STATUS QUAESTIONIS

A FUNDAMENTAL THEOLOGY FOR DOCTRINE: SCIENCE AND HISTORY

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Abstract: The categories that fundamental theology treats as key for the meaning of doctrine are largely historical. A fundamental theology that begins from the standpoint of the scientific enterprise of understanding nature is therefore orthogonal to the gospel and its doctrinal explication, although not contrary to it. In response to the work of G. Tanzella-Nitti, this paper evaluates theologians (McGrath, Lonergan, Rahner, Ratzinger), whose work has operated by deploying categories that treat *both* nature and history. Fundamental theology may be both a natural theology and a theology of historical meaning, but two things are required. First, it needs a better distinction between general and special categories without separating philosophy from theology. Second, recognizing a post-positivist turn in the philosophy of science, Christian wisdom uncovers the anthropological nexus between scientific and historical aspects of natural theology, as most clearly indicated in Ratzinger's theology.

Keywords: Fundamental Theology, Giuseppe Tanzella-Nitti, Karl Rahner, Bernard Lonergan, Alister McGrath, Joseph Ratzinger, Science and Theology, Natural Theology, History, Hermeneutic, Catholic Theology.

Riassunto: Le categorie che la teologia fondamentale considera come essenziali per il significato della dottrina sono in gran parte storiche. Una teologia fondamentale che parte dal punto di vista dell'impresa scientifica di comprensione della natura è quindi ortogonale al Vangelo e alla sua esplicitazione dottrinale, anche se non contraria ad esso. In risposta al lavoro di G. Tanzella-Nitti, questo articolo valuta i teologi (McGrath, Lonergan, Rahner, Ratzinger) il cui lavoro ha impiegato categorie che trattano sia la natura che la storia. La teologia fondamentale può essere sia una teologia naturale che una teologia del significato storico, ma sono necessarie due cose. In primo luogo, è necessaria una migliore distinzione tra categorie generali e speciali, senza separare la filosofia dalla teologia. In secondo luogo, riconoscendo una svolta post-positivista nella filosofia della scienza, la sapienza cristiana scopre il nesso antropologico tra gli aspetti scientifici e storici della teologia naturale, come indicato più chiaramente nella teologia di Ratzinger.

Parole chiave: Teologia fondamentale, Giuseppe Tanzella-Nitti, Karl Rahner, Bernard Lonergan, Alister McGrath, Joseph Ratzinger, Scienza e teologia, Teologia naturale, Storia, Ermeneutica, Teologia cattolica.

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SUMMARY: I. *Survey of Fundamental Theology in a Scientific Context.* II. *Patristic Foundations: Irenaeus.* III. *Karl Rahner's Fundamental Theology.* IV. *Bernard Lonergan, Consciousness and Fundamental Theology.* V. *Joseph Ratzinger and the* Logos. VI. *Conclusion.*

Fundamental theology is the genre of theology that supports but does not supplant the biblical sources and the doctrinal tradition of the Catholic faith. It is often associated with systematic theology or it is seen to be equivalent to systematic theology. More plausibly however, it is equated with the prolegomena or foreword to theology. It is a genre of theology that addresses assumptions, frameworks and categories into which the other fields of theology are somehow mapped. The metaphor of a map for theological fields is apt because the map and its demarcated territories has been utilized as a way of configuring both the scope of a discipline and the relationship between theology and the natural sciences over time. In a well known work on the 'territories' of science and religion, Peter Harrison claims:

> So familiar are the concepts "science" and "religion," and so central to Western culture have been the activities and achievements that are usually labeled "religious" and "scientific," that it is natural to assume that they have been enduring features of the cultural landscape of the West.[1]

Something identical is true for the various fields within Christian theology. Fundamental theology is in some sense a historically recent emerging field yet its role and its scope has been a part of theology for millennia. Of all the genres of contemporary theological discourse, fundamental theology possesses the most interdisciplinary significance, as Tanzella-Nitti has shown.[2] Not only does fundamental theology serve

[1] P. HARRISON, *The Territories of Science and Religion*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2015, 3.

[2] See especially the four volume work by Tanzella-Nitti that is published in Italian as *Teologia della Credibilità vol. 1: La Teologia fondamentale e la sua dimensione di apologia* (2015); *Teologia della Credibilità vol. 2: La credibilità del cristianesimo* (2015); *Teologia fondamentale in contesto scientifico - Teologia della Rivelazione vol. 3: Religione e Rivelazione* (2018) and *Teologia fondamentale in contesto scientifico - Teologia della Rivelazione: vol. 4: Fede, Tradizione, Religioni* (2022). This article refers to the English language compilation of the material covered in these four volumes that appeared in 2022 as *Scientific Perspectives in Fundamental Theology: Understanding Christian Faith in the Age of Scientific Reason* (Claremont Press). Cfr. G. TANZELLA-NITTI, *La dimensione apologetica della Teologia fondamentale. Una riflessione sul ruolo dei "praeambula fidei"*, «Annales Theologici» 21 (2007) 11-60.

as a bridge to other disciplines, especially philosophy, it has done so in different ways over time. Here is where the map metaphor serves us well. In the fairly recent past, Catholic fundamental theology was comprised of a set of manuals in a tradition that took the corpus of Thomas Aquinas and recapitulated it in a conceptual schema in keeping with a deductive inference bound scholasticism. Fundamental theology in this neo-Thomist key was epistemically bound to a deductive and explicitly Aristotelian type of logical framework and also Cartesian deduction. Despite being epistemically framed within a Leonine, anti-modernist framework, the neo-scholastic theology of that era shares a family resemblance with various forms of fundamental theology, Christian philosophy and apologetics. These forms of theological discourse both preceded neo-scholasticism and followed it.[3] Thus, the term 'fundamental theology' has developed different meanings historically since it has overlapped with apologetics, natural theology and dogmatic theology at different points. Each of these kinds of theological discourse has occupied ground mapped by fundamental theology, analogous to the way that science, natural history and natural philosophy have shifted over time with respect to the understanding of the natural world.

This article surveys some key themes and figures in modern fundamental theology to see to what extent the field itself is capable of absorbing the findings of science and the reflections on nature that arise in 21st century interdisciplinary contexts. The options are complex, because as we shall see, much of the past century's preoccupations in Catholic fundamental theology have been historical in nature. *That is, in modernity, until recently, Catholic fundamental theology has been retreating away from nature toward history*. But, the work of Fr. Giuseppe Tanzilla-Nitti indicates how this retreat from nature may now be halted and reversed because a post-positivist paradigm is now a common starting point in the philosophy of science. As I will show, the Logos theology of Joseph Ratzinger is best situated to provide the kind of required scope and the work of Giuseppe Tanzella-Nitti shows how theology may proceed.

[3] For a narrative on how fundamental theology was framed in the formative years prior to and during the Leonine retrieval of Thomas Aquinas, see G. McCool, *From Unity to Pluralism: The Internal Evolution of Thomism*, Fordham University Press, New York 1992.

These contributions build on some of the necessary building blocks put in place by theologians like Alister McGrath, Bernard Lonergan and Karl Rahner. In short, as Tanzella-Nitti demonstrates, there is an opportunity for fundamental theology to become re-directed toward nature, in keeping with some of the important indicators from key theological figures of recent theological memory. This paper relates how a turn to nature has occurred within Christian theology in recent decades in the work of key scholars. This turn to nature is not arbitrary when it is supported and accounted for in fundamental terms, which is precisely the thrust of Tanzella-Nitti's contribution. On the contrary, a return to nature only underscores the centrality of the doctrine of creation and some of the most important categories of theological thinking. What is more, as we shall see in the conclusion, a return to natural categories has positive implications for how we think about history and historical categories. This is bound to be the case given that the world of God's creation is a single world.

We begin with the observation that the scientific enterprise of understanding nature is orthogonal to the gospel and its doctrinal explication, although not contrary to it. By 'orthogonal', I mean that fundamental theology deploys a series of reflections that are distinct, in contrast to the personal, directly spiritual, metaphor laden and dramatic character of the stories told about Jesus Christ and the disciples in the Bible. In response to the work of G. Tanzella-Nitti, this paper evaluates several theologians (McGrath, Lonergan, Rahner, Benedict XVI), whose work has operated in light of the categories that treat *both* nature and history. This is a key feature that appears in each of these theologians. McGrath is the outlier in this group since he is not a Catholic. Yet, he has been a prolific thinker leading the dialogue between science and Christian theology. As we shall see, in each thinker, there are clues over how the fusion of nature and history in a single fundamental metaphysical account might be rendered. What this survey also hopes to show is that a Christian fundamental theology of nature will always be insufficient and even incoherent unless the categories that are used to interpret nature are also pertinent to an understanding of human history as well. In a sense, this fundamental theology is a late and important response to the challenge issued by Marx and Engels in the nineteenth century, who proposed a decisive, influential program of (evolutionary) dialectics against metaphysics.

I. Survey of Fundamental Theology in a Scientific Context

The reference points of nature and history vie for attention in the modern period in a way that is new in contrast to pre-modern theology. Historical mindedness grew in the wake of the Enlightenment and centered around a paramount set of insights that emerged in response to the Hegelian and Marxian challenges to the Christian church. Especially challenging for reasons related to Christian thought was the rise of historical critical methods of biblical analysis. The impact of historical critical textual analyses is an indirect yet crucial factor in assessing the trajectory of modern fundamental theology. Historically, Catholic theologians interpreted the category of nature from the tradition's appropriation of Greek philosophy via terms such as *ousia* and *hypostasis*. Natural categories are closely intertwined with Christian doctrine since its inception. History as a category of change and development was incorporated only slowly and with grave misgivings over whether traditional theologies of revelation could withstand the scrutiny of modern thinkers who based their expertise not on the basis of classical letters but on a combined realisation of cultural pluralism, historical contingency, textual comparisons, Darwinian theory and theories of a very old universe. Thus, history and nature together became twin threats to the Catholic theological paradigm as part of a large bundle of emergent cultural beliefs. However, Saint John Henry Newman observed that "this one thing at least is certain; whatever history teaches, whatever it omits, whatever it exaggerates or extenuates, whatever it says and unsays, at least the Christianity of history is not Protestantism… one who is steeped in history has ceased to be Protestant."[4] This is an ironic claim in light of the fact that church history is set against a broad canvas of human history, the terms of which were changing in ways contrary to a traditional Christian understanding by the nineteenth century. Fundamental theology arose in part because of the need to formulate a way of thinking about Christian faith without reliance upon newly vulnerable doctrinal claims. The point here is that a Catholic fundamental theology of nature cannot be separated from the struggles with historical

[4] J.H. Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, Longman, Green and Co., London 1890, 7-8.

inquiries that helped give rise to the discipline of fundamental theology in the first place.

