Address: A Tour of Harvard in 1908

Peter J. Gomes
Harvard University

Ladies and Gentlemen, I am here as the best that could be got, which is to say that there are at least three others who would be much better suited to the task assigned to me than myself. Two are dead, my great teacher George Williams, who knew everything about everything and would have kept us much longer than I intend to keep you today; Bill Hutchison, whose field was modernism, of which the *Harvard Theological Review* is a remarkable example, and Conrad Wright, who is not dead but is retired, and may have decided never again to darken our precincts. These three, all of whom were my friends, teachers, and colleagues, would be able to explicate all the interstices of the year 1908 with fascinating and passionate insights, while I, as their student and the only one here, shall simply do the best I can with the assignment.

I have been asked to discuss "The Historical, Cultural, Theological, and Religious Situation at Harvard University in 1908." Well, in one sense that could be a very short disquisition, for one could say that there wasn't such a situation; and, on the other hand, one could do as I have tried to do, in going through the documents and circumstances that do honor to that title. So, I begin.

The *Harvard Theological Review* is described in George William's history as the "corporate literary effort of the Divinity School faculty." I have always been impressed that as a member of the Divinity School faculty I am associated with the *Harvard Theological Review*, although I have had nothing of any substance to do with it during these many years. I've never written for it, and I will confess that as a student it was a bit of a chore even to read it, but it was always reassuring to know that it existed. Then, when I entered into the glory of a professorship, to be described as a part of the editorial team was always something of great joy, and a coup d'état. It is always good to be associated with one's betters, and this was certainly the intellectual case as far as I was concerned. An invitation to comment on the one hundredth anniversary of anything is an invitation not to be refused, and to comment on the hundredth anniversary of an intellectual and literary monument

HTR 101:3–4 (2008) 299–304

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816008001843 Published online by Cambridge University Press

such as this, which continues to do what it was meant to do from the very beginning, is a great privilege, and I certainly would not decline any great privilege.

The *Review* started in 1908 with George Foot Moore as editor, on an endowment provided by Miss Mildred Everett as a memorial to her late father, Charles Carroll Everett, dean from 1878 to his death in 1900. In the variety of things that I read, I saw that Miss Everett "partially" endowed the *Review*, and I don't know if that was treasury-like persnicketyness, or if it became clear, as with so many other things at Harvard Divinity School, that costs soon outran means. Nevertheless, the *Review* seems never to have suffered from editorial stinginess, and whether Miss Everett provided sufficient funds to begin it or a stimulus to provoke others to do so, we are indebted to her for her filial duty to her father and her farsightedness for generations yet to come, in providing the means for the *Theological Review* to get off the ground.

I will set the context for the *Review*. I discovered that 1908 was a seminal year for all sorts of reasons, not least for the fact that the Andover-Theological Seminary, which had departed Cambridge and Harvard, shaking the dust of the place from its feet in 1808 for the safer and more orthodox climes of Andover, Massachusetts, decided for a variety of reasons best not gone into here, to return to Cambridge and enter into an article of affiliation with Harvard University. That is, the oldest theological school in New England, Andover Theological Seminary, returned in 1908 to the bosom of its erstwhile mother, Harvard, which itself was a momentous occasion. The result was a combination of resources in teaching and a theological reunion that closed the opening created a century earlier when the orthodox had withdrawn from Harvard and Cambridge because of the election of Henry Ware and the tendencies toward what would later be called Unitarianism. With due deference to my old teacher Conrad Wright, it was then known simply as liberal Christianity.

When Andover decided to return to Cambridge, it was not going to do so slinkily or unnoticed; rather, it decided that it would acquire property as near to Harvard as possible and build a new building on the eastern borders of the University, with its front doors facing Somerville and its hind parts facing Harvard. The building was completed and dedicated on Wednesday, October 25, 1911, and it was meant to stand out, which it does. It is Harvard's only collegiate Gothic building, and it was built in purposeful departure from Harvard's usual architectural vernacular. Distinct from everything else, it was a remarkable building in that it was intended to contain all that a sensible and modern divinity school required, including a common room, a library, classrooms, offices for the faculty, a chapel, and space to expand. From its inception, complementary wings were planned, with this part as the centerpiece and a dormitory wing on one side and a library wing on the other, and as we move into the twenty-first century we appear to be completing the design that originally was intended. The dedicatory exercises are described in great detail in the *Harvard Alumni Bulletin*, in which I discovered for the first

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816008001843 Published online by Cambridge University Press

time that the center tower, which we all recognize as the point of entry, was to be referred to as the "Founders Tower." I had had no idea of that, and that must be why there are medallions of Calvin, Luther, and other reformers there, with not a Unitarian among them.

