

‘Necessary Knowledge’ or ‘Inductive Science’? Theology at Oxford, 1833-60

Two Excursions to Germany

In the summer of 1839, Arthur Penrhyn Stanley, a probationary fellow of University College, accompanied the Balliol College tutor, Archibald Campbell Tait, on a visit to Bonn. Several decades later, Stanley would be the Dean of Westminster and Tait the Archbishop of Canterbury, but in 1839 they were two young scholars travelling to Germany in search of a better way to organize a university. Stanley had in the previous year won the university Chancellor’s Latin Essay prize on “The Duties the University Owes the State,” and this continental excursion was for both men an opportunity to develop their thinking about how Oxford might be reformed. In Bonn, the young Oxford men attended lectures, heard sermons, cross-examined students, inspected schools, and called upon

celebrated Bonn professors such as Karl Immanuel Nitzsch, “sitting in his study, in a dirty old brown great-coat”.¹

Their research led to Stanley assisting Tait in the writing of a pamphlet on university reform (“hearing, criticising, and perhaps correcting, each sentence”²), entitled *Hints on the Formation of a Plan for the Safe and Effectual Revival of the Professorial System in Oxford*. It proposed a revival of the professorial system at Oxford. Having already registered “alarm” across the university that “this admirable part of our system be fast sinking”, his experience of Germany led Tait to advocate a fourth year for undergraduates in which they would attend lectures and encounter “the progress of true science” in the labours of their professors.³ Having observed the German university, Tait wished to induce a love of learning for its own sake in the English system, compulsory attendance at lectures, and such space within a four-year course that would allow students to explore their own interests and “the advancement of several branches of knowledge” through dissertations.⁴

Although Tait was anxious to stress the primacy of the liberal education provided by the faculty of arts, he believed the revival of the professorial class would also allow for a more rigorous professional education within the walls of the university. Even in theology, which benefited from a well-endowed, resident and relatively active professoriate, there was much that could still be done:

...it must be plain to every thinking man, that nothing really important can be done till all our Theological Professors are actively engaged

1. Rowland E. Prothero, *The Life and Correspondence of Arthur Penrhyn Stanley, D.D.* (2 vols., London: John Murray, 1893), i, 221.
2. R.E. Prothero, *Life and Correspondence*, 224.
3. Archibald Campbell Tait, *Hints on the Formation of a Plan for the Safe and Effectual Revival of the Professorial System in Oxford* (Oxford: J.H. Parker, 1839), 9, 13. See also, Robert Hussey, *An Examination of the New Form of the Statutes Tit. IV. Tit. V: With Hints for Establishing a System of Professional Teaching* (Oxford: J.H. Parker, 1839).
4. A.C. Tait, *ibid.*, 16.

in habitual instruction. The departments into which Theology divides itself are so multifarious, the necessity for thoroughly instructing the rising clergy in all the branches of their profession is of such paramount importance to the welfare of the nation at all times, and in these days of infidel activity is so generally acknowledged in our Church even by men who in ordinary times would have quietly acquiesced in stagnation – that, even though a Clerical Seminary were attached to every Cathedral in England, there would still remain ample room for the full operation of a great Theological Faculty in each of our Universities.⁵

Oxford compared poorly with Durham, Tait believed, whose theology professor had embarked upon “praiseworthy labours” to revive learning; similarly, the new diocesan theological colleges only highlighted Oxford’s intransigence, and the neglect of its ample resources.

Tait’s call for improved professional education for the clergy at Oxford (and, by implication, Cambridge) is worthy of attention because of, firstly, its comparison with German universities. Although very few scholars at Oxford even read German at this time, the influence and strength of Prussian theological faculties were notable and Tait’s and Stanley’s visit to Bonn was testament to an anxiety about England’s comparative inadequacies. Secondly, Tait’s pamphlet is the first of many pleas over the succeeding thirty years for improved professional education at Oxford, particularly in relation to the theological faculty. While committed to the primacy and foundational importance of the liberal education Oxford dispensed, the young Tait’s frustration would be echoed in succeeding years in both clerical and secular circles. Thirdly, the visit was influential because both men would in due course sit on a royal commission of inquiry that presented recommendations for Oxford’s reform in 1852. Considering the arguments over theology’s role in the university that would inflame Oxford opinion over the coming decades, this visit

5. A.C. Tait, *ibid.*, 26.

to Germany in 1839 and its resulting pamphlet, *Hints* signalled a growing desire in 'liberal' Church circles for wholesale reform of the English university, and in particular the practice of theology.

Far more significant, arguably, for the future shape of theology at Oxford was the experience of another young scholar's visit to Germany fourteen years earlier. Edward Bouverie Pusey was a dazzlingly competent graduate of Christ Church and protégé of the Regius Professor of Divinity, Charles Lloyd (later bishop of Oxford). Pusey became a fellow of Oriel in 1823. It was a college that, under its provost Edward Copleston, had been "constructed to nurture and encourage genius within Oxford at the postgraduate level...with considerable catholicity, looking for prospective development rather than past achievement, and with a readiness to defend Anglicanism in fresh and challenging terms."⁶ As Lloyd's student at Christ Church, Pusey had secured a double first having reputedly studied for sixteen hours a day and, in a bid to further his linguistic capabilities and critical faculties, Charles Lloyd encouraged Pusey to learn German and to visit the German universities so as to hear and read the new biblical criticism.⁷ Accordingly, in 1825 Pusey travelled to Göttingen and Berlin and made a second visit, at Lloyd's prompting, in 1826.

