Rethinking Fundamental Theology

Toward a New Fundamental Theology

Gerald O'Collins, S.J.

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Contents

Abbreviations xiv

1. History, Terms, Identity, and Themes 1
   Historical background 2
   Apologetics and fundamental theology 4
   Terms and boundaries 5
   Themes for fundamental theology 15
   A coda: the contribution of Bernard Lonergan 16

2. Faith in a Personal God 18
   The divine attributes 19
   Special divine activity 22
   The existence of God 29
   Approaches to the God-question 34
   Conclusion 35

3. The Human Condition 37
   Four possible visions 37
   Homo experiens 42
   Religious experience 52

4. General and Special Revelation 56
   General revelation 57
   General revelation and faith 61
   Special revelation 65
   Means of revelation 74
   Word and event 79
   Mediators of special revelation 83
   Discerning the prophetic experience 87
   True and false prophets 90
   Conclusion 92

5. Jesus the Fullness of Revelation 96
The fourfold witness to the historical Jesus 97
The preaching of the kingdom: parables and miracles 106
The kingdom in person 114
The Trinity revealed? 120
Revelation past, present, and future 128

6. The Crucified and Resurrected Revealer 136
Revelation through the cross 138
Revelation through the resurrection 144
A case for the resurrection 146
The meaning of the claim 147
The Easter appearances 149
The discovery of the empty tomb 154
Novelties to explain 156
The resurrection as revealing 159

7. The Faith that Responds to Revelation 166
Three Positions 168
A narrative theology of faith 179
Some conclusions 188

8. Tradition and the Traditions 190
The human reality of tradition 192
Christian tradition 194
Toward an ecumenical convergence? 196
Discerning the tradition within the traditions 207
Revelation, tradition, and Scripture 212

9. Revelation, the Bible, and Inspiration 216
The formation of the Bible 216
The use of the Bible 220
The inspiration of the Bible 223
The function of inspiration 231

10. The Truth, Canon, and Interpretation of the Bible 234
The saving truth of the Bible 234
The canon of Scriptures 244
Interpreting the Bible 253
A coda: hearing the word 261

11. The Founding of the Church 265
The founder of the Church 268
The call of the Twelve 275
Any time for the Church? 278
The early Church 279
Early leadership 283
Into the second century 287
The kingdom and the Church 291

12. World Religions and Christ the Revealer and Saviour 292
Two preliminaries 293
The doctrinal background 294
The universal presence of Christ 298
Christ's universal presence and the religious 303
The transformation of Christ 307
The permanence of Christ's humanity 308
The universal presence of the Holy Spirit 311
The faith of others and the Church 317
A coda: the omnipresence of the risen Christ 319

13. Theological Styles and Methods 322
Three styles of theology 323
Risks and possibilities 329
Some guidelines 331

Epilogue 342

Index of Names 345
Subject Index 353
Biblical Index 355

1

History, Terms, Identity, and Themes

If this book is to provide resources for rethinking, renewing, and even relaunching the theory and practice of fundamental theology, it needs to begin by clarifying the specific character of this branch of theology. By doing that, we will then be in a position to gather into a logical sequence the themes that fundamental theology addresses and that constitute its identity. Since, however, readers often cannot work up too much interest in a topic or even in a whole discipline unless they know where it has come from, let me first sketch the background of fundamental theology.[1]

[1] See R. Latourelle and R. Fisichella (eds.), *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1994; hereafter *DFTh*); R. Rauser, *Theology in Search of Foundations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); M. Seckler, 'Fundamentaltheologie: Aufgaben und Aufbau, Begriff und Namen', in *HFTh* iv. 451–514; R. Sokolowski, *The God of Faith and Reason: Foundations of Christian Theology* (orig. edn. 1982; Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1995); H. Wagner, 'Fundamentaltheologie', *TRE* xi. 738–52. The absence of any entry on fundamental theology in F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone (eds.), *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (3rd edn. (rev.); Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005; hereafter *Oxford Dictionary*) offers another, disturbing sign of how this discipline has been quietly marginalized or simply ignored in some or even many quarters. This dictionary contains, however, entries on the related enterprises of 'apologetics', 87–8, and 'natural theology', 1139.