The affiliation between Andover and Harvard, begun in 1908 and expressed in this building in which we sit today, resulted in 1922 in the formation of the Theological School in Harvard University, a new entity in which both Andover and Harvard were to be subsumed, although they were not to lose their particular identities. Of that new institution, of which Abbott Lawrence Lowell was president, Willard Learoyd Sperry became its dean, and it was no accident that Sperry, a renowned Congregationalist preacher and minister and a member of the Andover faculty, was asked to preside over this new creation. The Congregationalists were worried that their old school would be lost in the greatness and grandeur of Harvard University, and every effort was made to avoid a sense of triumphalism upon the return of Andover to Cambridge. There is an account by Dean Sperry of how he was asked to become the dean. He was minister of the Central Congregational Church in Boston, which is now the Church of the Covenant, and he said that one day his secretary came in and said, "Mr. Lowell, of Harvard, wishes to see you." He replied, "Am I to go to Cambridge?" and she answered, "No, he's right outside in your outer office." So, the pastor received the president of Harvard, and the president of Harvard is alleged to have said to him—according to Sperry—"Mr. Sperry, I want you to become dean of the new school we are creating in Cambridge." Mr. Sperry said, "Well, Sir, I am not a scholar," to which President Lowell responded, "I know that, Mr. Sperry, but all a dean is required to do is to know a scholar when he sees one, and I have the sense that you are able to do that."

After a few minor circumlocutions it was agreed that The Reverend Dr. Sperry would become the dean of the new Theological School in Harvard University. This affiliation came to a premature and unhappy end upon the agitation of the Andover Board of Visitors, who protested, and in 1925 the relationship was disallowed by the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts and Andover took its suit to Newton hill, where it has been ever since, and the Harvard school became Harvard Divinity School once again. All that remains of the union are the Andover-Harvard Library and Andover Hall, the interest in which the University acquired for three hundred fifty thousand dollars. It might also be said that the only tangible on-going living sign of that great hoped-for union was the *Harvard Theological Review*. I'll come back to that in a minute.

The year of the *Review*'s birth, in 1908–1909, was the final year of President Eliot's administration. His successor, Abbott Lawrence Lowell, had waited at least twenty years for Mr. Eliot to finally give over, and there was a sense of impatient expectation as to what might follow after Charles William Eliot's long reign of forty years. Mr. Eliot had succeeded in making the Divinity School non-denominational by diversity in admissions and diversity in faculty appointments. He had long

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816008001843 Published online by Cambridge University Press

determined that the Divinity School as simply a Unitarian finishing school would not be worthy either of that denomination or of the University, and thus worked hard to turn the Divinity School into a place that from his point of view would be worthy of the University. He shared Charles Carroll Everett's comprehensive and catholic spirit, and he saw the Divinity School as a place where the religion of the future could be worked out.

Now, I can tell Dean Graham a little bit about that conference about which he expressed total ignorance, and he may learn more than he wants to. I had to look it up. President Eliot wrote a very long paper, and delivered it here, on the religion of the future, addressing the eleventh session of the Harvard Summer School of Theology on July 22, 1909. The Harvard Summer School of Theology was apparently one of the great initiatives of this faculty, and won for it the long-spread support of its friends and admirers, and attracted the attention of President Eliot, who would be the last president to visit the school until 1953, when Mr. Pusey came. For President Eliot, the religion of the future seemed very much like the religion to which he was accustomed in the First Parish in Cambridge. This is what he said:

> The religion of the future will not be based on authority either spiritual or temporal, there will be no personification of the primitive forces of nature, there will be no worship expressed or implied of ancestors, teachers, or tutors, no identification of any human being, however majestic in character with the eternal Deity. The primary object will not be personal welfare or safety. The religion of the future will not be propitiatory, sacrificial, or full of expiation. It will not perpetuate the Hebrew anthropomorphic representations of God. It will not be gloomy, ascetic, or maledictory. This twentieth century religion is not only to be in harmony with the great secular movements of modern society, democracy, individualism, social idealism, the zeal for education, the spirit of research, the modern tendency to welcome the new, the fresh powers of preventive medicine, and the recent advances in business and industrial ethics, but also in essential agreement with the direct personal teachings of Jesus as they are reported in the gospels. The revelation he gave mankind thus becomes more wonderful than ever. (Charles William Eliot; "The Man and His Beliefs" Volume II)

Those are Mr. Eliot's words, and that is how he imagined the religion of the future.

