

PART I

A Theological Vision

I will be investigating Francis Schüssler Fiorenza's project for a critical reconstruction of fundamental theology as a reconstructive hermeneutic of the paradigmatic identity of the Christian tradition through a survey of the underlying vision that underpins its emergence and development. This survey involves reconstructing Fiorenza's theological history by analysing the influences and developments of his theological intuition, exploring the theoretical foundation of his vision and investigating the methodological elements of his theological project. Such a reconstruction is a vital prolegomenon to a productive retrieval of the value of Fiorenza for contemporary theology because it underscores the rich diversity of his sources and the refinement of his thought in response to developments in theology. This retrieval will provide the basis for further exploration into how Fiorenza's vision and project can fruitfully engage with the concerns and challenges that characterise contemporary theology. The value of Fiorenza's theological vision lies in a critical and creative engagement with a broad range of thinking in transcendental theology, critical theory, contemporary hermeneutical theory, feminist theology and political theology. The breadth and depth of Fiorenza's reading in theology, philosophy and political theory, coupled with an insight into the dynamics of their historical and contemporary development, gives him a privileged perspective on the nature of the diverse challenges that confront contemporary theology.

The arrangement of this part follows the reconstructive method Fiorenza himself proposes—an analytical and critical investigation that systematically uncovers the underlying structures of thought that shape his own critical reconstructive project. This is in contrast to a foundationalist approach that works systematically from a fixed base and then proceeds to construct subsequent layers of development that demonstrate a methodical progression secured on a foundational point. This method for revealing the layers of Fiorenza's vision and narrative goes beyond a vertical synchronic view that methodically moves from origins to final product, and employs a diachronic conceptualist approach that reflects across the strands and layers of his thought

from emergence and development, transversing across themes, influences, developments and refinements to bring them into a coherent relation.

An exploration of Fiorenza's method entails situating it in the broader context of his theological journey and then understanding its relation to the ideas that have shaped its underlying vision. The intention of this first part is to recover, through a reconstructive survey, the foundations of Fiorenza's theological vision and program for a renewed understanding and implementation of method in systematic theology generally, and in fundamental theology particularly. This will involve a review of the contours of his theological narrative through an account of the formative influences on his theological vision, the theoretical principles underlying his critical-reconstructive program for foundational theology and the methodological elements of his theological project. With these three aims guiding the discussion, the first two chapters will trace the trajectory of Fiorenza's thought from its origins, emergence and development. The third chapter will devote itself to a critical evaluation of Fiorenza's theology and briefly assess the value of his project and method for the larger question of this study. This will provide a basis for the investigation into the corresponding thesis of this study in relation to Fiorenza's approach to the universality-particularity discussion in the philosophical, sociocultural, political and theological domains.

Formative Foundations of a Theological Journey

Tracing Francis Schüssler Fiorenza's theological journey gives insight into his own narrative and the shifting patterns in theology over the past half century. His theological development reflects and intersects with recent and contemporary Catholic and Protestant theology, revealing how as a theologian receptive to the changing currents of theological thought, he has also contributed to its development and deepening. This receptive and critical appropriation of diverse strands of thinking in a range of academic influences is a distinguishing feature of his theological vision. Mapping this journey, from early influences and original insights to a comprehensively systematic project to reconstruct the foundations of theology and to defining the critically practical function of religion in society and politics, will pave the way for a more defined survey of figures and thought that were both formative influences and constructive dialogue partners. While the link between Fiorenza's vision and project is unmistakably clear, it is important not to reduce the depth of his vision to ideas at the service of a method for foundational theology. While his project and its related method are motivated by and theoretically grounded in a vision, this vision possesses an internal coherence and an independent value beyond merely providing a propaedeutic function to his method. Therefore, while the first part of this chapter primarily explores this vision in relation to Fiorenza's more specific project, it also deals with the underlying ideas of hermeneutics, critical theory, political theology and pragmatic philosophy in relation to theology generally and their critical appropriation in Fiorenza's theology. In his over 150 publications, ranging from books and book sections to journal articles and reviews, Fiorenza readily acknowledges his indebtedness to those who have considerably contributed to the forming and deepening of his theological thought. This consciousness of the formative nature of figures and movements of thought on his own work has enabled Fiorenza to critically appropriate ideas and insights through a process of modification, revision and

application. Thus, Fiorenza has also appropriated formative influences as dialogue partners, interlocutors in the development of his theological intuition and the refining of his methodological project. As a reconstruction of Fiorenza entails an uncovering of the underlying principles that have guided the process of his vision and project, this section will deliberately seek direct influences and trace the main lines of thought in each category, figure and school that specifically shape his vision and the construction of his project. This will entail a survey of figures such as Schleiermacher, Rahner and Metz, and the figures and thinking that impress directly upon the methodological aspects of his reconstructive project—Habermas, Peirce, and Rawls—and the schools of thought with which they are associated. This approach does not advocate too sharp a division between vision and project, and between isolating the nature and degree of influence, but does provide a methodological framework to facilitate a descriptive and explanatory account of the development of Fiorenza’s thinking. However, a brief theological biography sets the background to this task.

A BRIEF THEOLOGICAL BIOGRAPHY

In 1963, after graduating from St. Mary’s University and Seminary in Baltimore with a Master of Divinity degree, Francis Peter Fiorenza received a scholarship to pursue doctoral studies under Karl Rahner at the University of Munich. “Rahner has not only influenced my thinking, but his essays inspired me to become a theologian and to study in Germany.”¹ As Rahner held the Romano Guardini Chair in Philosophy in the Faculty of Arts and Letters, the university rules forbade him to supervise postgraduate degrees in the Theology Faculty,² with the result that Johann Baptist Metz, his postgraduate student, transferred to Münster. At the same time, Joseph Ratzinger had also secured a teaching position at Münster. At the last minute, Fiorenza transferred his fellowship from Munich to Münster to study with Metz and Ratzinger, and to have the advantage of studying in a Protestant faculty. A few years later in 1967, Rahner accepted a theology chair at Münster, where Fiorenza had the opportunity to know him both personally and academically as they shared lodgings and Fiorenza studied under him.³ Fiorenza’s hasty transfer from Munich to Münster

1. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, “Karl Rahner: A Theologian for a Cosmopolitan Twenty-First Century,” in *In God’s Hands. Essays on the Church and Ecumenism in Honour of Michael A. Fahey, S.J.*, ed. Jaroslav Z. Skira and Michael S. Attridge, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 109–35, at 109.

2. Fergus Kerr, *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 89.

3. Fiorenza, “From Theologian to Pope,” *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* 33, no. 2 (2005): 56–62.

was to prove decisive for his personal life, his academic formation, and most significantly, for the direction his theological thought would take.