Pusey did not waste the opportunities provided by both universities and learnt German, Chaldee, Syriac, Hebrew, and Arabic, studied with Schleiermacher, heard the lectures of Hegel, and formed friendships with Ewald and Tholuck. He wrote to his fellow lodger John Henry Newman of the high level of linguistic ability in the German education system (many learnt Hebrew from the age of fourteen, for example) and he returned ambitious for the rejuvenation

6. H.C.G. Matthew, "Edward Bouverie Pusey: From Scholar to Tractarian," *Journal of Theological Studies* 32 (1981):104.

7. A "double-first" refers to first-class results in both Moderations (second-year examinations) and the Final Honour School of *Litterae Humaniores*.

of biblical study in England, keen even to produce singlehandedly a revised translation of the Old Testament.

Pusey seemed to have been no less impressed by the breadth and rigour of the German university system as Tait and Stanley. The fruits of his learning in Germany became evident in his book, *An Historical Enquiry into the Probable Causes of the Rationalist Character Lately Predominant in the Theology of Germany*, published in 1828. In the same year, Pusey's extraordinary linguistic capabilities and learning ensured that when the Regius Professor of Hebrew, Alexander Nicoll, died unexpectedly, the twenty-eight year old Pusey was chosen to replace him.⁸ As Colin Matthew argued, the *Theology of Germany* is, by the standards of Pusey's later writing, a methodologically liberal document. Confident that Schleiermacher's method was a dawning of a new period for Lutheran Protestant theology, Pusey viewed in the latest theological work being done in Germany "rich promise, that the already commenced blending of belief and science, without which science becomes dead, and belief is exposed to degeneracy, will be perfected beyond even the degree to which it was realized in some of the noblest instruments of the earlier Reformation."⁹

As Matthew noted, Pusey's embrace of German historicist techniques in 1828 allows him to be viewed as a forerunner of later liberal Anglican historical writing.¹⁰ The implications of Pusey's writings were quickly recognized by Hugh James Rose, who criticized *Theology of Germany* for its failure to register the importance of apostolic succession and the dangers of rationalism.

8. This was at the urging of Lloyd, who called upon the influence of his former pupil, Robert Peel.

9. E.B. Pusey, *Historical Enquiry into the Probable Causes of the Rationalist Character Lately Predominant in the Theology of Germany* (2 vols., London: C. & J. Rivington, 1828), 1:179, quoted in Matthew, *ibid.*, 110.

10. Matthew likens Pusey's writing at this stage with Mark Pattison's contribution to the 1860 compendium, *Essays and Reviews*, which Pusey fiercely condemned upon its publication.

Although Pusey would write a defence in 1830, the parliamentary challenges to the position of the Church of England in national life in the years 1830–34 coincided with the young professor beginning to reject his earlier enthusiasm for German methodologies. Despite this methodology having been impressively employed by Pusey in completing Nicoll’s cataloguing of the Bodleian’s Arabic manuscripts, Pusey now saw it as part of a wider threat to the integrity of the faith. After he finished this project, Pusey sold his Arabic books and withdrew copies of *Theology of Germany*, later stipulating in his will that it should never be republished. His growing distaste for the historical-critical method was, as both Matthew and Timothy Larsen have indicated, borne out of a growing concern for the integrity of God’s Word in the Bible; historical-critical methods for studying the Bible failed to recognize that “the Bible is God’s Word, and through it God the Holy Ghost, Who spake it, speaks to the soul which closes not its soul against it.”¹¹

Unlike Newman, Pusey never wrote an autobiography that detailed the reasons for his change of opinions. Colin Matthew identified Rose’s trenchant criticism of Pusey’s book as the primary reason for his reversal of opinions. This criticism, Matthew suggested, made Pusey recognise that the integrity of dogma was deeply threatened by the historical-critical method, which saw no distinction between sacred and profane in its investigations. Understanding the potential destabilizing effects of his methodology, Pusey “buried” his earlier approaches and retreated into dogma. Timothy Larsen has moderated Matthew’s assessment of Pusey by elucidating the Hebrew professor’s extraordinary grasp of the Bible, even in his now largely forgotten (or derided) commentary on Daniel from 1864.¹² As Stanley noted in his experience of Pusey’s lectures,

11. E.B. Pusey, *Daniel the Prophet* (London, 1864), xii, xxv; quoted in Matthew, *ibid.*, 116; Timothy Larsen, “E.B. Pusey and Holy Scripture,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 60 (2009): 490–526.

there was no other professor in the university so well acquainted with German scholarship; Pusey reminded him of Professor Nitzsch of Bonn, having “the same solemn and continuous flow, the same endeavor to exhaust the text in all its bearings, even the very same peculiarity of brief and systematic reference to other interpretations, versions, or parallel passages.”¹³

Nonetheless, the reversal of Pusey’s methodological instincts during the 1830s is mirrored in his subsequent determination to deliver Oxford from the godless professorial system of Germany, as we shall see. Although the young professor seemed poised in 1830 to spearhead the reform and development of Oxonian and English theology in the style of Göttingen and Berlin, his sharp rejection of German methodology and university life would characterise Oxford theology until his death in 1882.

The experiences of German theological life of Pusey on the one hand and Tait and Stanley on the other cannot, evidently, be viewed as the root of all disagreement about the nature and purpose of theology at Oxford during the rest of the century. Although the German university was perennially viewed as offering either promise or peril by ‘liberals’ and ‘conservatives’, the differing appreciations of these two excursions do symbolize how the influence of the German universities and their theological faculties was far from one of imitation and appropriation in the English context. Among Anglican liberals, there would be sharp criticisms of the German system and many viewed with suspicion as much as with awe the extraordinary output and energy of the German theological faculties.

