Fundamental theology: The continuing debate

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Abstract
This article begins by taking up various questions raised by those who reviewed G. O’Collins, Rethinking Fundamental Theology: Toward a New Fundamental Theology (Oxford University Press, 2011). It then retrieves some valuable literature that concerns fundamental theology and that has recently appeared in such areas as natural signs of the existence of God and the theology of religions. Finally, it shows how the book could be developed further in the sectors of apologetics, the genesis of faith, and tradition as collective memory.

Keywords
fundamental theology, natural theology, revelation, science, tradition

Several years ago I published Rethinking Fundamental Theology in an attempt to relaunch fundamental theology, a discipline that has been allowed to fall into decline in various parts of the world. With the book now available as a paperback, this article aims at (1) entering into dialogue with those who have reviewed the book; (2) reporting some publications affecting fundamental theology that appeared after I completed my text in mid-2010; and (3) offering some reflections that modify and/or develop what I had presented in Rethinking Fundamental Theology.

The reviewers

The reviewers came up with some encouraging judgments: ‘an excellent and voluminously learned work’ (Groves); ‘a high quality resource’ (Lim); ‘packed with extensive learning and wisdom’ (Marley); ‘well structured, informative, [and] thorough in what it addresses’ (Marsh); ‘a very fine text that should be welcomed by teachers, scholars, and students of all kinds’ (Padgett); ‘a superb account of fundamental theology’ (Richardson). Cattoi summed up the audience of the book this way: ‘educated readers of all kinds will find much to inspire them and to challenge their preconceptions about the role and task of theology’.

More than any other reviewer, Cattoi agreed with the need to relaunch fundamental theology, ‘a discipline whose very academic survival is at stake in the many seminaries and departments of theology that have sidelined or discontinued it’. In elaborating a viable, new-style fundamental theology, my aim was to find a more ‘modest’ middle ground between a relatively ‘mindless’ fundamentalism and a overconfident foundationalism bent on producing knockdown arguments to support the credibility of Christian claims. Alonso understood ‘overcoming both extremes’ to repeat the battle against ‘the fideism and rationalism that have always threatened the Christian faith’.

Cattoi, for his part, related my rethinking and reformulating ‘the first stages of the theological endeavour’ to previous attempts made by Karl Rahner, Bernard Lonergan, and Avery Dulles to ‘emancipate Catholic theology from the long hand of neo-scholasticism, which had set the terms of this debate until the eve of the Second Vatican Council’. Fundamental theology could no longer be ‘grounded in the supposed normativity – and immutability – of classical European culture’. As Cattoi implied, I had set myself to produce a fundamental theology that embraced Vatican II and went beyond it, when reflecting on revelation, faith, tradition, scripture, the founding of the church, and the world religions. Developing a deeply scriptural approach involved turning away from ‘static certainties’ to engage with ever-shifting cultural and social conditions of the twenty-first century.

In reaffirming ‘the credibility of the Christian claim’, Cattoi understood me to emphasize ‘the inner congruence between the gift of God’s self-disclosure and the deepest aspirations of the human spirit’. Padgett rightly commented that for this self-disclosure to take place God needs first to ‘break down barriers to genuine encounter and saving faith’. The divine grace creates ‘the possibility for any


3 On ‘the faith that responds to revelation’, see O’Collins, Rethinking, 166–189.
genuine experience of God’. I had highlighted how the word of God heals and transforms, but I should have added that in some real sense such healing and transforming must already be there ‘before’ (ontologically, if not chronologically) ‘such experience is possible’.

Padgett questioned my persistently championing revelation as ‘an interpersonal event’, offering a vivid example to support a ‘propositional’ view: a telescope can ‘reveal things about distant objects in the sky without any personal element’ being involved. To illustrate such a propositional model, I had pointed to language that recurs in the print media about ‘revelations’ that affect governments. Journalists can uncover and report new and important items of information, which the current prime minister would prefer to be kept out of sight. These ‘startling revelations’ can ‘significantly change prevailing attitudes towards the government in power’. Such propositional revelations appearing in the morning newspaper enjoy a certain priority over any personal reactions on the part of the government and the public, but they certainly produce such reactions. Likewise in Padgett’s example the things revealed come first, but they can obviously have very personal results: one team of astronomers may be proved to have predicted successfully what their observations would produce, while another team who took a different point of view may suffer professionally and even personally. *Pace* Padgett, some ‘personal element’ is regularly ‘involved’ in such propositional revelation.