During his time at Münster, Fiorenza was to share in the spirit of intellectual hope that infected Germany's theology faculties during the Second Vatican Council, and enjoy the company of those who were *periti* (expert theological advisers) at the Council, Rahner and Ratzinger, and others such as J. B. Metz, Walter Kasper and Karl Lehman. Fiorenza's intellectual relationship with Rahner has extensively determined the origins and the direction of his theological interests and specialisations. While exploring Rahner's theology during his time in Münster, he came under the formative influence of Metz's theological outlook and came to share some of his misgivings about the starting point of Rahner's theology, elements of his method and the absence of a sociopolitical consciousness in his theology generally. In 1968, Fiorenza wrote the introduction to the second English translation of Rahner's *Spirit in the World*, entitled "Karl Rahner and the Kantian Problematic."⁴ As one of Fiorenza's early publications, this work offers insight into Rahner's critical development of Kant's transcendental method through Joseph Maréchal's Thomistic appropriation. Not only does Fiorenza demonstrate the extent to which he has penetrated the fundamental principles of Rahner's thought, but also comes to his defence against misunderstanding of and critical reaction to Rahner's attempts to develop a constructive relationship to current philosophy and an increasingly secularised society.⁵

Despite Fiorenza's orienting his thought around the fundamental insights of Rahner's work, it was Metz, as Fiorenza's doctoral supervisor (Rahner was co-supervisor), who was to play a decisive role in redirecting his theological path during his time in Münster. In 1966 Fiorenza published an essay on Metz's thought, which reveals his grasp of the philosophical presuppositions of Metz's orientation toward a theology grounded in a postmetaphysical critique of society, directed toward the future and, in contrast to Rahner's transcendental-existential approach, an historical-existential horizon within which to situate the relationship between God and humanity.⁶ Not only does this early publication give insight into the foundational ideas that underpinned

4. Fiorenza, "Introduction: Karl Rahner and the Kantian Problematic," in *Spirit in the World*, by Karl Rahner, trans. William J. Dych (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), xiv–xlv.

5. *Ibid.*, xxxii. Fiorenza clarifies misinterpretations of Rahner's conception of the convertibility of Being and intelligibility as a form of metaphysical idealism by Cornelius Ernst, and rejects Hans Urs von Balthasar's accusation of Rahner's theology as an "anthropological and subjectivist reduction of theology and Christianity." Cf. Kerr, *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians*, 91–92.

6. Fiorenza, "The Thought of J. B. Metz," *Philosophy Today* 10 (1966): 247–52, at 248.

Metz's eschatological political theology, but it also points to Fiorenza's commitment to the same philosophical presuppositions that would play a central role in developing his own theological positions. Under Metz's tutelage, Fiorenza embraced the fundamental ideas of German thinkers who transformed modern religious and social thinking, particularly the philosophical-religious thought of Friedrich Schleiermacher and the political-historical ideas of Ernst Bloch. Over the period of a year (1968–1969), Fiorenza published a trilogy of articles in the *Heythrop Journal* entitled "Dialectical Theology and Hope," which describe and critically evaluate the influence of the categories of the neo-Marxist thought of Ernst Bloch on German theology in the 1960s.⁷ Throughout this period, Fiorenza continued to explore the newly founded political theology of Jürgen Moltmann and Metz. This led to an increased interest in and commitment to the social and political dimensions of Christianity, where his theology found new depths through engagement with political theology, critical theory and social history. His doctoral dissertation, "Eschatology and Progress: The Theological Problematic of Ernst Bloch's Philosophy of History" explored the relation between Bloch's philosophy of history and the understanding of eschatology in German political theologies.⁸

Rahner was the key factor in Fiorenza's decision to study in Germany and to take up a fellowship at Münster under Metz, and it was Rahner who was indirectly responsible for him and Elisabeth Schüssler meeting each other.⁹ Fiorenza and Schüssler's first encounter was both a clash and a meeting of minds that not only led to marriage and a lifelong friendship, but also to his own theology being influenced by elements of her theological vision.¹⁰ While Fiorenza's work and thought are in fields of theology somewhat removed from Schüssler's, and he has carved out a distinctive theological profile independently of her theological specialisation, there has been a shared vision and certain elements of agreement and divergence in several areas.

7. Fiorenza, "Dialectical Theology and Hope I" *Heythrop Journal* 9 (1968): 145–63; "Dialectical Theology and Hope II," *Heythrop Journal* 9 (1968): 384–99; and "Dialectical Theology and Hope III," *Heythrop Journal* 10 (1969): 28–46.

8. Fiorenza, "The Influence of Feminist Theology on My Thought," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 7 (1991): 97–105, at 100.

9. Fiorenza was advised by a mutual acquaintance, Mary Buckley, that if he wanted to become a good systematic theologian, he had to meet with Schüssler, at the time also doing postgraduate studies at Münster, and take into account her challenging criticisms of Rahner's vision of the church and its ministry. Fiorenza, "From Interpretation to Rhetoric: The Feminist Challenge to Systematic Theology," in *Walk in the Ways of Wisdom*, ed. Shelly Matthews, Cynthia Briggs Kittredge, and Melanie Johnson Debaufre (Philadelphia: Trinity Press, 2003), 17–45, at 17.

10. *ibid.*

In 1981, Fiorenza took up a professorship at the Catholic University of America in Washington after having taught at the Catholic universities Notre Dame and Villanova throughout the 1970s. A number of factors in the early part of the decade, most significantly, the 1971 Synod of Bishops document *De Iustitia in Mundo*, on justice and peace and the consequences of Gustavo Gutierrez's *A Theology of Liberation*, stimulated an interest in liberation theology as a specific development and critique of political theology. Fiorenza continued to explore political theology and liberation theology in conjunction with his continued commitment to critical social theory, with writings on these and related issues in a number of publications. An important outcome of this element of his theological journey is the publication in 1977 of a contribution to the *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* proposing the legitimacy of political theology as providing the necessary grounding for faith and theology in a foundational theology.¹¹ This, along with the publication a year later of a hermeneutical analysis of Rahner's conception of the foundation of the church in the same journal, begins to lay the groundwork for the elements that were to become characteristic of his theological vision.¹² These and subsequent publications indicate a deepening of a theological intuition inspired by his own theological history, his specialisations in fundamental theology, political theology, hermeneutics, theological history, method in theology and pragmatic philosophy, which in due course find expression in the coalescence of a vision of the nature and task of his foundational theology.

In 1984, Fiorenza published his *Foundational Theology: Jesus and the Church*, in which he sets out in precise and developed terms his vision for a critically reconstructed fundamental theology.¹³ Drawing on a rich variety of philosophical and theological sources, he comprehensively examines three foundational themes of traditional fundamental theology, and in rigorous arguments reveals the inadequacies of previous theological methods to confront the inherent difficulties of the resurrection, the foundation of the church and its mission. Through an analysis of these issues, Fiorenza demonstrates the application of his method, highlights his thesis that foundational theology cannot and should not be developed in isolation from the conditions of its goals and purpose, and concretises the principles of a critical reconstruction

11. Fiorenza, "Political Theology as Foundational Theology," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 32 (1977): 142–77.

12. Fiorenza, "Rahner's Ecclesiology: Jesus and the Foundation of the Church—An Analysis of the Hermeneutical Issues," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 33 (1978): 229–54.

13. *Foundational Theology: Jesus and the Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1984), 326. This book received the award of the College Theology Society for the best book published by a member.

of theology through implementation. The theological paradigm of a reconstructive hermeneutics that he presents would, faithful to its own reconstructive principles, be developed, revised and refined in further works as he continued to deepen his own appropriation of his methodological principles for foundational theology.

In 1985, Fiorenza was elected as president of the Catholic Theological Society of America, where his first task was to organise a convention on the ecclesial and academic nature and role of theology. In his 1986 presidential address, he would further develop his project for a reconstruction of fundamental theology with particular reference to the relationship between the lived faith of the church as a community of discourse and the proper rationality demanded by this understanding of the identity of the church.¹⁴ During Fiorenza's term of office, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith revoked Charles Curran's mandate to teach in the theology faculty of the Catholic University of America, for his stance on the right to dissent from church teaching that had not explicitly been defined as *ex cathedra*. Despite Fiorenza's urging and his attempts at a compromise position between the Congregation and the moral theologian, Rome declared Curran incompetent to teach Catholic theology.¹⁵ Fiorenza's address is a challenge to the church to understand itself as a community of faith that, in consonance with the demands of tradition and reason, is committed to open and free discourse. Shortly thereafter, Fiorenza left the Catholic University of America to accept the position as Charles Chauncy Stillman professor of Roman Catholic Theological Studies at Harvard Divinity School.