As institutions of the Church of England, Oxford and Cambridge were altogether differently constituted from their continental counterparts. After revolution or invasion by revolutionary armies,

12. T. Larsen, *ibid.*, 507ff.

13. Bodleian MS Eng. lett. d. 437 (ff.45-7).

many of the most significant European theological faculties, such as the Sorbonne, had been dismantled. Where new universities were being founded, theologians had to persuade the authorities that theology should be included, usually under the guise of professional training for the clergy. In these Church of England universities, however, theologians were more challenged by the less violent adjustments to the position of the Church of England in British public life as dissenters, Roman Catholics, and Jews were granted civil liberties previously denied them, and the concomitant desire for the universities to become more truly national – and not homogeneously Anglican – institutions. Alongside these political alterations to the position of the Church of England and the universities, the position of theology in the university and how it engaged with other disciplines was also affected by intellectual challenges, arising from anxiety about how to read the Bible in relation to the higher criticism, and, ultimately, changing understandings of how God revealed himself to humans.

Pusey's rejection of his earlier writings was not purely the desire of a young zealot to close ranks with his fellow Oriel controversialists; it was borne of an acute passion that theology must speak of God, the Church must guard its deposit of revelation, and that *wissenschaftliche* biblical study – however impressive its results – was perilously relativist in its treatment of texts. The debates about the practice and purpose of theology in the English university, and especially Oxford, are as much rooted in questions of theological epistemology as concern for the position of the Church of England in public life. Nowhere is this tangle of political and theological concerns more visible than in the “whirlwind” that accompanied the election of Renn Dickson Hampden as Regius Professor of Divinity in succession to Edward Burton in 1836.¹⁴

The Hampden Crisis

The most significant date for Oxford's ecclesiastical life in the early nineteenth century has usually been given, largely because of J.H. Newman, as 14 July 1833.¹⁵ This was the day that John Keble ascended the pulpit in the University Church of St Mary's to deliver his sermon, entitled 'National Apostasy', to His Majesty's Judges of Assize. This sermon has been seen as inaugurating the 'Oxford Movement' and its insistence upon the autonomy of the Church in matters 'apostolical'. Delivered in response to the proposed rearrangement of Irish dioceses by His Majesty's Government (rather than by the bishops of the Church of Ireland), the sermon brought High Church Tory resentment at Oxford into the national sphere.

While Keble's sermon was certainly significant, arguably far more important for theology's development at Oxford was the death in January 1836 of Edward Burton, the Regius Professor of Divinity. Who replaced him was in the hands of the Crown (in the person of the Prime Minister) and, such was their growing influence and stature in the university, Newman, Keble and Pusey were all candidates.¹⁶ They had been recommended to the prime minister by the archbishop of Canterbury, William Howley. The prime minister, however, was the Whig Lord Melbourne and these Oriel men were all High Church Tories. After consultation with his sympathisers at

14. Thomas Arnold, 'The Oxford Malignants and Dr Hampden', *Edinburgh Review* 63 (1836): 226.
15. J.H. Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 100. Nockles has suggested that Newman's university sermon of 22 January 1832, "Personal Influence the Means of Propagating the Truth", is a better marker for the Oxford Movement's beginning. (J.Catto, ed., *Oriel College: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1932), 328).
16. H.P. Liddon, *The Life of Edward Bouverie Pusey*, 3rd edn (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1893), 360-70. The suggested names from the archbishop did not purely consist of High Churchmen. The list also included Philip Shuttleworth (the liberal Master of New College), Charles Ogilvie, a chaplain to the archbishop and a former fellow of Balliol (a High Churchmen but not a Tractarian, later the first Regius Professor of Pastoral Theology), Thomas Short (a liberal, later bishop of St Asaph), John Miller (a conservative High Churchman from Worcester) and Charles Goddard (an Evangelical archdeacon of Lincoln).

Oriel, Melbourne disregarded the suggestions of Archbishop Howley and chose instead Renn Dickson Hampden, professor of Moral Philosophy since 1834, principal of St Mary's Hall since 1833, and for several years a fellow of Oriel. In 1832, Hampden had preached the Bampton Lectures, the most prestigious theological lecture-series in the University, entitled, *The Scholastic Philosophy Considered in its Relation to Christian Theology* (published in 1833). Of the Noetics, apart from perhaps Thomas Arnold, Hampden was considered to be the most theologically articulate.¹⁷

Hampden's appointment provoked a storm of protest from the outset, certain people having seen Melbourne's frank on the letter addressed to him in Oxford's post office. The Tractarians, in particular, were dismayed by Hampden's appointment, considering him heterodox and probably smarting from their failure to secure one of their own for this most senior of professorships. As the controversy reached its climax, Hampden tendered his resignation to the prime minister, who replied:

In justice to ourselves and you, for the sake of the principles of toleration and free inquiry, we consider ourselves bound to persevere in your appointment to the Regius Professorship of Divinity, which has been approved by His Majesty.¹⁸

Why had Hampden's appointment proved so offensive to other theologians at Oxford? As one of the 'Noetic' group, Hampden wrote in the tradition of Joseph Butler, the eighteenth-century bishop who came to be associated with a revival of Anglican apologetics based on the 'reasonableness' of the Christian faith during the 1820s at Oriel.

17. The legacy of John Bampton in 1751 required eight divinity lectures to be delivered in the University Church of St Mary the Virgin annually; Renn Dickson Hampden, *The Scholastic Philosophy Considered in its Relation to Christian Theology* (Oxford: J.H. Parker, 1833).