Historical background

As Gerhard Ebeling pointed out, from the eighteenth century Protestant authors used such terms as 'foundations', 'fundamental doctrine', and even 'fundamental theology', as well as engaging with the issues and realities that corresponded to these terms. They did this against the background of those who had earlier responded to deists, agnostics, and atheists, by developing, in various ways, 'apologies' for 'natural religion' and 'revealed religion' in response to deists, agnostics, and atheists. An apologetical literature that argued for the existence of God, the divine identity of Christ, and his establishment of the Church went back even to the end of the sixteenth century. When nineteenth-century Roman Catholic scholars introduced 'fundamental theology' as a distinct discipline within theology, they were influenced by widespread concerns of Protestant theologians who included F. D. E. Schleiermacher (1768–1834).[2]

What Ebeling wrote in a long 1970 essay was confirmed five years later in an even more documented account by Heinz Stirnimann about the origins of fundamental theology. In particular, after a Catholic faculty of theology moved from Erlangen to the University of Tübingen in 1819, such leading figures as Johann Sebastian von Drey (1777–1853) and Franz Anton Staudenmaier (1800–56) drew from their Protestant counterparts various suggestions and even models for thinking in the area of fundamental theology. Much more than a merely apologetical, 'defensive' intention played a role here. Many shared the desire to construct a scientific introduction to theology, which would set out principles and methods to be followed in the doctrinal or dogmatic tracts that followed. This led some to compose encyclopedias that embodied a fundamental and a dogmatic vision and approach. From the mid-eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century, something similar happened among those dedicated to producing a *Fundamental-philosophie* (fundamental philosophy), a term that gave its name to

[2] G. Ebeling, 'Erwägungen zu einer evangelischen Fundamentaltheologie', *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, 67 (1970), 479–524; this essay was reprinted in his *Wort und Glaube*, iv (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1995), 377–419; see also id., 'Fundamental Theology', in *The Study of Theology*, trans. D. A. Priebe (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 153–65.

various books that aimed at establishing the basic principles and methods of philosophical knowledge.[3] Thus it was in dialogue with different currents of thought that Drey and his colleagues created a tradition which would continue to inspire Catholic professors of the Tübingen School. Those who later contributed to fundamental theology include Karl Adam, Josef Rupert Geiselmann, Walter Kasper, Hans Küng, and Joseph Ratzinger. Max Seckler, as one of the three co-editors of and a major contributor to the four-volume *Handbuch der Fundamentaltheologie* (1985–8), represents a recent highpoint.

When fundamental theology began to emerge in the eighteenth century, it had an immediate background, as we saw above, in the apologetics developed by Anglican, Catholic, and Protestant authors in response to the Enlightenment. A movement that started in seventeenth-century Europe and spread to North America and elsewhere, the Enlightenment typically resisted authority and tradition and aimed at deciding issues though the use of reason alone. In religious matters many representatives of this movement rejected divine revelation, miracles, and Christ's resurrection, could be strongly opposed to mainline Christian beliefs, and in some cases doubted or denied the existence of a personal God.[4] Rebuttals came from such writers as the Anglicans Bishop Joseph Butler (1692–1752) and Samuel Clarke (1675–1729), the Protestant Jacques Abbadie (around 1654–1727; his 1684 *Traite de la verité de la religion chretienne* was frequently reprinted and translated into several languages), and the Roman Catholic Luke Joseph Hooke (1716–96). Butler, who was to influence considerably the thinking and apologetics of John Henry Newman (1801–90), led those eighteenth-century Christians who replied to the rationalism of the Enlightenment.[5]

Their apologetics fostered proximately the rise of fundamental theology and its reasoned defence of basic Christian beliefs. But the practice of apologetics formed a long-standing prehistory of

[3] H. Stirnimann, 'Erwägungen für Fundamentaltheologie: Problematik, Grundfragen, Konzept', *Freiburgerzeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie*, 24 (1977), 291–365, at 293–301.

[4] See 'Deism', *Oxford Dictionary*, 468; 'Enlightenment, the', ibid. 550; C. Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007).

