831.* (London: James Nisbet, 1832), 293–95.
[416] Scott, "Divine Will," 1.

from what *is* actually true in the world (unsaved persons). To extend the same 'is to intends' logic, he reasons we would have to conclude that God *wills* sin—or at least, does not *not* will sin—because it exists in the world. Not only is this conclusion prohibited by the *Confession*, but it is also absurd.[417] Indeed, Scott emphasises, 'every revelation of God has been designed to show us the opposition between what actually *is* in this world, and *what God would have it to be* in it.'[418] Here, Scott's distinction between the decrees of God and the will of God is relevant.

Whereas the *decrees of God* are 'determinate facts'[419] belonging to the 'predestinating, or rather originating resolves of the mind'[420] and 'never fail to be accomplished,'[421] Scott argues that the *will of God* is better understood in terms of 'the dispositions of His own character.'[422] With respect to the latter, he asserts, 'it is absolutely necessary for His honour, and for the practical use of all revelation, to acknowledge that His will is often resisted.'[423] Such resistance is possible because God grants genuine agency to his creation, even power that is 'capable of turning itself against him.'[424] Given this fact, Scott argues that divine intentionality cannot—and indeed, should not—be circumscribed to the decrees of God. Rather, they are only one mode in which the will of God is expressed—and, Scott argues, not even the most important one.[425] If divine intention is not limited to the decrees of

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[417] Article 3.1 declares, 'God from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass: yet so, as thereby…God [is not] the author of sin.' *Westminster Confession of Faith*.

[418] Alexander John Scott, "Hints for Meditation on Acquaintance with God (1830)," in *Discourses* (London and Cambridge: MacMillan & Co., 1866), 30.

[419] Scott, "Divine Will," 6.

[420] Scott, 4.

[421] Scott, 1.

[422] Scott, 3.

[423] Scott, 1.

[424] Scott, 13. Incidentally, it is also this agency that makes being-in-relationship with God so meaningful for Scott: God does not overpower or compel a relationship of holy love, but solicits it in and through the manifold revelation of his character. When a person yields to God, then, it is because they sympathise with the will of God. For Scott, this describes true at·one·ment with God, even if sin means it cannot be fully realised until the new heaven and new earth.

[425] Scott, 12.

God, it is plausible that God could *will* for all persons to be saved, without necessitating that all persons are *in fact* saved. In other words, at least insofar as it is conceived in the *Confession*, divine election is not necessary to account for the existence of unsaved persons. On this account, the power or virtue of Christ's satisfaction is not necessarily compromised by its limited 'success' (i.e., the fact that 'not all are saved'). In this manner, Scott prepares the ground for an alternative account of the scope and significance of the atonement—one that ascribes limited salvation not to God, but to failure to *know* God and the reconciliation effected in Christ.

Like Erskine, Scott believed that his contemporaries placed too much stress on divining the decrees of God, often to the neglect of knowing the God from whom such decrees issue. Stressing the decretive will not only incited individuals to a fraught epistemic task, but it also contributed to a misreading of the scope and significance of Christ's atonement. According to Scott, individuals are encouraged to pursue 'a knowledge and a faith of the decrees of God, and a *substance of things looked for* resting on these decrees.'[426] So, when a person 'thinks he has discovered the forerunning signs according to the law of God's operation,' he believes 'his salvation predetermined.'[427] Such study, however, confuses *knowing about* God and his decrees with *knowing* God.[428] As Scott avows, 'a study of God's predeterminate purposes may be as far from a study of *God* as the east is from the west; and…a confidence in God Himself as high above a confidence in His decrees, as the heavens are above the earth.'[429] When the Church—whether in its ministry or its confessional standards—encourages its members to seek the decretive will *apart* or *in*

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[426] Scott, 5.

[427] Scott, 6.

[428] Scott, "Hints," 25. We have already been introduced to the distinction between *knowing* and knowing *about* God in Chapter 2. In *Hints*, Scott writes, 'You know a great deal, perhaps, about the king of this country, and about his ministers and officers; but, most probably, you do not know one of these persons. It is not to know *about* God, that is eternal life, or that a man may glory in; it is to *know* God, to be acquainted with Him. For God is not a thing, nor a notion, nor a doctrine; He is the living God.'

[429] Scott, "Divine Will," 6.

isolation from the revealed character of God, it can have deleterious effects on doctrines like the atonement. For example, reflecting on the implicit prioritisation in the *Confession*'s presentation of the articles of belief, T. F. Torrance writes:

> The tendency to trace the ultimate ground of belief back to eternal divine decrees behind the back of the Incarnation of God's Beloved Son, as in a federal concept of *pre*-destination, tended to… provide ground for a dangerous form of Arian and Socinian heresy in which the atoning work of Christ regarded as an organ of God's activity was separated from the intrinsic character of God as Love.[430]

For Scott, considering the scope and significance of Christ's atonement *apart from* the character of God was anathema. To do so was to invite illusion and encourage doctrinal error—and the doctrine of limited atonement demonstrated this danger. By going 'behind the back of the Incarnation'—that is, by neglecting the character of God revealed in Christ, the ultimate ground of belief—Scott argued that it misread the scope, significance, and intention of the act in such a way that it actually imperilled that very character it sought to protect. In Groves' *Journal*, he writes, 'the question is not whether the scheme of salvation is merely reconcilable with divine love and justice, but how it constitutes the grand proof and manifestation of these attributes, and in general, of the perfections of God.'[431] 'The atonement,' he stresses, 'was designed to prove and establish these attributes: to be the ground of our confidence in them, and of our love to God because of them.'[432] The *Confession*'s presentation of limited atonement actually undermines these attributes, by seeming to present God's forgiving love as arbitrary rather than characteristic.[433]

While Torrance rightly commends the *Confession* for enabling 'the sheer sovereignty and majesty of God…to shine forth,'[434] the image of God that Scott draws is more

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[430] Thomas F. Torrance, *Scottish Theology: From John Knox to John McLeod Campbell* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 133.

[431] Alexander John Scott, ed., "Note C," in *Journal of a Residence at Bagdad, During the Years 1830 and 1831*, by Anthony Norris Groves (London: James Nisbet, 1832), 293.

[432] Scott, 294.

[433] Scott, 294.

[434] Torrance, *Scottish Theology*, 132.

incarnational and Christocentric in shape. Rather than going 'behind the back of the Incarnation,' Scott goes *through* the incarnation to elucidate the character of God. In *Hints*, for instance, he imagines God asking, 'Can my creature, my child, not believe Me, because he cannot see, he cannot understand Me?' Through the person of Christ, God promises, 'I will show thee my life in the form of human thoughts, my reason in the form of human reason.'[435] To discern the character of God, Scott invites his readers to study the actions and dispositions of the incarnate Son of God. He bids them to 'Observe the life he led. Were any ignorant? He taught them. Were any sick brought to Him? He healed them.'[436] Examples of such tender mercy can be multiplied. As Scott notes, Jesus even wept over Jerusalem, 'the city of His enemies and murderers…and said, "I would have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"'[437] More than any doctrine or scriptural passage taken in isolation, it is these consistent interactions that witness to the character of God—for, as Scott notes, Jesus Christ '*He was showing God in all His actions*. He did nothing of Himself, what the Father showed Him that He did, what the Father spake He spake…He and the Father are one.'[438] Like Torrance, Scott believes 'the atoning work of Christ as an organ of God's activity' must be read together with—and in light of—'the intrinsic character of God as Love.'[439]

In *Divine Will*, Scott presents the principle that was critical in the development of his own atonement theology over against that of the *Confession*: namely, the notion of 'the will of God revealed in Christ as *holy love*.'[440] Although Scott shares the term with Erskine, it refers to something quite distinctive in his theology.[441] At least as early as the autumn of

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[435] Scott, "Hints," 30–31.
[436] Scott, 31.
[437] Scott, 32.
[438] Scott, 31.
[439] Torrance, *Scottish Theology*, 133.
[440] Scott, "Divine Will," 23. Emphasis mine.
[441] Scott may well have appropriated the term from Erskine, whom he had met in 1826. Newell records that Scott, Erskine, and MacLeod Campbell spent significant time together in the summer of 1828—

1828—roughly the same time he withdrew his application for ordination citing conscientious objections to the doctrine of limited atonement—Scott was exploring the significance of Jesus' fulfilment of the law. According to Jesus, the law is summarised in the two great precepts (or commandments): namely, to 'love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind' and to 'love thy neighbour as thyself.'[442] Scott believed that the fact that 'Jesus came under [this] law; and that He fulfilled all the righteousness of that law' provided his followers with an opportunity to perceive the character and scope of divine love.[443] Erskine, who heard Scott preach on the subject in the autumn of 1828, wrote to his cousin that Scott reasoned that

> When God was manifested in Christ, in the man Christ Jesus, that man fulfilled the whole law, of which the second great division is, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. If there had been any single man upon earth whom He did not love as Himself, He would have been a breaker of the law. But He fulfilled the whole law, and loved every man, as He loved Himself -- ay and more; and as He thus fulfilled the law, He said, "He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father"; that is to say, My love to men is the very image of my Father's love to them.[444]

The implications of this insight are subtle, but extensive. First, and fundamentally, Scott draws upon God's holiness to *exegete* God's love—that is, he uses Jesus' perfect fulfilment of the law to reveal the universal nature, scope, and significance of divine love. One thing that distinguished 'the Man who was God, and revealed God, and all other men,' writes Scott in *Divine Will*, was 'His character: it was love to God with all His heart, and to His neighbour as Himself, with no peculiar selection, unless we take as such the emphasis with which He applies the law to the case of those that curse and hate and persecute us.'[445] If

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the same year that Erskine published *Unconditional Freeness*. See Newell, "Scott and His Circle," 46–52. Erskine, however, credits Scott's insight as original. He writes, 'You were the person that showed me first how all Divine precepts testified to Divine character, and consequently how we are entitled to look to God for this optimism.' Erskine, "302. To the Rev. Alex. J. Scott. 11th Feb. 1864," 146.

[442] Matthew 22:37b, 39b. Cross references Mark 12:30-31, Luke 10:27.

[443] Scott, "Hints," 32.

[444] Thomas Erskine, "55. To Miss Rachel Erskine. 6th September 1828," in *Letters of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen: From 1800 till 1840*, ed. William Hanna (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1877), 143.

[445] Scott, "Divine Will," 16.

Jesus' intercessory prayer witnesses to the will of God in and for the temporal order, then it is no insignificant thing that he tells his followers 'to love our enemies, bless them that curse us, pray for them that despitefully use and persecute us, that we may be the children of our Father who is in heaven.'[446] For Scott, it is entirely consistent with this character to imagine that 'the simple sincerity of love prompted him to the dreadful task [of the Atonement]; love unwilling that sinners should perish, rejoicing in the prospect of their holy welfare.'[447] Conversely, procuring a satisfaction that was sufficient for all but effective only for some was inconsistent with the tenor and compass of Christ's actions and dispositions. 'Is it credible, is it human,' Scott demands, 'that one capable of living and dying thus for *any of those* whom he saw truly in the mean deformity of their wickedness, could be indifferent to the eternal misery of *any one* of their fellow-sinners? Is it human? Can the same heart be capable of such intensity of love and of this hardenedness of indifference?'[448] If, as Scott asserts, 'the world is ruled by the man who is perfect in the law of love,' the notion that *God himself* would limit the efficacy of Christ's satisfaction—the only means through which reconciliation and creation's at·one·ment with himself might be effected—is incredible.

Second, moreover, Scott argues that to limit the love of God is effectively to compromise the holiness of God—a striking argument in an age that was preoccupied by divine holiness.[449] In Groves' *Journal*, Scott is adamant that 'to limit the divine love, to limit the atonement, the grand expression of that love, is to limit the love of Christ, and thus to make Christ a sinner.'[450] At stake, therefore, is divine holiness—even the moral character of God. Scott contends that limited atonement 'obliges us to believe that Jesus has broken the

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[446] Scott, "Hints," 32.
[447] Scott, 32.
[448] Scott, "Divine Will," 22.
[449] For more on this context, see Chapter 2.
[450] Scott, "Note C," 295.

law,' which 'he assuredly did, if he loved not mankind as himself.'[451] The logic of what it means for Jesus to love mankind as himself is implicit and underdeveloped in Scott's writing. Most likely, he means that for Christ to have fulfilled the law perfectly, the character of wholehearted love that typified the relationship between Father and Son must also have typified the Son's relationship with the whole of humankind. Because 'he and the Father are one,' moreover, humankind can be assured of the Father's love.[452] Scott never articulates this logic in terms of necessity—as if Jesus was compelled to do what he would otherwise not have done. Rather, he is more concerned with what is (and what is not) consistent with the character of God. He writes, 'the law is the transcript of the character of God'[453] and 'a revelation of that which God would.'[454] By fulfilling the law, Jesus confirms that God's love is trustworthy and universal: it is trustworthy and universal precisely *because of* his holiness. Indeed, Scott goes as far as saying that 'to doubt [the universality of the love of God to sinners such as 'me and thee'], were to assail the moral character of God's Holy One.'[455]

Whereas Erskine elucidates God's holiness *in terms of* his love, Scott reverses the terms and elucidates God's love *in terms of* his holiness. Both Scottish divines, however, share the same fundamental commitment: God's love and God's holiness cannot be divorced from one another without mutually destructive consequences. Indeed, Scott asserts that Christ's atonement is not 'merely reconcilable with divine love and justice,'[456] but was designed 'to prove and establish these attributes: to be the ground of our confidence in them, and of our love to God because of them.'[457] As with Erskine, it is

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[451] Scott, 294.
[452] Scott, "Hints," 31.
[453] Scott, "Note C," 294.
[454] Scott, "Divine Will," 11.
[455] Scott, "Hints," 33.
[456] Scott, "Note C," 293.
[457] Scott, 294.

important to clarify what Scott *is not* saying here. The logical consequence of the universal love of God is *not* the universal salvation of humankind. For Scott, salvation is not a function of *decree* but a function of *relationship*—and specifically, personal being-in-relationship with God in the sense developed in Chapter 2. On this account, universal salvation would follow if and only if there was universal being-in-relationship with God—if all people *knew* God. Not all do, and not all are saved. Thus, Scott concedes, 'sinners are destroyed, notwithstanding this love.' For him, the paradigmatic case is Jerusalem. Jesus wept over Jerusalem. Such tenderness notwithstanding, Jerusalem perished. He suggests that the reason is simple: '*Christ came to give her the knowledge of God; and she refused to know God.*'[458] Knowing God, therefore, is vital—but, as with Erskine, not all knowledge of God is equal (or equally salvific).

Earlier, to elucidate Erskine's theological epistemology, I employed Scott's distinction between '*knowing* God' and 'knowing *about* God.' In Scott's discourse most germane to theological epistemology—*Hints for Meditation on Acquaintance with God*—he avows that 'it is not to know *about* God, that is eternal life, or that a man may glory in; it is to *know* God, to be acquainted with him.' To clarify the relational and personally committed character of knowing God, he defines it over against two familiar phenomena: first, the knowledge that an average person might possess about a monarch; the second, the knowledge a material philosopher seeks. Scott writes, 'You may know a lot about a king, but it is unlikely that you know him.'[459] There is no personal acquaintance here; there is no commitment or involvement of self in what is known. Rather, this kind of general knowledge about a person is possessed with disinterest and detachment—a mild curiosity,

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[458] Scott, "Hints," 33. Italics mine.
[459] Scott, 25.

perhaps, but it matters little to one's ordinary, everyday existence.[460] Sharpening the image

of uncommittedly 'knowing about' some subject, Scott turns to the material philosopher.[461]

He warns that one of the greatest mistakes of the material philosopher is failing to

apprehend the address or claim that knowledge makes upon us—particularly, as it refers to

God. Scott writes, 'the Christian must be aware that there is no such miserable lying to

one's-self, such poor half-conscious cheating of a man's own soul, as the self-

congratulation and self-eulogy of the mere material philosopher; who calls [their] study of

the laws of nature a study of God; and would fain persuade himself that his travails…are

even intended as approaches, to the living God.'[462] The material philosopher cultivates an

impersonal and detached epistemic methodology, in which he is immune from and

invulnerable to the claims that are made upon him by what he learns. Scott demands, 'Is he

raised the higher for [his studies]? Does he pray the more for them?' In other words, does

he let what he discovers about God touch him and direct him towards being-in-

relationship with the living God? In language reminiscent of Coleridge, Scott affirms, 'God

is not a thing, nor a notion, nor a doctrine; He is the living God.'[463] The point is that

knowledge of God is intended *for* being-in-relationship with God—for *knowing* God and

the dispositions of his character and for being aligned to him and to them. Such knowledge

of God cannot occur so long as a person cultivates a detachment from their object of

study—that is, so long as they ignore the *personal address* that God makes to them in their

average, everyday being-in-the-world *through* their knowledge of him. A different mode of

participation with the subject at hand is necessary.

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[460] Of course, there are exceptions. An unjust or despotic monarch might well be a matter of existential concern; however, this scenario is not the ordinary experience that Scott seems to be imagining.

[461] A material philosopher maps roughly and imperfectly to adeistic scientist or natural theologian today.

[462] Scott, "Divine Will," 5.

[463] Scott, "Hints," 25.

In this context, Christ's atonement functions on two planes. On the one hand, it has an objective function—that is, a function that is free and independent from human agency or belief. According to the principle of holy love, Christ's atonement objectively expiates the sins of the whole world. Such satisfaction could neither be precipitated nor provided by human beings. On the other hand, it is *because* of this objective nature of the Atonement—and specifically, the holy love of God that it manifests—that the notion of relational at·one·ment with God becomes even imaginable as a potential reality for all human beings. For Scott, Christ's atonement signifies more than satisfaction or propitiation; it is also a testament of the character of God. With respect to salvation, he claims that 'the will of God revealed in Christ as holy love, has been revealed for the express purpose that the faith of it might constitute the very difference sought after.'[464] 'Faith,' he explains, 'belongs to present truth and trust to future contingencies. But such is the present truth regarding God, that the faith of it, the evidence of things not seen, becomes the substance, the *realizing enjoyment* of things hoped for, making them contingencies no longer.'[465] In other words, the objective nature of Christ's atonement— the fact that it testifies to God's character and commitment to reconciliation independent of any human act or belief—provides the sure footing that enables a person to let herself enjoy the reconciliation effected in Christ; and in so doing, she does *in fact* enjoy it. Enjoy has a delightful double meaning, which Scott exploits: it involves taking pleasure or possessing and benefiting from some situation.[466] In both cases, the enjoyment is highly *personal*: it is part of the essence of enjoying something that it affects, touches, alters, even

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[464] Scott, "Divine Will," 23.
[465] Scott, 19.
[466] According to the Oxford English Dictionary, *enjoyment* denotes 'the state or process of taking pleasure in something' or 'the action of possessing and benefiting from something.'

transforms you. Just as one cannot properly delight abstractly, neither can one properly possess and benefit from Christ's atonement abstractly.

Whatever work Christ's atonement does to effect reconciliation from God's perspective, it is *also* properly understood as an address to each and every human being that calls for him or her to respond.[467] Scott writes:

> The work of God in Christ [has] shown me a rest. But the work was done for this very purpose, that the confidence, not only permitted, but required as a duty might be encouraged by it: and what an encouragement it is to know, that God, whose commands honestly express His *desires*, has commanded me to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ in order to this very end, that I might further obey Him by giving up to Him my temporal and eternal all, and knowing it to be safe in his hands.[468]

Knowing that there is a rest, knowing the character of God that makes such rest possible, knowing that one is secure in God's hands—these are not examples of abstract or propositional knowledge. Rather, there is an existential depth to this kind of knowledge. It is personal and *self*-committed, even so far as 'giving up to Him my temporal and eternal all.' Of course, yielding to the overtures of God is not an end in itself. Rather, knowing oneself to be reconciled—by the intent *and* efficacious action of God—is the condition that makes possible being-in-relationship and the kind of holy love concomitant with such at·one·ment.

Having identified the core commitment that undergirds Scott's conviction that the efficacy of Christ's atonement was not limited to the elect—namely, the divine will revealed in Christ as *holy love*—it becomes clearer how much was at stake for the young probationer in choosing whether or not to affirm the *Confession*'s doctrine of limited atonement. Taking its doctrine as a confession of his own faith was no mere theoretical or doctrinal dispute

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[467] The character of this address is no less powerful—or personal—for its universality. As Scott explains in Groves' *Journal*, 'where a common benefit is received, its efficacy, as a motive to grateful returns, is limited to those who recognize and value it.' Scott bids his readers to consider the case of a patriot who 'has delivered millions of ignorant, suspicious, ungrateful countrymen.' Groves, *Journal*, 291.

[468] Scott, "Divine Will," 23.

for Scott. It was also moral and pastoral. How the doctrine of atonement was interpreted raised issues regarding the essence of salvation, the character of God, the grounds and nature of belief, and the possibility of being reconciled with God—and through God, with the whole of creation. That mattered to Scott—enough for him to pursue a course that proved injurious to his health, his reputation, and his career with the Church that ultimately culminated with his trial before the General Assembly.[469] From his published endeavours to reconceptualise the divine will *in terms of* the character of God, revealed in Christ and confirmed in his fulfilment of the law, it is clear that Scott sought to break open and reframe the image of satisfaction. The fact that Christ provides sufficient and efficacious satisfaction for the whole world remains critical to Scott's atonement theology; however, it is recast in light of the character of God as holy love as an *address* to each and every individual that claims a personal response. Both objectively and subjectively, Christ's atonement is intended *for* creation's at·one·ment with God. Because not all will respond to this overture—not all will comprehend the existential dimension of the address God makes in and through Christ's atonement and fittingly respond to it—not all will be saved. Rather, only in *knowing* God—as a friend knows a friend, or a son knows a father—can one enjoy the kind of being-in-relationship with God that is ultimately salvific. As with Erskine, so with Scott: knowledge of God is ultimately for the sake of this relational at·one·ment with God. How such knowledge is envisaged and validated within a community, therefore, was crucial to Scott—and as his address to the General Assembly reveals, he believed it too was imperilled by the *Confession*'s status within the Church.

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[469] Newell, "Scott and His Circle," 87.

iii) Constitution of an Epistemic Community

To challenge the *Confession*'s doctrinal representation of the atonement, Scott petitioned the General Assembly without success to be tried by the word of God alone. While scholars may be left in the dark with respect to Scott's intended doctrinal argument, his methodological petition to the court and the reaction it occasioned are nevertheless illuminative. In particular, they highlight the *Confession*'s elevated epistemic status within the early nineteenth-century Church—that is, its heightened relative standing in matters relating to knowledge of God and their validation. Scott was not anticonfessional in principle. He was, however, concerned that the obdurate reverence with which his contemporaries treated the *Confession* might compromise the Church's capacity to be a community of truth. As his own trial testified, potentially legitimate avenues of theological investigation could be jeopardised or barred altogether so long as the *Confession* was considered the indisputably 'fit and faithful interpreter of the Word of God.'[470] Scott maintained that it was epistemic hubris to hold up the *Confession* as the unquestioned and unquestionable standard for knowledge of God. It imperilled the Church's capacity to be a community of truth in two related ways. First, and most fundamentally, it closed the hermeneutic space between the *Confession* and the Word of God. This change reoriented how theological sources of knowledge were weighed and validated. In simple terms, the *Confession* carried more weight. How it interpreted divine revelation—and how it might be exposited—became more urgent epistemic tasks. Other sources, with their potential to be mutually corrective, were displaced in its wake. The General Assembly's immediate response to Scott's petition to be tried by Scripture alone, as well as the subsequent reaction in the press, exemplify this dynamic.

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[470] Newell, 137. Dr. John Lee, the leader of the Moderate party, represented the *Confession* in this manner in response to Scott. See also "Case of Mr Scott - Heresy. 28 May 1831."

Second, and in consequence, the elevated status of the *Confession* prevented probationers and ministers alike from raising reservations or dealing with doubts about its contents. With the increasingly uncompromising enforcement of the Formula of 1711 and its later counterparts, probationers and ministers were not permitted to admit any such uncertainties without jeopardising their offices—a fact that Scott believed risked the Church's capacity to be a genuine community of truth. By critiquing the Church's dogmatism on the issue of tolerance—i.e., the allowable degree or amount of variation permitted regarding the confessional standard—Scott endeavoured to restore the hermeneutical space occluded by the *Confession*'s pre-eminent epistemic status. By contextualising the young probationer's petition to be tried by the word of God alone, Scott indirectly solicited the Church to reimagine what obedience to the truth of God and its claims might signify *within its communion*. While unsuccessful in his bid, being compelled to consider what makes a community of truth—and what hinders it—undoubtedly shaped his later endeavours to foster communities of truth that were not dependent for their constitution upon adherence to confessional standards: communities based in the hospitality of his own home, in rented rooms or the dockyards of Woolwich, in the Mechanics' Institutes and Working Men's Colleges emerging across the country, or in the new places of higher education such as University College, London; the Ladies' College, in Bedford Square; or Owen's College, Manchester.