Fundamental theology is best understood according to three basic types. First, there is a traditional form of apologetics that has a long lineage in the Catholic tradition. Fundamental theology in this vein is ahistorical. Second, a fundamental theology has been conceived in the modern period, as I've just mentioned, is a form of theology that acknowledges and frames historical development in theology in order to expand the scope of doctrinal claims. It seeks to expand on the categories that are adequate to historical change in doctrinal formulae. Third, in line with the indications given by G. Tanzella-Nitti, a new possibility has emerged in recent decades.[5] Tanzella-Nitti also makes an essential point about Aristotle and the recovery of a full philosophical interpretation of the natural world:

> [Aristotle's] doctrine of causation, the notion of formal causality, the composition of reality in terms of potency and act, matter and form, as well as his deep philosophy of being, are all topics that still provide a useful philosophical insight into natural phenomena.[6]

So, while it is nature that is being recovered materially for a fundamental theology, formally, it is philosophy that is the key to this recovery. While Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas are central, they are not exclusive sources, since, as Tanzella-Nitti claims, theologically oriented scholars must "broaden their philosophical sources and admit different philosophical methods" into their thinking, which fits with the breadth of phenomena that need to be accounted for in metaphysical categories.[7]

The genre of fundamental theology that upholds the enduring role for metaphysics and the urgency of interpreting nature is evident among the theologians I am examining in this inquiry. This theological

[5] See especially G. Tanzella-Nitti, *Dialogue Between Theology and Science: Present Challenges and Future Perspectives*, «Religions» 15 (2024) 1304 1-22 and G. Tanzella-Nitti, *The Role of Theology in a University Curriculum*, «Church, Communication and Culture» 9 (2024) 361-380.

[6] Tanzella-Nitti, *Dialogue Between Theology and Science*, 8. On the issue of formal causality, see G. Tanzella-Nitti, *The Aristotelian-Thomistic Concept of Nature and the Contemporary Scientific Debate on the Meaning of Natural Laws*, «Acta Philosophica» 6 (1997) 237-64.

[7] *Ibidem*, 9.

genre does justice to both the metaphysics of nature on the one hand and the theology of history on the other hand. This nascent theological discourse is capacious about the standard metaphysical prolegomena of the theological tradition while aware of the modern and postmodern focus on the existential and transcendental contexts for doctrine and church tradition.

The emergence of this third way of thinking about fundamental theology in the Catholic tradition is something that might surprise theologians who were writing only a few decades ago. In 1969, the hermeneutical theologian Claude Geffré wrote:

> The most common definitions [of fundamental theology] today betray a definite uncertainty about the epistemology of a discipline which wants to fulfill at the same time the function of the old apologetics—i.e., that of providing a rational justification of the Christian faith—and exercise the critical function inherent in all science—i.e., that of explaining the basis and method of the science of theology.[8]

Thus, there is definite perceived tension that is built in to fundamental theology by virtue of the early modern turn to critical history and critical methods of textual analysis. Of course, much depends on the way that such a depiction of apologetics, justification and the 'critical function' mean for Geffré. But this portrayal of the problem certainly resonates with the general situation of fundamental theology, at least in the years after the Council.

The positive resonance evident in the reference to "science of theology" is understood in terms of what Geffré sees as its 'critical function'. Yet it is a reminder of the structuring principle that was offered by St. Thomas Aquinas. For Aquinas, a science is an organized discipline of study in a particular area, whether it is investigated through public reason or thanks to divine revelation, as with theology. In contrast to the other disciplines that rely upon logic and experience in a particular domain, theology is known as sacred doctrine and derived from divine revelation. Of course, the tension that is introduced by this different source of intellectual inquiry means that theology's starting point is complex. That is, theology is both dependent upon actions of God

[8] C. Geffré, *Recent Developments in Fundamental Theology: An Interpretation*, in J.B. Metz (ed.), *The Development of Fundamental Theology*, *Concilium* 46, Paulist Press, New York 1969, 5.

that are interpreted as a form of unveiling while at the same time, theology is made up of publicly available tools and methods of inquiry that overlap greatly with those used in other disciplines, especially philosophy. It is precisely the difference between theology and philosophy that is the first issue that Thomas Aquinas deals with in the first article of the *Summa theologiae*. That opening distinction allows for theology (sacred doctrine as Aquinas calls it) to exist as a discipline. The rendering of this basic distinction between philosophy and theology is not necessarily a matter of apologetics, although it can be construed as such. Regardless of the extent to which the polarisation that Geffré depicts between apologetics as a discourse of justification and theology as a critical science is true, the tension that he describes has been evident for fifty years in Catholic thought. Each of the theologians profiled in this summary of fundamental theology sees a way to heal the divide between these two basic ways of thinking. In that sense, they give witness to the significance of what Tanzella-Nitti undertakes in his interpretation of science in fundamental theology.

Extending from Boethius' form of theistic philosophy through the Leonine appropriation of Thomas Aquinas, Catholic apologetics has frequently relied upon syllogism, scholastic and logical forms of inference to the best explanation for the world and its orderly structure in order speak about God. Theological apologetics utilizes various interpretations of nature, such as the natural law or design arguments that see nature as precisely fine-tuned to constitute evidence for a creator. In fact Tanzella Nitti's own contribution explores this aspect of the apologetical dimension, for example in his discussion of Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence (ETI).[9] The ongoing aim of much theological apologetics is the goal of credibility. In that sense, contrary to how Karl Barth conceives of theology, apologetics is a publicly facing type of discourse. But, as we shall see, fundamental theology, insofar as it projects an apologetical aim, does not necessarily reject anti-modernist claims. It does not dismiss as ignorant the subjective dimension of Christian theology as some of this first type of apologetics has done. This approach is similar to that of the philosophers of science who follow the critical realist school. On critical realism, as with this apologetics, science is carried out with

[9] See Tanzella Nitti, *Scientific Perspectives on Fundamental Theology*, 299-319.

attention to both the objects of science while attending to the historical and subjective features of inquiry that affect the insights and judgments that scientists formulate. Alister McGrath has given increased attention to this matter in his writings over the years.

But, there is another form of fundamental theology that has arisen in Catholic modernity that attempts to show how revelation is credible as God's initiating message for humanity. This second way of thinking about fundamental theology is what Geffré alludes to in his reference to a critical discourse. On this way of formulating the theological task, a theology of revelation actually reacts against the earlier, apologetical contours of the first form of fundamental theology by utilizing the insights of spiritual theology in particular to stress the invitational character of God's grace. It also takes historical development as its central concern. As we shall see in the writings of Rahner, Lonergan and Ratzinger, there is ample reason to now suppose that this earlier distinction between apologetics and critical theology was not only interpreted as a rupture between two different styles of doing theology but also as a distinction without an enduring relevance. Most post-conciliar Catholic theology became characterised as optimistic about the world. However, ironically, the lack of attention to metaphysics and other matters pertaining to nature that were previously covered by apologetics rendered this new form of fundamental theology smaller and therefore more parochial as the questions of science, geopolitical turmoil and technological dystopia loom ever larger. This second kind of fundamental theology, for all its vigour in regards to the historical particulars of specific categories of persons, political struggle and the social relevance of gospel texts, is prone to historical myopia. The intra-Catholic tension between the largely Thomistic form of apologetics and the historicist revisionists has given way, as I have mentioned, to hybrid forms of emerging fundamental theology. There are parallels in the Protestant world and within the science-theology dialogue itself. Helpfully, each of these worlds overlap.

One can see evidence of this third way in forging a new kind of fundamental theology in a recent volume that correlates nicely with the themes I am touching on here. Carmody Grey's book *Theology, Science and Life* takes the work of John Milbank and interprets it in light of the philosophy and theology of biology. In that work she notes in regards

to Milbank's thought that "the basic impetus is non-violent: theology's story is the story which has room for all stories. Theology's own 'difference', which is its 'mastery', is the difference of peace, which it effortfully narrates here below, always with varied consistency and success."[10] Milbank's argument for theology's regnant role in the range of disciplines represents an effort in the Anglo-Catholic and Protestant world (Milbank is in the Church of England, which straddles different currents in church polity and tradition) to re-establish theology's authority vis à vis the social sciences. Grey is sympathetic to the effort for such re-establishment to occur as an interpretation of the created order itself, although she does not want to repeat the historic, imperialistic errors of dominant Christendom.

Grey's reference to the category of narrative and to Milbank's own preference for the poesis of Christian peace are signs that a largely historical, phenomenological and even romantic frame of reference still predominates in the literature on theological method. If this is fundamental theology of a kind, the categories are largely taken from within a historical framework, but in a way that opposes the earlier, simpler 'critical discourse' approach. Grey's position is explicitly situated as an interpretation of nature. In order for a broader theology to emerge, she relies on Michael Hanby's recent work. Hanby is a Catholic scholar whose own foray into the exchange with the natural sciences also begins from a Milbankian perspective. Hanby concurs with Milbank's opposition to the 'fantasy' of a self-grounding reason. For both thinkers, the practice of science and natural reason itself is implicitly theological by virtue of its own orientation to the understanding of the order of the world. Hanby, writing as a Catholic, is not content to reinscribe theological mastery in this manner because he also sees, as Milbank does not, that there is a proper autonomy to scientific inquiry, evident in the act of making distinctions and abstractions. However, this autonomy to science is granted by God, as is

[10] C. Grey, *Theology, Science and Life*, Bloomsbury, London 2023, 86. The book to which Grey is largely responding and which touched off debates that are still ongoing decades later is: J. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd ed., Blackwell Pub., Oxford 2006.

recognized by theology.[11] The difference between Milbank and Hanby is described by Grey as follows:

> In contrast to Milbank's articulation of theology's mastery of the disciplines, however, which takes as its goal the liberation of theology from its modern captivity, Hanby's account takes as its chief concern the *conflation* of science and theology which results in science posing as theology, as in the work of the New Atheists, or theology posing as science, as in creationism, both of which are among Hanby's targets.[12]

She continues,

> Where, for Hanby, the distinction between God and world established by the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* grounds the difference between theology and the sciences, Milbank's metaphysics of participation questions a too-definite distinction of God from world: the world is the mediation of God for us, and God is not for us 'an other' to the world.[13]

To avoid conflation, Hanby demarcates a semi-autonomous epistemic stance for the sciences, on the proviso of *creatio ex nihilo*. Thus, for Hanby, "the claims of evolutionary biology are neither here nor there from a theological point of view."[14] Hanby's viewpoint expresses a form of confidence about universal reason, as Grey elaborates in her analysis. Reading such accounts of science in the light of considering the historiographical problem of theology leads us straight to the question of fundamental theology and the degree of humility and confidence that it expresses. Hanby and Milbank, and to a great extent Grey herself, are preoccupied by questions of the status of theology in modernity. The character of theology is deeply contested of course within Catholic tradition, with increased tensions within the guild of Catholic theology fully evident. As I will show, each of Rahner, Lonergan and Ratzinger have solutions to the problem of how to address science from the perspective of fundamental theology that goes beyond questions of historiography. What each of these thinkers shares is a commitment to universal reason, in contrast to Milbank but consistent with Hanby. The point here is that a post-Christendom humility mixes with a boldness

[11] M. Hanby, *No God, No Science: Theology, Cosmology, Biology*, Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford 2013.