[5] See 'Butler, Joseph', *Oxford Dictionary*, 258–9; and M. J. Buckley, *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); id., *Denying and Disclosing God: The Ambiguous Progress of Modern Atheism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

fundamental theology. 'Apologies' for the Christian religion stretch back to innumerable authors, like St Thomas Aquinas (*c.*1225–74) in his *Summa contra Gentiles* and St Augustine of Hippo (354–430) in his *City of God*, through Tertullian (before he lapsed into Montanism and died, *c.*225), St Justin Martyr (d. *c.*165), and other second- and third-century apologists (who rebutted objections and offered educated outsiders a case for the Christian faith), as far as New Testament 'apologies', like St Paul's speeches in Athens to Jews, Epicurean philosophers, Stoics, and others (Acts 17: 16–34).[6]

The twentieth century saw a flowering of Christian apologists, who often deployed world-class skills as writers: in the English-speaking world, for instance, one thinks of C. S. Lewis (1898–1963), G. K. Chesterton (1874–1936), and Dorothy Sayers (1893–1957). Among professional theologians, such figures as Paul Tillich (1886–1965), Wolfhart Pannenberg (b. 1928), and Alistair McGrath (b. 1953) have, in their different ways, been considered outstanding apologists for Christian faith.

Apologetics and fundamental theology

If Christian apologetics developed from New Testament times and, historically speaking, provided the proximate background for the emergence of fundamental theology in the eighteenth century, what difference(s) exist between apologetics and fundamental theology? They both come from those who personally share Christian faith and operate within the believing community and at its service. They both aim to respond to objections raised by critics and to offer a credible account of central beliefs about such matters as the existence of a personal God, the divine self-revelation in Jesus Christ, and the nature of faith.

Yet apologetics and fundamental theology differ on at least three scores. First, a Christian apologist may deal simply with one question: does the existence of horrendous evil in our world rule out the existence of an all-powerful, all-loving God? Or has science made belief in God something to be relegated to the past? Or what can we

[6] On the history of Christian apologetics, see A. Dulles, *A History of Apologetics* (orig. edn. 1971; San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005).

know about the history of Jesus? Can we show that belief in his resurrection from the dead is also reasonable and not merely a matter of blind faith? Fundamental theology, however, must deal not only with these but also with many other questions. Its agenda, as we shall see later in this chapter and in subsequent chapters, constitutes a whole theological discipline in its own right. As a branch of theology, it is an exercise of 'faith seeking understanding' over a coherent and cohesive range of topics. Along with its apologetic function, fundamental theology embodies the study of various central Christian doctrines, like divine revelation and human faith.

Second, good apologetics characteristically has a sharply defined audience: apologists can seek, for example, to alert non-believers to the weakness of the case currently being made against God and religion. But fundamental theology frequently has a wider range of readers in mind: believers who wish to grasp the reasons for and the implications of their religious beliefs and so deal with difficulties they encounter about their faith; students and teachers of theology and religious studies; and interested outsiders who want to examine in depth the truth of basic Christian beliefs.

Third, polemics (in the good sense of that word and not as mindless ranting) belong to the exercise of apologetics. With their telling phrases and brilliant language, C. S. Lewis and G. K. Chesterton exemplified such polemics at their best. Some recent works, like the responses by John Lennox and Tina Beattie to the new atheists, illustrate how Christian polemics continue in good shape.[7] The tone of fundamental theologians, even when rebutting objections to Christian faith, is or should be more expository and less polemically inclined to illustrate defects in opposing positions.

Terms and boundaries

To bring the identity of fundamental theology into sharper focus, let me compare and contrast it with (1) the philosophy of religion, (2)

[7] T. Beattie, *The New Atheists: The Twilight of Reason and the War on Religion* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2007); J. C. Lennox, *God's Undertaker: Has Science Buried God?* (Oxford: Liam Hudson, 2007).

philosophical theology, (3) systematic (and dogmatic) theology, and (4) natural theology. In all four cases there are connections to be made and comparisons to be drawn.

