

Preface

Neil Ormerod recalls precisely the meal at which I suggested to him the value of writing a book on fundamental theology from the perspective of Bernard Lonergan. I had just published *Rethinking Fundamental Theology: Toward a New Fundamental Theology*,¹ which ended with three questions, the last question being: “How might Lonergan’s method and, in particular, his reflections on ‘foundations’ reshape the whole discipline of fundamental theology in the third millennium?” (343). I did not myself presume to “wrap it all up” by attempting to answer this and two other questions, which concerned, respectively, a debate on historical interpretation between Hans-Georg Gadamer and Jürgen Habermas and debates over the founding of the church.

Reading this joint work of Neil and his colleague, Christiaan Jacobs-Vandegeer, I have found it a significant contribution not only to Lonergan studies but also to the

1. Gerard O’Collins, *Rethinking Fundamental Theology: Toward a New Fundamental Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

development of fundamental theology. It has grown out of the conviction that conversion, in its various forms, is the foundational reality of theology.

The book puts into sharp focus for fundamental theology not only what Lonergan proposed about religious, moral, and intellectual conversion but also what Robert Doran later added about psychic conversion and the aesthetic concerns of Hans Urs von Balthasar. Such a fourfold conversion will enable theologians to see with the eyes of religious love. Unconverted theologians remain theologians who will never fulfill their mission. As the foreword to this book puts it, they resemble “an empty gong booming, full of sound and fury, but lacking the one thing essential.” Converted theologians, however, are “the foundation from which all sound theology emerges,” as our two authors state below.

If I were to name my favorite chapter in this work, which Neil and Christiaan have coauthored, I would pick chapter 5, “Psychic Conversion and the Question of Beauty.” Through the experience of beauty, the splendor of meaning, truth, and value can capture and hold our attention. What Doran has proposed about psychic conversion and von Balthasar has developed at length about the claims of beauty should shape deeply the practice of fundamental theology.

Neil and Christiaan appreciate the way in which fundamental theologians, even more than other theologians, need to share in debates that concern foundational questions. They should offer their readers help in navigating their way “through the competing claims of various theological camps.” Neil and Christiaan provide such help for those facing debates triggered by René Girard’s

mimesis theory, by John Milbank's Radical Orthodoxy, and by what various writers have argued about experience and, in particular, mysticism in the religions of the world.

In elaborating a foundational theology from a Lonergan perspective, our two authors have aimed to illustrate basic issues rather than provide a "comprehensive" treatment. They do not, for instance, tackle the question of the nature of scriptural inspiration and the truth to which the Scriptures witness. But they show us how to attend to foundational questions about God, the divine self-revelation, human faith, and so forth. They point to ways in which the study of foundations can anticipate something of what systematic theology elaborates about the Trinity, the incarnation, and the church.

All in all, I was delighted to discover not only that Neil and Christiaan approved of my proposal about the need to develop a fundamental theology in the light of Bernard Lonergan's achievement, but also how competently they have carried out this project. I hope that their book will be widely and positively received; I feel privileged to be associated with what they have done.

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