Fiorenza continued to promote and demonstrate the capacity of his method for foundational theology to analyse and respond constructively to several issues within theology throughout the 1980s. Of particular note during this period is his contribution to discussions around the nature and task of theological education with specific reference to foundational theology.¹⁶ His interest and concern in this regard is also evident in the numerous article contributions to theological dictionaries and encyclopaedias in topics as wide-

14. Fiorenza, "Presidential Address: Foundations of Theology: A Community's Tradition of Discourse and Practice," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 41 (1986): 107–34.

15. Cf. "Presidential Address: Foundations of Theology," 134.

16. Fiorenza, "Foundational Theology and Theological Education," *Theological Education* 20, no. 2 (Spring 1984): 107–24; "Theory and Practice: Theological Education as a Reconstructive, Hermeneutical, and Practical Task," *Theological Education* 23 (1987): 113–41; "Thinking Theologically about Theological Education," *Theological Education* 24, Supplement 2 (1988): 88–119; and "Theology in the University," *Bulletin of the Council of Societies for the Study of Religion* 22 (1993), 34–39.

ranging as political and liberation theologies, redemption, Christology, apologetics, Schleiermacher, and the history of various theological disciplines and movements, reflecting his aptitude for thinking across diverse theological issues. In 1991, he co-edited the two volume *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*,¹⁷ and in 1994 the *Handbook of Catholic Theology*,¹⁸ both of which have become standard prescribed texts at both Catholic and Protestant colleges and universities. A similar project is his co-authorship of the second volume of *Modern Christian Thought: The Twentieth Century*¹⁹ with James Livingston and contributions on transcendental Thomism, political theology, hermeneutics and the history of theology leading to Vatican II and beyond.

With a number of significant publications on the thought of Schleiermacher and Habermas, Fiorenza continued to contribute to defining more specifically the role of contemporary hermeneutics and critical theory in relation to theology and particularly foundational theology. His profile as an especially insightful student of Rahner's theology led to contributions to a number of books, conference and journal articles wherein he reassesses key aspects of Rahner's thought and its significance for contemporary theology. His interest and expertise in the vital function and ethicising role of religion in the public sphere of the increasing pluralist and globalised contemporary society is articulated in insightful contributions to the discussion surrounding these issues. His latest work, *Rights at Risk: Confronting the Cultural, Ethical, and Religious Challenges* is due for publication in 2014. This book confronts an issue for which he has sought clarity for some time and which is of crucial significance for the postmodern critique of the claim to a universal standard for ethics and human rights.²⁰ Fiorenza seeks to clarify the interrelated problems

17. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John Galvin, eds., *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, 2 vols. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991). In June 2011 a revised second edition of these two volumes was published in a single updated volume. The second edition aims to reflect the contemporary shifts in theological methodology in its engagement with postmodern philosophy and contains additional new material and new contributors. *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, ed. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John Galvin, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011). I will reference the 1991 edition throughout this work, except where indicated otherwise.

18. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and Wolfgang Beinert, eds., *Handbook of Catholic Theology* (New York: Crossroad/Herder, 1995).

19. James Livingston and Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, eds., *Modern Christian Thought*, vol. 2, *The Twentieth Century* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 2000), chs. 7–9, 11.

20. Cf. Fiorenza, "The Influence of Feminist Theology on My Thought," 104–5; and Fiorenza, "The Church as a Community of Interpretation: Political Theology between Discourse Ethics and Hermeneutical Reconstruction," in *Habermas, Modernity, and Public Theology*, ed. Don Browning and Francis Schüssler Fiorenza (New York Crossroads, 1991), 66–91, at 79–81; and Fiorenza, "The Challenge

of postmodern criticism of rights and the relation between religion and human rights, focusing on the tense and mutually creative nature of this relationship, particularly in the context of the social welfare policies of the United States of America. Although his theological interests and expertise cover a number of fields, his present concern with issues of social justice in the light of a theology responsive to philosophical–ethical reflections on contemporary issues, reveals a strand of thought and commitment to the relationship between religion and the world going back to his early years with Rahner and Metz.

A VISION FOR THEOLOGY—THEOLOGIANS

Fiorenza’s writings demonstrate his familiarity with the thought of the classic, medieval and modern thinkers that have shaped contemporary theology. He has engaged with the thought of Augustine, Aquinas, Bernard Lonergan, Richard R. Niebuhr, Joseph Ratzinger and David Tracy, among others. However, three key figures can be identified as influential in forming Fiorenza’s thinking. Friedrich Schleiermacher, Karl Rahner and Johann Baptist Metz have each in their own way served as inspiration, resource and interlocutor for the development of his theological vision and the construction of his method. This survey of influential theologians does not intend a comprehensive overview of the thought of these figures, but rather indicates how elements of their thinking contributed to Fiorenza’s theological formation and their specific role in his reconstructive hermeneutics.

FRIEDRICH SCHLEIERMACHER

While Karl Rahner is undoubtedly of primary significance in the formation of Fiorenza’s theological vision, Fiorenza says, “My interest in Karl Rahner’s theology had led me to go to Germany for doctoral studies. Once there, I discovered that much of what I had admired in Rahner had already been anticipated a century and a half earlier in Schleiermacher’s work.”²¹ A detour back to the early nineteenth century underscores how Fiorenza’s engagement with Schleiermacher affirmed the basic intuitions of his Rahnerian vision and led him along paths beyond Rahner. This path necessarily leads first through

of Pluralism and Globalization to Ethical Reflection” in *Concilium: International Journal of Theology* 4 (2001): 71–85. These articles indicate his concern with the tense relationship between universal and particularist notions of human rights in a postmodern context critical of the liberal principles advocated by the Enlightenment. His forthcoming book should be of great interest to see how his grasp of history, ethical theory and human rights issues confronts this challenge.

21. Fiorenza, “Religion: A Contested Site in Theology and the Study of Religion” *Harvard Theological Review* 93 (2000): 7–34, at 7.

a rediscovery of the Rahnerian intuition present in German theology for over a century; an “indirect” method of a preconceptual consciousness of transcendence beyond an excessive rationalism coupled with an external expression in a historically concrete religious commitment. The philosophical theology of Friedrich Schleiermacher, a watershed figure who systematically restated the essence of Christian religion in a romantic liberal understanding beyond Enlightenment rationality,²² particularly his reconstructive understanding of religion and theology as outlined in the *Glaubenslehre* (*The Christian Faith*),²³ inspired Fiorenza’s theological intuition to seek a contemporary reconstruction similar in intent and effect. Fiorenza’s vision for a nonfoundationalist approach to foundational theology is worked out from an interpretation that situates itself between the Protestant view of Schleiermacher as a foundationalist and the Catholic view of him as advocating antifoundationalism. Mediating these opposing views, Fiorenza incorporates the insight of a nonfoundationalist methodology into his vision for foundational theology.²⁴

22. James C. Livingston, *Modern Christian Thought: The Enlightenment and the Nineteenth Century*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 93.

23. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Der christliche Glaube: Nach den Grundsätzen der evangelischen Kirche im Zusammenhange dargestellt* (1830–31). *The Christian Faith*, ed. H. R. MacKintosh and J. S. Stewart (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, [1928], 1986).

24. Cf. Fiorenza, “Schleiermacher and the Construction of a Contemporary Roman Catholic Foundational Theology,” *Harvard Theological Review* 89 (1996): 175–94, at 176–77. Perhaps at this point it may be useful to briefly clarify Fiorenza’s understanding of a nonfoundationalist foundational theology. The section to come where his method is outlined will deal more extensively with these themes, but for the sake of immediate clarity, it is important to note that Fiorenza does not advocate antifoundationalism; nor does he reject the principle of foundations. However, he does advocate a particular approach to foundational conceptual structures and justificatory warrants from the perspective of pragmatism rather than from the Aristotelian–Cartesian axis along which traditional fundamental theology aligns its thinking. Fiorenza’s foundational theology is an attempt to go beyond the inherent foundationalism within apologetic, transcendental and correlationist approaches to fundamental theology and to employ a method of reflective equilibrium, which is an alternative approach to that of the former, predicated as they are on a conception of rationality that supports a foundationalism associated with positivism and scientism. Fiorenza turns to critical theory and North American pragmatic philosophy for a critique of an autonomous, neutral and individualistic rationality and the construction of a rationality that favours praxis, tradition, norms and community. Thus, his foundational theology is nonfoundationalist in its rejection of a method predicated on an outdated notion of rationality and foundational in that it seeks several foundations simultaneously in order to fulfill the demands of a contemporary rationality and the demands of discerning and articulating the truth and meaning of faith, theology and tradition. For an excellent overview and assessment of the relation between rationality and foundations, see Fiorenza, “Presidential Address: Foundations of Theology,” 116–27.

It was Richard R. Niebuhr's *Schleiermacher on Christ and Religion*,²⁵ a required text for a graduate course given by Niebuhr in Germany attended by Fiorenza at the time of his doctoral studies, which introduced him to the thought and work of Schleiermacher.²⁶ Schleiermacher, like Rahner, sought a grounding of Christian faith in the experience of God as given to human consciousness in "feeling" or more precisely, "immediate self-consciousness" as unmediated intuition not derived from rational reflection.²⁷ In many ways, this approach anticipated Rahner's preapprehension of being and his grounding of faith in the existential experience of grace in subjective self-consciousness. However, Fiorenza points out that Rahner's specific identification of self-transcendence with religious experience is closer to Hegel than it is to Schleiermacher.²⁸ Furthermore, the idea of re-establishing faith on a basis beyond the traditional methods unites Rahner and Schleiermacher in envisioning a restructured grounding for the theological project. It is more accurate to state that Rahner's fundamental theology approximates Schleiermacher's reconception of the basis for faith in that it explicates the whole of doctrine with primary reference to human subjectivity.²⁹ In fact, Fiorenza's analysis of the nonfoundationalist character of Schleiermacher's theological program as outlined in his *Glaubenslehre* and its intrinsic rather than extrinsic justification of systematic theology draws very close parallels with Rahner. "If one compares Schleiermacher's *Glaubenslehre* with Rahner's *Foundation of Christian Faith*, then it is not simply the introduction or even the introductory sections of dogmatic method, but the whole *Glaubenslehre* that correlates with Roman Catholic foundational theology."³⁰

The more specific elements of Schleiermacher that are to some extent consonant with elements in Rahner's thought and Fiorenza's appropriation of him could be succinctly stated as follows. Schleiermacher sought to establish the nature of religious beliefs by reconstructing its foundations. The external

25. Richard R. Niebuhr, *Schleiermacher on Christ and Religion: A New Introduction* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1964).

26. Fiorenza, "Schleiermacher and the Construction," 7.

27. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, §3; cf. Jacqueline Marina, "Schleiermacher on the Outpourings of the Inner Fire: Experiential Expressivism and Religious Pluralism," *Religious Studies* 40 (2004): 125–43, at 126.

28. "Rahner's interpretation of religious experience as self-transcendence and of the concept of Christianity suggests significant parallels to Hegel and differences from Schleiermacher." Fiorenza, "Schleiermacher and the Construction," 181n20.

29. Fiorenza, "Schleiermacher and the Construction," 181.

30. *Ibid.*, 194.

and dispensable elements of religion rejected by its “cultured despisers” obscure the real and fundamental essence of religion through a rationalisation that is “the handiwork of the calculating understanding.”³¹ Religion cannot and should not be defended on utilitarian or pragmatic grounds, by appeals to neither theoretical science (Hegel) nor morality (Kant). This signals a distinct rejection of Enlightenment rationality and Kantian ethical grounds for religion. Immediate self-consciousness is the faculty peculiar to religious consciousness and is an intuition where the self is present to itself as a unique and underived unity that constitutes the infinite manifest in the human spirit.³² Each person is therefore a concrete and specific representation in the world of the infinite and the ultimate. Nevertheless, despite these resonances, which excited Fiorenza’s interest in Schleiermacher, his further reading and reflection brought him to the position where he would discover in Schleiermacher’s approach and attitude the next step towards the beginnings of an outline for a nonfoundationalist fundamental theology.

In constructing his foundational theology, Fiorenza consciously appropriated and interpreted elements of Schleiermacher’s thought, which he then developed in light of their underlying principles. He took “into account the positive *Ansatz* (‘approach’) of Schleiermacher’s own construction, the criticisms of Schleiermacher by Roman Catholic theologians and by German Neo-orthodoxy (Brunner and Barth).”³³ Furthermore, he acknowledges the inspiration of Schleiermacher more explicitly when he says, “In suggesting that fundamental theology involves a broad reflective equilibrium between hermeneutical reconstruction, background theories, and retroductive warrants, I was attempting to reformulate a Roman Catholic fundamental theology in relation to Schleiermacher’s work.”³⁴ Fiorenza recognises in Schleiermacher’s critical procedure for philosophical theology’s reflection on Christianity a reconciliatory method beyond both a purely scientific analysis and an historical-empirical analysis that displays a method approximating a narrow reflective equilibrium. “I would like to suggest that for Schleiermacher ‘critical’ entails not foundationalism, but rather a type of reflective equilibrium.”³⁵ In “Schleiermacher and the Construction of a Contemporary Roman Catholic Foundational Theology,” Fiorenza systematically develops his intuition that

31. Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, trans. John Oman (New York: Harper and Brothers, [1893], 1958), 15; quoted in Livingston, *Modern Christian Thought*, 96.

32. Livingston, *Modern Christian Thought*, 96.

33. Fiorenza, “Schleiermacher and the Construction,” 189.

34. *Ibid.*, 190.

35. *Ibid.*, 183.

Schleiermacher's method is not foundationalist as supposed by George Lindbeck and the Yale school in their criticism of him, nor is it correct to equate it with the Catholic neoscholastic fundamental theology that Rahner tried to overcome.

Fiorenza identifies three procedures in Schleiermacher's method suggestive of a reflective equilibrium.³⁶ First, this appears in his interrelating of the historical-positive with the natural elements of Christianity to reach the true uncluttered "essence" of religion, where the natural inherent essence is constituted in the concrete historical fact of Christianity and is determinative of its historical specificity. Second, Fiorenza discerns a reflective equilibrium in the procedure wherein Schleiermacher demonstrates the mutual interaction between historical theology and philosophical theology, where the historical fact of Christianity and its conceptual idea are mutually constitutive. Third, Schleiermacher's developed notion of critical procedure as producing and leading to knowledge reflects a notion of epistemology that goes beyond deduction and induction to a method that seeks the underlying principles within the given, what Fiorenza describes as articulating Gilbert Ryle's and Clifford Geertz's "thick description."³⁷ This third element is also akin to Peirce's notion of an abductive approach to knowing and its relationship with nonfoundationalist modes of knowledge.