The philosophy of religion

Some classical and more recent collections of essays do not go out of their way to distinguish the philosophy of religion from philosophical theology. A book edited by Antony Flew and Alastair MacIntyre over fifty years ago, *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, aimed to 'apply the latest philosophical techniques and insights' to theological issues and helped to launch the term 'philosophical theology' into wider circulation—in particular, among philosophers of the analytic school. They acknowledged borrowing the term from Paul Tillich,[8] but did not provide any precise reference to his already published works.[9] Very recently T. P. Flint and M. C. Rea recall that earlier choice of title and see *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology* as standing in some continuity with the agenda set by Flew and MacIntyre. Neither Flew and MacIntyre nor Flint and Rea clearly distinguish philosophical theology from the philosophy of religion. In fact, Flint and Rea announce that 'the target audience' of their handbook of philosophical theology comprises 'philosophers of religion'.[10] Like Flint and Rea, William Wainwright in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion* seems to use 'philosophical theology' (which goes back to Aquinas, Maimonides, some classic Arab thinkers, Augustine, and even earlier writers) and 'philosophy of religion' (which as a name and a distinct discipline came into general usage in the nineteenth century) as largely equivalent terms. He

[8] A. Flew and A. MacIntyre (eds.), *New Essays in Philosophical Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1955), p. x.

[9] With all due respect to these two notable thinkers, I wonder whether 'philosophical theology' came into their mind when they read such statements from vol. i of Tillich's *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1951) as 'every creative philosopher is a hidden theologian' (25), and 'systematic theology includes philosophical discussion' (29). I have not been able to find Tillich using the phrase 'philosophical theology' prior to 1955 (when Flew and MacIntyre published their collection of essays under that title).

[10] T. P. Flint and M. C. Rea (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 5.

makes no studied distinction between philosophy of religion and philosophical theology.[11]

I would propose, however, joining such authors as John Macquarrie and Stephen Davis (see below) in drawing a firm distinction between the philosophy of religion and philosophical theology. In the five chapters that comprise part one ('Philosophical Theology') of his *Principles of Christian Theology*, Macquarrie addressed 'The Tasks of Philosophical Theology': 'Human Existence', 'Revelation', 'Being and God', 'The Language of Theology', and 'Religion and Religions'.[12] He set out two central functions of philosophical theology: first, in the cause of establishing that theology is 'reasonable', it 'lays bare the fundamental concepts of theology and investigates the conditions that make any theology possible'. Second, philosophical theology also has 'an apologetic function', in that it shows how 'theology can claim to have foundations in the universal structures of human existence and experience'. In this context Macquarrie also clarified the 'difference between philosophical theology and the philosophy of religion'. The latter studies religion from a 'disinterested' point of view, whereas 'philosophical theology belongs *within* the theological enterprise'.[13]

In parenthesis let me note that by treating such a theme as revelation and by recognizing an 'apologetic function' that also belongs to philosophical theology, Macquarrie, even if he did not realize this, attended to themes and issues that others deal with under the rubric of 'fundamental theology'. But my central concern here is to endorse his position about the philosophy of religion differing from philosophical theology.

[11] W. J. Wainwright (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 3–10. Not surprisingly, we read in the index: 'theology, philosophical, *see* philosophy of religion' (549). Apropos of the emergence of the philosophy of religion, one should note that its central topics (the existence and nature of God and the relationship of human beings to the divine Being) have been discussed since philosophy began. See also B. Davies (ed.), *Philosophy of Religion: A Guide and an Anthology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); W. L. Rowe and W. J. Wainwright (eds.), *Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings* (3rd edn. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[12] J. Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology* (orig. edn. 1966; London: SCM Press, 1977), 43–173.

[13] Ibid. 39–40; italics mine.

Forty years after Macquarrie brought out *Principles of Christian Theology*, Stephen Davis published *Christian Philosophical Theology*. Without using the term 'foundational theology'[14] or 'fundamental theology' (Ebeling, Fisichella, Joest, Latourelle, O'Collins, and many others), he set himself to produce 'a coherent statement and defence of certain central claims of the Christian world-view'. They include such basic claims as that God exists and 'reveals himself to human beings, and does so preeminently in his Son Jesus Christ'. Significantly, Davis, while recognizing that '"philosophical theology" is sometimes used as a synonym for "philosophy of religion"', states that he will use 'philosophical theology' 'to mean the kind of approach that a *believing* philosopher would make to Christian theological topics'.[15]

Like or even more than Macquarrie and Davis, I want to draw a clear distinction between philosophical *theology* and the philosophy of religion. The former, inasmuch as it is an exercise of theology, entails personally sharing in faith and seeking to understand it—just as fundamental (or foundational) *theology* does. Exponents of the philosophy of religion know *about* faith and theology, but do not necessarily share the vision of faith. In some sense philosophy of religion seems analogous to the philosophy of history and the philosophy of science. Those engaged in these latter disciplines know *about* the thought and practice of working historians and scientists, but need not be themselves professional historians and scientists.