[12] Grey, *Theology, Science and Life*, 122.

[13] *Ibidem*, 131.

[14] *Ibidem*.

about the regnant authority of Christian theology, a discourse about the peace that God brings.

Grey herself offers something of a fundamental theological key in her proposal, which is centered on the notion of life. Grey's view, which interprets and departs from the thought of the philosopher of biology Hans Jonas, is Christian vitalism. The details of her metaphysical account notwithstanding, the mode of her proposal is at the level of fundamental theology and this is significant because of how she arrives at the place where fundamental theology has been preoccupied over the centuries: how to understand nature as a prelude, a pretext and a mode of speaking about God. She writes: "In Jonas's recognition that life generates value, that it necessitates a notion of the good, is articulated the pervasiveness of the moral. This is the Christian truth of the involvement of all nature in the drama of salvation: there is no non-moral nature, no nature to which notions of 'good' and 'evil' do not in some way apply."[15] Grey expresses the point that was recognised by C.S. Lewis some time ago, which is the idea that our very ideas of goodness and evil are laden with theological meaning because there is no way for these moral notions to make sense without a theological measure of their meaning. For Grey, something of the same insight is available to us from within the seemingly autonomous realm of biology. Where categories such as life are enormously helpful is in identifying the commonalities between the earthly and the heavenly. Grey's proposal is couched in accessible language, such as the 'reverence for life' and 'solidarity of life'. It builds on much of the new ecological consciousness that is taking shape in contemporary culture. Before we come to distill further elements of a fundamental theology that depart from or take account of nature and science, I think it would be advisable to navigate one historical detour, the contribution of Irenaeus, in order to provide a more adequate context for contemporary fundamental theology.

But first, another, very prominent writer in the science-theology dialogue who has written on all the issues that border fundamental theology is Alister McGrath. In fact, of all the writers in English, McGrath's name is perhaps the most well known, especially given the prolific output throughout his career, notably at the University of Oxford as the

[15] *Ibidem*, 231.

Idreos Professor of Science and Religion at Oxford from 2014 – 2022. McGrath's engagement with science and nature, as concepts worthy of theological examination, is probably the most extensive among contemporary theological scholarship. However, in contrast with Catholic thinkers, his choice of genre is natural theology not fundamental theology. Nevertheless, given the wide appeal of McGrath's work and his insights into the conceptual nuances of philosophically freighted issues in theology, an appraisal of his work is an important benchmark in understanding the situation of the fundamental theology of nature.

McGrath's interpretation of natural theology is made with respect to its historically problematic status in Christian thought. In the eighteenth century, Isaac Newton's earlier celebrated view of the natural world as the demonstration for the wisdom of God's providence gave way to Hume's critique of that and other forms of natural religion. McGrath is aware that natural theology faces a number of contentious objections such as Hume's charge that natural theology ignores instances of natural evil or that Darwin's theory of evolution contradicts William Paley's argument for the creation of the world based on the mechanical analogy of a watch to its watchmaker.[16]

However, despite the drawbacks to natural theology, McGrath sees fresh potential for a contemporary natural theology in the light of three phenomena that share the characteristic of being anti-reductionistic in philosophical terms. McGrath cites the re-emergence of teleology in biology, cosmic fine tuning in physics and the insight that human beings appear to be naturally religious according to researchers in the area of the cognitive science of religion.[17] One of the clear implications of McGrath's prognosis of natural theology is the fact that it is conceived largely in terms of identifying evidence that supports Christian belief. As such, it is oriented to particular *doctrines*. In the case of the three criteria just mentioned, the doctrines of creation and of the *imago dei* are the relevant touchstones. Does natural theology displace fundamental theology, given that natural theology's apologetical thrust is seemingly

[16] A. McGrath, *Natural Theology*, in B.N. Wolfe *et al.* (eds.), *St. Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology*, University of St. Andrews 2022 (Article published August 10, 2022: *https://www.saet.ac.uk/Christianity/NaturalTheology*).

[17] *Ibidem*, sec. 11.

so central? Not necessarily, since, with McGrath, there is more than natural theology that is foreseen as adequate.

Moreover, in several of his monographs, McGrath has also laid out the terms and conditions of what he calls, following the example of Thomas Torrance, 'scientific theology'. Counter to the expectations of what this expression entails for some, McGrath constructs a notion of scientific theology that is non-foundationalist. That is, following the procedures followed in the natural sciences themselves, Christian theology cannot dictate in *a priori* fashion what needs to be known. For McGrath, in scientific theology, "knowledge is *a posteriori*, and conditioned by the specific nature of the scientific discipline and its object."[18] McGrath's theology is constructed in large part against a foil, which is the Enlightenment version of natural theology, specifically, versions of 'physico-theology' that were especially prominent in Great Britain during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This natural theology embodied what, for McGrath, is the christologically deficient philosophical tradition of Descartes and other rationalists. This tradition offered a conceptually predetermined view of what could be known about God rather than a view determined by what God does reveal. Therefore, what is crucial for the kind of scientific theology McGrath advocates is a prominence for divine revelation. But this is not a stance that he indicates independent of an alliance with the natural sciences. On his view, the theological alignment with science should be cognizant of science's own openness to phenomenological examination. For the philosopher Edmund Husserl, McGrath notes, science is interested in the given realities to which the mind is naturally open. Science works, moreover, when it is not "inhibited by preconceived epistemology" such as was arguably the case with the Aristotelian influence on natural philosophy in the medieval and early modern period.[19]

The same is true in theology. And in this regard, McGrath evinces an anti-metaphysical influence that is present across the Protestant theological world, namely that of Karl Barth. For McGrath, the point of scientific theology is that Christian thought should be shaped according to the unique realities arising from the object of its inquiry, the

[18] A. McGrath, *A Scientific Theology; Volume 2 Reality*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 2002, 288.

[19] *Ibidem*, 272.

person of Jesus Christ. Inspired by Thomas Torrance and St. Athanasius, a scientific theology is 'kataphysical'. We know something really only according to what *it* is.[20] Furthermore, in a nod to the unique significance of analogical language in theology, our terms are stretched beyond their natural sense when we turn to refer to God. This view is different from the views that we will explore later in the fundamental theology of Rahner and Lonergan, for whom there are categories that in some sense anticipate or contain what we understand in doctrine.

But, there are yet other component parts to McGrath's scientific theology that bear mentioning for their important role in shaping its meaning. One of these elements is the epistemological claim of critical realism. This is coherent with the sense of object-driven science that McGrath describes. Critical realism claims that there is a contextual uniqueness to the process of knowing that does not prevent affirmations of entities in the world from becoming shared understandings across different domains. When theories about those entities are verified by practitioners of the discipline, often working in networks or groups, progress in science occurs. For McGrath, the *loci theologici* of critical realism are the theological theories that purport to explain the reality of God, that is, doctrines. Doctrines lay out the explanandum on the understanding that there can be theoretical constructs that allow such explanations to be constantly subject to revision and adaptation to other realities.

For McGrath, the structure and history of doctrinal claims yields a middle ground between foundationalism and anti-foundationalism in epistemology on the one hand and naïve realism and anti-realism in metaphysics. As McGrath notes, reality is not disclosed to us directly. This is coherent with Einstein's approach and is consistent too with the critical realism of scientist theologians like John Polkinghorne, a Christian physicist. McGrath argues that in theology, knowledge of God is analogical and it is revealed to us in terms that are accommodated to our capacities.[21] Critical realist theology means thus: "the realities which it attempts to describe and interpret are prior to such description

[20] T. Torrance, *Athanasius: A Study in the Foundations of Classical Theology*, in *Theology in Reconciliation*, Geoffrey Chapman, London 1975, 215-66.

[21] A. McGrath, *The Foundations of Dialogue in Science and Religion*, Wiley Blackwell, Oxford 1998, 156.

and interpretation, and in some manner control the nature of that description and interpretation."[22] Reality is, in principle, intelligible. This is a clear feature of many fundamental theologies, even if in McGrath's case, the elements of a fundamental theology are couched in different terms: natural theology, scientific theology, the historicity of doctrine and even natural philosophy.[23] As with other theological critical realists, it is important for McGrath that the realities that (many) scientific theories and theological doctrines interpret are unobservable in principle. The caveat on this principle of unobservability is that Christian eschatology is premised on the hope for the beatific vision of God in his glory, itself based on the historical reality of the Incarnation.

I have mentioned natural philosophy, which is known mostly as the precursor to the disciplines of the natural sciences. However, in what is yet another type of discourse that fits within a science informed fundamental theology, McGrath has written that it is now possible to retrieve natural philosophy. He calls this a 'lost disciplinary imaginary'. It is lost because, as science became specialized in different disciplines beginning in the late eighteenth century, a cohesive vision of the whole of what we call science was lost. This kind of discourse can now be recovered according to McGrath, based in part on the idea that we already speak of science as a general term that covers a large number of disciplines that we refer to as the sciences. For McGrath, going on the integrative vision of Aristotle among others, natural philosophy can be recovered because of the recurring features in nature that we understand as beautiful and complex.[24] These features serve a broader agenda for a new natural philosophy however, and the link to a fundamental theology of creation is fairly clear: he seeks a better attentiveness to nature and a respect for its integrity in the context of the environmental crisis. It is this crisis then,

[22] *Ibidem*, 158.

[23] The latter, along with the multiplicity of rationality is emphasised especially in McGrath's more recent work. Cfr. *The Territories of Human Reason: Science and Theology in an Age of Multiple Rationalities*, University Press, New York-Oxford 2019. I have some doubts about whether the unity of reason that is expressed by the epistemological doctrine of critical realism is coherent with a strong stance in favour of the social construction of knowledge.

[24] A. McGrath, *Natural Philosophy: On Recovering a Lost Disciplinary Imaginary*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2023, 177.

that suggests a need for an appreciation for nature that takes us beyond the mechanical, reductionistic and utilitarian approaches to nature that have been associated with the scientific enterprise since Francis Bacon.