I would like to imagine a conversation between Pius X and President Eliot on the religion of the future, and I will come to the "acids of modernity" in a few minutes.

The world of 1908–1909 was a world caught between the idealistic modernism of President Eliot and the optimism represented by the new theological arguments in Cambridge, and the grim assessment of the theological situation offered by Professor Peabody in his article in the *Harvard Theological Review*, Volume 1, Number 1, to which the dean has already referred, and the anti-modernist onslaught

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816008001843 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of Pius X, where a renewal of medieval Thomistic authority is called for to repudiate what he calls the "acids of modernity." To read Pius X's *Pasciendi*, his famous anti-modernist encyclical, and compare it with Mr. Eliot's religion of the future would be a useful exercise. In the old days of the general examinations, someone might even have set it as a paper for seniors in the school. By 1908, the Divinity School, under the prodding of President Eliot, had achieved independence from the Unitarians and acceptance as a graduate school with standards worthy of the University. Dean William Wallace Fenn, whose picture you will see on the board, noted of this period:

> Within the past fifty years, the school has grown from a Unitarian school for the ministry, unworthy alike of the University and the denomination it served, into a University school of theology unqualifiedly devoted to University methods and standards. (Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Development of Harvard University*, p. 471)

Having tried to describe this context of optimistic institutional transformation, I would propose that the *Harvard Theological Review* represents in intellectual activity what was hoped for, and expected, in the new theological arrangements in Cambridge from 1908 onward, and as such, I would argue, it remains the vessel in which the hopes of new theological and intellectual collaboration can survive and flourish in each new and changing cultural age. Thus, the ambition of Dean Everett and his immediate successors are to be continued in the *Harvard Theological Review*. The year 1908 was fruitful, filled with promise and opportunity, fulfillment of which continues to be the daily work of the *Harvard Theological Review*.

There may be more here than one bargained for, having to do with the institutional history out of which the *Harvard Theological Review* comes, and there may be a good deal less here than one might have expected of a survey of the contents of the volumes. I have before me Volume I, Number 1—at some expense—and the articles in it represent both the cream of the Protestant scholarship of the day and a marvelous survey of some of the hot theological issues of the western world at the time. The first article is by one of my predecessors and a former dean of this school, Francis Greenwood Peabody, and is a rather grim assessment of the theological situation in which he issues a call to theology, arguing that theologians have to be able to speak to people in the real world and the broader world, and not just to one another. Then Arthur C. McGiffert, from Union Seminary in New York and a friend of the Andover faculty, wrote a rather long piece on the modern idea of God; and William Adams Brown wrote, "Is Our Protestantism Still Protestant?" There is a turning-point in synoptic criticism by Benjamin W. Bacon; David Gordon Lyon of the Harvard Divinity faculty writes of recent excavations in Palestine; Thomas N. Carver writes of the economic basis of the problem of evil, and Charles F. Dole writes of the divine providence. There is enough in there for anybody, and probably everybody, and that standard has not declined over the century that we celebrate today.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816008001843 Published online by Cambridge University Press

I would like to suggest that the year 1908 was a year of great promise, great hope, and a year at Harvard in which the Divinity School, in a strange sort of way, came into its own and perhaps for the very first time in its existence was taken seriously as a center of intellectual activity both within the University and, by the singular means of the *Harvard Theological Review*, well beyond the University. The *Harvard Theological Review* is part of the international profile and intellectual ministry of this faculty, and to be associated with it is a privilege and a great honor.

So, the great affiliation that was hoped for between Andover and Harvard never materialized, and although there have been many difficult years that the institution has had to traverse between its founding in 1908 and the present year 2008, the fact of the continuity—as Professor Bovon aptly said—of the *Harvard Theological Review* in its original mission, that was creative enough to respond to the demands of each new age, is a sign that the hopes and fears of that great year were met in this particular publication. We have every reason to believe that this noble enterprise will continue in full vigor and in great health. Thank you very much.

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