18. Henrietta Hampden, *Some Memorials of Renn Dickson Hampden Bishop of Hereford* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1871), 56-57. Quoted in David B. Roberts, *The Church Militant: Interpreting a Satirical Cartoon* (Oxford: Magdalen College, 2013), 36.

The Noetics were not straightforwardly Whiggish or latitudinarian in opinion. Hampden, for instance had been editor of the High Church periodical, the *Christian Remembrancer* (1825–6), a position that he employed to publish criticisms of both Unitarianism and Calvinism.

What distinguished the Noetics at Oxford, and what offended Tractarians and Evangelicals alike was their theological methodology. Following Butler, the Noetics had asserted that the inductive study of the natural world was a means to identifying a divine creator and that this same method might be applied to the study of the scriptural revelation. As a result, they examined the ‘facts’ of the Bible with an acceptance that the ultimate cause of the phenomena described in scripture could not be – as in nature – straightforwardly identified. This approach naturally entailed a certain ambiguity beyond the clear scriptural facts that led to a grading of dogmatic truths, with those from the post-apostolic period regarded with greater scepticism as they could supposedly not be inductively proven.¹⁹ This methodology was evident in Hampden’s Bampton lectures, where he characterized the dogma of the scholastics (which covered any post-apostolic dogmatic writing, including the patristic authors) as marred by human imperfection and written for particular historical contexts for the purpose of securing ‘orthodoxy’. This critical acceptance that doctrines had their own history and complex impulses led, in the minds of the Tractarians, to the perilous conclusion that creeds and formularies were “not so much apodictic conclusions as humanly construed definitions.”²⁰

19. For more on the Noetics of Oriel, see Peter Nockles’ invaluable chapter in the most recent history of Oriel, “Oriel and Religion, 1800–1833” in J. Catto, ed., *Oriel College: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 291–328. A useful introduction is also Richard Brent’s note, “The Oriel Noetics”, in *The History of the University of Oxford* 6:72–76. See also Richard Brent, “Hampden, Renn Dickson (1793–1868)”, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) and *Liberal Anglican Politics: Whiggery, Religion, and Reform* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

For Tractarians, the authoritative reading of Scripture “did not lie with private individuals today, but rather people today should be guided by the collective interpretation of the early church fathers.”²¹ Dismissing the later ‘speculations’ of the fathers would surely, the Tractarians believed, lead to all manner of dogmatic dissolution.

Within the university, these methodological considerations also naturally affected attitudes towards the ecclesiological and institutional questions of the period. Hampden’s less than enthusiastic appreciation of dogma as a vehicle of divine revelation led to his advocacy of abandoning subscription to the Thirty-nine Articles for those matriculating at the University of Oxford (as expressed in his 1834 pamphlet, *Observations on Religious Dissent*). The university was not, in Hampden’s opinion, a Church institution so much as an institution that happened to be populated by Church members.²² Hampden had quickly found himself under fire.²³ Henry Wilberforce, the youngest son of William Wilberforce, identified that Hampden’s assault on subscription came from “purely theological” arguments. “He would remove subscription,” he wrote in *The Foundations of Faith Assailed in Oxford*, “because he objects to all tests and creeds as conditions to communion, and sees no valid reason for any separation between ourselves, and those who ‘unhappily’ reject the doctrine of Our Lord’s divinity and atonement.”

20. R. Brent, “The Oriel Noetics”, 74.

21. Timothy Larsen, *A People of One Book: The Bible and the Victorians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 14.

22. R.D. Hampden, *Observations on Religious Dissent* (Oxford: J.H. Parker, 1834); [H.W. Wilberforce], *The Foundations of Faith Assailed in Oxford* (London: Rivingtons, 1835), 14. This followed on from a bill in Parliament that sought to admit dissenters to the university. It was defeated in the House of Lords, but prompted a declaration at Oxford (signed by 1900 members of Convocation and over 1050 undergraduates) against any future attempt to challenge subscription.

23. For a detailed account of the divisions with Oriel, see Peter Nockles, “A House Divided: Oriel in the Era of the Oxford Movement, 1833–1860” in *Oriel College: A History*, 337ff.

Hampden's doctrinal comprehensiveness was deemed heterodox to Wilberforce, Newman, and Pusey. Paradoxically, they now became defenders of the Protestant Thirty-nine Articles, not out of love for the Articles themselves (Newman was deeply uneasy with their content) but as Peter Nockles has asserted

[O]n the ground that religion was to be approached with submission of the understanding. While Protestant High-Churchmen regarded the tests as little more than fences of the establishment, the Tractarians bestowed a quasi-sacramental efficacy upon the act of subscription.²⁴

The university was, for Wilberforce, "a sacred ark wherein the truth has been preserved" and its members must be "humble and teachable disciples, labouring to ascertain what has been the church's faith and practice."²⁵

When Newman, Pusey, and Keble were passed over for the Regius chair, the charge of heterodoxy was again brought against Hampden. A committee met in the Corpus Christi College common room that consisted of High Churchmen, Protestant and Tractarian, as well as Oxford Evangelicals such as Charles P. Golightly (later a fierce critic of the Tractarians and 'Puseyites') and R.L. Cotton (about to become provost of Worcester College).²⁶ Pamphlets were quickly produced by Newman (*Elucidations of Dr Hampden's Theological Statements*) and Pusey (*Dr Hampden's Past and Present Statements compared*). They questioned the selection of Hampden as Regius professor and analysed his theological statements with regard to the Trinity, the divinity of Jesus, the atonement, original sin, grace, and faith. Pusey, in his pamphlet, recalled Hampden's reclassification of dogma, asking with no small degree of fury how Hampden distinguished between

24. P.B. Nockles, "Lost Causes and...Impossible Loyalties: The Oxford Movement and the University" in *History of the University of Oxford*, 6:222.