Another key to scientific theology for McGrath is the christocentrism of theological science. Christ is central, the "grounding of Christian theology" such that "any resulting theology will be determined by the adequacy of its representation of Christ within that system."[25] Again, the meaning of this christocentism is potentially counterintuitive to the way in which Catholic fundamental theologians have understood their own work. For McGrath, as for Torrance, "We do not seek to impose a pattern upon theological knowledge, but rather to discern the pattern inhering in its material content […] When we do that we are directed to Jesus Christ […]."[26] For McGrath and Torrance, following the patristic example, the centrality of Christ pertains directly to the doctrine of creation. As we shall see with respect to Ratzinger's understanding of fundamental theology, this way of thinking about scientific theology is about the perduring importance of the *Logos*, a principle of God, not a constructed concept of human rationality.[27] Echoing the tradition of the *analogia entis* in Catholic theology, McGrath affirms a " correspondence—not identity—between the rationality and beauty of the world and those qualities as they are found and grounded in God, revealed in Scripture and embodied in Christ."[28]

There is much more that should be said about McGrath's use of terms and concepts that pertain to science and to fundamental theology. One thinks, for instance, of his reference to beauty at several points. Beauty is also a category that fits within a Christian view of literature, and McGrath has examined the Christian meaning of literature, especially the writings of C.S. Lewis in this regard. Beauty also shows up in McGrath's exposition of natural theology unsurprisingly as well as natural philosophy as just mentioned. He cites Augustine approving-

[25] McGrath, *A Scientific Theology, vol. 2: Reality*, 301.

[26] *Ibidem*, 310.

[27] *Ibidem*, 313. See T. Torrance, *The Ground and Grammar of Theology*, Bloomsbury, London 2005.

[28] McGrath, *A Scientific Theology, vol. 2: Reality*, 313.

ly in saying that "The love of beauty is a transposed love for God."[29] One could cite other similar categories and descriptive approaches in McGrath's work on various genres of Christian apologetics, doctrines, historical theology, natural theology and philosophical theology that borrows especially from the philosophy of science. In short, there is a promiscuous appropriation of categories, interdisciplinary themes, epistemological insights, parallels and metaphysical claims, all of which would be equivalent to a Catholic view of fundamental theology. McGrath provides all of this without framing it in fundamental theological terms. His reference points are all relevant but not necessarily coherent across the myriad of issues that are present in his theology. The capaciousness of his theology has the additional advantage of relating to both the meta-categories of nature and history. Where McGrath's theological system is lacking is, in fact, in giving guideposts to a system or fundamentally connected enterprise. The contents of his corpus are, in the end, too diverse and pluralistic to be considered as comprising a unified fundamental theology. The two genres that dominate overall, natural theology and scientific theology, pertain to some verification of doctrine in the mode of a systematic theology or its communication. While essentially entailed by any broad theological program, these elements are nevertheless multiple and not available as a unifying ground for doctrine. Instead, McGrath's work is an enormous, extended effort to see what is entailed by doctrine, the effects of doctrine. Although McGrath does not develop a fundamental theology, each of the essential elements of what would make up such a discourse are present. They are scattered across his ventures into various genres of theology and philosophy. Let us turn now to examine a holistic precedent for a fundamental theology that pertains to science and nature via categories. What is key to my argument is to value the work of theologians whose attention to nature is both fundamental while not strictly apologetical or inattentive to the historical focus of other fundamental theologies. That is, we are seeking theology that expounds on doctrine by shaping it from the outset.

[29] A. McGrath, *The Open Secret: A New Vision for Natural Theology*, Blackwell, Oxford 2008, 262.

II. Patristic Foundations: Irenaeus

Arguably, Irenaeus should be regarded as the first fundamental theologian, because his original proposal of a divine *oikonomia* (*οἰκονομία*) incorporates many reflections on the relationship between the two divine aims, creation and salvation. Irenaeus treats Christian revelation as pertaining to a complete portrayal of temporal reality between the beginning and the end, the alpha and the omega. Of special importance is the introduction of a benchmark for Christian belief which is the 'rule of truth', a criterion by which doctrine is measured. For instance, in his work *Against the Heresies*, Irenaeus remarks that "The rule of truth which we hold, is, that there is one God Almighty, who made all things by His Word, and fashioned and formed, out of that which had no existence, all things that exist."[30] He goes on:

> He who retains unchangeable in his heart the rule of the truth which he received by means of baptism, will doubtless recognize the names, the expressions, and the parables taken from the Scriptures [by the Gnostics], but will by no means acknowledge the blasphemous use which these men [the Gnostics] make of them.[31]

The key to understanding what the rule of faith is doing in this context is to focus on Irenaeus' use of the term 'recognition'. The conversion of the Christian fosters a new way of seeing oneself and, indeed, the world. At this level, Irenaeus is positing a *pre*-doctrinal stance that is enunciated in forms of basic commitments. These commitments do not have explanatory force in themselves, but they are certainly capable of motivating the desire to formulate doctrines. As Gavrilyuk notes,

> He [Irenaeus] believed the doctrine to be so foundational as to constitute a 'rule of truth' […] Structurally, the "rule of truth" paralleled, more or less consistently, the first articles of the future conciliar creeds. Somewhat simplifying, one could say that the 'rule of truth' was a baptismal creed. As such, the "rule of truth" was closely aligned with scripture.[32]

[30] Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies* (*Adv. Haer.*) I,xxii.1. See, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, edited by A. Roberts, J. Donaldson, A. Cleveland, Christian Literature Publishing Co., Coxe. Buffalo 1885.

[31] *Ibidem*, I,ix. 4. Quoted in P. Gavrilyuk, *Creation in Early Christian Polemical Literature: Irenaeus against the Gnostics and Athanasius against the Arians*, «Modern Theology» 29/2 (2013) 22-32, 25-26.

[32] Gavrilyuk, *Creation in Early Christian Polemical Literature*, 25.

As a motivating set of commitments then, Irenaeus crafts what should be regraded as the first fundamental theology. As such, it is a first response to the biblical text and its character is narrative driven. That is, it originates in a person or a community's grasp of God's word, in the spirit of conversion to the truth.

One of the most enduring debates in theological method is the changeable relationship between scripture and doctrine. Irenaeus, while not aware of the later hermeneutical problems arising from the historical-critical method, does nevertheless see the importance of revelation and its unifying reception in the church. He sees how troubling it would be if the biblical message were to be interpreted according to different rules or systems of interpretation. Thus, his theological method alights on the importance of expressing Christian conversion as a first and fundamental step in doing theology.

We see how Irenaeus' method bears fruit in ways that have benefitted the church for almost two millennia. Eric Osborn has provided a wonderful analysis of Irenaeus' use of the rule of faith, its scope and purpose. It results from a decision of faith that, while established in a context of controversy with the gnostic heresy, is about framing Christian revelation as coherent, not divisive:

> Coherence comes from love, the higher knowledge which gives wholeness to life, leads to the knowledge of Christ crucified, holds the system of truth together and points a way through the mysteries of providence. As with creation and providence, so with the understanding of scripture, harmony (*consonantia*) is decisive.[33]

Consonantia or harmony is thus a sense of what scripture offers when it is interpreted, in summary form. As such, it promotes doctrinal claims but is not quite doctrine, at least not in the detailed, explanatory form that we find in the Nicene formula. As Osborn notes, Irenaeus' gift to Christian theology is his explication of several vital categories of fundamental theology, each of which lifts out themes of nature and history to express the harmony that divine revelation brings. According to Osborn, the major themes that result are: divine intellect and love, economy, recapitulation, participation and the glory of God.

Each of these fundamental theological categories are fundamental in the triple sense of being biblical, a consequence of conversion and

[33] E. Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2001, 160.

directed toward a harmonious seamless fabric of Christian doctrinal claims that are consequential upon adopting the rule of faith. For instance, recapitulation is the fundamental theological category that organizes doctrines to one another because of the centrality of Christ. The person of Christ is expressed through the fundamental theological task of 'summing up' human life, and so it pertains to Adam as the first man in contrast to Christ as the last man. God gathers together both type and archetype where Christ is the archetype and Adam is the type, being created after the image of Christ, who in turn is the true image of God.[34] The glory of God, understood here in this moment of fundamental conversion is nothing other than humanity fully alive, in his famous phrasing.[35] These categories have the additional advantage of providing an anticipation of a metaphysical formulation of Christian thought. Thus, it is Irenaeus' example that serves as one of the best models for doing fundamental theology. We turn now to the three modern figures whose fundamental theology has developed along lines that are roughly consistent with Irenaeus while being devoted to the using the categories of nature and history as prolegomena for theological doctrine.

III. Karl Rahner's Fundamental Theology

Twentieth century Catholic theology is shaped in large part by the generation of European theologians who came of age in the years preceding the Second Vatican Council. Of these, Karl Rahner's name stands out. Fundamental theology is not only associated with Rahner's name but it is Rahner who was instrumental in relating this genre of theological discourse with key theological doctrines.[36] That is, despite Rahner's debt to the philosophy of Heidegger and Kant, Rahner's sense of obligation to demonstrate theological assumptions is loyal to the discipline, scope and norms of the theological guild. His well known retrieval of trinitarian doctrine is one example of this outlook. In one of his first major writings, Rahner provided a vigorous interpretation of Thomas

[34] Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies*, III, 16.3 (*https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103316.htm*) and III, 22.3 (*https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103322.htm*).

[35] *Ibidem*, IV, 20.7 (*https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103420.htm*).

[36] D.R. Budiash, *Fundamental Theology for the Trinity: Karl Rahner's Contribution*, «Heythrop Journal of Theology» 57/6 (Nov. 2016) 917-934.

Aquinas as a theologian, not a philosopher.[37] This characterization of Aquinas, who is the most prolific and systematic theologian in the Catholic tradition, suggests a priority for a distinctly 'theological theology', as the Protestant John Webster refers to this line of thinking. That is, Rahner's fundamental theology is not a philosophical theology. Yet it is nevertheless a theology that takes into account the anthropological conditions of its possibility.

The relevant preconditions for theology include important Catholic subject matter, such as the relationship between nature and grace as well as the question of identity of the persons in the Trinity. In such cases as these, Rahner stakes out his perspective on foundational presuppositions without abandoning a properly theological form of inquiry. In the example of human nature and grace, Rahner deploys the medieval notion of the *potentia obedientalis*, a category of human nature that indicates both a form of human desire and a passive receptivity to the occurrence of divine grace. The doctrinal dimension of the early twentieth century dispute centered on the position taken by Henri de Lubac, SJ. The question there specifically concerned whether the human person has one overarching supernatural end or whether human beings have two ends: a purely natural and a supernatural end.[38] The fundamental dimension of this theological controversy is the nature of the human person: "the subject who is in relation with God must be explicitly reflected upon, as the person is an integral part of God's revelation."[39] Thus, if the person is an integral part of revelation, then fundamental theology is about the human person the contents of revelation. It is revelation that is the object of *doctrinal* theology.

In the example of the Trinity, Rahner indicates a revival of the doctrinal contents of the Christian understanding of God yet in a distinctive key. Unlike Karl Barth, for whom fundamental theology is actually impossible, Rahner posits a unique and widely received view, known as his *Grundaxiom*. The proposition is that the economic Trinity is the im-

[37] K. Rahner, *Possible Courses for the Theology of the Future*, in *Theological Investigations XIII*, Crossroad, New York 1983, 32-60.

[38] See R. Rosenberg, *The Givenness of Desire: Concrete Subjectivity and the Natural Desire to See God*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto 2017.

