PART FIVE

METHOD AND THEORY IN THE STUDY OF RELIGION
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INTRODUCTION

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Whenever I think about method and theory in the study of religion, the wonderful dinosaur sketch by the British comic group Monty Python comes to mind. The scene is a television interview program. The host, played by Graham Chapman, introduces a Miss Anne Elk, played by John Cleese, who is a specialist on dinosaurs. The dialogue between the two runs like this:

Host: Now, Miss Elk—Anne—you have a new theory about the brontosaurus.
Elk: Could I just say, Chris, for one moment that I have a new theory about the brontosaurus?
Host: Er... exactly. What is it?
Elk: Where?
Host: No, no, no. What is your theory?
Elk: Oh, what is my theory?
Host: Yes.
Elk: Oh what is my theory, that it is. Yes, well you may well ask, what is my theory.
Host: (slightly impatient) I am asking.
Elk: And well you may. Yes my word you may well ask what it is, this theory of mine. Well, this theory that I have—that is to say, which is mine—...is mine.
Host: (more impatient) I know it's yours. What is it?
Elk: Where? Oh, what is my theory?
Host: Yes!
Elk: Oh, my theory that I have follows the lines I am about to relate.
Host: Oh God.
Host: Right....
Elk: This theory which belongs to me is as follows. Ahem. Ahem. This is how it goes. Ahem. The next thing that I am about to say is my theory. Ahem. Ready?
(Host moans)
Elk: The Theory by A. Elk brackets Miss brackets. My theory is along the following lines.