Philosophical theology

A more sensitive task concerns the overlap and distinction between fundamental theology and philosophical theology (or what, in the

[14] Francis Schüssler Fiorenza used this term as a title for his *Foundational Theology: Jesus and the Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1984). Where some forms of traditional fundamental theology focused on three large issues (the existence of God, the divine identity of Christ, and the foundation/mission of the Church), Fiorenza attended to the second and third issues. He aimed to move beyond any search for unshakeable foundations ('foundationalism') and establish a 'reflective equilibrium' between 'hermeneutical reconstruction', 'retroductive warrants', and 'background theories'.

[15] S. T. Davis, *Christian Philosophical Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 1–2; italics mine.

subtitle to their *Analytic Theology*, Oliver Crisp and Michael Rea call 'the philosophy of theology')[16]. Even though the editors of and contributors to both *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology* and *Analytic Theology* never mention fundamental theologians, they also approach their task as believers and in the spirit of *credo ut intelligam* (I believe in order that I might understand), and they often deal with topics that belong to fundamental theology. The first part of *The Oxford Handbook* examines themes such as revelation, tradition, and the inspiration of the Scriptures that have long belonged to the agenda of fundamental theology. *Analytic Theology* likewise includes such mainstream topics of fundamental theology as faith (which responds to revelation) and biblical inspiration, as well as human experience, a theme which some fundamental theologians (e.g. Karl Rahner) have developed and to which we return in Chapter 3 below.

This overlap between the interests of philosophical theologians and fundamental theologians should have long ago led to a fruitful dialogue between the two groups. Through their *Analytic Theology*, Crisp and Rea aim at overcoming a current 'divide' that they correctly observe to exist: namely, the divide between many *systematic* theologians and those (already numerous) analytic philosophers who are fascinated by theological issues. One should welcome this invitation to a more widespread 'interdisciplinary conversation'.[17] But there is also a conversation that should be promoted between *philosophical* theologians and *fundamental* theologians. As we have just seen, the two groups share an interest in clarifying and expounding some central beliefs. Here it is not only philosophical theologians but also fundamental theologians who should be alerted to the need to recognize and interact with those 'other' scholars who also work on some of the major topics of their discipline. The *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, edited by René Latourelle and Rino Fisichella, included an entry on the 'Philosophy of Religion' by Salvatore Spera.[18] But neither Spera nor any other contributor to this major dictionary discussed philosophical theology as such or even seemed to be

[16] O. D. Crisp and M. C. Rea (eds.), *Analytic Theology: New Essays in the Philosophy of Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[17] Ibid. 2.

[18] *DFTh* 852–68.

aware of its continued existence and growing strength.[19] Fundamental theologians and philosophical theologians need to discover each other. They share much common ground and should be accepted and even welcome partners.

Along with the overlap between philosophical theology and fundamental theology, one should also observe some differences. The former discipline tends to be speculative and not empirical. The latter discipline often deals with questions of fact: for instance, the evidence for the life and activity of Jesus, as well as for his resurrection from the dead. Philosophical theology *also* takes up topics that do not belong to the agenda of fundamental theology. For example, philosophical theologians have recently dedicated much attention to the precise nature of divine omnipotence, to God's foreknowledge of what human beings will freely do, and to the relationship between the divine and human minds of Christ—topics that fundamental theologians do not treat. *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology* includes chapters on themes that likewise lie outside the scope of fundamental theology such as: morality and divine authority, the Trinity, original sin, atonement, and the Eucharist.

This contemporary work by philosophical theologians (or theological philosophers) illustrates splendidly the conviction of Karl Rahner, a conviction that goes back to Aquinas, Anselm of Canterbury (*c.* 1033–1109), and even to Justin Martyr (a second-century philosopher turned theologian and Christian apologist), that philosophy 'is an inner moment of theology'.[20] In recent times theologically minded philosophers have been drawn to some of the central beliefs studied by systematic or dogmatic theology. These philosophers have set themselves not only (a) to show how these beliefs are not logically incoherent and can be supported by various evidential considerations, but also (b) to

[19] In an essay 'How Philosophical Theology Became Possible within the Analytic Tradition of Philosophy', in Crisp and Rea (eds.), *Analytic Theology*, Nicholas Wolterstorff remarks: 'never since the Middle Ages has philosophical theology so flourished as it has during the past thirty years' (155–68, at 165).