[39] Budiash, *Fundamental Theology for the Trinity*, 919.

manent trinity. The fundamental theological strategy in Rahner's elaboration of this idea is that the Trinity is interconnected with both the doctrines of Christology and the doctrine of grace. This is the horizon along which fundamental theology runs: an account of the systematic nature of theology that systematic theology itself does not provide. For the revealed character of the Trinity as a reality that is simultaneously immanent and economic, it must be demonstrated as such in and through the testimony to the persons of Christ and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, starting with the biblical testimony.

From that acknowledgement, Rahner demonstrates the validity of a twofold divine self-communication. The doctrinal contents of the Trinity are justified by a set of categories that mark a way of speaking about human nature. These categories are the pairs of opposites: origin-future, history-transcendence, invitation-acceptance, and knowledge-love. For each pair, the first term anticipates the second term, as facts anticipate their fulfillment. As such, Rahner is sketching an anthropology of desire for both truth and love. God answers these twin desires in two ways, and these two ways, are experienced by human beings as God's twofold offer of God's very self. So the identity of the economic and immanent Trinity is a fundamental assumption that guides doctrinal theology because of how it logically makes sense in light of human nature. There is nothing scientific about this divine self-offering, but it does constitute a kind of apologetical approach that Rahner makes in his epistemic justification of doctrinal theology. This epistemic element is indeed the thrust of his fundamental theology.

So far, I have provided a sketch of how Rahner speaks about fundamental theology in broad terms. Reflecting his contact with the thought of Martin Heidegger and existentialism more generally, it is usually assumed that Rahner had history and the problems of historical development primarily in view as he wrote on topics of fundamental and systematic theology, but this is not entirely the case. In fact, Rahner does offer points of a fundamental theology in a more direct interpretation of scientific matters. This is definitely the case in regards evolutionary theory and the hominization process, a concept often associated with Teilhard de Chardin. Rahner's engagement with evolutionary science is an explication of his original doctoral thesis, which dealt with the relationship between matter and spirit.

Before grappling with the question of evolution directly, it is important to understand how Rahner structures fundamental theology in such a way that allows him to interpret biological evolution in a novel way that is nonetheless in continuity with Christian tradition. For Rahner, the fundamental ontological distinction that he grasps phenomenologically is the distinction between matter and spirit. This twin experience is a consequence of grappling with aspects of the infinite. In keeping with his transcendental approach, Rahner sees matter and spirit as equally capable of being conditions for the possibility of greater understanding. For him, matter is the condition for freedom (*material der Freiheit*), the condition for interacting with the other. On the other hand, being Spirit is the condition for the possibility of being a part of a great mystery. For Rahner, the twin basic experiences of self-awareness are material and spiritual. Together, these two experiences are grounds for affirming a non-reductive concept of being human, of seeing ourselves as "spirited body and embodied spirit."[40]

Rahner's notions of matter and spirit themselves presuppose a framework of emergence and self-transcendence. These are the fundamental concepts on which is built his 'optimistic' view of evolutionary self-transcendence. This view resembles that of Teilhard de Chardin's expression of human beings as the end to which the universe has evolved.[41] For Rahner, the justification of this view is not scientific as it is for Teilhard but rather philosophical. For Rahner, the actualizing of self-transcendence is a way of seeing a greater coherence of the world toward God, a relationship that is in some sense bound to become closer, more conscious and more intentional. This worldview strikingly resembles the gnostic approach to spiritual communion, except that for

[40] K. Rahner, *Die Frage nach dem Erscheinungsbild des Menschen als Quaestio Disputata der Theologie* in *Sämtliche Werke*, Bnd. 15, *Verantwortung der Theologie*, Herder, Freiburg 2002, 22-35. Cfr. O. Putz, *Evolutionary Biology in the Theology of Karl Rahner*, «Philosophy and Theology» 1 (2017) 85-105, 90.

[41] Putz claims (93) that Rahner's view is distinct from Teilhard's view of noogenesis because of Rahner's greater respect for disciplinary boundaries. I see a problem arising from Rahner's debt to the Hegelian notion of absolute being as an alternative, and equivalent way to that of Teilhard for arriving at a conflation of the disciplines however. See M. Barnes, *The Evolution of the Soul from Matter and the Role of Science in Karl Rahner's Theology*, «Horizons» 21 (1994) 85-104.

Rahner, the material world is not abandoned in what is also, and otherwise, a Hegelian account.

From this point of departure in a milieu of fundamental theology, we may therefore come to understand how Rahner expresses a theology of evolution. In short, the heavy philosophical filter that Rahner applies to the question of evolution is both insightful yet scientifically implausible. On the one hand, Rahner articulates a phenomenological starting point that captures the experience of self-transcendence. This starting point in the life of the human subject is seemingly a concession to the Kantian attentiveness to epistemic factors in the construction of a theological position. The phenomenological perspective on science is not a widely held position within the philosophy of science, but Rahner seeks an account of emergence that is contained within this phenomenological account of personhood or self-awareness.

On the other hand, however, Rahner cites on several occasions the need for directionality within the material universe so that human beings and the universe itself are not conceived along arbitrary, random or completely contingent lines. From a strictly biological point of view, as Putz argues, Rahner's view is at odds with what biologists themselves report regarding the prevalence of random chance events.[42] But this view of directionality is at least a view of human consciousness and its' tendency to self-transcendence. According to Putz, it is this principle of active self-transcendence that serves as an "underlying metaphysical principle of evolutionary process."[43] This may be the case, but it does not settle the fundamental theological reason behind why Rahner intentionally offers his own interpretation of evolutionary theory.

The rationale for Rahner's defense of evolutionary theory ironically has to do with the centrality of humanity which, according to Rahner and other Catholic scholars who came of age in the pre-Vatican II period, was inaccurately defended in the papal encyclical of 1950, *Humani Generis*. Although in the 1950's Rahner had defended the teaching of that encyclical that the human species is derived from an original pair, consistent with the biblical narrative in Genesis, he later came to change his view to the polygenist position. That is, he came to accept

[42] Putz, *Evolutionary Biology in the Theology of Karl Rahner*, 93.

[43] *Ibidem*, 101.

the position, consistent with the emerging neo-Darwinian synthesis, that the original human societies were evolved as a population from a prior species, not a differently sexed pair of individuals. Despite the differences between his view that was espoused in the 1950's and the later position that he adopted in the 1960's, Rahner nevertheless defends the same centrality of humanity and the meaning of original sin.[44] The fact that Rahner changed his view on a doctrinal question while nevertheless maintaining the same anthropological concern is testimony to the underlying importance of fundamental theology to his thought. Remarkably, his drift away from the monogenist view was accompanied by a theological shift toward christocentrism. Christ, not Adam, is the one around whom the unity of the human race was founded.[45] Thus, Christ's centrality allows for a shift at the level of doctrinal interpretation toward polygenism.

But did the changes in Rahner's approach ascertain for him a better way of thinking about science and nature? It is widely assumed that Rahner's shift, like that of many other theologians at this time, was made possible by the advances of scientific research and understanding. To be sure, there is evidence from Rahner's writing that he was aware of the importance of recent evolutionary theory and related scientific developments. However, what is explicitly evident in his thought as the main cause for his shift was his renewed attention to the concept of matter, the very subject of his early work. Matter was a key concept that lay at the basis of his fundamental theological concept, self-transcendence. For Rahner, it turns out that this prized concept in fundamental theology allowed him to shift toward the more scientifically plausible view of polygenism and away from monogenism. These are but two examples from within the vast corpus of Rahner's theological writing that demonstrate the relative stability of his fundamental theology, a stability that allowed shifts in his thinking to occur with respect to particular issues. Rahner's ability to maintain a focus on categories of nature is a

[44] K. Rahner, *Hominisation: The Evolutionary Origin of Man as a Theological Problem*, Herder and Herder, New York 1968.

[45] See K. Rahner, *The Sin of Adam*, in *Theological Investigations XI*, Helicon, Arezzo 1961, 247-262. Cfr. K.A. McMahon, *Karl Rahner and the Theology of Human Origins*, «The Thomist» 66/4 (October 2002) 499-517, 507.

major advantage in his fundamental theology even though his inclinations were othewrwise preoccupied by concerns of history and doctrinal development. His accomplishment in this regard shows that even for a fundamental theologian who is devoted to an understanding of history and historical mindedness, there is still a valid possibility of interpreting nature, despite the mild flaws of interpretation (e.g.: of evolutionary theory) that emerged as well.

IV. Bernard Lonergan, Consciousness and Fundamental Theology

For Bernard Lonergan, in comparison with the thought of Karl Rahner, fundamental theology is both more methodologically generic as well as theologically directed. This twin character to fundamental theology in Lonergan is due to a multi-faceted approach he adopts by prizing cognitional theory as a basis for conceiving of fundamental theology as a 'functional specialty' in theology. A functional specialty is a type of task that centers on a practitioner of a discipline who is engaged in a specific set of cognitional acts, which Lonergan specifies as fourfold (or, implicitly according to some of his interpreters, fivefold).[46] For Lonergan, fundamental theology is introduced with respect to two main topics: pluralism and the use of categories. The heading he chooses to use for thinking through fundamental theology is what he terms foundations.

The cognitional act that serves as the basis for Lonergan's fundamental theology is the personal decision of the theologian. A person's conversion to a new horizon of theological purpose governs a new form of life. On the basis of this conversion, one becomes able to propose and construct a worldview. This worldview in turn determines how to explicate theological doctrine, understand those doctrines in systematic theology and then communicate the meaning of those doctrines, un-

[46] In his magisterial work *Insight*, Lonergan develops his cognitional theory in a scientific key, and then explicated it in *Method in Theology*; see B.J.F. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, Seabury Press, New York 1979. This cognitional theory of four levels of consciousness serves his epistemological and metaphysical infrastructure for a differentiated portrait of theology. It is chiefly with reference to *Method in Theology* that this paper focuses its attention because of Lonergan's development of fundamental theology in chapter 11 there. On the question of whether there is a fifth level of consciousness, see M. Vertin, *Lonergan on Consciousness: Is there a Fifth Level?*, «Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies», 12/1 (Spring 1994) 1-36.

derstood systematically, in an ecclesial context. The major difference between Lonergan's expression of fundamental theology and earlier Catholic formulations in the modern period is the emphasis that he places on the conversion of the theologian:

> [R]eflection on conversion can supply theology with its foundation and, indeed, with a foundation that is concrete, dynamic, personal, communal, and historical. Just as reflection on the operations of the scientist brings to light the real foundation of the science, so too reflection on the ongoing process of conversion may bring to light the real foundation of a renewed theology.[47]

For some critics who are wary of Lonergan's affinity with Rahner's transcendental method, this way of thinking of fundamental theology appears equally subjective. Yet, Lonergan alludes, this definition of fundamental theology to the condition for the possibility of two types of categories, the special and the general types. These categories (like Carmody Grey's 'life' and Irenaeus' category of 'recapitulation') are notions that guide the process of doctrinal formulation, theological forms of explanation. Indeed, Lonergan's focus on conversion as the key fundamental theological element that conditions other theological tasks (or 'functional specialties' as he calls them) is an important corrective to overly rationalist accounts of theology. Lonergan is like Irenaeus in holding for the role of the heart. Whereas Irenaeus stood against the gnostic emphasis on knowledge as the means of God's revelation, Lonergan does likewise by turning away from an exclusive reliance upon the rationalistic principles of scholastic, "Handbook theology" toward the orientation of the theologian as converted by the love of God. Lonergan cites Romans 5:5: "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us." There is an entire horizon of theological currents that are implied by Lonergan's choice to make the converted heart of the theologian a central tenet of fundamental theology. Because of the unique nature of God's love, a change occurs in the order of knowing and loving. The norm that usually declares that we do not love that which we do not know—*nihil amatum nisi praecognitum*— is actually overturned. God's love is first, acting as a precondition for any knowledge, a fact that needs to be made explicit

[47] B. Lonergan, *Theology in Its New Context*, in *A Second Collection*, edited by W.F.J. Ryan, B.J. Tyrrell, University of Toronto Press, Toronto 1996, 67.

in the way that we carry out fundamental theology. That is, Lonergan places revelation first.