Fiorenza's interpretive understanding and development of ideas implicit and explicit in Schleiermacher, in relation to both fundamental theology generally and also to other elements of his project, indicates the inspirational and functional role of Schleiermacher in the formation of his theological vision. This is particularly evident in his expansion from a narrow to a broad reflective equilibrium, which Fiorenza acknowledges "as a continuation of the heritage that he has bequeathed to us."³⁸ It was through his encounter with Schleiermacher's hermeneutics and its subsequent development in German theology and philosophy that Fiorenza moved beyond Rahner's existential-transcendental theology to a predominantly hermeneutical approach to fundamental theology. However, it is his engagement with the formal fundamental theology of Rahner which provides both the impetus and the foil for his own reconstructed foundational theology.

36. *Ibid.*, 183–188. What follows is a brief description.

37. Fiorenza, "Systematic Theology and Hermeneutics," in *Between the Human and the Divine: Philosophical and Theological Hermeneutics*, ed. Andrzej Wiercinski (Toronto: The Hermeneutics Press, 2002), 510–30. Here Fiorenza advocates more explicitly his broad reflective equilibrium as a response to the inadequacies of thick description in fulfilling the tasks of systematic theology.

38. Fiorenza, "Schleiermacher and the Construction," 194.

KARL RAHNER

“As a student in theology, I started out with the usual youthful enthusiasm for the work of a great theologian. In my case, it was primarily the work of Karl Rahner in his development of a transcendental theology.”³⁹ If one were to identify a single motivating factor behind Fiorenza’s vision for a renewed fundamental theology it would have to be his critical engagement with the thought of Karl Rahner, particularly Rahner’s formal fundamental theology. From “Karl Rahner and the Kantian Problematic” in 1968 to “Karl Rahner: A Theologian for a Cosmopolitan Twenty-First Century” in 2006, Fiorenza’s writings, specifically devoted to exploring, analysing, applying, critiquing and developing Rahner’s theological thought, reveal a lifelong intellectual relationship with Rahner’s thought. Yet, these writings also demonstrate how Fiorenza *critically* appropriated his teacher over this forty-year period.⁴⁰ Fiorenza’s critique of Rahner is primarily with his starting point (transcendental method), and in the early years, along with Metz, dissatisfaction with the insufficiently historical and political nature of his theology. More recently, Fiorenza defends Rahner against these very criticisms, rehabilitating him through a deeper reading of his extensive oeuvre, clarifying misconceptions and highlighting the historical-social basis of Rahner’s vision.⁴¹ However, it is a worthwhile reminder that Rahner’s attention to history became more pronounced in his later writings, chiefly due to the influence of Metz.⁴² Taking into account Fiorenza’s nonfoundationalist theology, which he proposes as an advance on Rahner, precisely because of Rahner’s foundationalist tendency, it is interesting to note his rereading of Rahner in “Method in Theology” where he suggests that the occasional nature of Rahner’s writings indicates that he is not so much a foundationalist thinker as he is a practical theologian. However, in fairness, Fiorenza may well adopt two readings and distinguish between Rahner’s fundamental theology as seeking a distinct foundation in existential experience and the nonfoundationalist character of Rahner’s underlying theological intuition, which Fiorenza describes as practical and pastoral.⁴³

39. Fiorenza, “The Influence of Feminist Theology on My Thought,” 95.

40. Cf. Fiorenza, “Rahner’s Ecclesiology,” 254.

41. “Karl Rahner: A Theologian for a Cosmopolitan Twenty-First Century,” and “Method in Theology,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, ed. Mary E. Hines and Declan Marmion (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 65–82. In both of these articles, where the latter elaborates on the former, Fiorenza explicitly states his intention to correct caricatures and distortions of the basis of Rahner’s theology by resituating him within the evolving context of contemporary theology.

42. Cf. Hines and Marmion, “Introduction,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, 6.

Rahner's fundamental theology is intended as more than a simple advance on the apologetic approach that characterised neoscholasticism, but as a restructuring of the very basis of the discipline. Traditional fundamental theology was distinct and independent from systematic theology, and because it secured the foundations of theology on a rational basis, was considered prior to systematic theology.⁴⁴ Unlike the extrinsic demonstration of this approach, which sought a foundation for theology in the historical truth of revealed religion, the Christian faith and the Catholic church on an excessively rational basis prior to faith, Rahner's fundamental theology would ground faith and theology in personal experience and so attenuate the too-sharp distinction between the disciplines. "Rahner sought to show the correlation between the content of Christian faith and the existential self-transcending questions of human existence."⁴⁵ Rahner thus transforms an apologetic fundamental theology into a formal fundamental theology that correlates the transcendental experience of grace with its categorical expression as manifested in history. He also bypasses any philosophical preconditions for demonstrating faith, belief and doctrine by entering directly into a quest for the intrinsic meaning within the contents of faith itself. By formal, Rahner intends a correlation between a transcendental analysis, which reveals a preconceptual experience of faith, and the categorical and conceptual expression of this apprehension defined in the Christian symbols of faith, thus confirming both the *truth* and the *meaning* of Christian faith.⁴⁶ For Rahner, his formal fundamental theology reaches out to the conditions for faith as present within the very structures of the human subjective experience of finitude; it explicates the philosophical mediation of faith and illumines the meaning of faith to those who already accept the extrinsic truth of Christian beliefs. It points to faith as an inherent possibility in human self-experience, and that this transcendental experience always occurs within the historically conditioned events of life, thus pointing to meaning as always *co-present* with truth. Rahner's conception of the formal identity between fundamental and systematic theology, particularly as outlined in his *Foundations of Christian Faith*,⁴⁷ and the intrinsic interconnectedness of truth and

43. "Method in Theology," 68. It is interesting that another Rahnerian scholar, Karen Kilby also argues for a nonfoundationalist reading of his thought, but from an analysis of the philosophical underpinning of his theology. Karen Kilby, *Karl Rahner: Theology and Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2004).

44. Fiorenza, "Fundamental Theology and the Enlightenment," *Journal of Religion* 62 (1982): 289.

45. Fiorenza, "Schleiermacher and the Construction," 181.

46. Fiorenza, "Fundamental Theology and the Enlightenment," 292.

47. Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William J. Dych (New York: Crossroad, 1978).

meaning in and for fundamental theology will become important for Fiorenza in the more detailed discussion to follow on the specific features of Fiorenza's foundational theology.

If in writing *Foundational Theology*, Fiorenza's concern was to go beyond Rahner's achievement, then his initial theological intuition was grounded in the "reconstructive" project for fundamental theology envisioned by Rahner's project to overcome the foundationalism of neoscholastic apologetics through his formal fundamental theology and its indirect method and transcendental analysis. Fiorenza's engagement with Rahner gave him the guiding impetus to reconceive fundamental theology, to re-establish the intrinsic relationship between fundamental and systematic theology, to explore the notion that truth is constituted in meaning, and to ground faith and theology in a conceptual framework beyond foundationalism. Fiorenza, like Rahner, sought to engage as creatively as possible with the elements of contemporary philosophy to create a fundamental theology responsive to the demands of theological authenticity and the concerns of the church and society.