25. [Wilberforce], *Foundations of the Faith Assailed*, 6.

26. *Oriel College: A History*, 340-343.

the life of Jesus Christ as a fact and not the consubstantiality of the Trinity.²⁷ In response to a well co-ordinated protest at Hampden's appointment, the Hebdomadal Board submitted a statute to Convocation that deprived the Regius Professor of Divinity of appointing the select preachers for the university and his right to sit on a board that judged the orthodoxy of Oxford sermons.²⁸

While a triumph for Tractarians and High Churchmen, this success in Convocation was also the high point of clerical resistance to reforming pressures within, and from without, the university. It is important to note that, despite winning these limitations, Hampden was never formally censured for being a heretic; it was now possible to be a theological professor at Oxford without seeing one's role as primarily transmitting pure credal orthodoxy to new generations of students, much to the concern of Tractarians. Moreover, the coalition's success in limiting Hampden's influence can be overstated; it is important to remember that Hampden did not receive unstinting support from other 'liberal' figures in the university. Although Thomas Arnold launched a stinging attack upon the 'Oxford malignants' who were seeking to censure Hampden in the *Edinburgh Review*, to many moderates – such as his disciple Stanley – Arnold's article seemed excessive.²⁹ Hampden had also not received the support of the older generation of Noetics, with Shuttleworth noting that he “has alarmed many very moderate and liberal men in this

27. E.B. Pusey, *Dr Hampden's Past and Present Statements Compared* (Oxford: J.H. Parker, 1836), 6ff.

28. Convocation, according to the Laudian statutes of the University, consisted of all members of the University who were MAs, regent and non-regent (effectively, resident and non-resident). Unlike now, Convocation was able to appoint officers, enact and modify statutes, and examine and approve accounts. This statute was passed in Convocation on 5 May 1836 by 484 to 94 votes. For more on the Hampden controversy and Baden Powell's satirical cartoon of the whole episode, a print of which is kept in the archives of Magdalen College, see David B. Roberts, *ibid.*

29. R.E. Prothero, *The Life and Correspondence of Arthur Penrhyn Stanley* (2 vols., London: John Murray, 1897), 1:164.

place, not so much for himself as for the possible mischief he may do to the younger part of the University by his teaching.”³⁰

What was the legacy of the Hampden crisis in 1836 for the practice of theology at Oxford? It was certainly the ‘zenith’ of Tractarian influence in the wider university, as the coalition that Newman and Pusey had built with Evangelicals and other High Churchmen was now beginning to fracture. By the end of the decade, both Evangelicals and Protestant High Churchmen were highly critical and suspicious of the Tractarians as ‘Romanizers’, a suspicion only confirmed by the publication of Hurrell Froude’s *Remains* and the steady number of Oxford figures converting to Roman Catholicism. That influence, however, was weakening. In 1840, the Hebdomadal Board sought to raise the position of the professoriate and broaden the undergraduate curriculum. Although the measure was quickly defeated in Convocation in 1840, it signified how the governance of the university was increasingly less susceptible to Tractarian influence.

Nonetheless, even if Tractarian strength was waning on the Hebdomadal Board, the Hampden crisis certainly demonstrated how theological methodology was a significant point of division in thinking about the role of the university and its relationship to the Church. If, as Pusey and Newman claimed, the credal statements of the early church were authoritative as inspired developments in thinking about God, then the Church – and, by extension, its universities of Oxford and Cambridge – were compelled both to revere and hand on that deposit of faith. Theology was, by virtue of its duty to guard the revelation, the ‘queen of the sciences’ and every other discipline, and the moral life of the university, ought to be shaped by its truths. Hampden, by his promotion of an inductive

30. British Library Add. MS 51597, fo 136, P.N. Shuttleworth to Lord Holland, 1 March 1836; quoted by Nockles, “The Oxford Movement and the University”, 230, fn.196.

study of theology seemed to possess less commitment to the ‘speculations’ of men in later centuries, and so was less inclined to see the University as a guardian of the deposit of faith. As Stanley noted in an article for the *Edinburgh Review* in 1843, the Tractarians were seeking such a renewal of the university that would define education as

...the formation of moral character by habit, not the imparting of what is commonly called learning...Catholic theology and Moral Philosophy in accordance with Catholic doctrine, were to be the main foundations of the improved education of these newer days; science and literature were not, indeed, to be neglected, but to be cultivated as in subordination only to these great ‘architectonic’ sciences...³¹

The inductive method of Hampden, transferred from the natural sciences, threatened this concept of the university disciplines always being subordinated to the ‘architectonic’ sciences of Catholic theology and moral philosophy.³² Hampden’s theological approach may seem timid to the twenty-first century theologian (if not weak), but in 1836 it was offensive to the sensibilities of many Christians at Oxford, including many men who had been described as ‘Noetic’ and some who would later be called ‘liberal’. In effect, however, the crisis and its aftermath brought into relief a more partisan approach to Oxford’s theological life that was shaped by personal as much as theological enmities and resentments. Pusey became ever more ardent in his defence of the university as “priestly, seminarian in function, clerical in its educational core”, grounded in an unwavering faith in God’s immutable revelation.³³ On the other hand, a new generation of liberal, or ‘Broad Churchmen’ – several of whom had

31. [A.P. Stanley], “The late Dr. Arnold”, *Edinburgh Review* 76 (1843): 375.