One of the implications is the sense of God's action as a saviour, a deliverer of humans because God is a God of mercy towards us. That is, the God of fundamental theology is not prior to the biblical witness due to a series of abstract attributes that God possesses in advance. The converted theologian is a person seized by God in order to do theology well. Fundamental theology cannot be a philosophy of religion with a sprinkling of biblical rhetoric to justify the philosophical landscape that serves as a map for theologians to slavishly follow. Lonergan's stipulation of a central place for the converted heart of the theologian deserves a wide hearing so that it is not understood as a way to undermine or underdetermine doctrine or systematic theology. To explicate the significance of Lonergan's point, it is profitable to consider the paradigmatic Christian conversion of Augustine.

In Augustine's account, the converted heart is the key motivating factor for his vocation as a Christian theologian of both faith and reason. Augustine interprets Paul, who writes: "If anybody thinks he knows anything, he does not yet know as he ought to know. But anyone who loves God, this man is known by him." (1Cor 8:2). Augustine comments that "Even in this case, you notice, he (Paul) did not say 'knows him,' which would be a dangerous piece of presumption, but 'is known by him."[48] The point that Augustine highlights here is the centrality of revelation as a disclosure by God, not a human possession. Augustine has to contend with the Manichaean heresy that is premised on gnostic dualisms between mind and body that result in the valorization of knowledge at the cost of forsaking conversion of the distorted will. Augustine's conversion experience indicates a pivot point. Doing theology thereafter is marked by a new self awareness that famously pervades his thought thereafter as a long series of corrections and fresh elaborations on the knowledge that he possessed prior to his poignant moment in the garden in Milan. In the *Confessions*, Book VIII, Augustine tells of a new horizon that opens up for him as a consequence of hearing a child read Romans 13:13-14: "let us live honourably as in the day, not in revelling

[48] Augustine, *The Trinity*, Book five, Prologue 2, transl. by E. Hill O.P, New City Press, Hyde Park 1991, 270.

and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarrelling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires." What is crystallized in this moment begins as a reflection on the radical nature of sin and its effects on him. It is foreshadowed at the very beginning of the work when, in Book I, Augustine writes that "you have made us and drawn us to yourself, and *our heart* is restless until it rests in you." The use of the plural "our" combined with the singular "heart" instead of hearts in the Latin is a telling linguistic sign of the fundamental theological thrust of Augustine's confession. It is evidence for his own restlessness and eventual desire for God as well as the fact of a restlessness that is not his alone—it is a shared reality with which all human beings struggle. As the *Confessions* shows, the conversion broadens in scope to becoming a fundamental stance that then clarifies his stance on other issues. After the conversion event in Book VIII, Augustine goes over some of the immediate autobiographical features of his new life in Christ in Book IX, including his baptism and the shared vision of this new life with Monica, his mother.

But, in Book X, Augustine makes a dramatic turn from his conversion to some of the basic issues that underpin the philosophical and theological disciplines and their relation. God is now known as the "life of life" (X,6), something that resonates with Carmody Grey's biologically focused account that I referred to earlier. In the last four books of *Confessions*, Augustine treats several pre-doctrinal *topoi* that characterise Christianity's relationship with neo-platonism, such as the soul, its relationship to the body as well as memory. The focus on memory can be seen as the development of a fundamental theological category in response to platonic theories of recollection. Book X ends with reflections on sin, the vices of pride and lust as well as various derived temptations. These reflections establish a kind of prolegomena for considering the need for redemption in the form of Christ, the mediator. Remarkably, Augustine turns, in Book XI of *Confessions*, to the beginning, to the creation of the world and the biblical text as the source of truth about the world, its temporality, distinction from eternity and other basic ontological features. Augustine seeks to know the "nature of time" among other elements of the created universe.[49]

[49] IDEM, *Confessions*, XI, 30.

This excursus into the structure of Augustine's *Confessions* is a useful way to foreground what Lonergan is doing in his modern classic, *Method in Theology*. The reason for this claim, as I have tried to show here, is that the place of conversion, while it builds on a store of knowledge that precedes it, is nevertheless a new way of perceiving reality. Once the conversion is understood as a radical shift in personal horizon, then reality needs to be reappraised in the light of that conversion. The question that governs Lonergan's appreciation of fundamental theology is how conversion serves a theological method that is recognizably organized and structured. There are several aspects of Lonergan's methodical approach that need to be highlighted so that his notion of 'foundations', which I deem to be equivalent to fundamental theology, is properly understood. For Lonergan, conversion for a theologian is differentiated. It proceeds in ways that are firstly religious but also moral and intellectual. As we have seen in the example from Augustine's *Confessions*, the fusion of the moral with the religious is abundantly clear in the garden in Milan, or at least, in Augustine's recounting of that event. But what is also clear is that following on from his properly religious conversion to Christianity, there are intellectual entailments for Augustine that can be seen in his dialectical encounters in the decades following. In summary, the role of conversion in directing Lonergan's notion of foundations is not limited to a narrow religious conception of it. Rather, like Augustine, it is filtered through other important moral and intellectual dimensions. Thus, Lonergan's priority of conversion is fully consistent with an Augustinian theological method.

For Lonergan, foundations are for the last three functional specialties in theology especially. Fundamental theology is thus only one of eight types of theological task. Ideally, theologians are organized not according to the different sources of theology but according to the activities in which they are engaged. The eight functional specialties are found in either the first 'mediating' theology of research, interpretation, history and dialectic or the second 'mediated' theology of foundations, doctrine, systematic theology and communications. Foundations sets the parameters for theology that is carried out in the final three functional specialties, none of which can be reduced to being a set of premises, deductively powering the rest of the theological enterprise. However, foundations can certainly encompass the employment of premises. Foundations is,

for Lonergan, "the immanent and operative set of norms that guides each step forward in the process."[50] Thus, it is not a simple, logical presupposition per se.

One essential feature of Lonergan's theological method is that different functional specialties are correlated with particular cognitive operations or acts. Foundations, like dialectic, is operative at the level of decision. Thus, the nature of foundations, while never arbitrary, is subjective and personal. For Lonergan, human consciousness can be distinguished according to four levels, beginning with the level of experience (correlated to the tasks of research and communications respectively), understanding (correlated to the tasks of interpretation and systematics respectively), judgment (correlated to the tasks of history and doctrine respectively) and decision (correlated to the tasks of dialectics and foundations respectively). The foil against which Lonergan argues is what is known in Catholic theology as 'Denzinger theology' a reference to the set of manuals that were first published in 1854 by Heinrich Joseph Denzinger under the title *Enchiridion Symbolorum et Definitionum*. This anthology of conciliar decrees lists propositions, definitions and condemned propositions. It is historical in the limited sense of laying out doctrinal touchpoints in the tradition. But as a set of foundations upon which to *do* theology, it is deficient according to Lonergan. It does not elaborate on the necessary or sufficient conditions for a theologian to practice in the guild where different exigencies impress themselves on the theologian according to the needs of various realms of meaning, including those of common sense, theory, interiority and transcendence. Thus, on a Denzinger model, theology remains flat and static, not dynamic. The problem with a fundamental theology conceived along those lines is that it gives the impression of a system that rests on a deduction of logical first principles to a series of practices.

Lonergan does not abandon in any way the rational or intelligible components of fundamental theology, building as it does on the experience, texts, interpretations and history and the rational deliberation that is entailed in those theological components. But Lonergan knows, with Augustine, that the rational or strictly cognitive exigency of theology is complementary to how meaning is manifest in ways that are efficient,

[50] Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 253.

constitutive and communicative. That is, for Lonergan, meaning is built up in aggregates across communities and history.[51] This suggests that fundamental theology is rooted in categories that alter, depending on the exigencies of the theologian and the church at different periods in history. Augustine, for instance, drew on his conversion, triggered by morally laden memories, in order to attain a new foundation or horizon for living, which was anchored in the Incarnation, God's entrance into history and the significance of the human body. These categories are occasioned by the particular dialectical exchanges that Augustine waged against dualist, Manichaean renderings of divine attributes, human nature and the characterization of wisdom. But these categories are also necessary for elaborating on doctrine well. From these categories, Augustine was able to arrive at the *totus Christus*, a way of relating Christ and the church as analogous to the head and the body of Christ. What this web of categories do, at the level of fundamental theology, is to unite the specific doctrines that are taught by the church and theological authorities. The unifying role of fundamental theology is paramount.

Lonergan's emphasis on personal conversion that motivates the creation and use of theological categories *appears* to convey a radical theological pluralism in contrast to the unified fundamental theology of the past. However, the unity of historic fundamental theology in the Catholic tradition is sometimes less effective despite the alleged objectivity. Lonergan alludes to Melchior Cano's *De locis theologicis* which commended the direct study of all sources. But, as Lonergan says:

> The Scholastic aim of reconciling all the elements in its Christian inheritance had one grave defect. It was content with a logically and metaphysically satisfying reconciliation. It did not realize how much of the multiplicity in the inheritance constituted not a logical or metaphysical problem but basically a historical problem.[52]

Unlike other fundamental theologians however, Lonergan does not discard the metaphysics of nature from his theological method, even though his theological aim is largely cast in terms of ensuring that historical development is enshrined within Christian theology. The categories of Lonergan's fundamental theology are not divided conceptually between

[51] *Ibidem*, 76.

[52] *Ibidem*, 262.

those that are oriented to nature and those that are oriented to history. For Lonergan, the fundamental distinction is between general and special categories, each of which can apply to *both* nature and history.