[20] K. Rahner, 'Philosophy and Theology', *Theological Investigations*, vi, trans. K.-H. Kruger and B. Kruger (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1969), 71–81, at 80. Rahner anticipates here what the suggestive subtitle (*The Philosophy of Theology*) chosen by Crisp and Rea conveys: philosophy belongs to theological reflection and enjoys its proper place *within* theology.

explore intellectually, with due respect to the ineffable mystery of God, some aspects of these beliefs.

A spectacular example of (b) comes from the revival of interest in 'middle knowledge' (*scientia media*), a theory first developed by Luis de Molina (1535–1600) to reconcile authentic human freedom with the gifts of divine grace and God's foreknowledge of everything that will happen. He proposed that God knows and takes into account decisions that rational creatures would freely make in any situation in which they might be placed. Molina called it 'middle knowledge', because it is more than knowing mere possibilities but less than a vision of actual future events. Since the 1970s, Alvin Plantinga (b. 1932) and other analytic philosophers have revived interest in and stirred up fresh debate about Molina's theory.[21] It was through studying and teaching the doctrine of divine grace, a central theme for dogmatic or systematic theology, that Molina himself came to develop his (philosophical) views about God's foreknowledge.

Dogmatic/systematic theology

This last example brings us to dogmatic theology and systematic theology and the distinction to be drawn between them and fundamental theology. *Dogmatic* theology, often seen to be the chief branch of theology, draws on Scripture and tradition to examine and present coherently all the major doctrines of Christian faith. In that sense it comes across as a fully deployed expansion of the creeds confessed at worship. In modern times, it was Karl Barth (1886–1968) who stood out for his vast work in dogmatic theology: *The Church Dogmatics*. The first volume appeared in 1932, but this monumental treatment of Christian dogmas was still incomplete at his death.[22]

Since it also aims to present the main Christian doctrines in a coherent and scholarly fashion, *systematic* theology often coincides in practice with dogmatic theology. But it may differ by including a treatment of moral issues. It may also differ by paying more attention to methodology, the use of philosophical principles, and other such

[21] See e.g. T. P. Flint, *Divine Providence*: *The Molinist Account* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).

[22] K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 13 vols., trans. G. T. Thompson et al. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936–69).

fundamental issues as revelation and the human condition that shape the conditions for the possibility of receiving revelation. Paul Tillich included such fundamental issues in his *Systematic Theology*.[23]

Some years later Wolfhart Pannenberg published the three volumes of his *Systematic Theology* (German original 1988–93).[24] This outstanding work differs from normal systematic or dogmatic theology through its persistent appeal to critical rationality. Pannenberg does not want to distinguish between fundamental theology and systematic theology, as if 'the former has to confirm the credibility of the Christian revelation, the latter to unfold its content'. He finds this 'division of labour' unjustified, and asks: 'does not an unfolding of the content of Christian teaching inevitably involve the question of its truth and true significance?' 'Dogmatics' as systematic theology should 'also argue on behalf of the doctrinal content that it unfolds and confirm its truth'.[25]

Pannenberg, who has always defended theology's role in the general marketplace of human ideas, repeatedly argues for doctrines on philosophical and anthropological grounds as well as defending and expounding them as reasonable conclusions from 'historical facts' construed in revelatory terms. In his *Systematic Theology* and other writings, he has frequently tackled questions of fundamental theology (e.g. the nature of the human condition, the historical character of God's self-revelation, and the truth of Christ's resurrection). The tone and manner of Pannenberg's arguments often align him with fundamental theologians and apologists, who are bent on showing that Christian faith and its basic beliefs are publicly reasonable and credible. Thus, at times the way in which Pannenberg, like Tillich, has done his systematic theology illustrates an overlap with fundamental theology.

Natural theology

One should complete this 'mapping' exercise by introducing a further term, *natural theology*. In passing, Wainwright uses it synonymously

[23] P. Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1951–63).

[24] W. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, trans. G. W. Bromiley, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1991–8).

[25] Ibid. i. 20; see further 48–61.

with the philosophy of religion.[26] But can it be simply understood that way?