32. For more on the ‘Catholic’ reform of collegiate life in the 1830s and 1840s, see Peter Nockles, “An Academic Counter-Revolution: Newman and Tractarian Oxford’s Idea of the University”, *History of Universities* 10 (1991): 137–197.

33. Matthew, “Edward Bouverie Pusey”, 121.

been pupils of Thomas Arnold at Rugby School – were beginning to broaden Hampden’s sense of ‘inductive’ theology. Their aspirations for Oxford theology, however, would be limited by the events of 1836. The practice of theology was kept firmly under the control of the High Churchmen, principally at Christ Church, in subsequent decades. As Richard Brent notes, the crisis brought “to an end the process of Anglican renewal as a collaborative enterprise” in the University as the Noetics found themselves divided, liberals were separated from the High Churchmen, and Tractarians and Evangelicals found common cause in the defence of revealed theology.³⁴ Almost as an indictment of Oriel as a location for such life, Newman and Pusey rented a house on St Aldate’s in the summer of 1837 which was nicknamed the *Coenobitium* or *Monasterio*. Those who lived there practised asceticism and read the church fathers; Mark Pattison and James Mozley (later rector of Lincoln College and the Regius Professor of Divinity respectively) would both live there.³⁵ Both, in due course, would repudiate their Tractarianism.

As divisions grew over the practice of theology at Oxford in the context of the religious ferment of the 1830s and early 1840s, what was it exactly that Pusey, Newman, and their associates were defending, and how and why did ‘liberals’, or ‘Broad Churchmen’ as they came to be known, hope to reform theology and the university?

Theology in the University Prior to Reform

When the first examination statutes were framed at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Convocation had ensured a compulsory examination in divinity in Schools as part of its desire for ‘sound and godly learning’. Although it occupied a very minor position

34. R. Brent, “Hampden, Renn Dickson (1793–1868)”.

35. J.B. Mozley to A. Mozley, *Letters of the Rev. J.B. Mozley* (London: Rivingtons, 1885), 78; quoted in *Oriel College*, 345.

– it was a pass examination and did not affect one’s standing on the class list – no student could gain his *testamur* (the certificate that demonstrated he had satisfied the examiners) without showing knowledge of the ‘Rudiments of Religion’: according to the statute, “at every examination, on every occasion, the Elements of Religion, and the Doctrinal Articles...must form a part”.³⁶ According to the *University Calendar* for 1813, the first document to give details of what was required in examination listed as the first requisite for admission to the degree of Bachelor of Arts:

1. The Rudiments of Religion, under which head is required a sufficient knowledge of the Gospels in the original Greek – of the 39 Articles of the Church of England, – and of the Evidences of Religion, natural and revealed.³⁷

Even more so than classical study, the examination was considered by many as emblematic of the education that Oxford offered; an examiner from the 1820s would tell the Commissioners in 1850 that, “It has long been the glory of Oxford when her ablest and most accomplished Students stand up to be examined for the degree of BA, which is the turning point of life, *the first book* which is placed in their hands is the *Greek Testament*.”³⁸ However, like the classical exercises it accompanied, candidates were protected from any opportunity for radical speculation. One need only look at revolutionary Europe, the Tory High Churchmen averred, to see the terrifying results of rationalistic religion. Accordingly, undergraduates were only required to demonstrate knowledge of the Gospels in Greek, the outlines of biblical history, the Thirty-nine Articles, and the ‘evidences’ of Christian religion, being invariably

36. W.R. Ward, *Victorian Oxford* (London: Frank Cass & Co, 1964), 13.

37. *University Calendar*, 1813 (Oxford, 1813), 70.

38. *Report and Evidence upon the Recommendations of Her Majesty’s Commissioners for Inquiring into the State of the University of Oxford* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1853), evidence, 489.

Joseph Butler's *Analogy of Religion* (first published in 1736). Although no divinity papers exist for this period (the examination was *viva voce*) the curriculum remained essentially unchanged from its inception until the 1880s, when questions on the Articles were removed. A paper from 1863 exemplifies the standard of the examination:

4. The chief instances of Abraham's faith, and references to him in the New Testament.

8. "That the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs and of the same body." Trace the stages through which, in the Old and New Testament, this truth was gradually revealed.

9. "Thou bearest record of thyself, thy record is not true." Give our Lord's answer: and distinguish the several kinds of evidence to which He appealed in proof of His Divine Mission.

12. Against what errors were the following Articles directed: (a) on the Person of Christ; (b) on Holy Scripture; (c) of Christian men's goods not common?

13. "The old Fathers did not look only for transitory promises." Explain, and show by our Lord's words, (1) that the Old Testament revelation was imperfect, (2) that its truths are eternal.³⁹

As M.G. Brock has observed, the strictly limited level of criticism and understanding that was expected of candidates reinforced the tenet, rooted in the High Church reaction against continental theological speculation, that the "Christian faith, as the Established Church expounded it, was seen as a fixed system."⁴⁰ If revelation was essentially propositional and preserved in Scripture and the Church's historic formularies, there was no need to expect any kind of understanding of doctrinal or biblical history; it was sufficient – as far

39. *Second Public Examination: Honour School of Literae Humaniores* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1863).