Rahner's influence on Fiorenza was more in the nature of the products of his thought, his program for fundamental theology, the experiential anthropocentrism of his theology, the challenge of his vision of pluralism and freedom to traditional theology and ecclesial authority, and ultimately the practical-pastoral character that motivates his writings, rather than in the influences that shaped Rahner's own thinking. Fiorenza did not turn to Rahner's sources to develop his own advance on Rahner; he did not seek a similar appropriation of Aquinas, Kant, Rousselot, Maréchal or Heidegger. For a philosophical underpinning of his thought, Fiorenza turned instead to hermeneutical theory, critical theory and North American pragmatism. Fiorenza did not take the inward turn to the subject or seek a deepening of the transcendental basis of Rahner's method; instead, he followed the possibilities that Rahner's vision promised and so turned to history, politics and society and directed his attention to the hermeneutical challenge to the basis of theological certainty. The fundamental hermeneutical option of Fiorenza's theology, his appropriation of Habermas's communicative rationality, the pragmatic emphasis in his method and the socio-political content of his theology have all served to obscure any significant influences he may have initially drawn from Rahner. The advance that Fiorenza offers over Rahner can be identified and assessed only in relation to Fiorenza's appropriation and advance on Metz. Fiorenza shares Metz's dissatisfaction with Rahner's transcendental-existential, praxis-deficient and ahistorical fundamental theology.

JOHANN BAPTIST METZ

Next to Rahner, J. B. Metz is the figure most influential in the formation of his vision for a reconstructed foundational theology. If Rahner pointed Fiorenza in the direction of a fundamental theology that engaged with the best of creative thinking in modern philosophy, then it was Metz who inspired in Fiorenza the vision to make that fundamental theology practically applicable to the demands of history and society. Fiorenza's vision both draws on and develops Metz's practical fundamental theology by his appropriation of the historical and practical elements in his theology and by developing the significance of the public responsibility of theology overlooked by Metz.

Fiorenza identifies the unique contribution of Metz: "Johann B. Metz has more than any other contemporary German Roman Catholic theologian after Karl Rahner sought to reconceptualise the role of fundamental theology."⁴⁸ Metz's reconception begins on the basis of a perception that Rahner's transcendental formal method, while responsive to the challenge of the Enlightenment, deals only with the theoretical challenge and leaves untouched the radical critique of society and praxis at the heart of the Enlightenment challenge. Metz seeks to respond to the deeper underlying challenge of the Enlightenment by constructing a practical fundamental theology that is cognisant of the necessary rational task demanded by this response, but subordinates it to the more radical task of situating this response within the societal and political challenges to fundamental theology.⁴⁹ Metz's political theology is itself a distinct break with the individualising and privatising tendencies of the previous existential theologies, such as Rahner's broader and more specifically fundamental theology. "Metz's encounter with Ernst Bloch has led him to criticise the transcendental theology of his teacher, Karl Rahner, and to formulate his own position as being a 'political theology'".⁵⁰ For Metz, political theology is defined by its task, which is to challenge the rational impact of the Enlightenment precisely by revealing the more insidious influence upon society by the presuppositions of the Enlightenment's products. These products are the turn to the subject manifest in the central role given to the human person and to the emancipation of the person by promoting the autonomy of the person in relation to society and its institutions, notably the religious institutions. Therefore, its challenge to religion is to not only its doctrines, but

48. Fiorenza, "Fundamental Theology and the Enlightenment," 289.

49. *Ibid.*, 290.

50. Fiorenza, "Dialectical Theology and Hope I," 146.

also its political and social function and influence.⁵¹ Metz breaks with Rahner precisely on this point.

Metz profiles his own voice as Rahner's disciple,⁵² by developing his practical fundamental theology in relation to and in divergence from Rahner's by stressing the importance of the historical and practical in fundamental theology. Rahner's transcendental theology fails to uncover and respond adequately to the political and social products of the Enlightenment, marked as it is by the absences of ideological criticism, social consciousness and political consequence. Because Rahner's formal fundamental theology bypasses the concreteness of history and collapses historical objectivity and personal subjectivity, it fails to meet both the theoretical and the practical political challenges levelled at theology by the Enlightenment.⁵³ He first analyses the historical effects of the Enlightenment and then presents a practical fundamental theology that emphasises the primacy of praxis, memory and narrative based on an ideological criticism of the effects of the Enlightenment on modern society.⁵⁴ Metz's approach correlates the primacy of praxis with a theology of the human subject wherein the experience of the self as at once religious and as subject is central in the history of salvation. Furthermore, this experience is co-extensive with the experience of God as being in active solidarity with the victims of history: "The notion that God is a practical idea that constitutes human subjecthood underlies Metz's explanations of the function of praxis, memory, and narrative."⁵⁵ Metz's political theology is outlined in his *Zur Theologie Der Welt* (1968) [*Theology of the World*], where he analyses the secularisation of society and develops a political theology to respond to the privatisation of religion in this secularised bourgeois context. In 1977, he argues specifically for a practical fundamental theology in *Glaube in Geschichte und Gesellschaft: Studien zu einer praktischen Fundamentaltheologie* (*Faith in History in Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology*). He deepens the basic insights of these previous works in *Jenseits bürgerlicher Religion: Reden über die Zukunft des Christentums* (1980) [*The Emergent Church: The Future of Christianity in a Postbourgeois World*], where he puts forth his ideas of messianic religion versus bourgeois religion, a

51. Ibid.

52. Fiorenza, "Karl Rahner: A Theologian for a Cosmopolitan Twenty-First Century," 112.

53. Fiorenza, "Fundamental Theology and the Enlightenment," 291.

54. Ibid., 293. In this, Metz is indebted to his study of neo-Marxist philosophy of Ernst Bloch, whose *The Principle of Hope* exerted a significant impact on German theologians in the 1960s, and to which Metz directed Fiorenza.

55. Fiorenza, "Fundamental Theology and the Enlightenment," 294.

vision for a “second reformation,” the “eschatological proviso” and apocalyptic “interruption.”⁵⁶

Fiorenza’s firm grasp of the intention, analytical methodology and theoretical claims of Metz’s practical fundamental theology provides him with the necessary insight to offer a legitimate critique of his attempt to take fundamental theology in a new direction. While Fiorenza’s criticism ranges across a number of issues in Metz’s worked out program, which will be the focus of discussion in the next chapter, the primary shortcoming that he identifies in Metz is the lack of its proposals for concrete strategies for transformation consonant with its analytical critique, and the weakness of his claim upon the public domain. For Fiorenza, Metz does not work out the practical implications and challenges to his theology in relation to contemporary ethical and political theories in order to fulfill the apologetic and practical tasks of a practical fundamental theology. Despite these criticisms (responses to which would take Fiorenza along other paths to fulfill the demands of a fully developed foundational theology) the basic vision of a fundamental theology that intersects with the ideology and praxis of society that Metz pioneers would decisively determine the essential vision of Fiorenza’s theology. Metz’s sociocritical analysis of privatised religiosity, secularised and individualistic societies and the false ideologies that lead to unjust praxis provide for Fiorenza the basic starting point of a foundational theology that would seek to incorporate theoretical and practical elements to fulfill the task of a fundamental theology in relationship with history, praxis and society. The critical engagement of fundamental theology with history and context that mark Metz’s practical fundamental theology and distinguish it from Rahner’s would give to Fiorenza the crucial insight that fundamental theology cannot seek a basis for its claims in an ahistorical and rational foundationalism divorced from praxis.