Unlike MacLeod Campbell, who was brought before the General Assembly three days earlier on charges of heresy, Scott appeared before the highest ecclesial court voluntarily to appeal the Presbytery of Paisley's decision to withdraw his licence—a decision that excluded him from holding office at the Scots Church in Woolwich, outside London. Six months earlier, as we saw above, Scott had declared that he could not 'accept ordination, while [his] signing the Westminster Confession is made the condition of [his]

receiving it.'[471] Since his probationer's licence was predicated upon subscribing to the *Confession* and Scott himself had declared that his objections insurmountable, the Presbytery of Paisley concluded that his resignation from the ordination process was tantamount to a resignation of his licence. They therefore concluded that the young probationer was 'no longer a licentiate of this Presbytery and [ordered] his name to be removed from the roll of their probationers.'[472] Scott rejected this finding. Where the Presbytery of Paisley interpreted his declared objections to the *Confession* as of an intention to resign his licence, Scott asserted that he had merely intended 'to submit to the judgment of the Presbytery [of Paisley] whether this declaration [of his objections] was an offence worthy of…deprivation of his licence.'[473] In other words, he wanted his objections to be heard and deliberated. For Scott, appealing to the General Assembly represented a second attempt for such a hearing.

To argue for a reinstatement of his licence to preach, Scott pursued two related lines of argument. The first was to petition the court for the opportunity to show that his objections to the *Confession*'s doctrine of atonement could be justified by the witness of scripture. If his doctrinal concerns proved justified, then proscribing his continuance in office because of them would be unreasonable. Persuading the General Assembly to meet him on any other theological ground than the *Confession*, however, was an uphill battle—as MacLeod Campbell's trial demonstrated earlier in the week.[474] While Scott sought to differentiate his case from his friend and colleague, he also came equipped to fight for the right to defend his personal convictions. First, he recalled the Church to the epistemic humility written into its own ecclesiastical standards. Acknowledging their own limitations

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[471] Newell, "Scott and His Circle," 115. See also A. J Scott, "Letter to the Editor. 10 May 1831."

[472] Newell, "Scott and His Circle," 123. See also "Minutes of the Presbytery of Paisley (1823-36), 4 May 1831," 1831, CH2/294 14, Scottish Records Office.

[473] Newell, "Scott and His Circle," 124. See also "General Assembly Papers, 1831," May 9, 1831, CHI/2 154, Scottish Records Office.

[474] For more on the parallels between Scott's and MacLeod Campbell's trials, see Newell, "Scott and His Circle," 130–31.

as products of human hands, the *Confession* and its predecessors not only permitted but enjoined members of the Church to resolve their doctrinal controversies through careful elucidation of scripture. For example, the *Scots Confession of 1560*, which Torrance lauds for its 'humble readiness…to receive correction in light of divine revelation,'[475] makes the following critical invitation:

> …If any man will note in this our Confession any article or sentence repugning to God's holy word, that it would please him of his gentleness, and for Christian charity's sake, to admonish us of the same in writ; and We of our honour and fidelity do promise unto him satisfaction from the mouth of God (that is, from his holy Scriptures), or else reformation of that which he shall prove to be amiss.[476]

Article 18 asserts further that 'when controversy then happenth, for the right understanding…we ought not so much to look at what men before us have said or done, as unto that which the Holy Ghost uniformly speaketh, within the body of the Scriptures, and unto that which Jesus Christ himself did, and commanded to be done.'[477] If being superseded rendered the *Scots Confession* less authoritative, Scott contended that the same principle was present in the *Confession*. According the Westminster divines, 'the supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined; and in whose sentence we are to rest; can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture.'[478] Similar positions were promulgated in Ch. 1, §9, and Ch. 31, §3 and 4—the latter of which admits that 'all synods or councils, since the Apostles' times, whether general or particular, may err; and many have erred.' It recommends, therefore, that 'they are not to be made the rule of faith, or practice; but to be used as a help in

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[475] Torrance, *Scottish Theology*, 130.

[476] "The Scots Confession of Faith of 1560," Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, 2021, https://www.fpchurch.org.uk/about-us/important-documents/the-scots-confession-1560/#index.

[477] "Scots Confession."

[478] S. W. Carruthers, ed., *The Confession of Faith of the Assembly of Divines at Westminster*, Tercentenary Edition (London: Publishing Office of the Presbyterian Church of England, 1946), 5.

both.'[479] Indeed, Scott stressed that the 'essence of Protestantism' was the principle that all doctrines must be tried and tested against the Word of God.[480] While the second question he had been asked when he was licensed was about his subscription to the *Confession*, the question that preceded it—both chronologically and in order of importance—was 'Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, and the *only rule* of faith and manners?'[481] Refusing to meet him on this theological ground, Scott contended, violated the first principles of the Church itself and its commitment to him himself. With each appeal—historical, confessional, and personal—the young probationer pled for the *Confession* to be approached with epistemic humility. Without contesting its usefulness as an aid to faith or practice, it should not be afforded disproportionate epistemic status.

Scott's second line of argument for the reinstatement of his licence to preach was related, though more indirect. When he had appeared before the Presbytery of Paisley earlier in the month to defend his licensure as a probationer, Scott testified that he had not resigned his licence at the same time as he withdrew his ordination application because 'he was not satisfied of the correctness of his doing so, while he concurred with the standards of the Church in the great proportion of her articles, and only differed from her in a few.' As far as he understood, 'the Church had not decided that a man [could] *not* partially depart from her standards, and still conscientiously remain in her communion.' While Scott had requested 'a deliverance [of judgment on this point] from the Presbytery [of Paisley],' their sentence failed to address this issue.[482] Standing before the General Assembly, then, Scott

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[479] Carruthers, 23.

[480] Newell, "Scott and His Circle," 134. See also "Case of Mr Scott - Heresy. 28 May 1831."

[481] "Act Concerning Probationers, and Setting Ministers, with Questions To Be Proposed To and Engagements to Be Taken of Them.," 10 § (1711), https://www.british-history.ac.uk/church-scotland-records/acts/1638-1842/pp450-459. See Church Law Society, ed., "Acts: 1711," in *Acts of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 1638-1842* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Printing & Publishing Co., 1843), 450–59, https://www.british-history.ac.uk/church-scotland-records/acts/1638-1842/pp450-459.

[482] Newell, "Scott and His Circle," 139. See also "Presbytery of Paisley. 6 May 1831."

enquired whether 'the venerable Court would go the length to say, that if a man did not assent to every iota or tittle of the Confession of Faith, he was no longer to consider himself a licentiate of the Church of Scotland.'[483] While the young probationer conceded that some divergences from the *Confession* were 'so grand and dangerous' that it was unconscionable for the Church to allow their advocates to continue in their offices, he maintained his divergences were not of this sort.[484] Did the Church admit no spectrum? If the Presbytery of Paisley's course of action was representative of the Church, it certainly seemed so. Yet, Scott argued that taking such an absolutist position was absurd. It hardly fostered a community of truth, if submitting one's reservations about the *Confession* within the communion of the Church automatically disbarred one from holding office. If anything, it encouraged nominalism or the kind of language games that were incompatible with honest belief.[485]

Both these arguments were predicated upon the larger issue of *tolerance*—that is, the allowable degree or amount of variation with regard to the confessional standard. In this respect, both modern scholars and Scott's contemporary critics have misinterpreted the significance of his petition to be tried by the word of God alone. MacLeod, for instance, observes that Scott's licence to preach was withdrawn 'not for any specific doctrinal deviation, but because he had made it known that he would not subscribe the Confession.' While strictly true, he makes his observation in the context of rising anti-confessionalism, suggesting that Scott's refusal was anticonfessional in principle.[486] In fact, both Scott's appeal to the Church's own standards and his plea for greater tolerance *within the communion*

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[483] Newell, "Scott and His Circle," 134. See also "Case of Mr Scott - Heresy. 28 May 1831."
[484] Newell, "Scott and His Circle," 139. See also "Presbytery of Paisley. 6 May 1831."
[485] Newell, "Scott and His Circle," 134, 108. In addition to noting the 'temptation to hypocrisy and falsehood' such an environment created at the General Assembly, Scott declared he could not sign the *Confession* by comforting himself 'by the meaning which logical ingenuity could put upon it, but by the words on their plain broad surface.' See also "The Scots Presbytery, London. 22 October 1830."
[486] MacLeod, "Westminster Confession," 11.

of the Church militate against this inference. What is more curious, however, is his

contemporary critics' charge that his petition to be tried by scripture alone was evidence of

Scott's belief in the inviolability of private judgement. For example, Dr. John Lee, the

leader of the Moderate Party and a respondent at Scott's trial, strongly objected to the

purported establishment of private judgment as the ultimate arbiter of truth:

> This young gentleman, who was licensed by a Presbytery within the bounds of the
> Established Church, declared that he was not only entitled to reject the Confession
> of Faith as a fit and faithful interpreter of the Word of God in the Scriptures; but
> was at liberty at any time to signify his dissent from its articles, under some
> qualification or other, and yet remain a member or minister of the Established
> Church.[487]

John Geddes, who defended the Presbytery of Paisley against Scott's appeal, made a similar

argument. He worried, 'if it was held that in smaller points individuals might differ, one

minister might come objecting to his section, and another objecting to his; so that before

next Assembly the Confession of Faith might be in this way done away [with] altogether.'

Rather, he contended it was 'essential to purity in faith in practice' that preachers 'explain

the word of God agreeable to the standards of the Church.'[488] That this position regarding

the *Confession*'s status was not limited to the Moderate Party is suggested by the *Edinburgh*

Christian Instructor's introductory remarks to their coverage of 1831 General Assembly.

According to that organ of the Popular or Evangelical Party, although Scott's appeal to 'the

paramount authority of the word of God' was comprehensible, it was nevertheless 'wholly

inappropriate' because it failed to grasp the scriptural foundations of the *Confession* itself.[489]

Inveighing against the recourse to 'the sacredness of conscience, and the inviolability of

private opinion,' the editor argued that the Church had every right to propose 'certain tests

of admission to her offices,' including subscription. 'If to any, this condition appear hard,

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[487] Newell, "Scott and His Circle," 141. See also "Case of Mr Scott - Heresy. 28 May 1831."
[488] Newell, "Scott and His Circle," 140. See also "Case of Mr Scott - Heresy. 28 May 1831."
[489] 'Proceedings of the General Assembly', *The Edinburgh Christian Instructor* 30, no. 6 (June 1831), 437.

or unreasonable,' he observed, 'the door is open for retreat, and, out of the circle of her establishment, ample room is to be found for all the diversity of view.' Petitions such as Scott's represented 'nothing less than an inconclusive attempt…to justify [his] endeavour to continue within the *voluntary bond* of the establishment, and to reap the advantages arising from their connexion with it.'[490] These three responses—across prosecution, press, and party lines—share two notable commonalities.

First, each of these responses affords the *Confession* a high *epistemic status*—that is, the *Confession* possesses a high degree of authority and standing in matters relating to knowledge of God or how such knowledge is validated. Not only is the *Confession* represented as 'a fit and faithful interpreter of the Word of God,' but Geddes argues that the preacher's principal mission is 'to explain the word of God agreeable to the standards of the Church.' Under this schema, scripture is exegeted *in accordance* with the confessional standard of the Church—which also organises the terms of such engagement. While we should be wary of reading too much into one individual's comment, it is quite a remarkable statement of the *Confession*'s epistemic status. Since its adoption in 1647, the *Confession* has been the official 'sole subordinate standard'—that is, the principal standard responsible for representing the Church's doctrinal and ecclesiological positions and subordinate only to the word of God.[491] The resistance to Scott's petition to be tried by the word of God alone and his plea for tolerance exemplify the new and privileged place accorded to the 'subordinate standard' hermeneutic dynamic of the Church. This phenomenon was not isolated to Scott's case. By examining sermons of leading Churchmen, Torrance concludes

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[490] "Proceedings of the General Assembly," 436–37. Likely galvanised by similar concerns, Margaret Oliphant's characterisation of Scott in her work *The Life of Edward Irving* (1862) is a later—and more vivid—repudiation of what she perceived as Scott's 'knight-errantry.' She wrote that Scott, Irving's former assistant, appeared 'by himself upon the field, proclaiming his readiness, not only to impugn the standards, but to argue the matter with the Church, and maintain against all comers…his solitary daring assault against the might of orthodoxy.' She later retracted this characterisation. Oliphant, *Edward Irving*, 2:178.

[491] David Fergusson, "A Subordinate Standard: Where Next?," *Theology in Scotland*, The Westminster Confession in the Church of Scotland Today, 26, no. S (2019): 1, https://doi.org/10.15664/tis.v26iS.1875.

that the *Confession* 'attained such a powerful and definitive place in the tradition of the Kirk that the Holy Scriptures were often interpreted in light of its teaching rather than the other way around.'[492] A 'Panel on Doctrine' who reported to the General Assembly of 1970 came to the same conclusion. In their report, they declared that:

> Even though [the *Confession*] pointed beyond itself to Scripture it was commonly assumed that what was contained in it was an accurate interpretation of the Scriptures, and that to preach and teach the doctrines of the Confession was the same thing as preaching and teaching the doctrines of Holy Scripture… In practice the Westminster Confession tended to oust Scripture as the supreme standard of the Church.[493]

While there is disagreement over the extent to which the *Confession* itself fostered such a dynamic, what is clear is that—at least in this period—it was afforded unquestioned and seemingly unquestionable epistemic status.[494]

Second, each of these responses either explicitly or implicitly presumes unconditional commitment to the *Confession* for ecclesial officeholders, if not also for members. To some degree, this point is unsurprising. The Ministers Act of 1693 prescribed 'that no person be admitted or continued for hereafter to be a minister or preacher within this Church unless that he…subscribe the Confession of Faith.'[495] This requirement was also specified for 'all probationers for the Holy Ministry, before they be licensed to preach the Gospel,' along with a new Formula of Subscription, in 1711.[496] Of particular note with respect to the scope of one's commitment is the second question probationers were asked—namely, 'do you sincerely own and believe *the whole doctrine* of the Confession of

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[492] Torrance, *Scottish Theology*, 130.

[493] MacDonald quotes *Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland with the Legislative Acts, 1970* (Edinburgh: Church of Scotland, 1970), 174. See Finlay A. J. MacDonald, 'The Westminster Confession: Unfinished Business', *Theology in Scotland* 23, no. 2 (2016), 7.

[494] Torrance, *Scottish Theology*, 130. Cf.MacLeod, "Westminster Confession," 1.

[495] "Act for Setling [Sic] the Quiet and Peace of the Church," 38 § (1693), https://www.legislation.gov.uk/aosp/1693/38.

[496] For the full text of the formula towhich probationers and candidates for ordination were asked to subscribe, see Act Concerning Probationers, and Setling Ministers, with Questions To Be Proposed To and Engagements to be Taken of Them.

Faith…to be the truths of God, contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments; and do you own *the whole doctrine* therein contained as the confession of your faith?'[497] As Scott would have been aware from his own experience, licensure was predicated on receiving an affirmative answer.[498] In practice, however, during much of the eighteenth century, General Assemblies permitted greater tolerance than these ecclesiastical statutes mandated—a fact that may account for Scott asking whether a man had to 'assent to every iota or tittle of the Confession of Faith' to retain his licence to preach.

For instance, of the three most noteworthy cases of suspected heterodoxy within the Church of Scotland in that century—Professor John Simson for Arianism, Dr William McGill for Socinianism, and the Marrow Men for antinomianism—not one case led to a deposition.[499] Simson was suspended, the case against McGill was discontinued following his apology, and the Marrow Men were formally rebuked but left in their respective offices.[500] In fact, the specific issue of tolerance was very much a live issue. In particular, Innes notes the case of Alexander Fergusson of Kilwinning, suspected of Socinianism—a case that occasioned two years' vigorous debate that was published in *The Scots Magazine*. The sustained interest, he argues, turned 'not so much on the truth or falsehood of doctrine, as on the liberty to utter it after having subscribed to the Confession.'[501] In 1804, moreover, the New Light Anti-Burghers declared 'that, as no human composure, however excellent and well expressed, can be supposed to contain a full and comprehensive view of divine truth; so, by this adherence [to the *Confession*], we are not precluded from embracing, upon due deliberation, any further light which may afterward arise from the word of God

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[497] Act Concerning Probationers, and Setting Ministers, with Questions To Be Proposed To and Engagements to be Taken of Them. See Church Law Society, "Acts: 1711." Italics mine.
[498] Newell, "Scott and His Circle," 35.
[499] MacLeod, "Westminster Confession," 9.
[500] Drummond and Bulloch, *Scottish Church*, 205.
[501] Alexander T. Innes, *The Law of Creeds in Scotland: A Treatise on the Legal Relation of Churchs in Scotland Established and Not Established, to Their Doctrinal Confessions* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1867), 108.

about any article of divine truth.'[502] Being an offshoot of the Secession churches, The New

Light Anti-Burghers are admittedly not representative of the established Church of

Scotland's position on tolerance. Their public resolutions, however, necessarily attracted

renewed attention to the subject—even if that attention took a different (or reactionary)

direction in the established Church. In this context, the hostile reaction to Scott's plea for

greater tolerance exemplifies the Church's increasing emphasis on doctrinal uniformity.

Third, and relatedly, the responses predicate lasting communion within the Church

upon this unconditional adherence to the *Confession*. Historically, the *Confession* was used

both as a tool of cohesion and to demarcate its communion. As Torrance notes, the

confessional statement originated as a 'socio-political instrument designed to give rational

doctrinal cohesion to the participating Churches in the Commonwealth, both in order to

strengthen their Protestant stance over against the Church of Rome, and to bring about a

rather Rome-like uniformity of religion in the British Isles.'[503] Given Protestantism's

precarious position vis-à-vis the throne at the time, presenting a uniform face was critical if

the faith was to maintain its place in Britain.[504] Nowhere was the need for a 'united front'

felt more nearly than in Scotland, where the Solemn League and Covenant had placed the

nation in direct conflict with Charles I in 1643.[505] The *Confession* presented an opportunity

for theological and ecclesiological—and thus, at that time, political—consolidation across

Scotland and the British Isles. While it is anachronistic to characterise the Church of

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[502] General Associate Synod (Scotland), *Narrative and Testimony Agreed Upon and Enacted by the General Associate Synod* (Edinburgh: A. Neill, 1804), 10.

[503] Torrance, *Scottish Theology*, 126.

[504] In Scotland, James V of Scotland (r. 1513–1542); Mary, Queen of Scots (r. 1542–1567) and her mother, Mary of Guise of Scotland (r. 1554–1560) were Catholic monarchs. James VI & I who united the thrones (r. 1603–1625) was the first monarch brought up in the Church of Scotland. His son, Charles I (r. 1625–1649), favoured high Anglicanism. Failure to support the Protestant side in the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648), his marriage to Catholic Henrietta Maria of France, and his attempted imposition of Anglican rites of governance onto the Church of Scotland earned him continued conflict with his northern realm—including two Bishops' Wars in 1639 and 1640. These conflicts precipitated the Wars of Three Kingdoms (1639–1653), including the English Civil War, which eventually resulted in Charles I's execution.

[505] MacDonald, "The Westminster Confession: Unfinished Business," 6.

Scotland and the *Confession* as co-constitutive, being linked together by establishment meant that when the legitimacy of one was called into question, the other was called into question as well. With anti-establishment agitation gaining momentum in the early nineteenth century, the Church's place in the life and governance of Scotland was under threat.[506] In part, this set of circumstances might account for the uncompromising position the General Assembly took with respect to dissent from even an 'iota or tittle' from its confessional standard.

Yet, this is not the full story. From its creation, the *Confession* also served to demarcate the boundaries of the Church's communion—something which greater tolerance threatened. Whereas the *Confession* provided a unified front against the face of the external threat of Roman Catholicism or Episcopalianism in the seventeenth century, in the nineteenth century it was increasingly used to test and anticipate potential foes within its own borders. Eighteenth-century Presbyterianism was no stranger to internal controversy: ongoing tensions with the Cameronian Covenanters following the Presbyterian settlement early in the century, the First Secession (1733), the Second Secession (1743), the formation of the Relief Church (1761), and Auld Licht and New Licht controversies amongst both the Burghers (1798) and Anti-Burghers (1806).[507] Considering the ecclesiological tensions in the decade that preceded the nineteenth century, Lovegrove cites the *Scots Magazine* as representative, if unusually direct, in assessing popular discontent vis-à-vis the Church of Scotland:

> So prevalent has this disposition, to form themselves into independent
> Congregations, under the pastors of their own appointing, become among the
> lower orders of people in Scotland, that, if some effectual measures are not speedily
> adopted to check its progress, there is reason to apprehend that in the course of a

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[506] For more information, see Andrew Drummond and James Bulloch, "The Ten Years Conflict," in *The Scottish Church, 1688-1843: The Age of the Moderates* (Edinburgh: St Andrews Press, 1973), 220–42.

[507] For a map and brief information on these controversies, see Gordan Donaldson, *Scottish Church History* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic, 1985).

very few years…the Constitutional Church [may] be reduced to a form without substance.[508]

Evangelicalism, moreover, brought with it a fresh interest in mission—and, as Bebbington notes, not just mission abroad.[509] To the ire of established ecclesiastical leadership, a movement of 'home missionaries' and itinerant preachers was spilling across Scotland. In the General Assembly of 1799, McIntosh registers 'overtures from seven synods relating to unqualified ministers and preachers [that] were read and considered.'[510] Chief among the instigators in the upsurge of lay preaching were Robert Haldane of Airthrey, Stirlingshire and his brother James, who had both themselves become lay preachers. Having sold their estate to fund evangelical missions, Drummond and Bulloch record that 'by 1805 the Haldanes claimed to have trained 200 lay preachers, whom they largely supported, and between 1798 and 1810 their expenditure on these and other projects [including Sunday Schools] amounted to over £70,000.'[511] Being critical of the teaching offered in the parish kirk—and operating outwith the established ecclesiastical governance and educational structures—the activities of the 'Haldane sect' were privately and publicly censured as pernicious, undermining, and necessitating conclusive action.[512] In 1799, therefore, the General Assembly issued a Declaratory Act that forbade unqualified persons to preach or minister in congregations under the jurisdiction of the Church of Scotland—an act that meant that if Scott's appeal to retain his licence was not upheld, he would lose his ministerial role in Woolwich. Only ordained or licensed persons were permitted to accept a presentation or call to ministry in a parish. Ministerial communion or employment of

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[508] Lovegrove quotes *Scots Magazine*, 1801, 389. See also Deryck Lovegrove, "'A Set of Men Whose Proceedings Threaten No Small Disorder': The Society for Propagating the Gospel at Home, 1798-1808," *The Scottish Historical Review* 79, no. 207 (April 2000): 62.

[509] Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*, 40.

[510] Lovegrove, "'A Set of Men Whose Proceedings Threaten No Small Disorder': The Society for Propagating the Gospel at Home, 1798-1808," 64.

[511] Drummond and Bulloch, *Scottish Church*, 153.

[512] Drummond and Bulloch, 153.

persons without these qualifications, moreover, was prohibited 'under pain of such

censures as the judicatories of this Church may see cause to inflict.'[513] Indeed, for the sake

of 'unity and good order of the Church,' it was vital 'that no minister shall presume to set

up his individual judgment in opposition to the judgment of those to whom, at his

ordination, he promised subjection in the Lord.'[514] While this act changed little in rule, it

increasingly aligned communion with subscription to the Confession and attenuated the

role of private (or personal) judgment.