40. M.G. Brock, "The Oxford of Peel and Gladstone", *History of the University*, 6:10.

as religious education was concerned – merely to repeat the received truths of the Thirty-nine Articles and the Bible, and show that one had understood Butler’s triumph over the Deists in his *Analogy of Religion*. As Edward Copleston wrote in his reply to attacks against Oxford in the *Edinburgh Review*:

The scheme of revelation we think is closed, and we expect no new light on earth to break in on us... We hold it our especial duty... to keep strict watch round that sacred citadel, to deliver out in measure and season the stores it contains, to make our countrymen look to it as a tower of strength, and to defend it against open and secret enemies.⁴¹

A core component of an undergraduate’s career, yet evidently attainable by any schoolboy, the Rudiments of Religion became a rich source of mockery for students up until its abolition as a compulsory examination in 1932. A good early example is a pamphlet written by John Cockburn Thomson in 1858, *Almae Matres by Megathym Spleme, B.A., Oxon.*, which made extensive reference to the poor level of theological education at Oxford.⁴² He remembered his own experience of a *viva*:

In my own examination I was asked which of the minor prophets had the most chapters, and not remembering this – which had the fewest. I was asked what relationship there was between David, Joab, and Asahel, and whether Zeruah was a man or a woman. In fact, the Old Testament is generally treated more like a peerage than a history; and I have even heard of a jocose examiner putting a very certain “pluck,” whom he was engaged in tormenting, that very obsolete enigma – “Who was the Father of Zebedee’s children?”... But the Bible may be well and ill read. If it is read only to know that there is only one chapter in Obadiah,

41. E. Copleston, *A Reply to the Calumnies of the Edinburgh Review against Oxford* (1810), quoted in Brock, *ibid.*, 6:11.

42. John Cockburn Thomson, *Almae Matres by Megathym Spleme* (London: James Hogg & Sons, 1858). Thomson (1834–60) studied Sanskrit at Oxford and was a candidate for the librarianship of the India Office before he accidentally drowned when swimming off the Pembrokeshire coast.

that Asahel was Joab's brother, or that Huz and Buz (whom a modest curate of my acquaintance thinks it respectful in the reading-desk to call Hughes and Bews) were the grandsons of this man or that – I'm sure *I* don't know – you do not, in my humble opinion, read the Bible aright...⁴³

As a purely factual examination, Thomson could wryly observe that “the eccentric young lady in Jonson's ‘Alchemist,’ who was mad on the subject of scriptural genealogies”, was thus probably “the most fit person to have B.A. put after her name.”⁴⁴

Oxford's commitment to a common divinity education avoided the professional direction of theological learning that was evident in the Scottish and the newer English universities. Candidates for ministry in the Church of Scotland, for instance, were first required to complete a four-year arts course in one of the Scottish universities, where they would gain a foundation in philosophy, Latin and Greek. Then they would proceed to a divinity hall in their university for another three or four years, where they would systematically study Hebrew, theology, and ecclesiastical history.⁴⁵ Durham University had a Licentiate in Theology for both graduates and non-graduates since 1833 and King's College London had conferred its ‘Associate in Theology’ from 1847.⁴⁶

There were attempts to improve the teaching of theology in Oxford. Apart from Newman's hope that college fellowships would return to their medieval vocation as spiritual brotherhoods of graduates engaged in the study of theology, with tutorials as the primary pastoral duty of the fellow in holy orders, Tractarians had

43. *Ibid.*, 241–42.

44. *Ibid.*, 243.

45. See J.C. Whytcock, *An Educated Clergy: Scottish Theological Education and Training in the Kirk and Secession, 1560–1850*. (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007)

46. C.E. Whiting, *The University of Durham, 1832–1932* (London: The Sheldon Press, 1932), 259–262; S.W. Green, ‘Sketch of the History of the Faculty’ in *London Theological Studies* (London: University of London Press, 1911), xi.

supported a private offer to fund a new theological chair in liturgy in 1837 (only to be rebuffed by the Heads of Houses⁴⁷), and supported the creation of two new theological chairs in 1840, eventually resulting in the Regius professorships in Ecclesiastical History and Pastoral Theology.⁴⁸ However, when the Whig, Edward Hawkins of Oriel, sought to improve the theological education of future clergy in 1842 through the introduction of a Voluntary Theological Examination, this was viewed by Tractarians as a step towards reducing the nature of theology from an overarching system for all academic study into a professional department of learning. In this opposition, however, the Tractarians were unsuccessful and the Voluntary Examination was offered once a year, and was open to all BAs.⁴⁹

Between 1844 and 1863, however, only seven men passed the Voluntary.⁵⁰ Although no examination papers survive, William Jacobson, who was Regius Professor of Divinity between 1848 and 1865, detailed his course of twelve public lectures thus:

1. Introductory to the Study of Theology, and some points of Clerical Duty.
- 2, 3. On some of the aids at arriving at the sense of Holy Scripture.
- 4, 5. On Creeds; particularly on the three incorporated in our services.
- 6, 7. On the study of Church History.
8. On the Continental Reformation.
9. On the English Reformation.
- 10, 11. On the Book of Common Prayer.
12. On some of the practical Duties of a Clergyman in charge of a parish.⁵¹

47. I.e., the heads of the Oxford colleges.

48. For Newman on the tutorial as a pastoral office, see J. Catto, ed., *Oriel College: A History*, 338–39. Bodleian Law Library, *An Act to carry into effect...the fourth report of the Commissioners of ecclesiastical duties and revenues* (3 & 4 V., c.113, Pub.) (London, 1840).

49. W. Ince, *The Past and Present Duties of the Faculty of Theology* (Oxford: James Parker, 1878), 39.

50. *Ibid.* It has not been possible to determine how many students entered for the examination.

51. *Evidence*, 253.