Metz’s primary tools for analysing the secularism of modern society and its privatised religiosity came from the neo-Marxist philosophy of Ernst Bloch’s *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* (1959) [*The Principle of Hope*]. Metz introduced Fiorenza to Bloch’s work and to the Frankfurt School of critical theory, a relationship from which Fiorenza would benefit in the deepening of his vision and method. Fiorenza’s further engagement with Jürgen Habermas’s development of themes and directions in critical theory, along with currents of thought in North

56. Cf. Fiorenza, “Introduction,” in *Faith and the Future: Essays on Theology, Solidarity, and Modernity*, ed. Johann B. Metz and Jürgen Moltmann (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995), xii. Fiorenza would also have been influenced by the development of the idea of “interruption” in Metz’s, *Unterbrechungen: theologisch-politische Perspektiven und Profile* (Gütersloh, 1981).

American pragmatic philosophy and ethical theory, would provide elements for a more specific focus for developing and articulating his theological vision, a vision inspired by Schleiermacher, Rahner and Metz.

A METHOD FOR THEOLOGY—PHILOSOPHERS

If Schleiermacher, Rahner and Metz are influences on Fiorenza's conception of a foundational theology, then Jürgen Habermas, John Rawls, C. S. Peirce and Wilfrid Sellars can be regarded as influences on the articulated development of specific elements of his foundational theology. Considered in relation to their schools of thought, Fiorenza found confirmation for his vision in the theoretical principles and methodological procedures in the second generation of critical theory, and the North American school of pragmatic philosophy and of ethical and political theory. These sources would provide for him the necessary deepening and broadening of thought to begin to articulate a foundational theology principally hermeneutical, engaged with critical theory, based on a nonfoundationalist epistemology and practically oriented. As these influential figures and schools will be taken up in the next chapter in the analysis of the development of elements in Fiorenza's vision, this section will briefly introduce these influences and concisely indicate their role in defining the contours of his method.

CRITICAL THEORY—JÜRGEN HABERMAS

Habermas forms a conceptual bridge between Fiorenza's relation with continental philosophy as represented in the German school and the analytic tradition in North American philosophy as represented in the pragmatic school. Habermas straddles both worlds of thought with his grounding in the critical theory of the Frankfurt school and his conversations with Rawls, Richard Rorty and Hilary Putnam in the American school. The diversity of Habermas's sources and engagements and the capacity to interact critically with these creates an intellectual affinity between him and Fiorenza. Due to this intellectual relationship, Fiorenza is indebted to Habermas on a number of accounts and continues to engage with aspects of his thought. However, the more specific influences on Fiorenza are Habermas's hermeneutical theory, his rationality of communicative action and his discourse ethics, intertwined with dimensions of his development of aspects of critical theory's engagement with political, societal and ethical critique.

“My own approach to hermeneutical theory began within the context of the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, especially Jürgen Habermas's critique

of hermeneutics.”⁵⁷ Habermas’s critique and advance over the hermeneutical theories of Hans–Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur would be instrumental in the conception and development of Fiorenza’s reconstructive hermeneutics. In 1970, he co-edited with Justus George Lawler a series of articles for a special issue of *Continuum* on the Habermas–Gadamer controversy.⁵⁸ While Fiorenza is closer to the critical consciousness that stresses the relationship between *meaning and language* proffered by Habermas’s hermeneutics, he recognises the value of *reception hermeneutics* as developed by Hans Robert Jauss from sources in Gadamer, and borrows from Ricoeur’s hermeneutics the category of *testimony* as a functional element in reconstruction and the relationship between truth and meaning. Habermas’s critical hermeneutics underscores the social dimension of meaning and communication prevalent in all interaction, particularly the determining role of structures of domination and ideology within society. It is this insight that guides Fiorenza toward a critical reconstructive hermeneutic as the primary position in his foundational theology.

The social nature of reason in Habermas’s theory of communicative action appeals to Fiorenza’s commitment to a theology embedded within the discourse and praxis of the community, an insight that would be elaborated from sources within Habermas and Richard Bernstein that would decisively modify his foundational theology.⁵⁹ In his contribution to a conference that explores the relationship between critical theory and theology, Fiorenza engages with central elements of Habermas’s theory of communicative action, his interpretation of modernity and his discourse ethics to define their significance and limits for a political theology.⁶⁰ In this conference paper, Fiorenza reveals a grasp of Habermas’s key ideas by both an insightful exposition and analysis and by his appropriation and critical modification of elements of them to deepen and demonstrate his theological method.⁶¹ Throughout Fiorenza’s writings, the influence of Habermas and his development of critical theory are discernible

57. Fiorenza, “The Influence of Feminist Theology on My Thought,” 97.

58. *Cultural Hermeneutics: Special Issue of Continuum* 8 (1970).

59. Fiorenza would incorporate the fourth criterion of discourse within a community of faith in later developments of his method in response to Habermas’s *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon, 1981) and Richard Bernstein’s *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics and Praxis* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1983).

60. Fiorenza, “The Church as a Community of Interpretation.”

61. Of interest here is a critique of Fiorenza’s inadequate application of his analysis of Habermas’s ideas and the insufficiently developed notion of what precisely constitutes the church as a community in this article by Michael Haspel in “Hermeneutical Reconstruction and Discourse Ethics: A Critical Assessment of Francis Schüssler Fiorenza’s Concept of ‘the Church as a Community of Interpretation,’” *Scriptura* 82 (2003): 49–62. This will be taken up in the evaluative critique in chapter four.

in the primarily critical approach to assumptions and presuppositions in theological positions, in his reconstructive hermeneutics, in the capacity of background theories to influence theological attitudes and in the emphasis on the advantages of a communicative rationality for a public theology.

In 1991, Fiorenza collaborated with Don S. Browning in editing and publishing the papers of the presentations delivered at the above-mentioned conference held in 1988 at Harvard Divinity School, entitled “Critical Theory: Its Promise and Limitations for a Theology of the Public Realm.” The publication, *Habermas, Modernity, and Public Theology*, with an introduction and contribution by Fiorenza, is indicative of the influence that Habermas has had, and continues to have in the thought and work of Fiorenza. In further refining his theological vision, Fiorenza explores the mutual correlation and interaction that should take place between political theologies and the critical analysis and proposals of Habermas and the liberal theories of political justice of John Rawls.⁶²

NORTH AMERICAN POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY—JOHN RAWLS

Fiorenza’s engagement with John Rawls must be seen within the context of seeking a practical method for applying the theological analyses of political and liberation theologies and his encounter with the epistemology of North American philosophers. In 1971, Rawls published his influential *A Theory of Justice*,⁶³ in which he works out a theoretical system for a just egalitarian society, which would take Fiorenza in a direction that would determine both his vision for foundational theology and his concern for promoting a public theology that interacts with substantive issues in ethics, justice and politics. Rawls’s theories on concrete moral issues in the tradition of liberal politics provides Fiorenza with the principles for practical strategies for concretely applying theology as an advance on the inadequacies of specific ethical and social programs in political and liberation theologies. The defective methodology of interrelating praxis and theory in both theologies (in that the former’s analysis moves from theory to praxis and the latter from praxis to theory) provoked Fiorenza to seek a theology with a sound philosophical basis to relate more effectively theory and praxis.⁶⁴ This he found in pragmatic

62. Fiorenza, “The Influence of Feminist Theology on My Thought,” 100.

63. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1971).