The confluence of these factors—the high epistemic status of the *Confession*, the call

to unconditional subscription, and the alignment of communion with confession—

produced the 'powerful intellectual coherence in the theological outlook' to which

Torrance attributes the 'enduring unified character to Scottish theology and culture.' [515] Yet,

as I have shown this remarkable theological consensus was not without some cost to its

epistemic community. In a time when Scotland was otherwise distinguished for its

philosophical and technical prowess, Drummond and Bulloch argue forcefully that 'the one

exception was theology.'[516] They credit 'the total absence of any constructive thought by

the clergy in what should have been their distinctive field' to 'the fact that any explicit

deviation from the accepted pattern of theology in the Westminster Confession excluded a

man from the ministry.'[517] This problem was one of the reasons that arguably animated

Scott's later educational endeavours, particularly his work in expanding educational

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[513] "Declaratory Act of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, Respecting Unqualified Ministers and Preachers" (1799). SeeChurch Law Society, ed., "Acts: 1799," in *Acts of the General Assembly of Scotland 1638-1842* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Printing & Publishing Co., 1843), 865–75, https://www.british-history.ac.uk/church-scotland-records/acts/1638-1842/pp865-875. Italics mine.
[514] Declaratory Act of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, respecting Unqualified Ministers and Preachers. See Church Law Society, "Acts: 1799." Italics mine.
[515] Torrance, *Scottish Theology*, 127.
[516] Drummond and Bulloch, *Scottish Church*, 193.
[517] Drummond and Bulloch, 193.

opportunities to those who could not attend Oxbridge because of its confessional

requirements but also to women and working men.

Chapter 5: From Spiritual Sympathy to Spiritual Kingdom of Christ: Scott's Educational Endeavours and the Hope for At·one·ment

i)   Introduction
ii) Thy Kingdom Come, Thy Will Be Done
iii) Education and the Hope for At·one·ment
iv) Owens College: Outlier or Example?
v)   Lessons Learned

> *'I know not with what religion has nothing to do. I know that*
> *the greater any subject of human thought is, the more*
> *intimately it concerns the well-being of men,*
> *the more religion has to do with it.'*

A. J. Scott, 'Chartism,' 1841[518]

i) Introduction

One of the distinguishing characteristics of the long nineteenth century is newfound hope placed in education to 'reweave' the social tapestry of England, either through informal or semi-formal communities of learning such as the ones cultivated by Erskine or through more formalised endeavours such as those undertaken by Scott. Whether one aspired to restore or reform existing structures or create new ones, education could help to realise different visions of society—visions that were often deeply intertwined with specific theological commitments.[519] Today, it is difficult to imagine just how caught up the pursuit of knowledge of God (and thus, theological learning) was with broadening formal education in general. As Gillian Sutherland observes, 'everyone was agreed that any education worth the name had a moral and therefore religious core. But if religious, whose denomination?'[520] And by extension, whose theology? Evangelical-rooted

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[518] Scott, "Chartism," 133.

[519] As I acknowledged in Chapter 1, teasing out causality is difficult here: social visions might have been informed by theological commitments, or theological articulations might have been sought to rationalise social visions informed by other influences or motivations.

[520] Gillian Sutherland, "Education," in *The Cambridge Social History of Britain, 1750-1850*, ed. Francis M. L. Thompson, vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 130.

initiatives, such as the popular Sunday School Movement, prioritised teaching basic Biblical

literacy, comprehension of the core tenets of the faith, and moral sensibilities to the

masses—priorities consistent with their stress upon individuals' conversion, justification by

faith, and growth in personal piety.[521] Other endeavours like the Working Men's College in

London (1854) spearheaded by Church of England theologian-educationist Frederick

Denison Maurice concentrated on cultivating mutual understanding and cooperation across

class divisions, priorities consistent with Maurice's own emphasis on the universal

brotherhood of humankind—a brotherhood rooted in human beings' adoption into the

family of God in Christ and through Christ's atonement.[522] I will argue that there are also

striking congruencies between the character of the kingdom of Christ articulated in Scott's

theological writings and the character of the communities of learning he pioneered and

supported in London and Manchester—communities that extended higher educational

opportunities to working men, women, and those barred from Oxford or Cambridge by

their confessional commitments. Because the kingdom of Christ is a function of

at·one·ment with God in his theological schema, these congruencies can help us to build a

fuller picture of what Scott believed an 'at·one·ment orientation' for theological learning

entailed: the horizons he envisages for theological learning, its countercultural role in

realising flourishing societies, and its particular epistemic modes.

Attending to congruencies between Scott's writings and his educational work

provides new insight into the potential theological underpinnings of Scott's pioneering

educational endeavours. Here, it is important to proceed cautiously. Doubtless, there are

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[521] Hilton, *Age of Atonement.*

[522] Torben Christensen, *Origin and History of Christian Socialism* (Copenhagen: Universitetsforlaget I Aarhus, 1962), 204. It is worth noting that this mutuality was nevertheless essentially hierarchical. According to Christensen, the divine-ordained social hierarchy 'embodied in the established institutions of a country need only be recognised as a hierarchy of mutual support 'for everything [in society] to fall into its appropriate place.'

many factors that contributed to the particular shape of the communities of learning he sought to cultivate—perhaps not least of which is that Scott was a Scot. His formative education at the University of Glasgow between 1818 and 1827 would have been considered much more progressive than the education offered at English universities during that period, both with respect to the diversity of the student populations and the broad-based educational curriculum.[523] More than that, however, R. D. Anderson argues that Scottish universities exported a particular mythos with their graduates and proponents. In particular, he writes:

> The belief that Scottish education was peculiarly 'democratic,' and that it helped to sustain certain correspondingly democratic features of Scottish life, formed a powerful historical myth, [which served as]...an idealization and distillation of a complex reality, a belief which influences history by interacting with other forces and pressures...shaping the form in which the institutions inherited from the past are allowed to change.[524]

Scott's endeavours to extend educational opportunities explored in this chapter harmonise well with this mythos' idealisation of educational institutions as places 'where all social classes rubbed shoulders' and none were unduly fettered by the worldly orders of rank or commerce.[525] Scott's theology likely contributed to his educational motivation and direction, but it was unlikely to be the sole influence shaping his educational imaginary. Yet, if caution is warranted in threading the needle between Scott's theology of at·one·ment with God and his pioneering educational work, it is nevertheless worth doing. It is an underexplored dimension in the existing literature about the Scotsmen's educational enterprises, particularly with respect to his inaugural principalship at Owens College.[526]

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[523] Sutherland, "Education," 139. For specifics on the education Scott received at Glasgow, see Newell, "Scott and His Circle," 22–31.

[524] R. D. Anderson, *Education and Opportunity in Victorian Scotland: Schools and Universities* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 1.

[525] Anderson, 1.

[526] Newell's article on Scott's involvement with the Christian Socialism movement references his conception of the 'kingdom of Christ' in terms of an exemplar, but without reference to his specific atonement theology. Owens College's historian Henry Charlton characterises Scott as a 'moralist and teacher,' without explication of his particular theological commitments. Lees & Robertson likewise represent Scott as

Furthermore, Scott himself accredits it. As he declared in 1841, 'I know not with what religion has nothing to do. I know that the greater any subject of human thought is, the more intimately it concerns the well-being of men, the more religion has to do with it.'[527] How Scott navigates the sometimes-significant opposing cultural pressures can also provide insight into the resources and limitations of retrieving such an 'at·one·ment' orientation to theological learning, a subject that is explored in more depth in the next chapter.

Broadly speaking, then, this chapter contains three movements: (i) mapping the constitution and character of the kingdom of Christ in Scott's theological writings, particularly with a view to its implications for pursuing knowledge of God; (ii) elucidating Scott's endeavours in women's education and working men's education in light of these principles; and (iii) re-reading Scott's efforts as principal of Owens College—an early 'seminary of learning freely open to all sects'—as an endeavour consistent with the telos he envisions for theological learning, albeit a fraught one that intimates some of its potential practical difficulties.[528] First, however, it is vital to understand how the pursuit of knowledge of God (and thus, theological learning) is formed and informed in Scott's schema by the telos of at·one·ment with God, in holy love.

'one of those for whom religion provided a radical element to his Christianity and led him towards the Christian Socialism of Maurice and Kinsley and the social idealism of the Pre-Raphaelites,' without entering into discussion of specific theology. See Newell, "The Other Christian Socialist: Alexander John Scott," 281; Henry Buckley Charlton, *Portrait of a University, 1851-1951: To Commemorate the Centenary of Manchester University* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1951), 56.; Colin Lees and Alex Robertson, "Owens College, A.J. Scott and the Struggle against 'Prodigious Antagonistic Forces,'" *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester.* 78, no. 1 (1996): 158.

[527] Scott, "Chartism," 133.

[528] Editor, "Owens College - A Seminary of Learning Open Freely to All Sects. 12 Oct 1850," *Manchester Weekly Times and Examiner*, October 12, 1850.

ii) Thy Kingdom Come, Thy Will Be Done

By the early 1840s, when Scott's social theology was starting to take shape, social fragmentation was threatening to tear apart the very fabric of English society. Encouraged by innovations in agricultural practices, populations in the late eighteenth century had soared and became concentrated in newly developed industrial towns or industrialised areas.[529] Not only had existing paternalistic social structures proved insufficiently agile and inadequately equipped to handle the rapid rise of emerging working and middle classes, but, as Thane notes, proponents of laissez-faire political economy insisted 'that the government's role was at most strictly limited, that it should not but also could not determine the structure and working of society. Rather, its role was to provide a firmly established and clearly understood framework within which society could very largely run itself.'[530] As the effects of such policies were combined with 'the worst [economic] slump within memory' in the late 1830s and early 1840s,[531] 'various factors had combined to bring before the minds of many men and women the depth, width and intensity of the unhappiness and neglect caused by the intolerable living conditions and oppression that existed in the country.'[532] The press was instrumental in revealing cruelties inflicted by the New Poor Law of 1834, the crisis facing the agricultural labourer during the Anti-Corn Law campaigning in the early 1840s, and the unendurable sanitary conditions of urban areas especially after Edwin Chadwick's report in 1842.[533] Novels by Disraeli, Mrs. Gaskell, and Dickens revealed the appalling condition under which factory workers laboured and

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[529] Evans, *Forging Modern State*, 149.

[530] Pat Thane, "Government and Society in England and Wales, 1750–1914," in *The Cambridge Social History of Britain, 1750-1950*, ed. Francis M. L. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 1. Thane notes that this idea was 'most fully developed in the ideas and action of Peel and Gladstone' and 'most dominant in the 1840s to the1870s,' but also had earlier roots.

[531] Evans, *Forging Modern State*, 320.

[532] G. Kitson Clark, *Churchmen and the Condition of England: 1832–1885: A Study in the Development of Social Ideas and Practices from the Old Regime to the Modern State* (London: Methuen & Co. LTD, 1973), 66.

[533] Clark, 66.

starved. Palpable anger, frustration, and anxiety compelled new social compositions to be imagined; old compositions to be reappraised; and new categories to be created for individuals to understand themselves, their kin, and their place within the wider social order.

In response, a vast array of largely voluntary movements and associations with differing levels of affiliation with the church and with Christianity advocated fresh patterns of economic, social, political, and religious relationships through which to 're-weave' the fragmented threads of society. Working-class Chartists, for example, sought to enact change through legislation by presenting a six-point platform 'People's Charter' to parliament in 1838 that demanded electoral reform and universal male suffrage.[534] Owenite Socialists experimented with new 'co-operative villages' that sought to rearrange patterns of industry and distribution through co-operative principles and education.[535] The Oxford Movement (1833-145) advocated reinvigorating Eucharistic communities, 'the means by which [they believed] organic pre-commercial society and its concomitant social harmony might be reclaimed.'[536] Against this backdrop—and at the heart of these social, economic, political, and theological debates about how best to constitute society—Scott delivered a series of lectures entitled *Social Systems of the Present Day Compared with Christianity* which considered all three of these movements in terms of one criterion: the spiritual kingdom of Christ.[537]

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[534] Evans, *Forging Modern State*, 320. The People's Charter was introduced in 1839 and demanded 'Universal Suffrage, No Property Qualifications, Annual Parliaments, Equal Representation [i.e., constituencies of equal size], Payment of Members, and Vote by Ballot.' Support ebbed and flowed over the 1830s and 1840s, with the last real collective demonstration in 1848.

[535] Gregory Claeys, *Citizens and Saints: Politics and Anti-Politics in Early British Socialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 211. See also, Krishan Kumar, "Utopian Thought and Communal Practice: Robert Owen and the Owenite Communities," *Theory and Society* 19, no. 1 (1990): 1–35.

[536] S.A. Skinner, *Tractarians and "The Condition of England"* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), 143–44.

[537] Scott delivered these lectures in Woolwich (1840) and London (1841).

At the time, Scott himself was in a critical period of consolidation and transition. He was still ministering to a faithful congregation who had followed him from the Church of Scotland first to Providence Chapel (1831-1839) and later to the Welsh Chapel (1839-1845). For the young Scotsman, ministry and education presented two inflections of common vocation—namely, revealing the kingdom of God and bringing others into genuine relationship with its divine author. Over the course of his Woolwich period (1831-1846), Scott expanded educational opportunities both to his congregation and to the wider public, even offering evening classes to the dockyard workers who constituted about one-fifth of Woolwich's population.[538] Topics ranged from general and special revelation (August-September 1840),[539] to popular education (October 1840; June-July 1841),[540] to the method and study of history (October 1841),[541] to the Factory Bill (May 1843), to German scholarship (April-May 1843), to political systems,[542] to ecclesiastical unity and schism (July 1840, May-June 1842),[543] to European history (March 1842).[544] In many cases, full text transcriptions or summaries were carried in the local papers. Their remarkable breadth reflects the scope of his own studies in the period. Of all the reported talks, however, in

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[538] Newell, "Scott and His Circle," 235. Scott was also elected President of the Woolwich Institution for the Advancement of Literary, Scientific and Mechanical Knowledge in 1841, after supporting the institution from its establishment.

[539] A. J Scott, "The Harmony of Natural and Revealed Truth. 1 August 1840," *The Woolwich Gazette*, August 1, 1840; A. J Scott, "The Harmony of Natural and Revealed Truth. 8 August 1840," *The Woolwich Gazette*, August 8, 1840; A. J Scott, "The Harmony of Natural and Revealed Truth. 22 August 1840," *The Woolwich Gazette*, August 22, 1840; A. J Scott, "The Harmony of Natural and Revealed Truth. 29 August 1840," *The Woolwich Gazette*, August 29, 1840; A. J Scott, "The Harmony of Natural and Revealed Truth. 5 September 1840," *The Woolwich Gazette*, September 5, 1840; A. J Scott, "The Harmony of Natural and Revealed Truth. 12 September 1840," *The Woolwich Gazette*, September 12, 1840.

[540] A. J Scott, "Popular Education. 10 October 1840," *The Woolwich Gazette*, October 10, 1840; A. J Scott, "The Extension of Education. 5 June 1841," *The Woolwich Gazette*, June 5, 1841; A. J Scott, "The Extension of Education. 24 July 1841," *The Woolwich Gazette*, July 24, 1841.

[541] A. J Scott, "The Method of the Study of History. 23 October 1841," *Kentish Mercury*, October 23, 1841; A. J. Scott, "The Method of the Study of History. 30 October 1841," *Kentish Mercury*, October 30, 1841.

[542] A. J. Scott, "Social Systems of the Day Compared with Christianity," in *Discourses* (London and Cambridge: MacMillan & Co., 1866), 59–129.

[543] Scott, "On Schism."

[544] A. J. Scott, "On the Various Races of Europe (The Greenwich Society). 5 March 1842," *The Kentish Mercury*, March 5, 1842. Scott was actively engaged with lecturing on behalf of the Greenwich Society in this period. Newell, "Scott and His Circle," 404.

Social Systems Scott arguably offers his most systematic exploration of a theological vision

for a flourishing society—and theological learning oriented by at·one·ment with God

supports the realisation of such a society.

In the opening lecture, entitled 'Kingdom of Christ,' Scott argues that the only

'pattern' or social system that is constitutive of true social unity is the *kingdom of Christ*—

'that social system which Christ *has* already founded and introduced into the world.'[545]

Throughout history—in his interactions with Adam, with Abraham, Sarah and their

descendants, and with Moses, for example—Scott proposes God has revealed his claim to

be acknowledged as the author of all rightly ordered relationships: from 'the mysterious

constitution of the individual man, in soul and in body, [which] has its laws from God,'[546]

to the 'laws that bind men together in families,'[547] to the laws of the nation that created the

'theocracy of the Jewish people.'[548] In Christ, however, God introduces a new and

superseding kingdom, one whose reality is present now but not fully realised and one

whose constitution is spiritual.[549] To explain 'the meaning of *spiritual*,' Scott writes, 'to do a

thing because I am commanded, without entering into the principle, motive, or spring of

it—that may be service; to do a thing, entering into the principle of it—that is the spiritual

obedience of a friend or son.'[550] Whereas other dispensations relied upon external

institutions for maintaining social cohesion, 'the establishment of the spiritual kingdom of

Christ is the opening up of the inward meaning of things, and taking our heart into

sympathy with the spirit and purpose of God in it.'[551] To understand the implications of

this theological and social vision upon the pursuit of knowledge of God (and thus,

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[545] Scott, "Kingdom of Christ," 59.
[546] Scott, 60.
[547] Scott, 61.
[548] Scott, 62.
[549] Alexander John Scott, *Two Discourses. The Kingdom of the Truth, the Range of Christianity* (Cambridge, 1848), 21.
[550] Scott, "Kingdom of Christ," 86.
[551] Scott, 89.

theological learning), it is critical to map two dimensions of the kingdom of Christ: its

foundation in at·one·ment with God as the means of social unity and its epistemic

commitment to the mutual dependence of divine revelation.

At·one·ment with God and Social Unity

Scott's approach to theological learning is inextricable from his social vision of

at·one·ment; indeed, the foundation upon which the kingdom of Christ is built is none

other than at·one·ment with God, in holy love. Citing God's consistent revelation in

history as evidence (see above), in 'The Kingdom of Christ,' Scott defends the thesis that

God's call upon humankind is 'to acknowledge His claim in the social world, as the Author

of social unity among [them], as having created those laws by which social unity becomes

possible, and by full adherence to which the social unity is brought into its right

condition.'[552] Despite its first impressions, this proposal does not advocate any sort of

theocratic legalism. For Scott, as with Erskine, God's holiness must always be understood

in terms of God's love; they cannot be divorced from another without mutually destructive

consequences. Divine laws (or precepts) such as the ones that Scott has in mind express

God's will of holy love and witness to the world being created and constituted in and for

that love. This holy and loving dynamic becomes clearer as he explores the roots of social

fragmentation in general and its specific expression in the church in *On Schism* (1842).

At 'the root of schism,' Scott diagnoses 'the separation of man from God [such

that] he is thereby out of harmony with all that remains under that presiding system.'[553] He

explains, 'with his heart set upon God—on that which was in harmony with the entire plan

of God—there could be no mutual interference between man and man, between creature

and creature, in the pursuit of that which they desired.' In contrast, 'with the heart set on

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[552] Scott, 68.
[553] Scott, "On Schism," 230.

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creatures—on objects of sense, and vanity, and avarice and pride—life became a contest, a

mutual repugnancy throughout all its regions.'[554] While some costs of creaturely

disharmony can be curbed by coercive measures (e.g., enforced regulations or

institutionalised practices), Scott insists that the only enduring means of social restitution is

through persons' restoration to God; and thus, 'by a restoration to God, it is part of the

plan of the Father, and of the Saviour, that harmony should be restored between man and

man.'[555] For Scott, then, at·one·ment with the God of holy love is at the one and only true

root of genuine at·one·ment between creation.[556]

Critical to his image of restoration is the Jesus' prayer that his disciples 'may be one,

even as we are one.'[557] To understand what sort of 'unity constituted in a human society'

might fulfil 'the terms of this prayer of the Lord,' Scott contemplates (and dismisses)

various analogies. Parts of a machine form complex wholes that cooperate to perform a

particular task, but their actuation is external.[558] Plants are organic structures whose parts

cooperate to grow and propagate but do so with 'no conscious co-operation.'[559] Perhaps

the best analogy for the spiritual nature of the kingdom of Christ is the human body, where

many parts are united and actuated by 'the self-same Spirit.'[560] Drawing upon the Apostle

John's statement that 'every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of

God,'[561] Scott argues that

> that spirit or disposition of which the Apostle speaks, in men, can be in them no
> otherwise than by the Spirit of the living God. But still it remains not the less true
> that the spirit in man which thus confesses Christ is a disposition in man, by which

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[554] Scott, 272.

[555] Scott, 232.

[556] Scott, "Kingdom of Christ," 272. Though Scott does mention harmony between 'creature and creature,' the ecological implications of his theology are underdeveloped.

[557] John 17:22.

[558] Scott, "On Schism," 269.

[559] Scott, 269.

[560] Scott, 267. While Scott is specifically contemplating the unity of the Christian church in this context, the analogy is generalisable within the larger rationality of schism that he outlines at the outset of the lectures.

[561] 1 John 4:2b.

as a tone of feeling towards God and man—by which, as a consciousness of a faith in an inward and spiritual guidance, which hath come in Christ, enlightening every man that cometh into the world—the man, not in his words mainly, but in his life, acknowledges and manifests a truth, that Jesus Christ is come into the world.[562]

Among the many interwoven ideas contained within this short pneumatological statement, three stand out in this context. First, Scott maintains the primacy of God's agency in making possible the disposition that 'acknowledges and manifests' the truth that 'Jesus is come into the world.' Human beings cannot manifest such truth apart from the equipping and enabling work of 'the Spirit of the living God.' Second, dispositions that acknowledge and manifest Christ's presence in the world are also the consequences of faith in the witness of the Spirit to the human spirit. God *is* active in enlightening (or teaching) human beings; however, for that learning to truly transform dispositions and behaviours, there has to be confidence in that witness—and the God who stands behind it. *Knowing* God, in this sense, is vital to manifesting the truth of Jesus' presence and lordship in the world. Third, acknowledging Jesus Christ come into the world—and also, the reign of his kingdom—is not an abstract or conceptual affair, but a personal and existential one: it is expressed in one's 'tone of feeling towards God and man' and 'not in [a person's] words mainly, but his life.'[563] Truth is not subjective, but it is *personal*—it involves the whole person.

As Scott explains in his later discourse 'The Kingdom of Truth' (1848), the kingdom of Christ is nothing less than a kingdom of truth. Such a kingdom is not primarily constituted by doctrinal or intellectual reasoning, nor sentimentality about God, nor intentional acts of willpower alone. Instead, the kingdom of truth is constituted by a whole-person reorientation to something outside of themselves that brings unity to thought, word, and action: in short, by 'a submission to God,—a willingness to know, because a

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[562] Scott, "On Schism," 264.
[563] Scott, 263.

willingness to do his Will.'[564] Expressed differently, 'to be of the Truth is to stand in some certain relation to the universal Truth.' What is this Truth to which we are called to stand in relation? Not to an intellectual system or with a set or moral principles, but to a *person* in whom divinity is united to humanity: the one who is 'the Way, and the Truth, and the Life' and who says 'he [who] hath seen me hath seen the Father.'[565] Ultimately, being of the truth is a function of being-in-relationship with God—of at·one·ment with God, in holy love.

To reiterate from Chapter 4, conceiving of truth as more than mere cognitive assent—that is, as existential assent—does not entail an anti-intellectualistic or anti-materialistic spiritual escape from the world. Scott equally takes issue 'with the student of things natural, who thinks that they may be adequately and rightly apprehended apart from things divine' and 'the religious man, who keeps aloof from such objects and contemplations, thinking them foreign to his higher aims.'[566] The mutual dependence of God's revelation forbids such approaches to theological learning.

Mutual Dependence of Revelation

In Chapter 4, we saw how the holy love of God is inextricable from the pursuit of truth. Not only do distorted notions *of* God foster distorted relationships *to* God, but, on the flipside, knowing more about God and his relationship to creation can contribute to truer being-in-relationship with him. In *On Revelation* (1837), Scott proposes that 'there is a mutual dependence of all [classes of revelation]; and the harmonious, combined result is the manifestation of God.'[567] One cannot plumb the true depths of Scripture without reference to creation, the second book of revelation, he explains. Nor can one be confident in the witness of the conscience without the witness of scripture, which gives flesh to the

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[564] Scott, *Two Discourses. The Kingdom of the Truth, the Range of Christianity*, 22, 29–31.
[565] Scott, 9, 33. See also John 14:9b.
[566] Scott, 38.
[567] Scott, "On Revelation (1837)," 35.

character of God and the call to 'Be ye holy, for I am holy.' Not only are the modes of revelation dependent and mutually constitutive, but Scott maintains that there is a 'harmony of all truth,' based on a 'real unity' that 'subsists in the entire scheme of things [and] is constituted by the being of God.'[568] He writes, 'the Being on which all things rest, the Intelligence according to which all things have their law, is the illumination by which each thing is beheld' in its right relationship in creation and to God.[569]

To explain, Scott claims that 'relatively to each individual mind among us, [to reveal God] is the aim of the universe.'[570] As with many church fathers, reformers, and scientists before him, Scott utilises the metaphor of God as the divine author of 'two books': the book of scripture and the book of nature. Just as 'in the Bible one mind organizes, as it were, the many human minds of the subordinate authors, remote from one another in time and place, into a unity for the expression of one connected plan,' Scott asserts that there is 'one mind, with a coherent purpose, being discernible in all the multifariousness of nature.'[571] Pursuing knowledge of the universe, insofar as what is uncovered is true, brings its students into 'contact with an idea, not of the mind of Newton [for example], but of God.'[572] For example, he avows, 'if gravitation be the truth, then when I consider the heavens the work of God's fingers, the moon and the stars which he hath ordained…I am not merely reminded who is manifested there, but I know *how* he is manifested here.'[573] However, 'lest creation should be regarded as self-supported, and become a veil instead of a transparency through which a light of God is seen,' human beings are also created with the faculty to discern the workings of providence in creation through the conscience.[574] For

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[568] Scott, 35.
[569] Scott, *Two Discourses. The Kingdom of the Truth, the Range of Christianity*, 36.
[570] Scott, "On Revelation (1837)," 35.
[571] Scott, 54.
[572] Scott, *Two Discourses. The Kingdom of the Truth, the Range of Christianity*, 40.
[573] Scott, 40.
[574] Scott, "On Revelation (1837)," 41.