The difference between us, however, may be only a matter of emphasis. Padgett wrote that in his view divine revelation has ‘both propositional and existential, interpersonal elements’. As *Rethinking Fundamental Theology* repeatedly proposed, it would be better to reverse the order: the divine self-revelation is primarily interpersonal, a self-disclosure of God that invites people into a communion of faith, love and hope. Secondarily, such revelation involves knowing (and proclaiming) what God is. First, revelation concerns ‘who’ is revealed, and, second, ‘what’ is revealed. Revelation involves knowing God who is ‘the Truth’, and then knowing ‘truths’ about God.

Faith constitutes the human response to the divine self-revelation. When devoting a chapter to describing faith, I ended by breaking new ground, or so I thought, by developing a narrative theology of faith on the basis of the encounters with Jesus presented in John’s Gospel. While I would still endorse everything that entered that narrative version of the genesis of faith, the review by Marley (without his explicitly saying so) suggested to me something that should be added. Very helpfully he recalled some words of St Thomas Aquinas, ‘voluntas et intellectus mutuo se includunt (the will and understanding mutually include each other)’. Then he remarked that *Rethinking Fundamental Theology* ‘bears witness to the interpenetration of our understanding and our desires’, and went on to reflect on ‘that interpenetration of thought and love which comes from our being images of the Trinity’. Marley’s words made me regret that I had not remarked on the role of

love in the encounters that shape the Fourth Gospel, from the meeting between Jesus and Andrew (and his anonymous companion) in Chapter 1 right through to the meeting between Jesus and Peter in Chapter 21. To be sure it is only in the question repeated three times in that final encounter (‘Do you love me?’) that the theme of love emerges explicitly. But right from the outset the mysterious appeal of Jesus has been touching the hearts of Andrew (and his companion). The way they come to think of him is inextricably bound up with their coming to love him. From Andrew, through Nicodemus, Martha and Mary Magdalene, to Simon Peter, their ‘will and understanding’ mutually condition each other.

Before leaving the reviewers, let me attend to four items. First, Groves found me ‘a touch old-fashioned’ in ‘a completely uncritical assumption that the traditional two-source hypothesis explains the synoptic problem’. In the chapter on Jesus as ‘the fullness of revelation’, I needed to say something about the four gospels as my primary sources, and that involved taking a stand on several issues that included the relations between the first three gospels. In particular, the view that, as well using their own sources (including eyewitness testimony), Matthew and Luke drew on Mark and some kind of common tradition(s) of Jesus’ sayings (normally called Q) seemed the best working hypothesis for those writing in fundamental theology to adopt. When introducing what I wanted to examine in the four gospels, I referred to a number of leading New Testament scholars who are recognized experts on the gospels: Richard Burridge, James Charlesworth, James Dunn, Martin Hengel, Craig Keener, and John Meier. Perhaps I should have noted that, with various qualifications and nuances, they all relate Matthew and Luke through the hypothesis of two major sources (Mark and some form of Q). Far from feeling old-fashioned when assuming such a two-source theory, I believed that the strong (if not universal) support for this hypothesis exempted me from taking time out to examine it critically.

Groves brought up this question in the context of something wider and obviously more fundamental: the ‘level of narrative credibility’ that the gospels can command. The six writers just mentioned, as well as numerous other New Testament scholars, have largely left behind the fairly common scepticism of

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7 Groves wrote ‘narrative credulity’, but that seemed an obvious slip for ‘narrative credibility’.

8 See, for example, Paul R. Eddy and Gregory A. Boyd, The Jesus Legend: The Case for the Reliability of the Synoptic Jesus Tradition (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Academic, 2007).
some earlier generations and interpret the Gospels in ways that provide substantial access to the historical Jesus.

Second, in his review, Marsh observed that he could ‘draw up a long list of theologians and fairly standard recent theological works which do not put in an appearance’ in my book. But he did not draw up any such a list, and I was left wondering whom I had failed to include in the discussion. As it was, when moving from one theme to another, the book repeatedly offered abundant references.9 Who had been left out? Marsh specified only one supposed omission: ‘feminist theologians are in short supply’. Over 20 female writers turn up in the book; a few (for example, Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza) name themselves as ‘feminists’, but many of the others have not gone out of their way to adopt this label.