64. Fiorenza, “Political Theology and Latin American Liberation Theologies,” *Modern Christian Thought*, vol. 2, 273–308, at 300–301.

philosophy and the political-ethical theories of the North American political philosophy, particularly as elaborated by Rawls.

However, it is Rawls's theory of reflective equilibrium as outlined in *A Theory of Justice* that is significant for Fiorenza's program for his theological vision. The method of *wide reflective equilibrium* as employed by Fiorenza in his reconstructive hermeneutics is the *principal methodological specification* of the reconstructive character and program of his nonfoundational foundational theology. The narrow reflective equilibrium originally proposed by Rawls envisages a method for arriving at the correlation between political commitments and their practical implementation in a just and reasonable manner by correlating beliefs with considered judgments so that they cohere with and provide a corrective balance to each other. Through reflective equilibrium, theoretical beliefs and specific judgements are brought into a relationship that seeks a mutual correlation toward a practical judgment. However, because a narrow reflective equilibrium is primarily correlationist and descriptive, which Fiorenza wishes to avoid in his reformulation of fundamental theology, is of limited value to his reconstructive and normative method. Furthermore, Rawls's "veil of ignorance" as a hypothetical position which attempts to eradicate presupposed knowledge prior to judgment presumes an ideal situation and ignores the contextually constitutive nature of knowledge and the inescapable social conditioning that informs all theoretical positions. In contrast, a wide reflective equilibrium that employs background theories of philosophy, science and sociology introduces a necessary corrective against which principles and judgments are evaluated, and so enables a dynamic interaction among diverse criteria that ensures ongoing revision in which the method is continuously effective for evolving theories and mutable contexts.⁶⁵

Fiorenza appropriates the method of wide reflective equilibrium from its original use in ethical and political theory and modifies it to serve a methodological function in a reconstructive foundational theology. The strategy of wide reflective equilibrium, because it privileges no particular element in reconstructive discernment, giving equal weight to each in seeking a revisable judgment, avoids the trap of foundationalism that grants to certain beliefs or experiences an *a priori* and unrevisable status. It is precisely the foundationalism inherent in historical and transcendental approaches to fundamental theology that Fiorenza believes undermines their capacity to

65. Fiorenza, "Theology as Responsible Valuation or as Reflective Equilibrium," *The Legacy of H. Richard Niebuhr*, ed. Ron Thiemann, Harvard Theological Studies 36 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 33–71, at 54–55.

respond to the critical, practical and hermeneutical task central to disclosing the truth and meaning of faith.

*NORTH AMERICAN PRAGMATIC PHILOSOPHY—CHARLES S. PEIRCE AND
WILFRID SELLARS*

“The pragmatic critique of foundationalism pertains both to a foundationalism based on subjective experience [transcendental theology] and to one based on objective experimentation [historical theology].”⁶⁶ The North American school of pragmatism provides Fiorenza with the necessary theoretical grounding for a nonfoundationalist theology that began with his engagement with Metz’s rejection of transcendental experience as a basis for faith and theology in favour of a practical and contextual approach for fundamental theology. Pragmatism and neopragmatism also provide Fiorenza with a theoretical underpinning for his emphasis on the interrelationship between theory and praxis, where theory is constitutive of praxis as demonstrated in the value of C. S. Peirce’s retroductive warrants.⁶⁷

Charles Sanders Peirce is widely regarded as the founder of pragmatism, a school of thought influential in Anglo-American philosophy that emphasises the experiential and practical consequences of knowledge as central to theory formation and the justification of beliefs. Peirce’s critique of Cartesian and empirical epistemology underscores the communal and ongoing corrective process of coming to knowledge. The theory of abduction, which stands in contrast to deductive and inductive modes of knowing with their implications of foundationalism, highlights the role of practice in epistemological theory. Fiorenza appropriates the abductive method, its development and underlying principles of nonfoundationalism in the notion of *retroductive warrants* for his foundational theology.⁶⁸ The strength of a retroductive warrant is in its capacity to generate diverse practical and insightful inferences from a hypothesis and its utility in providing criteria for judging complex and often conflicting positions. Therefore, in Fiorenza’s view it is aptly suited to a nonfoundationalist and pragmatic approach to theological discourse.

Wilfrid Sellars’s work is largely in the philosophies of science, mind and language.⁶⁹ Sellars’s thought is principally associated with his term and concept of the “myth of the given” as assumed in the empiricism of positivism, which

66. Fiorenza, “The Influence of Feminist Theology on My Thought,” 96 my insertions.

67. Fiorenza has also developed his thought, particularly his more recent work, in relation to the neo-pragmatism of Richard Rorty, Hilary Putnam and Richard Bernstein.

68. Fiorenza, “Fundamental Theology and Its Principal Concerns Today: Towards a Non-Foundational Foundational Theology,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 62 (1996): 118–39, at 128.

assumes that knowledge is gained by mere observation without taking into account the background knowledge, preunderstanding and contextual notions that affect observation. Against the empiricism of behaviourism's interpretation of self-consciousness, which is reduced to knowledge of intention of an agent through observation of behaviour, he underscores the connectedness between experience and interpretation.⁷⁰ The critique of foundationalism by Sellars does not deny that knowledge has a foundation, but rather that the metaphor of foundation leads us away from the insight that "if there is a logical dimension in which other empirical propositions rest on observation reports, there is another logical dimension in which the latter rests on the former."⁷¹ Neither experience nor reason is uncontaminated by presuppositions embedded in consciousness and sociocultural conditioning. The myth is that experience is always pure and unmediated, providing a foundationalist base for further inferences adduced from the conclusions drawn from pure experience. This is in contrast to the critical hermeneutics of Fiorenza's position, which highlights the complex matrix of interpretive data and conditions that undercut any attempt to seek a single notional foundation on which to place the burden of truth or appeal to historical demonstration as a warrant for truth.

CONCLUSION

Fiorenza continuously engages with a diverse range of sources and dialogue partners that have contributed to the conception, development and refinement of his vision for theology, and more specifically, his theological project. This engagement has enabled him to construct a complex and carefully thought-out vision for the identity, task and methods of theology. His ongoing research into the history of theology has also contributed to this process, contributing new insights, shifts of focus and progressive revision. His relationship with these sources and influences for the conception and development of his vision and project will change as his thinking evolves. The limits he comes up against in some sources will force him to seek in others a resolution to an impasse, a strand of thought in one will provide inspiration to take him in a direction beyond that source, and the abiding inspiration of the more influential continually play a role in the further enrichment of his vision and project. The continually evolving relationship with these influences will see his thinking move away

69. His principal work is *Science, Perception and Reality*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963); the essays, "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind" and "Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man" are of importance for his stance against positivism, behaviourism and scientism.

70. Fiorenza, "Fundamental Theology and Its Principal Concerns Today," 129.

71. Wilfrid Sellars, quoted in Fiorenza, "Schleiermacher and the Construction," 191.

from a previous firmly held position to a more nuanced attitude to that position, modifying commitments and goals to incorporate contrasting ideas. This is evident in delicate shifts of focus from fundamental theology to a concern with method in theology generally, from a responsive political theology to a more tightly argued theory-praxis position rooted in liberal pragmatic principles, and from an identification of the task of theology with hermeneutics to distinguishing the task of interpretive retrieval from the cognitive and ethical tasks. These developments will be dealt with more comprehensively in an evaluative critique in chapter four. Nevertheless, indicators of this will emerge in an analysis of the ideas that underpin his vision, to which we now turn to explore how Fiorenza took up and developed the insights from his formative influences in order to provide a theoretical framework for his theological project.