Scott, the conscience plays an important role in *knowing* God and God's Being as holy love. He describes it as the faculty responsible for 'perception of that which is good in itself, and for itself; what is not merely instrumental but absolute good—that good that is in God.'[575]

While the conscience was also critical in evangelical paradigms of redemption, it has a much more mystical and epistemic role in Scott's theological imaginary. According to Scott, it is the organ in which 'God, as a Spirit, can manifest himself' to 'the spirit of man.'[576] Through the conscience, human beings are 'presented with a character which [God] commands [them] to be; —to be, not because of certain circumstances and events, but because it is, absolutely and irrespectively, good to be that which is commanded, and not to be otherwise.'[577] Thus 'setting love and truth before us as a good,' the conscience bears witness to God's claim upon 'the conformity of all the powers of the person.' Such claims, if granted, 'set the judgment and the active energies to work, to find and effectuate a due development of love and truth in act.'[578] For Scott, the call of the conscience is 'always a call to participate with Him, and thus to unite with Him.'[579] It is a call to at·one·ment with God; and thereby, to participate in God's holy love.

For Scott, then, the one naturally follows from the other: *knowing* God and uniting with him in holy love inwardly cannot but bear fruit in acts of a corresponding character. Of course, how best to proceed in light of this witness of *who* God is, is the province of the faculty of judgement.[580] According to Scott, the conscience merely presents that 'from which he dares not be out of communion, under penalty of being out of communion with God.' He acknowledges that it is 'a faculty little cultivated, little exercised,' remarking 'this

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[575] Scott, "On Schism," 242.
[576] Scott, 113.
[577] Scott, "On Revelation (1837)," 46.
[578] Scott, 46–47.
[579] Scott, 48.
[580] Scott, 46.

is our condemnation; but [it is] a faculty which exists, or it would not be our condemnation.'[581] With careful discernment—and when brought into proper relationship with the other manifold modes of revelation—it can be a powerful component of orienting theological learning towards the telos of at·one·ment with God. Indeed, whether studying creation or scripture or conscience or any other of the manifold ways that God reveals himself, sources of knowledge of God are prone to misinterpretation when treated in isolation.[582] Because sources of knowledge of God are mutually enriching and mutually corrective, Scott believed that human beings must seek to expand our understanding of each of them as a whole—learning to bring them to bear one upon another to reveal the God who is 'before all things, and in [whom] all things hold together.'[583] Knowledge of God, then, cannot and should not be limited to biblical studies or historical or systematic theology. Rather *all true knowledge*—when brought into this kind of mutual relationship—can aid in expanding our knowledge of who God is. Scott suggests the scope of theological learning, therefore, should likewise not be limited.

iii) Education and the Hope of At·one·ment

In *On Schism*, Scott argues that social schism arises 'out of our want of understanding of the principles which he has established for the unity of the world that [God] has made.'[584] For Scott, enjoying at·one·ment with God is premised on Christ's universal atonement *and* being-in-relationship with God through the Spirit. In 'Kingdom of Christ,' he reminds his audience, 'God has sent His Son to shed His blood, and sent his Spirit for renewal and restoration to Himself as to a Father's bosom.'[585] Pursuing

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[581] Scott, "On Schism," 244.
[582] For more on these relationships, see Scott, "On Revelation (1837)."
[583] Colossians 1:17.
[584] Scott, "On Schism," 230.
[585] Scott, "Kingdom of Christ," 95.

at·one·ment with God involves the pursuing knowledge of God—much like pursuing rich relationships in an emerging friendship involves learning about them, their history, their interests, and their character. Over time, what we know *about* them may be enough to say we *know* them in an important (if always incomplete) sense; and more importantly, that we would trust ourselves to them. Unlike human friendships, however, God's revelation is manifold: creation, scripture, conscience, and much more can be the means by which God revealing Godself, his agency, and his character. Being able to 'read' these sources—and crucially, read them together as unified—is one of the ways that persons can come to *know* God.

For Scott, the fact that Christ's atonement and human beings' capacity to receive the Spirit is *universal*—not limited to a certain subset of the human population—means that all people are responsible for acknowledging and manifesting the kingdom of Christ in their actions and dispositions. Recalling from earlier in this chapter, such acknowledgement means 'entering into the principle' of God's holy love—a spiritual obedience that comes from *knowing* God's character, from being transformed in love and equipped in relationship to participate in extending God's own holy love. From an educational perspective, Scott suggests that there are two relevant enjoinments of holy love.

First, educational endeavours ought to be reflect Christ's atonement—that great manifestation of the holy love of God—as reconstituting humanity and testifying to the dignity and ontological worth of human beings *as* human beings. Whereas some people name death the great leveller, Scott disagrees: *Christ's death* on the cross for the sins of the world is the great leveller. It provides the clean slate that presents a constant challenge to human constructions of ontological merit or worth. As Scott interprets history, 'the value for man *as man* sprang up in Europe, with the belief that God had bought with the blood of His own Son the slave as well as the emperor; that the slave as well as the emperor

might be inspired with the Spirit of God.'[586] The fact that the distinction of ranks in nineteenth-century Britain is not what it was in Ancient Greece, Scott accredits to the gradual (if incomplete) outworking of the implications of God's holy love, especially as it manifested in the Atonement. For Scott, the character of the kingdom of Christ mitigated against the idea of some divinely instituted social order 'embodied in the established institutions of a country,' but also the idea that controls upon education should be used to perpetuate constructions of human value inconsistent with the kingdom of Christ. This question was becoming more and more important.

As Evans observes, 'few aspects of life [came to] indicate the hierarchy of Victorian society so starkly as education.'[587] Education, however, did not just *indicate* social distinctions within Victorian society; it cultivated and perpetuated them. For example, by 1855, an anonymous contributor to the English periodical *The Governess* could write, 'the question no longer is – "*Shall* we educate?" or "*Whom* shall we educate?" but "*How* shall we educate?"'[588] In the first third of the century, debate centred on whether it was profitable (or even dangerous) to educate in general and to educate the poorer classes specifically.[589] By the 1830s, most middle and upper-class people thought education for all classes prudent; however, major division still ensued over whether such education should be funded by the government and administered through channels by the established Church of England.[590] Further debate centred upon the proper function of education.

For instance, if by the 1840s the question '*Shall* we educate?' was largely answered in the affirmative for all classes, the answer to the question '*How* shall we educate?' was less

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[586] Scott, "Chartism," 145.
[587] Evans, *Forging Modern State*, 397.
[588] Governess, *The Governess: A Repertory of Female Education* (London: Darton & Co, 1855), 3.
[589] While education does occur in informal means, e.g., interactions and relationships with families, peers, and others, it is understood in this context in terms of a reasonably formal, institutionalised process of instruction.
[590] Sutherland, "Education," 130.

clear cut. By the 1840s, for example, Evans records that the prevailing sentiment among the leaders of society was that the primary function of education 'was to fit its recipient for their proper station in life.'[591] It was not a new principle. For those within the establishment, for instance, education befitting a clergyman, statesman, or gentleman had long been the purview of Oxford and Cambridge.[592] Parallel dissenting academies with a stronger scientific and mercantile bent, moreover, were entrusted the next generations of nonconformist merchants and upper- and middle-class men.[593] Yet, in the context of emerging 'middling' and working classes, the notion of education befitting one's place in the world took on new overtones. Now, even paternalists, who had objected to the destabilising effects of broad educational endeavours earlier in the century, began to come around to the idea that educational programs that might be used to impress upon their subordinates or dependants the virtues of a complementarian social order.

By mid-century, historian Gillian Sutherland records that it was normal for middle- and upper-class boys in England and Wales to have formal schooling. Even as early as 'the first half of the nineteenth century in England,' however, schools for gentlemen had already become sharply differentiated from schools providing "useful" or clearly vocationally geared training,' with parallel schools established alongside older grammar schools to accommodate the distinct curriculum.[594] Not only were schools increasingly differentiated into categories of humanist and vocational training,[595] but from 1840 and 1870 there was an increasing sense of educational demarcations of social status and class

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[591] Evans, *Forging Modern State*, 397.

[592] For more on the social composition of Oxford and Cambridge from the late eighteenth to late nineteenth centuries, see Michael Sanderson, *Education, Economic Change, and Society in England* (London: MacMillan Press LTD, 1983), 40–41.

[593] David A. Reid, "Education as a Philanthropic Enterprise: The Dissenting Academies of Eighteenth-Century England," *History of Education* 39, no. 3 (2010): 300, https://doi.org/10.1080/00467600902855496.

[594] Sutherland, "Education," 135.

[595] Sutherland, 135.

boundaries.[596] For example, Sanderson notes, 'while small tradesmen and farmers might be interested in "useful subjects," those who wanted their sons to become gentlemen seemed at least as much interested in the capacity of the school to provide a degree of social segregation and style, as in any curriculum content.'[597] Curricular distinctions as well as leaving age largely dictated whether students would attend the university or enter different echelons of (respectable) employment.[598]

While not advocating homogenised education, Scott clearly lamented the spirit of social differentiation and self-interest that contemporaneous educational endeavours often revealed. In his lecture on Chartism in *Social Systems*, he interprets it as a deficiency in the spirit of love shown by the incarnate Christ:

> The spirit which desires to communicate to others that which we most value for ourselves, is that of Him who held it more blessed to give than to receive. There is [then] something exceedingly incongruous in the prevailing feeling, among the most highly educated classes, of the value of education, and the reluctance...with which they contemplate the chance of a diffusion of that education in other classes of society.[599]

Indeed, he declares, 'I would put the question of education on the footing of a religious duty.'[600] If God utters his being and character in manifold ways and if 'there is a mutual dependence of all; and the harmonious, combined result is the manifestation of God,' then to restrict education limits opportunities to *know God* in all His revelation.[601] Given the commandment to 'love thy neighbour as thyself,' Scott reasons, 'I am not entitled to keep

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[596] Evans, *Forging Modern State*, 400. Later, the Clarendon Commission (1861) and the Taunton Commission (1864), which examined the state of education in England and Wales, proposed formalising the existing stratification into a graded hierarchy of schools. Sutherland, 147. The three commissions were The Royal Commission on the State of Popular Education in England (Newcastle, 1858; reported 1861) which focused on working class education, the Royal Commission on the Public Schools (Clarendon, 1861; reported 1864) which focused on the 'great' elementary schools in the model of Eton, and the Schools Inquiry Commission (Taunton, 1864; reported 1868) which focused on the middle classes.

[597] Sutherland, "Education," 135.

[598] Sutherland, 147.

[599] Scott, "Chartism," 150.

[600] Scott, 152.

[601] Scott, "On Revelation (1837)," 35.

from my fellow-men any portion of *this* revelation of God, which it is in my power to communicate to them.'[602] On one level, all true knowledge contributes to knowledge of God—and for that reason, Scott commends expanding broad educational opportunities to all people, opportunities that are not simply dedicated to social advancement or self-interest.

Second, since acknowledging and manifesting the kingdom of Christ on earth requires heart, soul, strength, and mind, educational endeavours should strive to cultivate all the faculties of human beings. Scott reasons, '[God] cannot have made anything that He does not value; [and] that He cannot have developed such capacities as man's, of joy and sorrow, of good and evil, and left their exercise unregarded.' No, he insists, 'there is no part of my nature, as God has made it and means it that is not brought into the dearest nearness to Himself; there is nothing on which it is adapted to exercise itself that does not concern Him as it does me.'[603] Not only is a broad education warranted for the pursuit of knowledge of God (and thus, theological learning), but so too is the specific cultivation of imagination and sympathy of heart—modes of knowing that deepen our capacity for participating in the holy love of God. For Scott, then, (theological) learning represents not just the hope of greater at·one·ment with God, but the formation in holy love that makes at·one·ment between human beings possible at all.

In fact, Scott actively extended semi-formal and formal higher educational opportunities to marginalised groups in England, particularly focusing upon working men, upper- and middle-class women, and those excluded from Oxbridge and Durham because of their confessional requirements. In the absence of explicit statements of intention and given other factors like Scott's own educational background, it is impossible to make the

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[602] Scott, "Chartism," 152.
[603] Scott, *Two Discourses. The Kingdom of the Truth, the Range of Christianity*, 34.

strong claim that the sometimes-countercultural character of the communities of learning that Scott cultivated are attributable to his distinctive emphasis on *at·one·ment with God, in holy love*. However, there is a remarkable degree of congruence between his theological vision of education and the character and scope of his educational pursuits, sometimes even in the face of 'prodigious, antagonistic forces.'[604] While such congruencies are more perspicuous in his dealings with working men and with women, which are explored here only briefly, they are also arguably present in the case of Scott's principalship at Owens College—the first English institution outside London that did not require religious tests.[605]

Working Men's Education

Throughout the latter half of his life, Scott dedicated significant portions of his time and talents to cultivating communities of learning that included working class men in a manner that is remarkably consistent with his theological principle of not '[keeping] from my fellow-men any portion of this revelation of God, which it is in my power to communicate to them.'[606] One avenue of communication open to the Scotsman was offering evening lectures at existing local Mechanics' Institutes for working men. Between 1826 and 1841, the number of these alternative, voluntary educational associations tripled in England from 100 to over 300.[607] While their original objective was to cultivate a scientific and technical education for the working classes, their functions diversified to meet regional needs that might include basic literacy, cultural education, and political agitation.[608] Scott lectured in Mechanical Institutes in Greenock, Manchester, Rhodes,

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[604] A. J. Scott, "On University Education," in *Introductory Lectures on the Opening of Owens College, Manchester* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longman, 1852), 2.

[605] While I intended to do further primary research on the first two subjects, the coronavirus pandemic precipitated mass closures of archives rendering such pursuits impossible.

[606] Scott, "Chartism," 152. Education of working-class women, unfortunately, was not a priority until much later in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Arguably, this is one of the blind spots within Scott's educational outreach.

[607] Sanderson, *Society in England*, 28.

[608] Sanderson, 28.

Salford, Greenwich and Glasgow, covering topics such as 'The Foundations of Society, Moral and Economical,' 'Self-Education,' and 'The Middle Ages.'[609] In Glasgow, after Scott's lecture on 'Dante,' a committee was formed to make an annual course of 'Scott Lectures' – a testament to his ability to connect with working-class audiences.[610] Intriguingly, Newell reports that these lectures were often given alongside talks to more well-established associations such as the Edinburgh Philosophical Institution and Manchester Royal Institution.[611] Scott, therefore, used existing Mechanics' Institutes to provide working-class men with similar educational opportunities offered to men of more educated classes.

But Scott did more than use existing institutions. He also contributed to the foundation of two new institutions alongside for working men: the Woolwich Institution for the Advancement of Literary, Scientific and Mechanical Knowledge (established May 1838) and the Manchester Working Men's College (established 1858).[612] Between 1840 and 1841, Scott served first as Vice-President and then President of the Woolwich Institution. During that time, he demonstrated his commitment to universal educational opportunity by offering evening lectures to dockyard workers, a project he believed was preparing 'the most beneficial, and the most stupendous of revolutions.'[613] Following his principalship at Owens College, he also helped found the Manchester Working Men's College, giving its inaugural address in 1858. The college was founded upon the same educational philosophy as the Working Men's College in London (established 1854), spearheaded by Scott's friend and colleague, F. D. Maurice.

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[609] Newell, "Scott and His Circle," 228, 290–91.
[610] Newell, 290.
[611] Newell, 132.
[612] Newell, 235, 402.
[613] A. J. Scott, "Address to the Greenwich Society's Festival. 12 June 1841," *The Woolwich Gazette*, June 12, 1841.

In the years immediately following the Chartists' march upon the House of Commons in 1848, Scott had collaborated with Maurice in laying the foundations for the nineteenth-century Christian socialist movement—a movement that that loosely bound together a venerable circle of reformers in the hope of promoting social and economic change based on the principles of fellowship and mutual self-sacrifice modelled by Christ and his apostles.[614] While Christian socialists promoted new means of co-operative association, arguably their most distinctive contribution was their direct engagement with working-class men in establishing communities of learning to explore the social and economic questions of the age, communities out of which the London Working Men's College grew.[615]

Reflecting on his visit to that institution, Scott comments approvingly, 'the working and laborious teachers of working men…[are found] mingling with them not on a footing of condescension on the one hand, and of an expected servility on the other, but on both sides as brother man with brother man.'[616] How accurate Scott's perception was is difficult to gauge, but the college did endure and inspire other institutions like the Manchester Working Man's College and the South London Working Men's College.[617] Certainly, his description demonstrates an esteem for the spirit of fellowship across classes—a spirit that is congruent with the ontological realities of the kingdom of Christ, where all share the same 'ontological footing.' For Scott, such an educational paradigm might well have

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[614] These reformers included John Ludlow, Edward Neale, Charles Kingsley, John Ruskin, and Walter Cooper.

[615] While the tangible products of the Christian socialist movement were limited to two penny periodical entitled *Politics for the People*, to which Scott contributed two articles, and *The Christian Socialist*, the intangible products were more considerable: the promotion of co-operative association and the cultivation of communities of learning whose membership crossed classes being two notable ones.

[616] "Manchester Working Men's College - Inaugural Address by A. J. Scott," *The Manchester Weekly Times*, January 16, 1858.

[617] Marcella P. Sutcliffe, "The Origins of the 'Two Cultures' Debate in the Adult Education Movement: The Case of the Working Men's College (c.1854–1914)," *History of Education* 43, no. 2 (2014): 151, https://doi.org/10.1080/0046760X.2013.844278.

represented what education that aimed at at·one·ment with God looked like—one whose

curriculum and pedagogical modes receive their proper character by that animating telos.

Women's Education

If working men's education was becoming more of a social priority by the 1830s,

the place of women's education within society was not a major issue of social concern until

about the mid-century and onward.[618] Victorian perceptions of separate spheres, the

spiritual role of women as guardians of the home, and a developing literature 'scientifically'

proving women's inferior intellectual capacity suggested women should be educated *for* the

home, *in* the home.[619] Against this cultural backdrop, the establishment of Queen's College,

London (1848) by F. D. Maurice and The Ladies' College, Bedford Square (1849) by Mrs.

Reid, Scott and others became significant: both institutions were progressive in challenging

assumptions about women's fitness for intellectual study in non-domestic fields, their

ability to earn academic qualifications, and their proper role outside the private sphere of

the home.[620] For Scott specifically, his founding role in The Ladies' College, Bedford

Square (established 1849)[621] and his encouragement of George MacDonald to found a

similar institution in Manchester (established 1855) are consistent with his belief in

education's role in modelling the kingdom of Christ and forming people in and for the holy

love of God.[622]

To recall, Scott argues that '[God] cannot have developed such capacities…of joy

and sorrow, of good and evil, and left their exercise unregarded.'[623] Nor should human

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[618] Deirdre Raferty, "The Opening of Higher Education to Women in Nineteenth Century England: 'Unexpected Revolution' or Inevitable Change?," *Higher Education Quarterly* 56, no. 4 (2002): 332–33.
[619] Joan N. Burstyn, *Victorian Education and the Ideal of Womanhood* (London: Croom Helm, 1980), 95.
[620] While both institutions were progressive in many respects, it should be noted that they nevertheless still appealed primarily to middle-class women rather than working women.
[621] Newell, "Scott and His Circle," 319.
[622] Newell, 365.
[623] Scott, *Two Discourses. The Kingdom of the Truth, the Range of Christianity*, 30.

beings. In fact, however, Scott contended that women's intellectual faculties and

sympathies were often left undeveloped. One of the legacies of the Enlightenment had

been the perpetuation of two archetypes: the 'thinking man' and the 'feeling woman.'

According to historian Ann Stott, 'the "sentimental" revolution of the third quarter of the

eighteenth century constituted women as creatures of sensibility, more compassionate than

men and with more delicate nerves, with faculties that were more imaginative than

analytical, and reasoning that was lively rather than solid.'[624] When new levels of disposable

income occasioned by the industrial revolution and Evangelical moralism combined, two

gendered 'spheres' were constructed: the women's domain of the home ('private sphere')

and the men's domain extending beyond the home ('public sphere').[625] Houghton argues

that the home became 'both a shelter *from* the anxieties of modern life, a place of peace

where the desires of the heart might be realized (if not in fact, in imagination), and a shelter

for those moral and spiritual values which the commercial spirit and the critical spirit were

threatening to destroy, and therefore also a sacred space, a temple.'[626]

Amongst the more prosperous classes, then, women's education was therefore seen

as fitting her for a life as a 'relative creature,'[627] as the morally and spiritually pure guardian

presiding over the home.[628] While competition undoubtedly contributed to the censure of

claims for equal educational opportunity, Houghton argues that resistance was 'much more

to prevent what [many] honestly believed would mean the irreparable loss of a vital moral

influence.'[629] Such moral and spiritual insight was a function of women's almost childlike

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[624] Margaret E. Bryant, "The Unexpected Revolution: A Study in the History of Education of Women and GIrls in the Nineteenth Century," in *The Unexpected Revolution* (London: University of London, 1979), 28–29.

[625] Bryant, 28–29.

[626] Walter E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), 343.

[627] Ann Stott, "Women, Religion and Feminism in Britain," in *A Singular Injustice Towards Women: Hannah More and Evangelicalism and Female Education* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 31.

[628] Burstyn, *Victorian Education*, 33.

[629] Houghton, *Victorian Frame of Mind*, 352.

innocence, a purity carefully preserved by limiting exposure to the corrupted (and

corrupting) ways of the modern world. As Scott explains, the intention was 'rather, thus to

fence [women] within Eden, than out from it.'[630] To this moral and spiritual rationale,

phrenologists in the mid-century added 'scientific evidence' for women's inferior

intellectual capacity noting that her brain tended to be smaller and more childlike in

character.[631] Evolutionary principles from Darwin's *Origin of the Species* (1859) wedded to

cultural beliefs in societal progress. Since 'society had always been well-served by the

process of sexual selection, which had always tended to strengthen the males but not the

females,' critics reasoned that women's education should not be reformed.[632]

    While Scott's *Suggestions on Female Education* (1849) predate some of these

evolutionary developments, his writings clearly oppose the materialistic and deterministic

assumptions undergirding fields such as ethnology in ways that are congruent with the

anthropology he develops in *Social Systems*. Phrenologists, he argues, 'represent their

doctrine as substituting the evidences of the sense for that of consciousness; as if a man by

poring over the shape of the bones of the head could, even in imagination, have connected

certain protuberances with certain sentiments *unless he knew from another source what those*

sentiments were.'[633] Scott reasons that it is impossible to speak of benevolence—let alone

Howard's propensity for it, given the shape of his skull—without recourse to

consciousness of benevolence or the conscience's role in recognising or manifesting it. Any

anthropology that conceives of human beings, regardless of gender, in such deterministic

terms is deficient, even perilous. In consequence, their conclusions about the fitness of

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[630] Alexander Scott, *Suggestions on Female Education: Two Introductory Lectures on English Literature and Moral Philosophy* (London: Taylor, Watson & Maberly, 1849), 8.
[631] Burstyn, *Victorian Education*, 78.
[632] Burstyn, 79.
[633] Scott, *Female Education Suggestions*, 59. Italics mine.

women for intellectual activity is inherently suspect. So, too, argues Scott is the logic of women's education, which seeks to limit her sphere to the home.