As contrasted with 'revealed theology' (which accepts and examines the witness to revelation that warrants such beliefs as those in the Trinity and the incarnation), natural theology deals with the knowledge of God's existence and nature available through the light of human reason. Reflecting on human beings (and, in particular, their higher faculties of intellect and will) and on the whole created universe in its beauty and order, those who practise natural theology aim to establish truths about the being of God and about human beings in their relationship to God. In doing this, they appeal to ordinary 'sources' (the generally available data of the world) and employ ordinary 'means' (the power of the human intellect).

Encouraged by such biblical passages as Wisdom 13: 1–9, Romans 1: 18–23, and Psalm 19: 1 ('the heavens declare the glory of God; the heavens proclaim the work of God's hands'), Christian thinkers elaborated natural theology long before the term itself came into wide use. Thus Thomas Aquinas held that some truths about God could be established on the basis of unaided reason. Following Francis Bacon and his *Advancement of Learning* (1603), exponents of natural theology, especially in England, developed the 'two books' tradition: the book of God's word (the Bible) and the book of God's works. They understood the Scriptures and nature to be distinct but complementary sources for our knowledge of God.

From the time of the Enlightenment, when the validity of traditional arguments for God's existence came under fire, non-believers challenged natural theology. Much later, Karl Barth and some other Christian theologians, retrieving positions developed by Protestant Reformers in the sixteenth century, vigorously excluded any kind of natural theology, arguing that sin had made unaided human reason simply incapable of knowing God. Mostly natural theology has been practised by such Christian believers as William Paley (1743–1805), who shaped natural theology in the English-speaking world. Even if they set to one side what they knew through revelation, nevertheless, they raised questions about God only because they were already familiar with the answers. Apropos of the human relationship to

[26] Wainwright (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion*, 4.

God, an approach shaped by 'purely natural' theology presents an abstract, philosophical view of humanity—quite different from the concrete view of sinful humanity found in the biblical history of salvation and the theologies that draw on that history.

In his *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, Alister McGrath dedicates some pages to the scope and limits of natural theology.[27] Arguing that only Christians have the 'right' way of seeing nature, he subsequently published *The Open Secret: A New Vision for Natural Theology*.[28] His Gifford Lectures for 2009[29] took up the origins of life, the 'directionality of evolution', and an updated form of 'natural theology'. For his 2009–10 Hulsean Lectures at the University of Cambridge, he chose the general theme of 'Darwinism and the Divine Evolutionary Thought and Natural Theology', and dedicated his sixth and final lecture to 'Darwinism and the Future of Natural Theology'.

While McGrath and others[30] continue to endorse the practice of natural theology, it remains, like the philosophy of religion, distinct from fundamental theology. The latter does not set faith aside (as natural theology, despite being called natural *theology*, has normally been understood to do), but remains an exercise of 'faith seeking understanding' (in the spirit of Anselm, Aquinas, Barth, and many others).[31] Moreover, as we shall see in a moment, fundamental theology takes up a much wider agenda than simply truths about God, the world, and the human condition that may be available through the 'natural' powers of thought.

[27] (4th edn. Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 159–70.

[28] Oxford: Blackwell, 2008.

[29] A. McGrath, *A Fine-Tuned Universe: The Quest for God in Science and Theology* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2009); see also N. Ormerod, 'Charles Taylor and Bernard Lonergan on Natural Theology', *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 74 (2009), 419–33; A. Padgett, '"Theologia Naturalis"; Philosophy of Religion or Doctrine of Creation?', *Faith and Philosophy*, 21 (2004), 493–502; Pannenberg, 'Natural Theology', in *Systematic Theology*, i. 73–118.

[30] Michael Sudduth has much to say about natural theology in 'The Contribution of Religious Experience to Dogmatic Theology', in Crisp and Rea (eds.), *Analytic Theology*, 214–32; Sandra Menssen and Thomas D. Sullivan push the claims of natural theology in *The Agnostic Inquirer: Revelation from a Philosophical Standpoint* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2007), 22–30, 44–61.

[31] In the expression 'natural theology', the term 'theo-logy' usually means 'thinking/talking about God', and this 'neutral' stance brings it close to the philosophy of religion.