General categories are those that are transcultural, that is, not the product of any one culture but are the products of what Lonergan refers to as 'authentic subjectivity', the fruits of which are objectivity. An authentic subject is one who is self-transcending. Self-transcendence is the description of a structure of knowing through the differentiated consciousness of operative levels: one attends, inquires, reflects and deliberates. For Lonergan, it is necessary for fundamental theology to proceed from this epistemological base.

Special categories are oriented around a methodical theology, not a theoretical theology. These are derived firstly from religious experience, a capacious notion that Lonergan expounds on at various points in his later work. From there, Lonergan moves to thinking about what is derived from considering salvation history, the beatific vision, the purification of elements within Christianity and how they contribute to the redemption of what is perpetually subject to progress and decline in history. In summary, Lonergan lays out a theological method that includes in summary form a fundamental theology, termed foundations, that is rooted in an Augustinian notion of conversion and which results in the presence of categories into which doctrinal explanations are enfolded. While not influential in the details, Lonergan's notion of theological foundations provides a major precedent for a fundamental theology that is attached to nature and science without abandoning the historical thrust of twentieth century Catholic theology.

V. Joseph Ratzinger and the *Logos*

Sometimes referred to as an existential Thomist or a reforming Augustinian, Joseph Ratzinger's theology is, in part, a development of fundamental theology that has had a strong influence in contemporary Catholic thought. Many of the themes in his theological thinking have received expression in the papal teaching that he provided in his years as Pope, between 2005-2013. Ratzinger's engagement with the sciences has been a notable theme in his

thought, and references can be found in a number of his writings that deal with fundamental theology.[53]

One of the most important themes in Ratzinger's theology is the *historiographical* reading of science and its place in the history of western thought. His understanding of the distinctive interpretations of Descartes, Vico, Kant and Hegel makes for a masterful view of the foundational assumptions that support the natural sciences. His account of the thought of Auguste Comte and Francis Bacon are illustrative analyses of how the relationship between science and technology is construed, the world of human making. In one essay, he notes that Bacon "disavows the question of truth as the old, outmoded question and transforms it into the question of know-how, the question about power."[54] In his *Introduction to Christianity*, one of Razinger's most cited works, he spends quite some time in reviewing the various ramifications of Comte's theory of transitions from a theological to a metaphysical to a scientific stage of human civilization. As with his treatment of epistemological issues in general, Ratzinger deals with the historiographical nature of Comte's theory on its own terms by allowing Christianity to be the measure of Comte's three historical stages. For instance, it does not depend on the myths of Comte's first religious stage of human history, "Christianity's precedents and its inner groundwork lie in philosophical enlightenment, not in religions."[55]

Where Ratzinger is particularly strong in his grasp of the sciences and their impact on contemporary society, is regarding the alleged relationship between science and atheism. Early in his career, in the context of an assessment of positivism, he remarks that "with the breakthroughs made by Planck, Heisenberg, and Einstein, the sciences were once again on their way to God. The anti-religious orientation that had reached its climax with Haeckel

[53] Notably cited in this context is the essay published in English under the title *'In the Beginning…': A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the Fall*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 1990.

[54] J. Ratzinger, *Fundamental Speeches from Five Decades*, Ignatius, San Francisco 2012, 180.

[55] J. Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions*, Ignatius, San Francisco 2004, 169.

had now been broken, and this gave us new hope."[56] Instead of casting nature and history as two disparate sources or meta-categories in a theology of revelation, he brings them together. This combined way of thinking allows Ratzinger to provide a broader account than is commonly available in a natural theology. In fact, his approach is consistent with a theology that is connected to a fulsome blending of natural philosophy and an interpretation of politics, culture, social trends and world history.

This is the tradition of the dialogue between faith and reason, in the pattern of St. Augustine, who addressed all these areas in his many occasional writings as well as in his well known syntheses. Ratzinger himself deals with the question in a dialogue with key intellectuals of his own era, such as the philosopher Robert Spaemann. As summarised by Christian Schaller, "In Christian faith, reason emerges precisely because faith strives for reason. And in reason, Christian faith emerges because faith is the specific locus of reason and reasonableness."[57] Faith is the condition for the possibility of reason. So, as an expression of human thought on the basis of faith, reason is subject to a form of (recursive) theological analysis. The connection to Spaemann is instructive for showing how reason functions as the prime category of fundamental theology for Ratzinger, since Spaemann's own scholarly career dealt in large part with Marxist materialism. That ideology, possibly more than every other political ideology, is constructed on the basis of a reductionist interpretation of science and nature, the creed that matter is all there is. In his own lifelong engagement with Marxism, including his clash with liberation theology, Ratzinger bears witness to the interpretation of science and nature that served as part of his diagnosis of the widespread political reductionism of human needs to the economic

[56] J. Ratzinger, *Milestones. Memoirs 1927-1977*, Ignatius, San Francisco 1998, 42-3. As Euclides Eslava notes in *Auguste Comte: Science, Reason, and Religion* (in Joseph Ratzinger, *Dialogue with Philosophical Traditions: From Plato to Vattimo*, edited by A. Sada, T. Rowland, R. Albino de Assunção, T&T Clark, London 2024, 118-132), Ratzinger drew from Henri de Lubac's interpretation of atheism and its complex relationship to the sciences. See H. de Lubac's *The Drama of Atheist Humanism*, Ignatius, San Francisco 1995.

[57] C. Schaller, *Robert Spaemann: Person, Ethics, and Politics*, in A. Sada, T. Rowland, R. Albino de Assunção (eds.), *Joseph Ratzinger in Dialogue with Philosophical Traditions: From Plato to Vattimo*, T&T Clark, London 2024, 328-335, 330.

type of needs. Rowland diagnoses it accurately as a critique of Marx not for explicit theological reasons but for reasons that strike him as lying at the heart of the foundations on which theology draws: "Ratzinger obviously regards Marx's atheism as problematic. It is however Marx's attitude to truth, rather than his attitude to the God of Christianity who is the source of all truth, that dominates Ratzinger's criticism of Marxist thinking."[58]

The key to Ratzinger's diagnosis is the problem of science becoming captive to philosophical positivism, a theme which is present in Tanzella-Nitti's writings too, concerning the role of interpretative acts. Against positivism in philosophy and science, both Ratzinger and Tanzella-Nitti cite the role of interpretation and interdisciplinary forms of cognition as truth oriented. Yet science has become a breeding ground for the growth of positivism in modernity: "Where positivist reason dominates the field to the exclusion of all else – and that is broadly the case in our public mindset – then the classical sources of knowledge for ethics and law are excluded."[59] This tendency toward positivism in science is internal to the act of understanding the practice of science. The adoption of positivism certainly lies in tension with the straightforward desire to see in science a vantage point for general revelation. But more basically, it is contrary to the spirit of science as open inquiry into the truth. Additionally, as Ratzinger notes, when a positivist approach to science is the dominant approach, then how may we trust the reports and interpretation of nature that emanate from the scientific disciplines for this important theological purpose?

Ratzinger discusses the idea that science functions as internal to Christian revelation because of the important impact of the separation of facts from values. This separation was most prominently announced by the British philosopher, G.E. Moore, the separation of 'is' from 'ought'. Ratzinger diagnoses the dysfunction of this separation as regressive because of the negative impact on the concept of the natural

[58] T. Rowland, *Karl Marx and Marxism: The Problem of the Priority of Praxis*, in Sada, Rowland, R.A. de Assunção (eds.), *Joseph Ratzinger in Dialogue with Philosophical Traditions*, 133-147, 134.

[59] *The Listening Heart: Reflections on the Foundations of Law*, visit to the *Bundestag*, Address of his Holiness Benedict XVI, September 22, 2011.

law. According to Ratzinger, natural law needs to be retrieved for the purpose of supporting moral reasoning with a metaphysical account of nature. This is only possible if positivism about nature and scientific reasoning is overturned.

The centrality of intelligibility is a guiding notion for both theology and the sciences and this is evident in many areas of Ratzinger's thought.[60] As mentioned already in the context of his view of Comte's positivism, for Ratzinger, the role of philosophy is *internal* to Christian theology, and this suggests its animation of fundamental theology. This is evident in his campaign against dehellenization for instance, his rejection of the view that Christian thought can flourish without Greek inspired metaphysics.

But the Logos is the central Christian insight into the provision of reason as a key characteristic of the world. For Ratzinger, reason is not a realm that is separate from revelation or an aspect of human curiosity that is intended to be satisfied *apart* from God's creative and salvific intentions. For him, reason is a reality that lies at the heart of God's very being. So, as he stated in his now famous Regensberg address of 2012, "[n]ot to act reasonably, not to act with *logos*, is contrary to the nature of God."[61] This comment was received negatively because of the historical context that he referred to, namely the Byzantine emperor Manuel II Paleologus' negative assessment of the apparent lack of reason embedded in the Islamic concept of God and divine action. In contrast to all such depictions of God, whether Muslim or Christian occasionalism and voluntarism, Ratzinger cites the reasonableness of God's action. The way that Ratzinger endeavours to make this make this claim count is with reference to the necessity of Hellenic thought in Christian theology. Against the program of 'dehellenization' of Christian revelation, led by Adolf von Harnack in the early years of the 20th century and continued by German biblical scholars such as Rudolf Bultmann, Ratzinger outlines an alternative. He buttresses the claim that reason is

[60] This paper will continue to refer to the late Pope by his surname, by which most of his original theological work was written.

[61] Benedict XVI, *Faith, Reason and the University—Memories and Reflections*, Meeting with the representatives of science, Aula Magna of the University of Regensburg, September 12, 2006.

inherent to God's being with the claim that reason, understood through the Logos, is also inherent to faith:

> it is often said nowadays that the synthesis with Hellenism achieved in the early Church was an initial inculturation which ought not to be binding on other cultures […] This thesis is not simply false, but it is coarse and lacking in precision. The New Testament was written in Greek and bears the imprint of the Greek spirit […] the fundamental decisions made about the relationship between faith and the use of human reason are part of the faith itself.[62]

Ratzinger's contribution has frequently been described as an Augustinian voice in the rapprochement of faith and reason. While this is true, Ratzinger also acknowledges the contributions of medieval and a specifically Thomist framework for positing the *Logos*. Although he does so infrequently, Ratzinger argues for the role of an analogy between God and nature. For example,

> the faith of the Church has always insisted that between God and us, between his eternal Creator Spirit and our created reason there exists a real analogy, in which unlikeness remains infinitely greater than likeness, yet not to the point of abolishing analogy and its language (cf. Lateran Council IV).

Thus, the *Logos* is not only conceived as a Greek vehicle for the message of the gospel, it is at the heart of a broad metaphysical framework, such as that provided by the doctrine of analogy. The *Logos*, moreover, is that principle that underpins the common ground that unites otherwise diverse historical periods and texts. In a lecture in 2008, Ratzinger points to the centrality of interpretive exegesis for scripture to have the capacity to inspire. As such, exegesis brings forth the intelligibility of Christian faith: "Christianity does not simply represent a religion of the book in the classical sense (cf. par. 108). It perceives in the words *the* Word, the *Logos* itself, which spreads its mystery through this multiplicity and the reality of a human history."[63] In this instance, Ratzinger refers to historical context because of the theology of scripture that he is advocating. But this does not mean, as we shall see below, that he is unaware of the world of science and nature as equally receptive to the presence of the *Logos*.