In his own experience, Scott observes, 'very often the mind of a young lady is cultivated up to the point of activity, inquisitiveness, capacities for varied sympathy, and then left to the resources of balls, shopping, and Berlin wool, at an age when her brother is walking the hospitals, conveying estates, or bustling among men-of-war's men.'[634] Besides being unwise and inhumane, Scott also believed it was illogical. For example, the position was often taken by paternalists that the study of literature ought to be proscribed or strictly controlled amongst the lower classes because of its capacity to bring 'moral chaos to the mind not trained to choose the good and the evil.' If true, then Scott argues that it would be illogical for 'the same man who has professed such terror for its effect on the mind of the multitude of labourers and artisans, [to] expose the candid and susceptible mind of his daughter' to its influences in the libraries of the home or in the profusion of the modern press when she is only 'fortified against its perils' by some knowledge of 'French, the piano-forte, dancing, calisthenics, and the use of globes.'[635] Even on its own terms, the disparity between the acute concern demonstrated about literature's effects upon the working class and the sheer indifference with which the same was contemplated for women was not only incongruous, but almost cruel. Scott characterises such contrast as hardly 'public-spirited.'[636] It is not difficult to see the resonances between his advocacy for women's education and the theological vision for education he outlines in *Social Systems*. Certainly, the educational implications that Scott derived from the commandment to 'love thy neighbour as thyself' come to mind, particularly the religious duty not to withhold (the

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[634] Scott, 13.
[635] Scott, 19.
[636] Scott, 10.

means) of God's revelation from one's neighbour who also has been reconstituted in Christ and through the Spirit.

Scott's advocacy *for* literature to form an integral part of women's education also has congruencies with emphases in his theological vision of education upon the cultivation of intellect and dispositions as integral to the pursuit and enjoyment of at·one·ment with God and with the whole of creation. For Scott, literature has a special place because it 'calls into action the whole mind, and presents the whole variety and intensity of action and passion.'[637] For all its students, it affords occasions for 'living contact of spirit with spirit,' in which 'a speech, not dead or foreign, but instinct with home tones, meanings, and associations, presents its objects with a vivid directness and transparency to our imagination' and brings its reader 'into some degree of like contact with the inward and outward life of those who used it.'[638] In other words, it exercises and cultivates a person's sympathies. When well-rounded and well-exercised, one can imagine such sympathies could be a means of greater at·one·ment—with God, but also between the elements of God's creation. Scott's advocacy of women's education in general, and the study of literature in particular, is therefore highly congruent with the theological vision of education he sets out in *Social Systems* and other publications.

While there are consistencies between the character of the communities of learning that Scott sought to cultivate with working men and women and his theological commitments, the outstanding question is whether the education offered at Owens College (now, University of Manchester) was also congruent with Scott's theological vision of education. It was, after all, his longest appointment and the one where religious education was most hotly contested. To the extent that it is congruent with Scott's vision for

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[637] Scott, 13.
[638] Scott, 11.

theological learning, then, it can provide much-needed insight into the possible resources

and limitations of such an 'at·one·ment orientation' to theological learning, a subject that

will be explored at more length in the next chapter. First, however, it is necessary to

establish the extent to which the education offered at Owens College *was* congruent with

Scott's theological vision of education.

iv) Owens College: Outlier or Example?

Scott's longest appointment in higher education was held at Owens College,

Manchester, where he served first as its inaugural principal (1850-1857), occupied its chairs

of English Literature and Moral Philosophy and was its Professor of Hebrew (1850-

1860).[639] At first glance, his position at Owens College seems like an outlier to someone

committed to an at·one·ment-oriented vision of theological learning. Owens College, after

all, was distinguished for being one of the first institutions in England *not* to include

theological studies within its mandatory course programme. Nevertheless, there are

significant congruencies between Scott's at·one·ment-shaped orientation towards learning

in general and the communities of learning cultivated at Owens College: specifically, its

vigorous attempts to make higher education accessible regardless of confession or class and

its refusal to permit the dictates of profession or industry unduly constrain its subjects or

admissions.

Founded in Manchester in 1850, Owens College was intended to be a pioneering

institution of learning 'open freely to all sects'—a description that sounds not unlike

modern secular universities.[640] John Owens (1790-1846), to whom the college owed its

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[639] Newell, "Scott and His Circle," 341.
[640] Editor, "Owens College - A Seminary of Learning Open Freely to All Sects. 12 Oct 1850."

initial bequest, was a born-and-bred Mancunian merchant.[641] While generally reserved, Hartog reports that he was outspoken 'with regard to the injustice of religious disabilities imposed on Dissenters at Oxford and Cambridge.'[642] At that time, English higher education institutions were still largely intertwined with the Church of England. Students who wished to matriculate at Oxford or graduate at Cambridge were required to subscribe to the Church of England's statement of doctrine and practice, the *Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion*.[643] Even if in practice Kings College, London (1829) was open to all students irrespective of confession, both it and Durham University (1832) were largely Anglican institutions.[644] Only University College, London (1826) was also distinctively non-conformist in origin.

At the urging of his friend and business partner George Faulkner, therefore, Owens bequeathed £96,954 to establish a new higher education institution within Manchester.[645] He specified that the college was to provide instruction 'in such branches of learning and science as are now and may be hereafter usually taught in the English Universities,' with two religious provisos: (1) 'that the students, professors, teachers, and other officers and persons connected with the said Institution, shall not have to make any declaration as to, or submit to any test whatsoever of, their religious opinions'; and (2) that 'nothing shall be introduced in the matter or mode of education or instruction in reference to any religious or theological subject which shall be reasonably offensive to the conscience of any student,

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[641] John Owens' initial bequest totalled £96,954, the equivalent of almost £14 million in 2021. For an intimate portrait of John Owens, see Joseph Thompson, "John Owens," in *The Owens College: Its Foundation and Growth; and Its Connection with the Victoria University, Manchester* (Manchester: J. E. Cornish, 1886), 36–49.

[642] Philip Joseph Hartog, *The Owens College, Manchester: A Brief History of the College and Description of Its Various Departments.* (Manchester: J. E. Cornish, 1900), 3.

[643] Rothblatt notes, 'University tests, oaths of subscription to the Thirty-Nine Articles at Oxford and Cambridge, did not end until 1871.' Sheldon Rothblatt, "State and Market in British University History," in *Economy, Polity, and Society British Intellectual History 1750–1950*, ed. Stefan Collini, Richard Whatmore, and Brian Young (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 240.

[644] Loughlin, "The University," 79, 82.

[645] Hartog, *The Owens College, Manchester: A Brief History of the College and Description of Its Various Departments.*, 3.

or of his relations, guardians, or friends, under whose immediate care he shall be.'[646]

Theological education was not expressly forbidden by his provisions, but its scope and activities were constrained by them. So severe was the popular perception of the limiting effect of these provisions that when the proposal to include some religious instruction amongst its curriculum was raised in 1850, there was public outcry. According to the editor of the *Manchester Guardian*, a community-sponsored 'deputation of six gentleman' was commissioned to censure the college's trustees. They argued that 'any theological teaching in the college, must be at variance with the will and intention of the founder' and that 'a wider scope of prohibition could hardly be devised by human will.'[647] Theological instruction did not belong in the university, which was to offer secular education, but in the home:

> The curriculum of a university education, even as limited to secular instruction, is sufficiently wide to occupy every portion of time to be allotted to it, while the students will have ample opportunity during their hours of leisure, both week-day and Sunday, to receive that amount of religious teaching which every one must desire for his son.[648]

Given such strictures on its content and influence on 'the matter or modes of education,' Owens College would seem to be an unorthodox example for considering the nature of the objects, modes, and meanings that an 'at·one·ment orientation' to theological learning confers.

Even if the unorthodoxy of the example was resolved, there is a further issue with respect to chronology. Scott was offered the principalship of Owens College in October 1850, a full four years after John Owens' death (July 1846) and over two years after the first

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[646] Hartog, 3.
[647] Editor, "Religious Teaching in the Owens College. 17 April 1850," *The Manchester Guardian*, April 17, 1850.
[648] Editor.

joint meeting of the trustees (June 1848).[649] By the time of his appointment, the committee

formed to 'take into consideration the general character and plan of the institution to be

founded' had concluded consultations with 'eminent men' representing the major higher

education institutions across Great Britain.[650] By March 1850, recommendations under the

headings of subjects of instruction and study, professorial and teaching posts, courses and

modes of instruction, encouragements to study, and the management of the institution

were already being published in the *Manchester Guardian* and other local newspapers.[651]

Because these foundational steps were taken *prior* to Scott's appointment and because Scott

himself was frequently ill throughout these initial years—illnesses that sometimes required

deputising the Professor of Classics, Joseph G. Greenwood to stand in his stead—it might

seem irregular to look to Owens College to see what Scott's vision for learning (and indeed,

theological learning) might have looked like.

These considerations might caution against the strong argument that would

attribute Owens College's distinctive educational philosophy to Scott's theology; the

situation is likely too multi-faceted for that. However, neither concerns over the restricted

place of formal theological education nor the issues of timing prevent the lesser argument

that there *are* significant congruences between the philosophy of education Owens College

adopted and the theological vision of education that Scott had articulated in his earlier

theological writings and communities of learning. Furthermore, while Scott's illness did

militate against his success as Principal—a point that both historians of the College and

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[649] Joseph Thompson, *The Owens College: Its Foundation and Growth; and Its Connection with the Victoria University, Manchester* (Manchester: J. E. Cornish, 1886), 46.

[650] Thompson, 121. These institutions included, but were not limited to, University College, London and Kings College, London; Edinburgh, Glasgow, St Andrews, and Kings and Marischal College, Aberdeen; the Royal Academical Institute, Belfast. Conspicuously absent are representatives of Oxford and Cambridge.

[651] "Owens College. 30 March 1850," *The Manchester Guardian*, March 30, 1850.

Scott have acknowledged[652]—he nevertheless was accredited by students, colleagues, and critics alike for his formative influence on the character of the education offered in the College's early days.[653] So beloved was he by so many of his students (though certainly not all), that when ill-health prevented him from continuing his teaching duties in 1860, his current and former students organised a subscription amongst themselves to have a bust created that could be honour his place in the College.[654] Even were there not so many dedications and testimonials to Scott on the part of students like George MacDonald or James Baldwin Brown, there is enough reason in Scott's appointment alone to consider the congruencies. Indeed, it may well be the case that the reason that he accepted the appointment at Owens College was *because of* the resonances between his own vision and the vision the college's trustees articulated when they approached him as a candidate for the principalship.

Of the many congruences, three are both foundational to Owens College's experimental educational character and to core principles within Scott's theology of at·one·ment (and the social vision of education consistent with it). First, as noted earlier, Owens College was set upon the condition that no man would be restricted from admission or scholarship based on confession.[655] Unlike Oxford or Cambridge (and, to a

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[652] Scott's resignation letter is reprinted in Newell, "Scott and His Circle," 394. In this letter, Scott expresses regret that 'during that period I have had but too frequent occasion to experience your indulgence when the state of my health has interfered with my efficiency in a manner more painful to none than myself.'

[653] For example, Joseph Thompson, a former student of Owens College and later trustee, devotes a chapter of his comprehensive tome *The Owens College, Its Foundation and Growth* (1886) to Principal Scott, excusing his extensive treatment to the fact that he 'deserves full recognition' as 'the first principal of the college.' Thompson, *The Owens College: Its Foundation and Growth; and Its Connection with the Victoria University, Manchester*, x. Even Scott's critic Charlton admits formative influence in contradistinguishing Scott's administration from the subsequent Roscoe-Ward period. See Chapter 4, 'College to University: The Roscoe Ward Period,' in Charlton, *Portrait of a University, 1851-1951: To Commemorate the Centenary of Manchester University*, 53–77.

[654] Newell, "Scott and His Circle," 414–15.

[655] On this subject, Lees and Robertson note that although 'the evening classes from 1853 [at Owens College] remained to the end of the century, the preserve of men,' nevertheless 'there is evidence that Scott would have liked to open evening work to women in 1857 and the trustees appeared to agree, with the result that women are listed among the students of that year.' They also note these names never re-appeared for unknown reasons. Colin Lees and Alex B. Robertson, "Community Access to Owens College,

lesser extent, Durham and Kings College, London), Owens College was adamant that there

be no expressed or unexpressed religious restrictions upon who could receive the full rights

and privileges of a higher education. Given his theological vision of education, this aspect

of the unconventional and experimental nature of the college likely suited Scott. One of the

lessons he had derived from his struggle with the General Assembly of 1831 was that the

pursuit of truth was not always best served by being restricted by confessional

requirements. More important, though admittedly more difficult, was fostering

communities of learning that pursued knowledge of God (and all things relative to God)

and practiced being accountable to truth's claims upon the whole of one's life. Confessions

were not strictly necessary to such endeavours. With care, they might equally be served

through intentional coursework and the selection of its teachers.[656] At Owens College, for

example, Scott offered an annual course entitled *Relation of Religion to the Life of the Scholar*,

which was designed as a series of weekly lectures open to the public.[657] By Scott's

reasoning, institutions that barred students from pursuing knowledge—of God's

revelation, or the means to God's revelation, or those faculties that would otherwise

deepen their being-in-relationship with God—were guilty of frustrating the holy love

manifested in Christ's atonement and codified in the great commandments. Understood in

this light, Owens College offered a way of participating in England's educational ecology in

a manner congruent with Scott's own commitments.

Manchester: A Neglected Aspect of University History," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 80, no. 1 (1998): 146, https://doi.org/10.7227/BJRL.80.1.7.

[656] Scott notes that the trustees do bear responsibility in ensuring no person was appointed 'should be appointed whose teachings in literature or other learning should be adverse, or even alien, to just views of religion, or wanting in sympathy with it.' His assumption that such assessments would be obvious to the trustees is a weakness. A. J. Scott, "Owens College - Address by the Principal. 15 Oct 1853," *Manchester Weekly Times and Examiner*, October 15, 1853.

[657] See Thompson, *The Owens College: Its Foundation and Growth; and Its Connection with the Victoria University, Manchester*, 130. Newell notes that this course drew students from Lancashire Independent College, in Manchester. Newell, "Scott and His Circle," 344.

Second, and related to the first, Owens College was *not* a residential college—a fact that presented challenges, but also the possibility for making education more widely accessible. As Scott described his end-of-year address:

> the compulsory methods of a school are not applicable; the students do not reside under the superintendence of college authorities [as, for example, in Oxbridge], and are in most cases exposed to the distractions of home; we are utterly destitute of the venerable associations which lend to some university honours on all but national interest; above all, the proportion here who consider study as a business for life is smaller than elsewhere, and in nothing is English utilitarianism more rooted than in an unwillingness to spend labour in preparation, unless for a practical application most positively and definitely anticipated.[658]

While these challenges were not insubstantial, keeping Owens College non-residential enabled a broader spectrum of Manchester's society to frequent its halls, including those who could not afford the expense of residing in London to attend UCL. Later, with instrumental support from Scott, the Manchester Working Men's College (1858) even came to share the college's premises and was amalgamated with their evening classes in 1861.[659] The other advantage to non-residential programs was that they discouraged the separation of intellectual pursuits from other 'streams of influence' upon their development. Had Owens College been residential and not provided religious instruction, Scott averred that he would not have accepted their principalship: Scott declares, 'these two things [are] associated.'[660] Scott set great store in the family's role in education, in ways that seem unusual now. For example, Scott affirmed, 'in the intellectual development of children, the intercourse of parents and guests goes further, by range of the subjects in which an interest is shown, and by the habits of thought exhibited and communicated, then long courses of lectures and solitary study.'[661] While there might be benefits to the residential systems,

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[658] A. J. Scott, "A Public Address at the Owens College Annual Distribution of Prizes. 2 July 1853," *The Manchester Examiner and Times*, July 2, 1853.

[659] Newell, "Scott and His Circle," 404, 406.

[660] Scott, "Owens College - Address by the Principal. 15 Oct 1853."

[661] Scott, *Female Education Suggestions*, 4.

extracting young men as young as fourteen such 'streams of influence' was not necessarily

beneficial in cultivating the kind of unified life Scott envisioned as the fruit of education.[662]

Third, Owens College' bequest specified that it offer a foundational higher

education that presumably served the population more broadly, rather than to prepare

individuals for the learned professions specifically (i.e., divinity, law, or medicine). While

routes were available for these students to meet the necessary qualifications, the

institutions' course offerings were not limited to them. In one of his earlier addresses, Scott

opined that 'few are aware of how novel is the experiment here [of] making of a college

entirely unprofessional in its provisions.'[663] Manchester had no shortage of intellectual

societies for non-professionals, but it remained to be seen whether its recreational interest

in education could be converted into a demand for general and systematic study.[664] As

Scott realised, many institutions devoted to broad education set their sights on reaching

this class of individuals without success. For example, while acknowledging that UCL '*had*

materially improved the average education of that [professional] *class of persons in this*

century,' he argued that it had nevertheless 'not been attended in any large measure by the

non-professional classes.'[665] Similar challenges faced Mechanics' Institutes.[666]

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[662] In fact, it might have made the life of the College much easier. In 1876, the first hall of residence was established. Notably, it was called 'the Friends' Hall.' Hartog, *The Owens College, Manchester: A Brief History of the College and Description of Its Various Departments.*, 13.

[663] Scott, "A Public Address at the Owens College Annual Distribution of Prizes. 2 July 1853." See also Scott, "Owens College - Address by the Principal. 15 Oct 1853."

[664] As Lees & Robertson note, 'Love and Barton's Manchester guide of 1839 provides an impressive list of institutions that spearheaded change in the city and encouraged high-level debate and research. Among them were the Royal School of Medicine and Surgery, the "Lit. and Phil." (the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society), the Athenaeum, the Royal Institution, the School of Design, the Statistical Society, the Mechanics' Institution, and numerous professional societies, often with academic pretensions.' Alex B. Robertson and Colin Lees, "Owens College and the Victorian University, 1851-1903," *The University of Manchester: A Portrait*, 2006, 10–11.

[665] A. J. Scott, "Owens College - Address by the Principal. 10 Oct 1853," *Manchester Weekly Times and Examiner*, October 10, 1853.

[666] For Scott's sensibility of this particular issue, see A. J. Scott, "Address on Education, at the Opening of the Salford Mechanics' Institution (Salford Mechanics' Institution) 16 November 1853," *The Manchester Examiner and Times*, November 16, 1853.

In fact, although the long nineteenth century was a period of immense democratisation of knowledge in Britain, it was nevertheless also a period in which secure foundations were laid for the professionalisation of knowledge. Technological advances in printing and distribution enabled a burgeoning popular press, amateur literary and scientific institutions mushroomed, private and public libraries developed—all of which were enjoyed by more and more individuals as the scattered seeds of formal and informal elementary and secondary educational initiatives bore fruit. Knowledge-based societies, which proliferated in the first half of the nineteenth century, were tremendous forces in opening new communities of learning. Between 1823 and 1851, over 700 Mechanics' Institutes were founded in the UK.[667] By mid-century, at least 16 'philosophic and literary societies' were created in major English provincial centres.[668] Specialised, national societies were established—often with royal patronage—in the fields of geology (1807), astronomy (1820), zoology (1826), geography (1830), statistics (1834), botany (1839), chemistry (1841), and mathematics (1865).[669]

Even as there was a cultural push for democratisation, there was an opposite response to professionalise models of knowledge. Professionalisation is the process by which education, qualifications, or membership to a specialised body are more and more depended upon to circumscribe an occupation, field of study, group, or activity. Drawing upon Max Weber's framework of 'rationalisation,' it is possible to characterise professionalisation as promising more efficient and predictable outcomes within the field; quick and calculable means of assessing knowledge its producers; and a method of mitigating the variable 'human factor' through shared compliance with standardised

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[667] Thomas Kelly, *A History of Adult Education in Great Britain*, 2nd ed. (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1970), 113.
[668] Kelly, 113.
[669] Kelly, 112–13.

practices, rules, and credentials.[670] Professionalising tends to stratify those within and outwith a particular field or occupation. To those within the professionalised field, possessing the right credentials are a central factor—if not always a sole factor—in how knowledge-making power, prestige, or confidence is conferred. To those outside the professionalised field, O'Day notes the dynamic associated with an 'ethos of service' that nevertheless rests upon 'an insistence upon the separation between the expert and the client.'[671] Between the utilitarian appeal of 'useful knowledge' and the recasting of social hierarchies in terms of knowledge-based criteria, communities of learning could easily be reoriented to teloi inhibited or supplanted the ideals of at·one·ment so vital to Scott.

Owens College, insofar as it resisted the strict professionalisation of knowledge and contextualised professional-oriented courses within a broader educational programme, better represented the character of the kingdom of Christ, as Scott understood it. Indeed, in his address Scott articulated the ability of liberal education to cultivate 'the faculties of sympathy [a man] has for the world in which he lives.'[672] These faculties help man to realize that he 'is not a stranger, sent into the world to rule and govern by the strength of a mere unsympathizing insight.' Rather, 'he is a true brother of all God's children.'[673] In this sense, the objects, modes, and meanings of education offered at Owens College were much more consistent with Scott's social vision of education and his theology of at·one·ment. Of course, that did not mean all was plain sailing at Owens College—and here, there may be lessons to be learned as we contemplate retrieving elements of Scott's alternative proposal for theological learning today.

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[670] For a helpful commentary on Webster, seeGay, *(Modern) World*, 138–46.

[671] Rosemary O'Day, "Social Change in the History of Education: Perspectives on the Emergence of Learned Professions in England, c.1500-1800," in *Social Change in the History of British Education*, ed. Joyce Goodman, Gary McCulloch, and William Richardson (London & New York: Routledge, 2009), 25.

[672] Alexander John Scott, *Introductory Lectures on the Opening of Owens College, Manchester* (Manchester: Printed by T. Sowler, Saint Ann's Square, 1852), 51.

[673] Scott, 51.

v) Lessons Learned

Throughout Owens College's foundational years, antinomies strain in the background: the religious core of all education and the right to freedom of conscience, the supply of broad education and the demand for specialised knowledge suitable to mercantile life, the push for knowledge to be democratised and the pull towards its increased specialisation and professionalisation. When the city's dignitaries, the college's students, and members of the public gathered at Manchester City Hall for the principal's inaugural address (October 1851), Scott praised 'the interest excited by this new effort to introduce into the city the means of acquiring academical scholarship.' He also, however, alluded to 'the prodigious antagonistic forces, with which the serene and ideal attractions of the intellectual life have to struggle in this metropolis of the world's industrial activity.'[674] As much as the College was pioneering, it was also a precarious—in all probability, more liable to fail than to succeed.

In fact, the College nearly did fail. Newell notes that, 'if the first three years of Owens College showed a doubling of student numbers, the following three produced almost the exact reverse.' In fact, 'by the 1856-57 academic year, although the total number of students, including evening and part-time theological students, had increased to 54, the number of ordinary students had dropped to a mere 33.'[675] When numbers did not improve in 1858, tensions simmering since the college's foundation, boiled over. The editor of *The Manchester Guardian* declared Owens College to be in a state of 'mournful decay,' a decay mournful because it was preventable. He argued that its visionaries were failing 'to conciliate the support of the people' for two, basic reasons: 'first, the College supplies a

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[674] Thompson, *The Owens College: Its Foundation and Growth; and Its Connection with the Victoria University, Manchester*, 130.
[675] Newell, "Scott and His Circle," 391.

kind of education which is not wanted; and secondly, it does not supply the education which is wanted.'[676] Or, as one of Owens College's defenders surmised, the trustees and professors are alleged to 'have failed in placing before the public that *educational commodity* which the public of Manchester want.'[677] This latter editorialist defends the college's curriculum as being 'precisely the kind of education which the wealthy and refined portion of the Manchester community seek for their sons,' but blames the lack of demand on competition from 'London and the ancient universities,' where 'it is more respectable for their sons to complete their education.'[678]

What followed was an editorial exchange, which brought no less than fourteen individual voices out of the woodwork to discuss the kind of education offered at Owens College. These voices spanned the spectrum from hostile critic to ardent advocate, from former student to disinterested outsider. Most specific indictments against the College did not stand up under scrutiny, but the perception the editorial presented was nevertheless significant. While it is not certain how representative any individual position might have been, the editorial exchange is a vital window into competing higher educational narratives present within Manchester and its surrounding environs. In the two examples above alone, the rationality for pursuing education is represented in terms of its utilitarian (or commercial) value or its capacity to confer respectability (social distinction). Perhaps because of Manchester's 'fervent Nonconformity' and the 'strong sense of freedom of thought and individual liberty' Charlton notes that its citizens possessed, there is very little discourse within this body of editorials about the educational concomitants of theological belief.[679]

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[676] Editor, "Mournful Decay of Owens College. 9 July 1858," *The Manchester Guardian*, July 9, 1858.
[677] An evening student, "To the Editor of the Manchester Guardian. 15 July 1858," *The Manchester Guardian*, July 15, 1858.
[678] An evening student.
[679] Charlton, *Portrait of a University, 1851-1951: To Commemorate the Centenary of Manchester University*, 13.