My main misgiving about natural theology is that the term could readily suggest that drawing conclusions about the existence and nature of God from the created universe is a merely natural exercise of unaided human reason. Beyond question, the active presence of the risen Christ and his Holy Spirit need not be consciously felt, but in a wide variety of ways this presence *is extended to everyone.*[32] Right from the beginning, God has freely called all men and women to the supernatural destiny of eternal life; that call affects every human act, including the activity of reflecting on the knowledge of God available through created reality. In that sense, while they may not be aware of this, those who practise 'natural theology' are always engaged with 'supernatural theology'.

Themes for fundamental theology

As its name suggests, fundamental theology studies foundational or basic issues. These have frequently included: (1) the revelation of God in the history of Israel and Jesus Christ; (2) the conditions that open human beings (in particular, their experience in its deepest aspects) to accepting in faith the self-communication of God; (3) the testimony that puts us into contact with the ministry, death, and resurrection of Christ and that makes faith in and through him a credible option; (4) the transmission (through tradition and the inspired Scriptures) of the experience of God's self-communication; (5) the founding and mission of the Christian Church; (6) questions about theological knowledge and methods, including issues arising from the interpretation of texts. Some exponents of fundamental theology have also (7) rightly attended to world religions, their claims, the reasonable credentials that commend them to their followers, and the impact on them of the risen Christ and his Holy Spirit.

Obviously issue (1) presupposes some (limited) knowledge of God. Otherwise how could anyone have reacted to certain events by accepting in faith that it was God who had spoken and acted—for instance, through the Old Testament prophets and pre-eminently through Jesus Christ? Traditionally, however, theological reflection

[32] See G. O'Collins, *Salvation for All: God's Other Peoples* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 206–29.

on God preceded fundamental theology and was dealt with under the rubric of the 'preambles of faith'.[33] But was this satisfactory?

Reading *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology* has raised for me some questions about expanding further the programme for fundamental theology: does some study of the divine existence and attributes and of God's activity in creation belong to the curriculum of fundamental theology? Before reflecting on the historical revelation of God, should those who engage in fundamental theology take up such questions as: how might the eternal God be revealed in time? What might one say in reply to those for whom the existence of horrendous evil rules out the very existence of God?

Such reflections on 'God-questions' could well follow the lead of the *Oxford Handbook* and also pay some attention to the science and religion debate that Richard Dawkins and other contemporary atheists have kept vigorously alive. Chapters by Del Ratzsch ('Science and Religion') and Robin Collins ('Divine Action and Evolution') offer guidelines for a contemporary programme of fundamental theology.[34] In short, practitioners of philosophical theology might be pleased to find one valuable consequence of their discipline being heard and appropriated by fundamental theologians: the question of God should take its place on the agenda for fundamental theology.

This chapter has sorted out differences between fundamental theology and five related disciplines (apologetics, philosophy of religion, philosophical theology, dogmatic/systematic theology, and natural theology). It has also listed eight major themes that should find their place on programmes for fundamental theology. We move now to questions about God, the first major theme for fundamental theologians.

A coda: the contribution of Bernard Lonergan

In sorting out the distinctive character of fundamental theology and the themes that shape or should shape its proper identity, one should

[33] See J. P. Whalen and T. Horvath, 'Preambles of Faith', in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, xi (2nd edn. Farmington Hills, Mich.: Gale, 2003), 635–6.

[34] Flint and Rea (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*, 54–77, 241–61, respectively.

also recall the contribution of Bernard Lonergan (1904–84). Rightly dissatisfied with the 'old [nineteenth-century] fundamental theology', he developed what he called a 'fifth functional specialty, foundations', which followed four other specialities (research, interpretation, history, and dialectic). Instead of reflecting on a set of doctrines, Lonergan's 'foundations' present 'the horizon within which the meaning of doctrines' can be apprehended. His foundations promise to elucidate 'conflicts revealed' in 'dialectic' and provide a principle to 'guide the remaining specialties', concerned, respectively, with doctrines, systematics, and communications.[35] When dealing with theological styles and methods, the final chapter of my book will appropriate some of Lonergan's thought on historical consciousness and conversion.

[35] B. J. F. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (orig. edn. 1972; Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1979), 131–2; see further on 'foundations', 267–93. For what Lonergan understands by 'horizons' and 'dialectic', see ibid. 235–7 ('horizons') and 235–66 ('dialectic').