[62] *Ibidem*.

[63] *Meetings with Representatives from the World of Culture*, address of His Holiness Benedict XVI, Collège des Bernardins, Paris, September 12, 2008.

Tanzella Nitti adds to this theology of the *Logos* by noting that in modernity, there has been a transferral of authority and intelligibility away from nature and towards history. He writes: "A remarkable change of perspective occurs with the rise of German idealist romanticism. Many contents associated with the concept of nature shift into the concept of *history* […] In this view the true way of looking at nature is history and nature itself is a history."[64] This is a key insight that resolves many of the problems associated with a fundamental theology that is too exclusively concerned with the category of history. For Tanzella-Nitti, this fusion of interpretive horizons is made possible through a recourse to the metaphor of the two books. This metaphor is about the book of nature and the book of scripture as two ways to become aware of God's revelation. He prefaces this discussion by citing Ratzinger on the legibility of the cosmos, an "ordered book.[65] But where, for Tanzella-Nitti, the question is how to account for a theology of revelation, for Ratzinger, it is the foundational concept of the *Logos* that underpins faith and science.

In *Introduction to Christianity*, Ratzinger cites the prominence of the logos as something that comes about as the result of a decision, where it contrasts with "mere matter."[66] The *logos* is capacious, inclusive of several vital components of theological subject matter. It denotes the idea that "all being is a product of thought and […] in its innermost structure is itself thought." To decide for the logos means to act in faith and this faith is for truth, and "being itself is truth, comprehensibility, meaning […] the belief in creation."[67] It is striking that the discussion of the logos in this work of Ratzinger's includes praise for mathematics, a citation of Einstein's encomium for the laws of nature, testimony to the structured intelligence in matter and in being. From this vantage point, it is but a short hop to the consideration of a world in which these very same laws of nature figure in the depiction of a world that is also beautiful. Ratzinger cites the complex biological system of pollination, the symbiotic relationship between bees and tree blossoms. Matter points beyond itself but this conclusion is paralleled by an equally sceptical

[64] Tanzella-Nitti (2022), 193.

[65] See Pope Benedict XVI, *Discourse to the Pontifical Academy of the Sciences*, October 31, 2008.

[66] *Introduction to Christianity*, Crossroad, New York 1986, 105.

[67] *Ibidem*, 106.

consideration of idealism as a philosophical option for determining how we understand the world. Ratzinger uses the category of being-thought as a way of linking the logos concept to the history of secular philosophy. In making this link, he also considers metaphysical coherence as a problem in history. What to make of all the different schools of thought that have philosophized in different directions about the way that the universe appears to be ordered? In a way that is unique among his theological peers, Ratzinger considers seriously both the strictly natural, scientific ways of construing nature alongside the historical forms in which such construals have been expressed. This ability to consider both the natural and historical elements is testimony to his adaptive and flexible frame of thought. He does not fuse nature with history.

As a result of his considerations of nature and history stands Ratzinger's commitment to the personal God. The category of person sits easily alongside that of the logos as the entailment of it. The personal meaning of the created universe contrasts with the impersonal, anonymous God of the philosophers for whom some sort of necessity is an ontological requirement. Rather, the freedom of the Christian God to create, redeem and provide is what is entailed. For Ratzinger, the importance of the *Logos* concept is philosophically important for it means something very different than idealism, a way of pointing to consciousness at the foundation of being.[68] But in the context of his broader theological program, there is another, more urgent implication. That is the anticipation of divine revelation. The *logos* concept is unique for its ability to straddle the basic categories of theology and the two basic forms of theological inquiry. First, it supports both the categories of nature and history as we have already seen. It speaks to both the intelligibility that is sought in scientific contexts and it identifies an underlying order in history as well. Second, it is significant because it serves to mediate natural theology and a theology of revelation, which are the two basic forms of theology in the Catholic tradition. The notion of *logos* takes from nature its origins and purpose a structure for developing a specifically Christian language of creation. It maps out redemption also, in light of a distinctive natural theology that is fulfilled in a faith in Jesus Christ. The trajectory that is indicated from one form of theology to the

[68] *Ibidem*, 111.

other form of theology is expressed by Ratzinger as the trajectory from the *logos* to the reality of the personal God. As he puts it, "the logos is a person and therefore faith is the option in favour of the primacy of the particular over the universal."[69]

The transposition from natural theology to revealed theology cannot stand unless a transfer of intentional categories has taken place that are anticipated by the logos and made manifest in the personal. Ratzinger indicates this transposition by speaking about love. Echoing Augustine's saying that one cannot know what one does not love, Ratzinger determines that the creative thinking about the being of the universe "not only knows but loves; that it is creative because it is love; and that because it can love as well as think it has given its thought the freedom of its own existence, objectivized it, released it into self-being."[70] For freedom, not cosmic necessity is, as he goes on to say, "the supreme factor in the world", a metaphysical set of guiding assumptions and insights are thus aligned to give meaning to both creation and redemption as part of a greater whole. As a consequence, we come to appreciate the intelligibility of systematic concepts such as that of 'recapitulation' from Irenaeus. That category, for wholly apologetic reasons, unites the action of creation with the action of redemption, in order to counter the gnostics. Ratzinger, like Irenaeus, develops a bridge from the intelligibility of creation to the intelligibility of redemption without resorting to dualism. Like the apologetics literature of old, and in concurrence with Tanzella-Nitti's own contribution, Ratzinger shows how faith arises from a consideration of nature *and* history, even these realities understood from a predominantly secular perspective.

God, the object of faith, then becomes a condition of the possibility for doing science, for studying nature and seeing in *it* implicitly a general form of the revelation that is announced explicitly in the historical figure of Jesus Christ. For Ratzinger and Tanzella-Nitti, given that both appreciate the scientific context in which categories like nature and history are meaningful, sin and evil must also be anticipated. This is a strict consequence of the fact that freedom entails multiple potential outcomes of events, what Ratzinger refers to as reality's 'incalculability'.

[69] *Ibidem*, 111.

[70] *Ibidem*, 112.

For Ratzinger, the mediation of history in ontology is the key problem for fundamental theology.[71] But, as I say, nature is developed as a distinct theme of fundamental theology, and it is not fused with history in such an effort. The clear advantage of Ratzinger's understanding of fundamental theology is the way that he brings forward the Christological as well as the natural and rational dimensions that are present in the tradition's notion of the *Logos* for the purpose of settling the horizon of Christian thinking, of Christian doctrine. The fusion here is not of nature and history but a fusion of the general and special categories that are still separated in the theological method of Lonergan. It makes good on the reasonable character of nature in ways that Rahner's theology cannot deliver beyond its existentialist form of expression. The *Logos* also fulfills the diversity of genres that are left disunited in the natural / scientific theology of Alister McGrath.

VI. Conclusion

This paper has argued that fresh perspectives from contemporary theologians can help fulfill the mission and scope of fundamental theology as it was originally designed in the light of more ancient apologetical, doctrinal and philosophical forms of theology. Without abandoning the category of history, we now have tangible examples of an engagement with nature that may animate the theological guild to deliberate on how to interpret nature in a post-positivist paradigm. As I have shown, the *Logos* theology of Joseph Ratzinger is best situated to provide the kind of scope that is required and the work of Giuseppe Tanzella-Nitti shows how the specific contours of this theological program might progress.

Despite the modern turn to history, we now see a convergence of fundamental theological concern for historical subjectivity alongside a realization of the enduring authority of nature and the metaphysical panorama that was previously taken for granted by pre-modern theologians. The modern genre of fundamental theology was set in motion by modern theologians who saw that a unified theological project must heal the breach between scripture and doctrine. This effort was patchwork, seen most notably among adherents of new ways of thinking like the Tubingen school, represented by figures such as Johann Sebastian

[71] J. Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 1987.

Drey. In light of the theological turn to historical subjectivity, evident in its reception in the theological instincts of Karl Rahner in particular, there emerged, quite unintentionally in some respects, a dualism that opened up between nature and history and culture, as an unspoken presupposition for Catholic theology.

This implicit dualism between nature and culture is breaking down as the third form of fundamental theology begins to emerge in the writing of those like Tanzella-Nitti. From the point of view of a fundamental theology that is informed by science, there are important developments taking place within biology, the philosophy of science and theological anthropology that wholeheartedly support this enterprise. One of these is the growth in attention to the extended evolutionary synthesis, an empirical way in which evolutionary mechanisms are framed in conjunction with culture. In his book *Signs in the Dust: A Theory of Natural Culture and Cultural Nature*, Nathan Lyons offers "an account of cultural meaning that is at home in natural materiality."[72] There is also the ongoing debates over the origins and even the definition of life. As Mariusz Tabaczek sees it, there is an ongoing debate that entails revisiting the fourfold causation of Aristotelian philosophy in assessing the debates over life and its necessary or sufficient elements.[73] It marks the return of a philosophy of organism, which not only goes beyond the reductionism of neo-Darwinian biology but also establishes a new way to think about the interrelatedness of different causes. A number of important fundamental insights into the nature *of* nature are interwoven in such debates. These insights were unavailable until recently because the exchange between faith and science had not taken shape yet. The organismic view of life is tied up with the vivid teleology of the Christian view of creation. New interpretations of creaturely life, such as that by Dennis Noble, on the problems of understanding life exclusively in terms of mechanical genetic causation, are plausible ways for a fundamental theology to again appropriate theories from the philosophy of nature in order to develop categories

[72] N. Lyons, *Signs in the Dust: A Theory of Natural Culture and Cultural Nature*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2019, 3.

[73] See M. Tabaczek, *Aristotelian-Thomistic Contribution to the Contemporary Studies on Biological Life and Its Origin*, «Religions» 14/2 (2023) 214; *https://doi.org/ 10.3390/rel14020214*.

to frame the doctrine of creation.[74]

It is very positive from the point of view of fundamental theology that these new, reinterpretations of science and nature are occurring now. They give impetus to the recasting of fundamental theology that has been underway for some time. Nascent within the systems and engagements with science and nature in the work of Rahner and Lonergan, the return of a fundamental theology that springs from nature and science is now indicated by the work of Tanzella-Nitti in a fresh way. This allows for another reinterpretation, which is the reinterpretation of the work of our contemporaries in the science-theology dialogue, like McGrath and Grey, whose appreciation for the realities of (Augustinian) conversion and a unified theological discourse could come to fruition. In these exciting intellectual contexts, a renewed Catholic fundamental theology has much to offer and much to learn.

[74] See D. Noble, *The Music of Life: Biology Beyond the Genome*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2006.