Here is not the place to enter into debates about the merits and faults of education, which others have done much more thoroughly than can be attempted here.[680] Rather, raising the issues that Scott encountered at Owens College for consideration functions much like a speed hump (or speed bump, depending on one's geographical abode). Speed humps encourage drivers to slow down and pay attention for possible hazards. Here, there are three possible factors that it seems to me would need further consideration in retrieving elements of Scott's countercultural theology of at·one·ment. First, lurking in the background of some of the criticisms levied against Owens College is the critique of intellectual paternalism—namely, the practice on the part of Owens College's trustees and managers of restricting the educational freedom of their students in their presumed best interests. The editor writes that a 'favourite calumny against the commercial class' is that 'our citizens apply all the energies of their minds to commerce; and to this idol sacrifice all that graces and enables mankind' while leaving 'things of equal or higher importance… neglected.' Rather than listening to what the 'real wants of the middle classes in Manchester,' the editor charges the college's authorities of proceeding in the supposed interest of their young charges by refusing to offer anything other than the *right* kind of education—a classical education in similar guise to Oxford or Cambridge. While Scott rebutted this accusation by noting the numerous streams through the programme available to students, the perception does raise the question of how at·one·ment is fostered: whether in fact it is fostered through at·one·ment with God in ways that allow and equip the kinds of genuine diversity to which the New Testament metaphor of the body attests, or whether is it is grounded in homogenous acculturation.

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[680] For example, see Alistair Miller, *A New Vision of Liberal Education: The Good of the Unexamined Life* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016); Martha C. Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998); Darryl Gless and Barbara Herrnstein Smith, eds., *The Politics of Liberal Education* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1992).

Second, and relatedly, the difficulties involved in maintaining course in the onslaught of competing educational paradigms alert us to the possible merits of being able to articulate a robust, theological vision of education—and the realistic challenges doing so involves in a pluralistic context. Following the first editorial, Scott conceded to the editor, 'if your statements shew essential misapprehension to the system pursued at Owens College, it is not likely that more correct notions prevail at all generally in this city and its neighbourhood.'[681] While speaking specifically about course offerings, the statement could just as easily apply to the more general educational vision of Owens College. If theology is to offer something distinctive to educational debates, perhaps it is the character of the 'kingdom' (a term here used loosely) that education cultivates. That cannot be done if theological terms of reference are avoided. Neither, however, are such terms of reference meaningful unless there is some degree of cultural familiarity with them. There is, therefore, a need for public theology more broadly.

Third, and finally, how predominant the values of market and distinction signals the need to take seriously their force and their implicit assumptions have on shaping educational narratives about what education is *for* and what it *means*. Education can be a means in realizing a different vision of society—a society in which working men could study alongside men of other classes, as equals, in accordance the spirit of the Kingdom of Christ, constituted through God's universal love—but the way may be cruciform in shape.

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[681] A. J. Scott, "Response to 'Owens College - Why Has It Failed?' 14 Jul 1858," *The Manchester Guardian*, July 14, 1858.

Chapter 6: A Thread to Follow? Erskine and Scott in the Twenty-First Century

*'We can start again. The "again" being a gift from the God
who raised Jesus from the dead. Theological education exists in the "again."...
God offers us an uncontrollable reconciliation, one that aims to re-create us,
reforming us as those who enact gathering and who gesture communion with
our very existence… This, of course, is a dream,
but it is God's dream.*

Willie Jennings, After Whiteness[682]

i) Threads to Follow

The opening chapter of this dissertation began with a story about a laird, a lady,

and a dying tenant farmer in the Scottish lowlands—a story that gestured towards a

complicated and underexplored dynamic that shapes and stimulates the course of

theological learning. In its broadest terms that dynamic is of *relationship*: the character and

state of being connected with others, which frames how we know and are known (and

thus, also what we know). In the story, Erskine and the farmer's developing friendship

became the hermeneutic space in which the farmer could explore theological subjects that

were previously abhorrent to him: death, dying, and the nature of the God in whom

Erskine asked him to confide himself. Only as the relationship between the two men

deepened was the farmer able to open himself up to the entanglements and vulnerabilities

involved in knowing and letting himself be known—first by Erskine, when he confessed

his fear and uncertainty about what was to come; and then by God, as the farmer began to

confide in him. This relationship also did theological work, expanding sources of

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[682] Jennings, *After Whiteness*, 152.

knowledge and revealing the shape of God's holy love. Human friendship, for instance, became a 'living metaphor' to elucidate what being-in-relationship with God involves and invites. For our purposes, the story opened a perspective on a kind of theological learning that *intends* that specific relational telos—for the sake of cultivating genuine relationship with the God who is holy love. It suggested that such personal and committed relationship can transform and reorder a person's being-in-the-world, in this case transforming the farmer's final days into days of hope and longing for greater union with God.

Although simple, the themes in that story have reverberated throughout the remainder of our work: namely, that (1) friendships act as hermeneutic space, informing not just who and how we love but how we know and are known; (2) relationships expand the sources and contexts of theological learning, as the living metaphor of friendship demonstrates; and (3) theological learning can be pursued *for* relationship and is best realised when it is integrated through relationships, both with God and with creation. I have hinted that Erskine and Scott's at-times countercultural enactment of at·one·ment retrieves an orientation towards theological learning and an epistemology appropriate to it that is relevant to such education today. However, the work thus far has been to establish the threads against which an alternative vision of theological education might be rewoven. In Chapters 2 and 4, we explored the theological underpinnings of Erskine and Scott's objections to contemporaneous characterisations of theological knowledge to reconstruct an alternative vision for the pursuit of knowledge of God: one undergirded by atonement, and oriented towards at·one·ment with God; and through God, with others. In Chapters 3 and 5, we considered how Erskine and Scott's theological endeavours resonate respectively with such an orientation: in Erskine's more informal communities cultivated both in his correspondence and in the hospitality that he extended at Linlathen, and in Scott's semi-formal and formal educational work with marginalised communities of learning.

This chapter now summarises the key arguments of the dissertation and begins to answer the questions of Erskine's and Scott's relevance to modern discussions about the future shape of theological education. Having re-examined the theological and practical threads of their alternative vision for theological learning in section (i), section (ii) brings Erskine and Scott back to the table with contemporary scholars John Webster, Willie Jennings, and James K. A. Smith—noting both how Erskine and Scott might supplement or reframe discussions, as well as where their contributions are limited or challenged in light of them. Section (iii) then explores the limitations (or provisos) needed to accompany any efforts to retrieve elements of Erskine's and Scott's sometimes countercultural enactment of at·one·ment. Finally, section (iv) briefly explores two contemporary theological endeavours that have resonances with key emphases in Erskine's and Scott's orientation towards theological learning—and that help us imagine different ways we might continue to find inspiration and embody some of their key principles in the contemporary moment. To begin, though, we shall return to some of the integral threads that hold together Erskine's and Scott's proposal for reorienting theological education and redefining its objects, meanings, and modes.

Some Threads to Follow

Throughout this dissertation, I have elucidated Erskine's and Scott's writings, theological engagements, and cultivation of communities of learning in terms of representing an alternative perspective on theological learning—one that does not share all the *Wissenschaft*-ian assumptions about what theology *is*, what theology is *for*, and how theology is *done* that dictate how much of theology is done within the modern research academy today. Unlike contemporary initiatives that delimit theology to 'a discipline, self-conscious scholarly enterprise of understanding,' Erskine's and Scott's alternative

perspective conceives of theology's objects, meanings, and modes in terms of a larger relational telos.[683] That telos is *at·one·ment with God, in holy love*—an abiding, transformational relationship with the triune God that shapes what and whom we love (and thus, how we know and let ourselves be known). Before bringing Erskine and Scott to the table with modern dialogue partners, it is worth briefly recalling the three main threads of their thought teased out in this dissertation.

First, Erskine and Scott demonstrate how important it is to reorient theological learning in terms of the pursuit of 'knowledge of God'—both in the more impersonal sense of knowing *about* God and in the person-involved sense of *knowing* God. As noted in Chapters 2 and 4, distinguishing between these two modes of knowledge of God provides a means of articulating a resistance to the phenomenalist turn in theological studies identified by Edward Farley (Chapter 1). Moreover, taking seriously the ontological significance of God's being as *subject* means expanding the modes of knowing that figure in theologians' epistemic toolkit. Pursuing knowledge of God is not about delimiting a static object or about systematising others' thinking about such an object; rather, it is a response to an ongoing address that involves us with a dynamic other. Although *knowing* God in an 'I-Thou' relationship represents the highest kind of knowledge of God, knowing *about* God is also an indispensable endeavour. Formal theological pursuits have vital preparatory, substantive, and corrective roles in the service of a larger relational telos: namely, at·one·ment with God, in holy love. So long as one dimension is underdeveloped or their vital connection is disconnected, the horizons of theological learning will be circumscribed—and its objects, meanings, and modes subject to distortion.

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[683] Farley, *Theologia*, 31.

Second, according to Erskine and Scott, the pursuit of knowledge of God receives

its best objects, modes, and meanings when it is animated by the telos of at·one·ment with

God, in holy love—a term not native to their work, but that summarises the loving and

ordering character of being united to God in and through meaningful personal relationship.

Unlike other terms like union with God, as I noted in Chapter 1, at·one·ment has the

advantage of calling attention both to God's gracious reconciliation in Christ through the

atonement as well as the eschatological hope for relationships of at·one·ment between

God and the whole of creation. For Erskine and Scott, Christ's atonement is for the sake

of creation's at·one·ment with God. Christ's atonement is the great social equaliser: 'for all

have sinned and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through

the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.'[684] Indeed, because Christ fully embodies the law of

love, Erskine and Scott reason that Christ's atonement must effect reconciliation for all

people—a reconciliation that is realised in and through a person's being-in-relationship

with God (Chapter 2 and 4). Much like a good friendship, being involved with another in

such profound and deeply personal ways changes how a person is attuned to the world

around her. Over time, living in relationship with God in Christ and through the Spirit

capacitates the gradual transformation and reordering of her loves and being-in-the-world

in ways that resonate with Gods own character as holy love. At·one·ment with God,

therefore, becomes the wellspring and realising hope of sharing greater at·one·ment with

others—the end of social divisiveness and exploitation and the beginning of shalom for all

creation.

    Third, Erskine and Scott argue that patterns of relationship and social belonging—

whether that takes the form of informal relationships or of formal institutions—ought to

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[684] Romans 3:23–24.

reflect the relational implications of Christ's atonement and the divine will for reconciliation it signifies. So long as social systems and communities of learning do not share the character of God's holy love or nurture the patterns of belonging that God communicates, they cannot claim to reflect God's will or purposes. Rather, being 'at·one with God in holy love' means creating spaces where persons can work together in community to seek truth and be accountable to its claims *together*; it means communicating God's at·oning love by creating spaces consonant with and conducive to the cultivation of at·one·ment with God and between creation on holy love's terms. Such commitments characterised Erskine's countercultural cultivation of communities of learning at Linlathen and through his correspondence (Chapter 3); and Scott's commitment to extending higher education opportunities to women, working men, and those excluded from England's historic universities because of their latter's confessional requirements (Chapter 5).

Pursuing knowledge of God in both personal and impersonal modes, being formed in holy love through at·one·ment with God, and creating communities that reflect and participate in the reality of such love: these three threads make up the cord that runs through Erskine and Scott's alternative approach to theological learning. Retrieving elements of such an orientation towards theological learning (and an epistemology appropriate to it) remains relevant today, something that becomes clear as Erskine and Scott are brought into dialogue with contemporary thought-leaders in theological education debates such as Webster, Jennings, and Smith.

ii) Erskine and Scott at the Table

John Webster and the Pursuit of a 'Theological Theology'

Bringing Erskine, Scott, and John Webster into conversation about the telos of theological learning is difficult because their social imaginaries are so different. Webster, for example, had to carve out a space for theology in ways that Erskine and Scott did not and, in particular, a space for theology as a distinctive discipline within the halls of the modern research university. He is thus more preoccupied with the conditions under which theological activities are possible at all; and secondarily, with their remit and character. Yet despite their different interests and priorities, bringing these three scholars around the same metaphorical table is enlightening. Noting where they might find common ground and where they diverge helps us begin to assess the extent to which retrieving an Erskine-Scott-inspired 'at·one·ment orientation'—and an epistemology appropriate to it—remains relevant for theological learning today. In this case, Erskine and Scott's 'at·one·ment orientation' for theological learning complements Webster's ontological priority on God as *subject* with relational modes of knowing appropriate to that commitment. Further, their relational orientation offers a gentle challenge to the priority on the rational individual that secures Webster's proposal.

Erskine, Scott, and Webster share vital commitments about how theological activities are best understood and constituted in relation to God. As Davidson notes, Webster proposes that theology is best realised when its activities are comprehended as occurring in light of 'the gospel of the entire outworking of the Triune God's free and loving resolve to have fellowship with his creatures.'[685] God is known insofar as he

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[685] Ivor J. Davidson, "Introduction," in *The Culture of Theology*, by John Webster, ed. Ivor J. Davidson and Alden C. McCray (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 78–79.

discloses himself in 'a movement of love.'[686] As we noted in Chapters 2 and 4, Erskine and Scott similarly represent the Incarnation, Atonement, and justification by faith as divine-initiated acts of revelation that witness to God's resolve to make it possible for creation to know and be known by God, to share relationship with God. For all three theologians, God's self-disclosure is relationally purposive: it addresses persons in a movement of love and calls for whole-person responses. One of the many ways that human beings respond to that address is by pursuing knowledge of God. Historically, academic theology represents a formalisation in part of that endeavour. Webster's 'theological theology' seeks to elucidate the theological first principles upon which such formal activities are possible and to develop some normative principles upon which it should proceed.[687]

Both Webster's earlier and later articulations of a 'theological theology' paint a largely formal and idealistic portrait of theology and theological inquiry. He situates the future of theology *qua* theology in reframing its essential rationality—albeit an endeavour made possible only by the gracious self-disclosure of God.[688] Resisting pressures from cognate disciplines that push 'God in himself…to the periphery of theological concern,' he suggests the formal foundation of theology must be 'God in himself in his antecedent self-existent perfection, integrity, beatitude, and simplicity as Father, Son, and Spirit, prior to and apart from any relation to creatures.'[689] He reasons, 'God relatively rather than absolutely considered is a derivative element of theology's attention to its principal matter.'[690] Indeed, only by fixing our gaze upon God as the distinctive 'source of our

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[686] Webster, "Theology Theological," 20–21.
[687] For further detailsabout Webster's proposal, see Chapter 1 of this dissertation.
[688] Webster, "Theology Theological," 20–21.
[689] Webster, 18.
[690] Webster, 19. Webster does admit the 'permanent quandary' of the fact that 'theology has very little to say' on 'what is first in material order and has greatest material proportion – God in himself,' even as 'this material order is, of course, not necessarily the order of discovery or instruction.'

correctedness' can the epistemological and anthropological reference points ordering theological learning be corrected and transformed. [691]

If less formal in their considerations, Erskine and Scott's interest in theological learning is no less concerned with the distinctively *theological* foundations that inform the objects, meanings, and modes appropriate to the pursuit of knowledge of God. Both Scotsmen moreover share the two convictions that animate Webster's original articulation of a theological theology: namely, the principles that 'the being of God…is the reality which actively constitutes and delimits the field of theological activity'[692] and 'that "object" to which the theologian's gaze is directed is inalienably *subject*'—that is, not something that is a passive object of enquiry but someone whose self-presence actively addresses us in and through our inquiries.[693] On this latter point especially, Erskine and Scott have something to offer in conversation with Webster. Their writings, theological engagements, and communities of theological learning are dedicated to elucidating the *personal-relational* implications of God's being as *subject*—and the epistemic consequences of such an ontological commitment—in a much more substantial way than articulated in Webster's works dedicated specifically to the subject of theological theology. Perhaps this difference can be attributed to Webster's greater focus on the significance of the eternal divine processions, whereas Erskine and Scott are more concerned with the significance of the economic trinity for defining theology and its pursuits.

Erskine and Scott offer a distinctively theological foundation for correcting and transforming the epistemological and anthropological reference points ordering theological learning, one that finds its footings in the doctrine of atonement and justification by faith, but with the larger telos of reconciliation in the holy love of God in view. Because of their

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[691] Webster, "Theological Theology," 26.
[692] Webster, 25-26.
[693] Webster, 26.

relational interpretation of the telos of theological learning, God's being as *subject* takes on new epistemic prominence: if the field of theology is not to be inadequately circumscribed or unduly limited, more personal and relational modes of knowing appropriate to that ontological commitment are needed. Relational theological metaphors, such as the poetic image of friend, open up new avenues for rearticulating a more robust, practical theological epistemology, one that is appropriate to Webster's ontological insistence upon God's being as *subject*. For Erskine and Scott, moreover, theological learning at its best understands itself to be in the 'already-not yet': between God's historical act in the atonement and the eschatological hope of perfect at·one·ment with God and with the whole of creation. Its objects, meanings, and modes cannot be properly extricated from God's reconciliatory purposes—something to which the Atonement attests. God is a God of knowledge (1 Sam. 2.3), *and* God is also a God of reconciliation. In this sense, the two Scotsmen's proposals for theological learning offer a personal-relational complement to Webster's pillars of 'theological theology,' but also counterbalance some of its implicit cognitive and individual-centric inclinations, a point that is also important to our next scholar, Willie Jennings.

Willie Jennings and Belonging as the 'Hermeneutical Starting Place'

If Webster cautions against 'saying too much too early about the subjectivity of the theologian' and opines that such concerns should 'enter into consideration only after we have treated theology's object, cognitive principles, and ends,' then Willie Jennings represents the cautionary counterpoint.[694] On the back of a phenomenologically-inspired critique of modern, Western theological education, Jennings argues that neglecting the subjectivity of the theologian until too late in the process of reconceptualising theology actually has a deleterious effect on how the discipline's objects, cognitive principles, and

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[694] Webster, "Theology Theological," 25.

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ends are imagined. Whether consciously or not, certain ideas and conceptual ideals can foster 'a way of being in the world and seeing the world that forms cognitive and affective structures.'[695] Such ideals shape how we image and are attuned to God; and how we attribute value and meaning to the activities and topics of theological learning. By unfolding the ways that whiteness as a relational-intellectual paradigm attenuates academic theological pursuits in particular, Jennings challenges the myth that considering and cultivating fresh patterns of relationality are superfluous to the 'real business' of the discipline of theology. Rather, he argues that relationship itself is constitutive of theological learning; for good or ill, relationships have the power to organise the purposes, meanings, and modes of theological pursuits. At its worst, theological studies institutionalises an ideology of self-sufficient mastery antithetical to God's reconciliatory purposes. At its best, it participates in (and thus, modelling) the reconciling embrace that God offers.[696]

Although Erskine, Scott, and Jennings all agree on the propitious and constitutive role of reconciled and reconciling relationship for theological learning, the specific terms that serve as cornerstones to their theories are different—and therefore, so are the concomitant conceptual resources, abilities, and skills upon which they can then draw. Jennings' conceptual cornerstone is a Christian feminist reading of eros, which Ann Bathurst Gilson defines as 'a body-centred love marked by a yearning, a pushing and pulling toward erotic mutuality, a movement toward embodied justice.'[697] Such love is not detached or abstract, but personal and particular and passionate. Peter Black suggests that, in contrast to sexual eroticisation (a form of misdirected erotic desire), feminists connect redeemed eros with a compassionate way of 'relat[ing] to a world and to others in a way

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[695] Jennings, *After Whiteness*, 10.
[696] Jennings, 152.
[697] Anne Bathurst Gilson, *Eros Breaking Free: Interpreting Sexual Theo-Ethics* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 1995), 110.

that gives recognition to their vulnerability, mystery, and beauty, and [that fights] for that recognition.'[698] For Jennings, this conceptual framework of eros (or embrace) provides a means of articulating the foundations, purposes, and modes that he claims best animate theological learning. He argues that all theological learning is founded upon the reality of 'God relentlessly giving Godself to us' in the pursuit of reconciled communion with creation.[699] Theology's central purpose then is 'to give witness to God's embrace of the creature and the desire of God to make embrace the vocation of creatures that have yielded to the Spirit.'[700] How this is achieved in different communities of learning varies; however, in general, they involve cultivating a new kind of belonging as a 'hermeneutic starting place'—a belonging that witnesses to and participates in the 'uncontrollable reconciliation' that God offers us, which 'aims to re-create us, reforming us as those who enact gathering and who gesture communion with their very existence.'[701] When contrasted against his interpretation of Western theological education as cold and impersonal, Jennings' evocative image of God's loving endeavour is compelling—as is the invitation to participate in it.

Erskine and Scott likewise bring love to the foreground in reconceptualising the telos of theological education; however, their conceptual cornerstone is at·one·ment with God, in holy love—that is, personal being-in-relationship with God that transforms who and what we love and becomes constitutive of being-in-the-world. For Erskine and Scott, loving the God of holy love with all our hearts and minds and strength rightly orders our love for our neighbours and the whole of creation. Such love is only possible 'because he first loved us' with a love so profound that it led to Christ's death on the cross—a death

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[698] Peter Black, "The Broken Wings of Eros: Christian Ethics and the Denial of Desire," *Theological Studies* 64 (2003), 125.
[699] Jennings, *After Whiteness*, 152.
[700] Jennings, 143.
[701] Jennings, 10, 152.

that made reconciliation in Christ possible for world.[702] Christ's death on the cross, therefore, represents both the natural conclusion of the human quest for self-sufficiency and masterful autonomy, as well as the possibility and pattern of beginning 'again' in Christ. Certainly, there are resonances between these three theologians' understanding of how theological learning is constituted: the necessary foundation of divine-initiated reconciliation, the transformative power of loving God and being loved by God for the whole of life, and the hope of reconstituting patterns of belonging in ways sympathetic to divine purposes and that contribute to more profound theological learning. Erskine and Scott's cultivation of communities of theological learning—whether at Linlathen, in Erskine's correspondence, or in Scott's multifarious educational initiatives—can all be read faithfully as attempts to cultivate new hermeneutic spaces through a reconstituted understanding of belonging. Erskine and Scott's at·one·ment (with its connection to Christ's atonement and the eschatological hope of at·one·ment with God and between all creation) offers another distinctive 'pillar' for resourcing, in distinctively theological terms, the relational reconstitution Jennings argues is necessary for theological learning to flourish.

If Erskine and Scott's approach of at·one·ment foregrounds the costliness of pursuing masterful self-sufficiency to its logical conclusion *as well as* the wellspring of hope for reconstituting belonging, though, Jennings' account of the underappreciated power of whiteness to transform cognitive and affective structures within theological learning communities urges us to assess more closely how its ideals shaped Erskine and Scott's theological endeavours. It urges us to consider who they considered important to read or engage, and the terms upon which they sought to cultivate at·one·ment in their communities of learning more broadly. Certainly, considering what we now know about

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[702] 1 John 4:19.

the implicit values and expectations communicated in personal and institutional practices, any attempts to retrieve elements of their orientation toward theological learning would need to explore these considerations—and the wisdom offered by other voices from historically marginalised perspectives, such as Black, womanist, feminist, and Latinx communities—in much greater detail than I have been able to do here.

James K. A. Smith and Desiring the Kingdom of God

Smith shares Jennings' faith in theological learning to form 'a certain kind of people whose hearts and passions are aimed at the kingdom of God.'[703] In particular, he shares a common desire to see theological learning reoriented through an anthropology of desire, one which understands that a person's being-in-the-world is oriented by his or her fundamental loves—'what we love "above all," that to which we pledge our allegiance, that to which we are devoted in a way that overrules other concerns and interests.'[704] Whereas Jennings focuses on the patterns of relationality involved in forming such desires, Smith focuses on the entailments of understanding 'human persons as *embodied* actors rather than merely thinking things'[705] Through his analysis, liturgical, pedagogical, and cultural practices and institutions come into focus in new and meaningful ways: these are the sites where love is practiced, formed, and counter-formed.