As an examination which offered no distinction (there were no class lists for the Voluntary Examination), and which prolonged residence in the university (as students could not attend the divinity professors' lectures before graduation), there was little incentive for graduates to embark on the course, and, apart from their dislike of the course *per se*, Tractarians were disinclined to recommend the examination as it was overseen by R.D. Hampden, who remained the Regius Professor of Divinity until his equally controversial appointment by Lord Russell to the see of Hereford in 1847.⁵²

Although the Archbishop of Canterbury supported the examination's institution, the episcopal bench never insisted that their candidates for holy orders take it; ordinands were merely required to gain a certificate that proved attendance at the lectures of the Regius Professor of Divinity and one other theological lecturer. This teaching, as Thomson records, was dismal:⁵³

...those who have attended [the lectures] know what was their real value. The Regius Professor hurriedly mounts the pulpit in the small side-chapel of the cathedral, and reads a list of some four or five hundred works, which he recommends you, somewhat ironically, to study. The Margaret Professor, who is generally the other one attended, reads a series of terribly soporific discourses on the Creed, which add little or nothing to what Pearson has written. These lectures are commonly attended when the young aspirant is...totally engrossed by history, chemistry, or algebra; and even if he can give his whole attention to theology, it is only for a fortnight or three weeks, after which the lecturers begin the same course over again.⁵⁴

52. *The New Examinations for Divinity Degrees* (Oxford, 1844), 13.

53. Cf. the speech of Hawkins on the theological statute in 1863 in the *Guardian*, 18 March 1863: 261.

54. J.C. Thomson, *Almae Matres*, 244. "Pearson" refers to the *Exposition of the Creed* (1659) by John Pearson (1613-86), Bishop of Chester from 1673. It was a staple text of theological study at Oxford, originating in a series of lectures extended over several years at St Clement's, Eastcheap. It was later combined with book five of Hooker's *Ecclesiastical Polity* to form a staple textbook, entitled *The Creed and the Church: A Handbook of Theology*, by Edgar Sanderson (Oxford: J. Parker, 1865).

This lack of systematic theological teaching was perhaps all the more striking when one realizes that the theological professors were perceived as being more diligent and active than most others in the university. Across Oxford, all the professorships had become largely redundant as valued instruments of education, with the primary duties of the university being undergraduate education in the classics. Only nine out of the twenty-five university professorships were supported by college endowments in 1840, and were consequently less attractive posts than many ecclesiastical offices or even college fellowships.⁵⁵ Christ Church, as a cathedral foundation, was unique in being able to incorporate professorships into its governing body and support them financially, since the canonries allowed the incumbents to be married. The divinity chairs enjoyed handsome stipends as a result and were naturally attractive destinations for preferment within the university and Church.

Despite this institutional support, one cannot claim that the divinity professors at Oxford occupied their offices in a manner any way comparable to their German counterparts, who published prodigiously and taught a range of specialized courses in biblical, historical, and theological subjects. Charles Lloyd, as the Regius Professor of Divinity between 1822 and 1829, was remembered as the “infuser of a new and more energetic spirit” in theological studies at Oxford; he was responsible for tutoring Robert Peel, Newman and Richard Hurrell Froude, amongst others, and encouraged that growing sensibility for the ancient origins of the Anglican liturgy among the younger Oxford scholars (and later Tractarians).⁵⁶ Yet, his own publications were slight, the most famous being the compendium, *Formularies of Faith Put Forth by Authority during the Reign of Henry VIII* (1825).

55. M.C. Curthoys, “The ‘Unreformed Colleges’” in *History of the University*, 6:166.

56. *Gentleman’s Magazine*, 1st ser., 99/1 (1829), 561.

Since the English universities were primarily committed to teaching rather than research for most of the nineteenth century, the relative lack of theological publications should not surprise us. Oxford theology was communicated largely through small-scale teaching, sermons (a large number of which were published either in pamphlets or in volumes) and the annual Bampton lectures. In the years succeeding Hampden's infamous series, the Bamptons were far more cautious, treading along the "well beaten tracks of Catholic Theology" where, Charles Ogilvie assured the readers of his own,

will be found sure footing amidst the dangers and safety from the misleading temptations of a restless and speculative age, fond of novelty and eagerly aiming at discoveries even on the most sacred subjects.⁵⁷

Similarly keen not to provoke further cross-party enmity in the Bamptons, Edward Hawkins in his 1840 series positioned himself carefully between Tractarian dogmatism and Hampden's latitudinarianism, reiterating the Anglican balance on Scripture and tradition.⁵⁸ Likewise, William Conybeare in his 1839 lectures, stressed that the lectures for the year, "however deficient in other respects, will sufficiently manifest, that to engage in personal and individual controversy, is of all things the most remote from the habits and intentions of the author."⁵⁹

57. C. Ogilvie, *The Divine Glory Manifested in the Conduct and Discourses of our Lord: Eight Sermons preached before the University of Oxford* (Oxford: J.H. Parker, 1836), x.

58. E. Hawkins, *An Enquiry into the Connected Use of the Principal Means of Attaining Christian Truth* (Oxford: J.H. Parker, 1840); cf. *Oriel College: A History*, 346. Other post-Hampden Bamptons exhibit similar caution: see Thomas Vogan, *The Principal Objections against the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Oxford: J.H. Parker, 1837).

59. William Conybeare, *Analytical Examination of the Character, Value, and Just Application of the Writings of the Christian Fathers during the Ante-Nicene Period* (Oxford: J.H. Parker, 1839), vi-vii. His Anglican methodology, as with Hawkins, treated the tradition as "an important subsidiary aid in interpretation" of the Bible, carefully avoiding the less conservative methodologies of some Tractarians and some Noetics (ix).