Like Smith, Erskine and Scott situate the hope of theological learning in reframing its pursuits in terms of the formation of constitutive loves—in their case, the holy love of God. Both men, moreover, shared concerns with how rationalist-cognitivist paradigms might misorient theological learning and circumscribe its horizons. While Smith begins from the philosophical and cultural studies perspective rather than soteriological concerns,

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[703] Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 18.
[704] Smith, 87.
[705] Smith, 35.

he shares Erskine's and Scott's concerns about knowledge *about* God that remains at the purely cognitive level and is not translated into meaningful, personal change. Indeed, Smith's critique of the worldview-style epistemological framework and the cognitivist-rationalist conception of human beings as 'thinking things' lends another conceptual framework for articulating some of the existential distinctions between '*knowing*' and '*knowing* about,' particularly insofar as *knowing* God in the manner Erskine and Scott could also be said to 'take hold of our gut and aim our heart to certain ends.'[706] These similarities are significant, but so too are the differences between the two scholars—one of that reasons that bringing Erskine and Scott into modern conversations about theological learning is valuable.

For example, neither Erskine nor Scott engages with Smith's central anthropological thesis that human beings 'are not primarily *homo rationale* or *homo faber* or *homo economicus*… [or] even *homo religiosis,*' but 'more concretely *homo liturgicus.*' According to Smith, 'humans are those animals that are religious…not because we are primarily believing animals but because we are liturgical animals—embodied, practicing creatures whose love is aimed at something ultimate.'[707] One of the critical contentions of *Desiring the Kingdom* (and his subsequent series) is 'that liturgies—whether 'sacred' or 'secular'—shape and constitute our identities by forming our most fundamental desires and our most basic attunement to the world.'[708] In this sense, Erskine's and Scott's project is very different. Both men were concerned with issues of attunement, but neither dedicated much formal attention to how practices themselves attune desire or being-in-the-world. If anything, particularly as the Oxford Movement gained pace, both men express concern about Christian communities who attend *to* liturgical practices or the material structures of a given

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[706] Smith, 40.
[707] Smith, 40.
[708] Smith, 25.

community, rather than *through* them *to* God. Scott, in particular, likely overstepped the mark here. In his fears that *knowing* God would be replaced by rituals that preserved (or at least, allowed) relational distance between God and God's people, his discourses often emphasise the importance of the invisible church and its visible outworking without adequately acknowledging the riches of the visible church and its invisible in-working among those steeped in its practices.[709] Smith's Schmemann-like 'exegesis' of the elements of Christian worship are an important corrective, insofar as they acknowledge—perhaps better than Erskine or Scott do—the fact that practices and habits are formed, at least in part, by our practices as embodied agents in the world.

Casting light on one area often means casting another area into shadow. In spotlighting the role of practices in forming *what* we love our constitutive loves, Smith largely leaves the question of relationships untouched: e.g., how *whom* we love also contributes to 'our most fundamental desires and our most basic attunement to the world,' whether that is Christ Jesus or a beloved teacher who brings us into new relationships of care for the world in which we dwell. While this element is certainly not denied, it does receive very little attention even in *You Are What You Love*. In this sense, Erskine and Scott perhaps offer a gentle corrective to bring back into the discussion the place of *relationship*— and specifically, being-in-relationship with the God of holy love. For both theologians, it is love for *this* God that shapes how we intend the world, that shapes imagination, and that motivates actions. It is therefore not enough to hold that 'you are what you love.' In fact, you are *who* you love. Such considerations are present in Smith's corpus, but often recede into the background. As I showed in Chapter 2 and 4 especially, centring being-in-relationship with God (or its fruit, at·one·ment with God) safeguards the responsive and

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[709] For examples, 'Romanism and Its Modifications' in Scott, "Social Systems of the Day Compared with Christianity"; A. J. Scott, "First Principle of Church Government," in *Discourses* (London and Cambridge: MacMillan & Co., 1866), 281–319.

dynamic nature of that ultimate constitutive love, while still articulating the need for robust practices to cultivate the relationship. In this sense, Erskine and Scott offer a gentle corrective to possible overcorrections in theological learning circles that would merely append spiritual disciplines to existing theological studies practices without contextualising them within their larger relational telos of at·one·ment with God, in holy love.

The fruitfulness of putting Erskine and Scott's philosophy of theological education into dialogue with Webster, Jennings, and Smith suggests that contemporary discussions of theological learning can still benefit from their insights. Such considerations also intimate that retrieving elements of Erskine and Scott's orientation towards theological learning— and an epistemology appropriate to it—is certainly not a straightforward endeavour. The concerns Webster, Smith, and Jennings raise are not the only possible entanglements in any retrieval attempts. Threads of insight as we have been tracing are prone to becoming twisted, confused, or compromised if we do not acknowledge their inherent limits or the genuine tensions under which they might need to work. To that end, in the following section, I will briefly explore three potential concerns or criticisms: namely, that (1) the Scotsmen's schema places too much responsibility upon the individual's capacity to discern the will of God, without offering adequate resources or safeguards for such endeavours; (2) modern conceptions of friendship, thinned through consumerism and social media, weaken the metaphor of friendship with God and may distort how modern audiences imagine being-in-relationship with God and the character of relational hermeneutic spaces that foster theological learning; and, (3) because of its distinctively Christian theological foundation, an at·one·ment orientation towards theological learning is unlikely to have purchase outside of Christian communities of learning—a serious limitation to its practicability given modern ideological and funding trends for many institutions of theological learning.

While certainly not comprehensive, these three issues involve diverse and decisive elements of Erskine's and Scott's conceptual framework. The first concern asks whether 'at·one·ment with God' is adequately conceptualised and resourced in general. The last two concerns reflect two challenges associated with such a retrieval for modern theological learning in particular. While Erskine and Scott do offer some general resources for responding to these concerns—as does our treatment of them in this dissertation—these three areas would certainly need further attention in bringing Erskine and Scott into discussions about reimagining the future(s) of theological education today.

iii) Possible Entanglements

Willing At·one·ment

One of the first places where an 'at·one·ment orientation' such as Erskine and Scott propose might become complicated concerns the question of discerning the will of God. As we saw in Chapters 2 and 4, at·one·ment with God expresses itself in a heart sympathetic to God's holy love. Obedience whose wellspring is at·one·ment with God is willing; it flows organically from 'taking our heart into sympathy with the spirit and purpose of God' as we discern it in each situation.[710] Being-in-relationship with God—and knowing God's character—helps us to love as God loves (and thus, to will as God wills). While such a schema sounds good in theory, in practice it raises the question of whether Erskine and Scott provide adequate resources and safeguards for distinguishing and disentangling human will from divine will. This is an important question because, as Paulo Freire reminds us, 'all education is political; teaching is never a neutral act.'[711] Without adequate resources and safeguards for discernment, it is all too easy for the notion of

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[710] Scott, "Kingdom of Christ," 89.
[711] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Seabury Press, 1968), 19.

'at·one·ment with God' to become identified with socio-cultural compositions that are instead beholden to personal or political interests of status and power.

Even a cursory study of history shows the challenges of (and perils of not) disentangling divine purpose and will from human ones—whether we look back to the Crusaders' rallying cry *Deus vult* ('God wills it');[712] to the cultural genocide of indigenous peoples through the residential school program in twentieth-century Canada;[713] or to the prophetic mantel claimed by twenty-first century U.S. politicians in support of neo-conservative, socio-political agendas.[714] As Jennings and Smith illustrate, moreover, even familiar and seemingly innocuous educational and institutional structures can underwrite teloi for theological learning that counter the kind of 'theological learning for the sake of at·one·ment' that Erskine and Scott envision. While it is possible to disentangle some general principles from their writings, theological engagements, and cultivation of communities, neither theologian explores personal or corporate discernment in any systematic way—an important area for expansion if we are to continue to develop their proposals for reimagining theological learning.

In considering what Erskine and Scott *do* have to offer, there are three 'broad stroke' principles and practices that stand out. First, if not in the same language, Erskine and Scott maintain that at·one·ment with God cannot happen without Christ's atonement. Christ's atonement serves as a warning and a reminder: it warns us that the unmediated pursuit of our human will for mastery and self-sufficiency culminates in death, but it also recalls us to the condition upon which new compositions of life lived together are made

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[712] Peter Frankopan, *The First Crusade: The Call from the East* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012), 3.

[713] For an introduction to the church's role in the Canadian residential school system, see Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.*, vol. 1 (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 2015).

[714] Daniel K. Williams, *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

possible—even new compositions of theological learning. Keeping in the foreground the essential connection between atonement and at·one·ment helps ameliorate the conceit that might incline us to conflate God's will with our own. Second, both Erskine and Scott encouraged their communities to deepen their understanding of the character of God—and the constitution of the kingdom of God, as Christ has already revealed it. Scott, as I noted in Chapter 4 posited that the will of God might best be understood as 'the dispositions of His own character…[that] take their stand on the manifestation of that character in the work of Christ Jesus, the object of our faith.'[715] God is not wedded to any fixed social, political, or educational composition, but rather to compositions that are consistent with his own character. To disentangle human and divine dispositions, then, in part becomes a function of knowing the normative *character of God* as holy love—and being able to engage in the kinds of cultural exegesis that reveal consonances and dissonances with the character of God and his kingdom.

Considering how concerned Scott was about the will of God being co-opted to serve popular political or social ends, it is strange that he does not examine the process of personal or corporate discernment in any systematic way—something which would need to be remedied if we were to take Scott's philosophy of theological education forward. For example, in *On Revelation*, he helpfully reminds readers, 'there is a mutual dependence of all [modes of divine revelation]; the harmonious, combined result is the manifestation of God.'[716] To safeguard ourselves against constructing a god in our own image, then, Scott insists that different modes of revelation need to be 'read' together and against one another, such that seeming incompatibilities between modes of revelation become signposts to areas where more wrestling needs to be done—with the longing for a deeper

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[715] Scott, "Divine Will," 3.
[716] Scott, "On Revelation (1837)," 35. The modes of revelation Scott identifies are creation, providence, miracles, conscience, incarnation, and scripture.

synthesis to emerge and the humility to acknowledge when it does not.[717] Such synthetic

thinking would require a much broader 'exegetical toolkit' than is often cultivated in

students of theology (or biblical studies) now. The formal requirements of such an

endeavour do not seem to have concerned Scott too much, perhaps because the general

education that he and his colleagues championed assumed that all subjects are undergirded

and unified by a Christian framework of revelation. With hindsight, perhaps failing to

articulate or cultivate that skillset of discernment across different modes of revelation

shows their naïveté—something which more recent endeavours in theologically engaged

art and science seek to redress.[718] Still, if underdeveloped, the principle of cultivating a

more robust skillset for 'reading' the natural world, our personal and corporate history, and

the testimony of scripture *together* does at least suggest one potential avenue for

safeguarding against the conflation of divine and human will.

More communal practices of discernment might add another avenue for

safeguarding against an excessive dependence upon an individual's (sometimes mistaken)

conscience, a risk especially relevant given Scott's epistemic reliance upon the conscience as

the most immediate organ of God's communication. Practices like spiritual accompaniment

in the Ignatian tradition or the Quaker Clearness Committee are not impervious to

misdirection or external pressures, but their stress upon open questions and a multifaceted

examination of the circumstances in light of God's character and revelation offer additional

tools and safeguards for more faithful discernment—practices that can reduce some of the

cultural noise and permit 'the witness of the Spirit upon our spirits' to be heard more

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[717] For more on how Scott understood the mutual dependence of these classes of revelation, seeScott, "On Revelation (1837)."

[718] For example, see John Perry and Joanna Leidenhag, "What Is Science-Engaged Theology?," *Modern Theology* 37, no. 2 (April 2021): 245–53, https://doi.org/10.1111/moth.12681; Margaret McKerron, "TheoArtistry: Practical Perspectives on 'Theologically Informed Art,'" *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 18, no. 4 (2018), 354–68, https://doi.org/10.1080/1474225X.2018.1535478.

clearly. More informally, as Erskine's cultivation of learning communities particularly through his correspondence demonstrate, such communal discernment and accountability can be practiced in robust friendships. In robust friendships, self-examination can be encouraged, positions challenged, motivations clarified, and much-needed reassurance offered. Given how friendships are mediated through social media today and the transience of social relationships more broadly though, the question remains whether friendships today can bear the weight of such roles or responsibilities. This issue also raises questions about the utility of retrieving the poetic image of friend to describe relationships of at·one·ment with God, another pillar of Erskine and Scott's proposal for reconceptualising theological learning.

Thin Conceptions of Friendship

So far, we have considered how more robust discernment practices might better safeguard us against the temptation to (re)imagine *at·one·ment with God* in our own image. For Erskine and Scott, however, confidence was not located first and foremost in formal structures, but in the transforming character of everyday being-in-relationship with God. Both men elucidated being-in-relationship through the metaphor of human friendship— using the interplay between likeness and unlikeness to nineteenth-century friendship models to reframe who God is and the character of relationship he offers for creation. As I noted, Hart argues that metaphors 'have the power to transform the vulgate [by] the breaking open of *our terms* on the rock of divine otherness [and] compelling reconsideration and revaluation of their familiar meanings.'[719] While we have looked at Erskine's model of friendship in particular, modern friendship looks very different. If we want to retrieve an orientation towards theological learning that is animated by at·one·ment with God today

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[719] Hart, *Between the Image*, 25. Emphasis mine.

(and friendship is critical to how we conceptualise and embody that), then surely one of the next steps is to explore how the metaphor of friendship addresses us today.

Such considerations are especially relevant considering how modern consumer paradigms and social media—as well as transient character of modern relationships fostered by greater mobility—may be 'thinning' friendships in contemporary life. Jennings, for instance, lauds friendship as a potential locus 'where people open their living to one another, allowing the paths of life to crisscross in journeys imagined as in some sense shared.'[720] Yet he refuses to ground his proposed ecology of learning on friendship over concerns that too many 'friendships [today] form with suspicious and vigilant volunteers, always ready to escape once more if they sense confinement approaching.'[721] Such relationships reinforce an individualistic 'rationality freed from communal obligation except at the level of volition… [which is] first and foremost woven in utility and aiming at profit.'[722] When the internal calculus determines the relationship is no longer profitable or its perceived demands outweigh its benefits, dissolution may not be far around the corner. As Mark Vernon observes, modern friendship can alternatively be idealised as possessing levels of intimacy that rival 'the union to which romantic love aspires, a trope which commercially plays much better than advocating difference.'[723] Both presentations offer 'watered down' versions of deep friendship, where friends accompany and support each other through the peaks and valleys of life together.

Thankfully, there is significant interest in (re)discovering the theological and scholarly import of friendship, in part from feminist scholars' and theologians' interest in communal constructions and networks of knowledge and in part from new accents upon

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[720] Jennings, *After Whiteness*, 147.
[721] Jennings, 148.
[722] Jennings, 144.
[723] Mark Vernon, "The Spirituality of Friendship," in *The Philosophy of Friendship* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 146.

social histories since the latter half of the twentieth century.[724] Feminist scholars like

Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, Sallie McFague, and Mary Hunt have all published

substantial work on the theological promise and modern challenges and of recovering

friendship.[725] Practical theologian Anne-Marie Ellithorpe's forthcoming book *Towards*

Friendship-Shaped Communities: A Practical Theology of Friendship looks especially promising.[726]

Such accounts enable us to distinguish better the modern challenges to deep friendship and

develop a better picture of what a poetic image of God as friend communicates today.

Social media continues to redraw lines of intimacy, self-disclosure, and connection—often

in surprising ways.[727] Mapping the full effects of social media on modern expectations of

friendship is beyond the scope of this project, but it is a necessary next step if we are to

employ with the metaphor of friendship to speak of being-in-relationship with God in

contemporary contexts.

Preaching to the Choir

One final unresolved concern about retrieving an at·one·ment orientation' to

theological learning is whether it has any purchase *outside of* Christian communities of

learning, especially in modern research universities. Erskine and Scott's convictions about

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[724] Jeannette L. Nolen, "Social History," in *Encyclopaediea Britannica*, 2009, https://www.britannica.com/topic/social-history. Encyclopedia Britannica identifies social history as 'the branch of history that emphasizes social structures and the interaction of different groups in society rather than affairs of state.' For some examples of studies exploring circles of influence, see Colin Duriez, *C. S. Lewis: A Biography of Friendships* (Oxford: Lion Hudson, 2013); S.A. Skinner, *Tractarians and "The Condition of England"* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004).

[725] For more, see Hunt, *Fierce Tenderness: A Feminist Theology of Friendship*; Lott, "God as Mother, Lover, Friend"; Moltmann-Wendel, *Rediscovering Friendship: Awakening to the Power and Promise of Women's Friendships*.

[726] Anne-Marie Ellithorpe, *Towards Friendship-Shaped Communities: A Practical Theology of Friendship* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2022).

[727] Riley A. Scott, Jaimee Stuart, and Bonnie L. Barber, "Contemporary Friendships and Social Vulnerability Among Youth: Understanding the Role of Online and Offline Contexts of Interaction in Friendship Quality," *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 38, no. 12 (2021): 3451–71, https://doi.org/10.1177/02654075211029384. For example, Scott et al. suggests that social anxiety might be less impactful upon young people's friendship quality when that relationship is mediated entirely online rather than a hybrid of in-person and online. Modes of friendship cultivated online—and the kind of accessibility social media offers—might offer new avenues of exploring the poetic image of God if handled carefully.

how knowledge of God ought to be pursued are so fundamentally Christian that it is difficult to imagine how they would find much of a foothold in a modern, secular, educational context—that is, grounded as they are in the practical implications of Christ's atonement and oriented by and to the holy love of God. Indeed, we can imagine two critical worries emerging. One apprehension might be that such a proposed orientation for theological education collapses the pursuit of knowledge into the inculcation of faith—a compromise of scholastic integrity that might also undervalue the contributions of non-Christian scholars to the theological discipline. A second apprehension, perhaps closer to the hearts of Christian educators in secular institutions, might relate to translation or practice: the extent to which it is possible to render the meanings of such Christian commitments within secular educational imaginaries or contexts with integrity.

Although Erskine and Scott can offer some suggestions in response to these two apprehensions, their contextual differences prevent any simple, 'lift-and-place' solutions. As diverse as their circles were for their period, they nevertheless lived and moved within a cultural milieu that was largely shaped by and articulated in Christian terms. Even their more unorthodox companions like Thomas Carlyle, whom Vanden Brossche describes as experiencing a loss of faith in traditional Christianity, were not indifferent agnostics or atheists;[728] rather, to play upon Anselm's dictum, their approach to religious belief could be characterised as 'doubt seeking understanding.' The need to pursue knowledge of God in secular terms (or the desirability of doing so) would have been foreign. Still, their sometimes-countercultural work and thought suggests two possible avenues for working towards a future for theological education that might be more amenable to 'at·one·ment'— even outside Christian communities of learning.

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[728] Chris Vanden Bossche, "Thomas Carlyle, Orestes Brownson, and the Laboring Classes," in *Thomas Carlyle and the Idea of Influence*, ed. Paul Kerry, Albert Pionke, and Megan Dent (Lanham, MD: Fairleigh Dickinson University, 2018), 27–34.

The first possible direction that Erskine and Scott's work suggests is to develop a more robust, 'practical theological epistemology'—one that acknowledges the distinctive epistemic commitments that are involved in knowing *about* God and *knowing* God; and that articulates the epistemic richness that a more integrative or relational orientation towards pursuing knowledge of God might permit.[729] On one level, articulating a practical theological epistemology makes no significant 'ask' of non-Christian educators: no sweeping pedagogical or curricular changes that might compromise educators' or students' consciences. Rather, it represents an intellectual foundation for a plea for *epistemic humility*—that is, a conscious acknowledgement that epistemic commitments and modes of knowing that the modern, secular research university currently favours to provide epistemic access to their objects of study are not the only (or necessarily the most demanding) ones. On this epistemic point, Christian and non-Christian scholars and educationists might be more likely to find common ground—particularly since articulating the epistemic value of more integrative and experiential learning continues to be an area of academic and popular interest. Even in the face of resource competition and the countervailing pressures of institutionalised disciplinary hegemony, there are pleas—sometimes shouted, sometimes whispered—to find new ways to 'reconfigure the social and cognitive space of the academy.'[730]

Perhaps in the search for 'new ways of thinking and forms of scholarship, reconfigurations of disciplines, new modes of teaching and assessment, and a relational pluralism,' new allies might be found to clear epistemic space for more personal, relational,

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[729] Hart, *Between the Image*, 25. As Hart notes, T.F. Torrance 'reminds us repeatedly that in all properly scientific and objective procedure it is the nature of the particular object itself which must prescribe the relevant mode of knowing, and thus the form and the content of whatever knowledge arises.' On the reverse side, such articulation could also be used to help others recognise—in epistemic terms—what is lost by circumscribing 'knowledge of God' to 'knowledge *about* God.'

[730] Julie Thompson Klein, "Mapping Interdisciplinary Studies," Opinion Papers (Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 1999), 16.

and integrative modes of knowing—modes of knowing that are more compatible with an 'at·one·ment orientation' to theological education.[731] Parker Palmer's educational renewal endeavours in this direction, originally outlined in his book *To Know As We Are Known* and refined during his fifteen-year term as senior associate to the American Association of Higher Education, are just one example of the broad appeal that such epistemology-centred approaches to reforming education can have outside of Christian communities of learning.[732] Equipped with a well-rounded, practical theological epistemology in particular, theologians of all faith backgrounds or none can better articulate the common need for epistemic humility, perhaps as a secularised 'spiritual discipline' for higher theological education (or Western higher education, more broadly). They can also better champion initiatives that favour fuller epistemic engagements with the environing world, whether in the university itself or through parachurch organisations that exist in symbiosis with the university education ecosystem.[733]

Such an approach takes a small step towards addressing the concern that Erskine and Scott's educational proposal collapses the pursuit of knowledge into the inculcation of faith, insofar as the epistemic humility proviso itself implies that within the compass of theological activities there is space for contributions to knowledge from both Christian and non-Christian scholar-educators. To avoid the compromise of scholarly integrity and to value non-Christian contributions to theological understanding, we need to signpost a second (but intersecting) avenue of Erskine and Scott's thought: their representation of a hermeneutic circle governing the pursuit of knowledge of God, in which 'knowing *about*

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[731] See also Stuart Henry, "Disciplinary Hegemony Meets Interdisciplinary Ascendancy: Can Interdisciplinary/Integrative Studies Survive, and If So, How?," *Issues in Integrative Studies*, no. 23 (2005): 1–37.; W James Jacob, "Interdisciplinary Trends in Higher Education," *Palgrave Communications* 1, no. 15001 (2015): 1–5, https://doi.org/10.1057/palcomms.2015.1.

[732] See Parker J. Palmer, Arthur Zajonc, and Megan Scribner, *The Heart of Higher Education* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010).

[733] Intervarsityin North America and Christian Union are possible examples.

God' and '*knowing* God' represent integral, interpretative moments within an ever-deepening understanding of God and all things in relation to God. Knowing about God is possible irrespective of being-in-relationship with God, or faith for that matter. Biblical or language or comparative religion scholars, historians, archaeologists, sociologists, artists, or scientists—all have the potential to contribute to our 'fund' of this kind of knowledge.[734] As D'Costa writes, 'all creation is God's creation, so that, in principle, no form of authentic knowledge properly gained from any discipline will contradict the truth of Christianity. Indeed, all such knowledge will in fact illuminate, deepen, and develop our understanding both of the created world and the creator'—a conviction that Erskine and Scott certainly shared.[735] Recall, knowledge *about* God might precede *knowing* God—e.g., when exegetical work or environmental conservation work modifies our image of who God is or the character of God's relationship to creation. Or knowledge *about* God might provide invaluable assistance in correcting misapprehensions or idolatries that might distort more personal modes of *knowing* God. As Erskine and Scott remind us, genuine relationship— the root that nourishes faith—cannot happen in the absence of truth.[736] Even when theological learning is directed toward at·one·ment with God then, neither the pursuit of truth nor the contributions to such pursuits made by non-Christians can be ignored.

By distinguishing these two types of epistemic access as moments within a larger, ongoing, interpretive enterprise, Erskine and Scott resist the temptation to collapse knowledge of God into the endeavour to inculcate faith. Indeed, they make space for both kinds of knowledge as moments within a hermeneutic circle that draws human beings' ever

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[734] While articulating conviction in theunity of all truth, the practicalities of how to evaluate and integrate these sources of knowledge—especially when they seem to present contradictions—was less explored.

[735] D'Costa, *Theology in the Public Square: Church, Academy, and Nation*, 184.

[736] As we noted in Chapters 2 to 4, the idea that 'all that matters is my relationship to Jesus' is just as dangerous (if not more) to an impersonal understanding of God.

deeper into the mystery of learning who the triune God is and how he loves. Where theological learning conducted in secular institutions are often constrained to the pursuit of knowledge *about* God (and the distinctive risks that entails), Christian institutions—and particularly, universities—can embody both moments in the pursuit of ever greater, if never complete, at·one·ment with the God of holy love.

As Jennings reminded us in Chapter 1, 'we who journey in theological education—as teacher, as student, as administrator, or as committed graduate—often fail to realize that *we always and only work in the fragments,*' or 'creaturely pieces of memories and ideas and practices with which we work to attune our senses to the presence of God.'[737] Because we are finite creatures, 'the world is always too much for us to hold at once.'[738] Retrieving elements of Erskine and Scott's alternative perspective on the telos of theological education has limits: it requires more thought on the issue of discernment and the interaction of heart and will, better mapping of modern friendship and modern strategies for resisting pressures to thin it, and it depends on the cultivation of epistemic humility in a culture where hubris is rewarded. Nevertheless, Erskine and Scott provide a valuable composition of theological learning that works to attune human beings to God's presence. Indeed, as initiatives at Regent College and City Seminary of New York illustrate, it is possible to reimagine elements of an 'at·one·ment orientation' to theological learning even today.

iv) Stories of Hope Today

Because this dissertation has largely focused on theological epistemology enacted in adult, Christian communities of learning, I have selected two such contemporary

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[737] Jennings, *After Whiteness*, 16–17. Emphasis mine.
[738] Jennings, 34.

institutions who offer hopeful initiatives in theological education: Regent College, founded

in 1968 and based in Vancouver, Canada; and City Seminary of New York, founded in

2003 and based in Harlem, NY.[739] They are similar in several critical areas. Both institutions

are degree- and certificate-granting trans-denominational communities of learning that

originated as grassroots initiatives to re-imagine theological learning for underserved

demographics. Both hold cherished practices of hospitality as core to their pedagogical

approach and both articulate and evidence a commitment to exploring the space where

theological learning intersects with students' lived experiences.[740] Yet, they are also quite

different institutions—sometimes in subtle and sometimes in not-so-subtle ways. Such

dissimilarities open up imaginative space for envisaging how theological learning might

look otherwise in the future and help us to imagine multiple ways that an 'at·one·ment

orientation' toward theological learning retrieved from Erskine and Scott might be pursued

in contemporary contexts.

Regent College-A Rocha Partnership

Although older than City Seminary of New York, Regent College's distinctive

approach to theological education has received scant scholarly attention—Charles

Cotherman's recent examination of the college's formative role in the nascent Christian

Study Center movement in the latter half of the twentieth century being a notable

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[739] There are many other examples that could have been selected. In the U.K. specifically, Pusey House offers another model of a para-university institution exploring the integration of faith and learning. "What Is Pusey House?," Pusey House. St Giles, Oxford, accessed September 22, 2022, http://www.puseyhouse.org.uk/what-is-pusey-house.html. However, L'Abri, the C.S. Lewis Institute, and other institutions from the Consortium of Christian Studies also merit attention. Charles Cotherman's recent monograph *To Think Christianly* offers unique historical insight into the enormous opportunities and challenges by such endeavours. Charles E. Cotherman, *To Think Christianly: A History of L'Abri, Regent College, and the Christian Study Center Movement* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2020).

[740] Regent College, "Mission and Values," Regent College, accessed September 12, 2022, https://www.regent-college.edu/about-us/mission-and-values.;City Seminary of New York, "Mission," City Seminary of New York, 2022, https://cityseminaryny.org/.

exception.[741] Opening its doors in 1970, Regent College aimed to be 'the first graduate

school in North American to make education of the laity its central focus,'[742] an aspiration

that Bolton notes once prompted the college to promote itself as 'the un-seminary' to

prospective students.[743] While multiple visions for the college were present from its

establishment, he states one of its defining visions was 'training [students] in Christian

maturity so that graduates will leave to be better equipped Christians, ready to enter their

careers as engineers, doctors or housewives' and husbands.[744] According to Stackhouse,

'Regent was concerned to train these others [i.e., those outside traditional ministry fields] in

a Christian world-view that would inform precisely their pursuit of these extra-ecclesiastical

occupations.'[745] Over the years, Regent College introduced a Masters of Christian Studies

(1972) and a Masters of Divinity (1979), with many of its students going on to pursue

successful careers in the church and academy. Still, Stackhouse argues that its attempt to do

'full justice to its commitment to integrating theological studies with all vocations'[746] is what

historically what made Regent stand out on the educational map.'[747]

    While there are several dimensions of Regent College's approach to theological

education that are worth exploring, I shall pursue only one here: its partnership with A

Rocha International, 'a global family of Christian organizations which, inspired by God's

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[741] Cotherman, *To Think Christianly: A History of L'Abri, Regent College, and the Christian Study Center Movement.*

[742] Regent College, "About Us," Regent College, accessed September 12, 2022, https://www.regent-college.edu/about-us.

[743] Kenneth V. Botton, "Regent College: An Experiment in Theological Education" (Deerfield, IL, Trinity International University, 2004), 3.

[744] Botton, 64.

[745] John G. Stackhouse, "Regent College," in *Canadian Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 158.

[746] Stackhouse, 162.

[747] Stackhouse, 158. While students must have the experience and skills necessary for graduate-level academic work, the student population includes everyone from musicians to manufacturers, professional biologists to businesspeople, prospective academics to stay-at-home parents. At present, the Masters degrees require 'an undergraduate degree from an accredited institution' with 'a minimum grade point of 2.8 on a scale of 4.0 (or equivalent).' Regent College, "Admissions & Finance: Admission Requirements," Regent College, accessed September 12, 2022, https://www.regent-college.edu/admissions-finance/admission-requirements.

love, engages in scientific research, environmental education, and community-based conservation projects' around the world.[748] Quoting theologian John Wesley, A Rocha Canada—with whom the college has its closest working relationship—proposes that 'faith in Jesus Christ [leads] us beyond an exclusive concern for the well-being of other human beings to the broader concern for the well-being of the birds in our backyard, the fish in our rivers and every living creature on the face of the earth.'[749] Strong biblical and theological roots nourish hands-on conservation and educational efforts, which in turn involve the whole person in integrative knowing. Such rich experiential learning in turn becomes fodder for new biblical and theological engagement, completing what we might describe as a 'practical hermeneutic circle.' While there are distinguishable moments in the circle, the reciprocal partnership between the two organisations ideally ensures that neither side of the circle is left unattended. Both sides 'feed' each other, combining different modes of knowing to explore common loci for theological learning—subjects like how God cares for the created world, what stewardship means, where we find hope for redemption, and what justice might entail here and now.[750] Scholarship informs action; action informs scholarship. Two courses offered in partnership between the two organisations illustrate how this dynamic works in practice: 'Food: Communion, Community, and Creation' and 'Technology, Wilderness, and Creation,' affectionately known by students respectively as 'The Food Course' and 'The Boat Course.'[751]

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[748] A Rocha International, "About A Rocha | Christian Environmental Organization | A Rocha," accessed September 12, 2022, https://arocha.org/en/about/.

[749] A Rocha Canada, "Why a Christian Conservation Organization? - A Rocha," accessed September 12, 2022, https://arocha.ca/who-we-are-a-rocha-canada/why-the-christian-connection/.

[750] A Rocha Canada. A Rocha notes these specific theological pillars.

[751] Regent College, "INDS 525 | Technology, Wilderness, and Creation | Courses | Regent College," accessed September 12, 2022, https://www.regent-college.edu/course-listing/course-details/INDS.525.; Regent College, "INDS 535 | Food: Creation, Community, and Communion | Courses | Regent College," Regent College, accessed September 12, 2022, https://www.regent-college.edu/course-listing/course-details/INDS.535.

In the Food Course, food serves as the 'hub' around which 'some of the biological, ecological, psychological, aesthetic, spiritual, agricultural, and economic aspects of what, how, and why we eat' are explored 'within the framework of Christian theology.'[752] While the syllabus outlines the standard fare for graduate-level theological coursework—readings, lectures, and discussions—it also describes how the residential setting of Hunterston Farm, Galiano Island, provides 'a living context of cooking, feasting, fasting and gardening together, which [the professors promise] will add good spices to the academic victuals.'[753] Cataloguing the instances of reflexive movement between thought and practice cultivated in such a course is impossible, but perhaps one anecdote from what many students find to be the most evocative part of the course will suffice: the slaughter of a lamb. After exploring readings about industrial agricultural processes and before embarking on two days' focused biblical study upon subjects like the Passover and the Sabbath, a lamb is slaughtered—slaughtered humanely by a trained professional with the assistance of student volunteers and prepared for the celebration of a seder supper three days later.[754] For many students, it is the first time they have experienced first-hand the death of an animal that they will later consume, having only engaged with the comparatively sterile experience of purchasing meat pre-cut and hermetically sealed. Not only does this sort of visceral, shared experience becomes a locus (and impetus) for exploring theological subjects like atonement or stewardship, it also breaks open and reformulates the metaphors that populate students' theological imagination, metaphors like 'Lamb of God.'[755] For some students, these experiences—and the readings and reflexive praxis encouraged through the course—also

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[752] Loren Wilkinson and Mary-Ruth Wilkinson, "INDS 535: Communion, Community, and Creation Syllabus 2013" (Regent College, 2012), 2.

[753] Wilkinson and Wilkinson, 2.

[754] Wilkinson and Wilkinson, 3–5.

[755] *Food Forethought* (Regent College Marketplace Institute, 2013). A short documentary by filmmaker Theran Knighton-Fitt on the course.

incite new ways of being-in-the-world, including reducing their meat consumption or building relationship with butchers who prioritise animal welfare. While small, these initiatives help move towards greater relationships of at·one·ment with the whole of creation.

The Boat Course takes a similarly experiential approach. Here, the locus for learning is a sea voyage across the Gulf Islands—a series of about two hundred rugged isles spanning between southwestern mainland British Columbia and Vancouver Island. Experiencing 'creation on sea and island, by means of the well-developed (but largely abandoned) technology of oar and sail' over the ten-day course neither encourages nor proselytises students into modern Luddism or back-to-nature worldviews. Rather, changing how interactions with creation are technologically mediated facilitates a kind of Husserlian-inspired, practical 'phenomenological bracketing' of students' usual involvements with technology, creation, and one another. Students' journals record both the physical events of the day and the mental and spiritual developments as the eight-day journey passes, reflecting on how relationships are reconfigured as they suspend—and later, resume—their everyday communities, routines, and technologies. Wilkinson and Wilkinson observe that such reflections serve as the raw material for 'thinking about ourselves, our communities…and the ways we shape and experience the world through our technologies.'[756] As with the Food Course, Boat Course students journey through graduate-level readings, lectures, and book presentations—with coastlines and forests and ocean serving as classrooms according to the physical realities of tide and weather. Facilitated by both research and integrative papers, experience and reflections facilitate an epistemological shift in their theological learning. To use Polanyi's language of personal

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[756] Loren Wilkinson and Mary-Ruth Wilkinson, "INDS 525: Wilderness, Technology, and Creation Syllabus 2011" (Regent College, 2011).

knowing, in both cases students do not merely encounter knowledge of God by looking *at* it; rather, they are also invited to bring all their physical, mental, and spiritual capacities to bear upon the learning process by looking *from* their learning *to* their personal world of involvements. Students are asked to understand and evaluate the personal claims that such learning makes upon them and upon us.

Such richly integrative courses are necessarily resource-intensive and enrolment-limited, two factors that admittedly reduce accessibility and militate against broader institutional implementation. Perhaps they are best understood as 'focal practices'—a term coined by Heideggerian scholar Albert Borgmann to refer to certain practices that help to disclose the significance of our context and inform its relations. Borgmann notes that the term *focus* comes from the Latin word for 'hearth'—the hearth being the traditional place where house and family were 'sustained, ordered, and centred.'[757] For Borgmann, 'a focus gathers the relations of its context and radiates into its surroundings and informs them.'[758] Focal practices, then, bring historical, social, and religious relations into focus through the enactment of an activity, custom, or tradition. As the integrated relations are experienced in and through a rich practice, they can disclose something of our average, everyday relationship with other entities and how we understand our own being-in-the-world. An autumnal Thanksgiving meal is not an everyday occurrence, for example; however, it fosters a different sense of time, place, and service through recipes handed down from generation to generation, through the seasonal fruits of gardens or farms, through the acts of service involved in bringing everyone to the table. Focal practices like festive meals can become a gentle means of recalling us to our essential relationality as human beings—a multi-dimensional relationality sometimes overlooked during the course of our ordinary

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[757] Albert Borgmann, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life: A Philosophical Inquiry* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 86.

[758] Borgmann, 197.

lives. Focal practices—or more aptly here, 'focal courses'—cultivate a richer theological epistemology, one where the objects, meaning, and modes of learning reflect a commitment to the ultimate end of pursuing at·one·ment with God and creation. While undoubtedly still costly, collaborations like the Regent College-A Rocha partnership may give theological institutions a more financially sustainable and academically robust means of beginning to reorient theological learning towards the kinds of whole-person 'at·one·ment' telos that Erskine and Scott imagine. City Seminary offers a different model of pursuing theological integration and educational accessibility, one that takes us to 'the capital of Black America': Harlem, NY.[759]

City Seminary of New York

In the storefront of a red-brick, mixed-use commercial building on Frederick Douglass Boulevard, there is an unassuming street-level gallery called the Walls-Ortiz Gallery and Centre (WOGC). Named for Christian missions scholars Andrew Walls (1928—2021) and Manuel Ortiz (1938—2017), WOGC stands at the threshold between the well-worn streets of Harlem and the halls of one of its newest seminaries: City Seminary of New York, established in 2003. The gallery serves as the seminary's street-level presence, and one of its specifically public-oriented spaces dedicated to exploring theological issues of life shared together. In 2015, the gallery hosted a small, juried exhibition of six emerging and established artists, who came from a mix of ethnic, national, and faith backgrounds. The exhibition was called 'Who is My Neighbor? NYC,' a theme that invited artists and audiences alike to 'see' their urban communities afresh—to attend to their urban communities' diverse occupants, explore historical and cultural dynamics between communities, and contemplate that gospel question of 'Who is my neighbour?'

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[759] Jonathan Gill, *Harlem* (New York: Grove Atlantic, 2011).

through public engagement with art.[760] Exploring the philosophy of theological education animated the ventures at WOGC—and the theological commitments they represent offers some ideas for imagining what a hopeful 'at·one·ment orientation' to theological learning might look like today. Specifically, we might find inspiration in its cultivation of liminal spaces for personal and interpersonal learning, its attention to cultivating communities of theological learning outside the formal academy, and its role within the institution's larger telos of 'seeking the peace of the city.'[761]

Liminality can be a vague and overused adjective among academics, but it aptly describes the place of WOGC vis-à-vis CSNY and the wider urban populace of New York City. Liminal has two meanings: it can describe 'a transitional or initial stage of a process,' or something that spans a boundary or threshold.[762] As we noted earlier, WOGC stands at the physical threshold between CSNY's more formal learning spaces and the streets of Harlem. For some people, participating in the WOGC's art programs serves as an initial or transitional stage into other more formal programs at the seminary. It can also become 'a way to welcome people who might never set foot inside a "religious" space like a church, or even our own seminary.'[763] Art itself, too, can be a liminal space—a way of (physically) coming alongside one another to look together at something that we share between and before us. Artists' panels, art workshops, gallery hours, and structured 'community conversations' held in conjunction with themed exhibitions help facilitate communal explorations of issues that have deep theological and personal resonance.[764] While both

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[760] Luke 10:29b.

[761] According to their mission statement, 'the mission of City Seminary of New York is to seek the peace of the city through theological education.'City Seminary of New York, "Mission."

[762] Oxford University Press, "Liminal, Adj.," OED Online, September 2022, https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/108471?

[763] Maria Liu Wong and Carrie Myers, "'Who Is My Neighbor? NYC': Art, Community, and Welcome for the Peace of the City at the Walls-Ortiz Gallery and Center" (Society of Vineyard Scholars Conference 2016, Raleigh, NC: City Seminary of New York, 2016), 5.

[764] Liu Wong and Myers, 4.

scholars are careful to acknowledge that 'art itself is able to embody and enact witness, even in times when no direct human conversation takes place,' they also note that the kinds of conversations that artmaking (or art viewing) prompt are also important occasions of breaking down interpersonal barriers and opening up theological learning on a personal level.[765]

Because CSNY is less than two decades old, little research on the institution's distinctive educational paradigm has been conducted by scholars *outside* of the institution—circumstances that sometimes increase the risk of positive reporting bias in educational research.[766] Such limitations notwithstanding, the institution's distinctive educational philosophy and pedagogies has been the subject of a virtual cornucopia of evaluative research—primarily by scholar-practitioner Maria Liu Wong, Dean (2008-2020) and Provost (2020-present) of City Seminary; and also by Mark Gornik, the seminary's founder and long-serving director. Their publications suggest that as much as WOGC bridges street to seminary, it also acts as an intentional bridge from seminary to street. Because the gallery is staffed by seminary staff and faculty on a rota basis, for example, Liu Wong and Meyers observe that there is ample opportunity for members of the seminary to have 'conversations and [build] connections with local community members.'[767] Such connections and community-based insights feed into City Seminary's philosophy of cultivating a 'City Learning Ecology'—i.e., an 'ecological' approach to theological education especially concerned with the interactions between people and with their particular urban

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[765] Liu Wong and Myers, 5.

[766] Phillip Dawson and Samantha L. Dawson, "Sharing Successes and Hiding Failures: 'Reporting Bias' in Learning and Teaching Research," *Studies in Higher Education* 43, no. 8 (2018): 1405–16, https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2016.1258052. One important exception to thisrule isChristian Scharen and Sharon Miller, "Bright Spots in Theological Education: Hopeful Stories in a Time of Crisis and Change," Auburn Studies (New York: Auburn Seminary, September 2016), https://auburnseminary.org/report/bright-spots/.

[767] Liu Wong and Myers, "'Who Is My Neighbor? NYC': Art, Community, and Welcome for the Peace of the City at the Walls-Ortiz Gallery and Center," 4.

surroundings. According to City Seminary, the objective is 'the integration of all [the seminary's] courses and programs in a dynamic relationship for the flourishing of [their] neighbourhoods, congregations, and city.'[768] By occupying that liminal space between city and seminary—and making and showcasing art that does the same—the gallery can build relationships between dissimilar peoples; move within and between communities to explore theological issues of shared concern; and 'create a community space for interaction with art, for conversation, for telling stories, for visualising and engaging faith, and for new questions and unexpected appreciations.'[769]

While such experiences are more specifically art-mediated than the informal and semi-formal communities of learning Erskine and Scott cultivated, the reflexive dynamic of City Learning Ecology—and specifically WOGC's public opening hours and 'community conversations'—bear similarities to Erskine's extension of hospitality at Linlathen and Scott's practice of 'at-homes' in London and Manchester. Participants gather over an evening meal, tour the exhibition, hear from its artists, converse over questions loosely prompted by the exhibition, and respond to the evening's revelations through artmaking— all part of a process to explore issues and experiences with theological and personal resonances.[770]

Cultivating richly relational spaces for diverse communities to pursue truth together through intentional practices of hospitality in spaces beyond theological learning's more formal abodes of church and academy is part of City Seminary's larger mission of 'seeking the peace of the city through theological education,' an aim that shares some resemblance

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[768] "City Learning Ecology" (City Seminary of New York, n.d.).
[769] Liu Wong and Myers, "'Who Is My Neighbor? NYC': Art, Community, and Welcome for the Peace of the City at the Walls-Ortiz Gallery and Center," 3.
[770] Community conversations are free, half-hour evening events that are held once or twice a month. According to Meyers and Liu Wong, they involve 'dinner, introductions, a walk through the exhibition, and art-making. The group usually consists of gallery staff and new and old neighbors.' Liu Wong and Myers, 4.

to Erskine and Scott's plea for theological learning to be understood in reference to genuine at·one·ment with God; and with others, in and through God.[771] The specific locus of the city (of New York) is more constrained than the generalised ideal of at·one·ment envisioned by our two Scotsmen, probably a product of the place-based, localised approach to discerning the will of God that is so central to the seminary's sense of vocation. Peace, though, is often an English translation of the Hebraic *shalom*: as Swartley notes, 'an iridescent word' with a 'base denominator of…*well-being, wholeness, completeness.*'[772] In the Hebrew Bible, shalom is 'a gift of God,' realised in a life that is 'rooted in God's character and initiative' and 'correctly ordered' in relation to the rest of creation.[773] 'Shalom,' reflects Shannon 'requires but is more than justice': it 'means the enjoyment of relationships and the flourishing of the God-given design and potential of all people.'[774] While the exact terminology may not be used by the seminary, the ultimate 'end or telos' of theological education that directs the seminary's work—namely, 'the flourishing of God's people and God's world, the reconciliation of brokenness, and glimpses of grace and wholeness in families, churches, and communities across the world'—does share commonalities with a telos of an 'at·one·ment orientation' towards education.[775] For example, such 'shalom-like' peace attends at·one·ment: it occurs in and through being transformed through being-in-relationship with the triune God in and through holy love. Whereas CSNY focuses on peace, the Scotsmen focus upon at·one·ment with God, in holy love, as both an end in itself and the means of reordering creaturely patterns of

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[771] City Seminary of New York, "Mission."

[772] Willard M. Swartley, *Covenant of Peace: The Missing Peace in New Testament Theology and Ethics* (Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 27, 33.

[773] Swartley, 29–30.

[774] Nathan D Shannon, *Shalom and the Ethics of Belief* (Cambridge: James Clarke Company Ltd., 2015), 91.

[775] Maria Liu Wong, "Engaging the Telos and Sharing Tales of Theological Education," *Religious Studies News*, April 28, 2017, 3. Cf. 'new forms of belonging,' Shannon, *Shalom and the Ethics of Belief*, 91; "City Learning Ecology," 2.

relationship (i.e., through God, at·one·ment with others). While this difference should not be overlooked, what is most important is that both groups imagine 'shalom-like' peace as the concomitant of the kinds of knowledge of God they seek to cultivate.

Such resonances between CSNY, Regent College, and aspects of Erskine and Scott's composition of theological learning suggest that there are mechanisms for bringing elements of their thought and practice of at·one·ment into practice today, albeit with some necessary modifications, supplementation, and modernisation. Of course, these institutions—and the initiatives explored here—are not the only possible models that retrieving Erskine and Scott's sometimes counter-cultural enactment of at·one·ment might take in the modern educational ecosystem. Like Erskine and Scott's own proposal, they are fragments—but as Jennings reminds us, '*we always and only work in the fragments.*'[776] Bringing Erskine and Scott's endeavours within the theological learning space into conversation with modern thought-leaders like Webster and Jennings as well as initiatives at Regent College and City Seminary of New York opens space for engaging in reflexive contemplation about our own historical and theological moment—its promise and its limits. As Jennings reminds us, for Christian theologians and theological educators, such contemplation is done in the faith that 'God works with these fragments, moving in the spaces between them to form communion with us.'[777] Engaging in the difficult work of synthesising and differentiating these fragments in the hope of reimagining how theological learning might flourish today is good and worthwhile work.

In the end, Erskine and Scott do not leave us with a model for theological education, but instead a series of principles that might guide our efforts. In larger part, their contribution is to call their audiences—and us—back to that relationship of ultimate

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[776] Jennings, *After Whiteness*, 16–17. Italics mine.
[777] Jennings, 34.

significance that can transform and reorient our whole being-in-the-world, including our theological learning. The character of our relationship with God—whether we see God as object or subject, as fearsome judge or holy friend—frames how we love and let ourselves be loved, and how we know and are known. For Erskine and Scott, indeed, theological learning receives its best orientation—its correct object, meaning, and modes—when animated by the telos of at·one·ment with the triune God, in holy love. Genuine at·one·ment with God, in holy love, cannot be grasped by human initiative or on human merits alone. It is a gift, a gift offered in Christ through his atonement on the cross and in the ongoing presence of the Spirit. And it is also a mystery that cannot be reduced to something that can be resolved by applying standardised pedagogies, implementing spiritual disciplines, or establishing alternative institutions. Rather, as Erskine and Scott envisioned, at·one·ment with the triune God, in holy love, means being involved, deeply involved, with the God of holy love—and to quote Scott, 'being actuated by the principle of life' to extend that holy love to the world. The pursuit of knowledge of God receives is properly oriented when it is animated by this telos. Not all will concur with their composition of theological learning nor where they locate hope for its future; that must be acknowledged. But for those who recognise the harmony between Jesus' formational teachings and how Erskine and Scott envision the telos of theological learning, perhaps their perspective prepares a way in the wilderness for fuller and more meaningful theological learning. As Jesus tells his disciples, 'Abide in me, as I abide in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.'[778]

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[778] John 15:4.

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