Third, Marsh found the pneumatology sketched in Chapter 12 (‘World Religions and Christ the Revealer and Saviour’) ‘challenging’ and fresh, but – in the light of the book’s subtitle, ‘Toward a New Fundamental Theology’ – wondered what else might be called ‘new’ in the whole work. I would claim some novelty in various sections: for instance, no one that I have read who practises either discipline has acknowledged and plotted the overlap between philosophical theology and fundamental theology;10 no one that I know has developed a Johannine narrative theology of faith;11 I am not aware of anyone who has developed the scheme of three styles of theology (thinking, acting, and worshipping) that I proposed. Finally, in reading other theologians (fundamental or otherwise) I have not come across any who recognize how Hebrews 11 suggests a way to understand and interpret the faith of those who do not (or do not yet) enjoy the possibilities offered by the special revelation conveyed through the Jewish-Christian message.12 Here and elsewhere, mistakenly or not, I thought that I had something fresh and new to say. Perhaps I should always explicitly flag positions that seem to break new ground, but personally I feel reluctant to adopt that practice.

Fourth and finally, Marsh noted that the six theologians who exemplify the three styles of theology to which I drew attention were ‘all white men, three now deceased, three in their 80s’. While allowing that they had proved themselves ‘brilliant’, Marsh did not believe that naming them would encourage the fully ‘intergenerational conversation’ that I wished to stimulate. But when identifying the three styles, I wanted to cite a small group of theologians, such as Gustavo Gutiérrez, Wolfhart Pannenberg and Karl Rahner, who could command more or less universal recognition.13 If I had cited such younger, ‘living’ names as Shaji George Kochuthara (Bangalore), Carmen Márquez (Madrid), and Michael

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9 See Rethinking, for example, on special divine activity (23); on revelation (57), on the canon of Scriptures (244); on theological method (322).
10 O’Collins, Rethinking, 8–11.
11 O’Collins, Rethinking, 179–189.
13 O’Collins, Rethinking, 330.
McCarthy (Santa Clara, CA), I could not have counted on the wide recognition that I needed in order to clarify and establish my classification of theological styles. Promoting ‘intergenerational conversation’ began by introducing younger scholars in Chapter 1 and continued right through the book.

New publications

Since I completed the text of *Rethinking Fundamental Theology* in mid-2010, various works have appeared that touch on themes that it examined. The *Routledge Companion to Modern Christian Thought*, for instance, contains updated treatments on a number of the figures (such as Kant and Rahner) and topics (such as apologetics, Christian philosophical theology, Christian theology of religions, and fundamentalism) that feature in my book. Apart from such ‘full-scale’ works, specific publications on the gospels and on such questions as the miracles and resurrection of Jesus concern Chapters 5 and 6 of *Rethinking Fundamental Theology*, respectively, and would now be included in the material offered by those two chapters.

But, all in all, I consider that in the last few years fundamental theology has received its richest input in two areas: (1) natural signs of the existence of God, including religious experience (see sections in Chapters 1–4 in my book), and (2) world religions (see Chapter 12). Let us look at some contributions in both areas.

Probably the most significant contribution under (1) has been *The Oxford Handbook of Natural Theology*. Alongside this magisterial, 632-page book we can place further relevant volumes, which discuss contemporary scientific theories and arguments for God’s existence. In this area Thomas Nagel has recently

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published an intriguing work, which, without claiming to ‘see in the world the expression of divine purpose’ and to ‘invoke a transcendent being’, nevertheless, argues powerfully against the prevailing ‘reductive materialism’ that claims to explains the origin of life and ‘the appearance of conscious organisms in the world’. Let me concentrate, however, on the former work.

Examining from historical and contemporary perspectives the complex and interdisciplinary reality of natural theology, The Oxford Handbook brings us squarely not only to what Rethinking Fundamental Theology calls ‘general revelation’ (Chapter 3) but also to 21st-century debates on science and religion. Claims of natural theology to establish the existence of (a personal) God need to be assessed against scientific investigation into the origins of the universe and the evolution of life, above all human life. Does the universe show signs of being theistically designed and even finely tuned for the emergence of human beings? Do cosmological, teleological and moral arguments for the existence of God prove convincing? On such questions The Oxford Handbook contains thoughtful and searching chapters: for instance, by Keith Parsons and Paul Ewart. It also includes a fine chapter by Mark Wynn on religious experience. That chapter adds to what I wrote in Rethinking Fundamental Theology. All in all, The Oxford Handbook shows us the rich table offered by contemporary natural theology, which, as a congenial ally of fundamental theology should have received longer treatment in Rethinking. Nevertheless, I continue to endorse the view that there is no such thing as purely natural theology and purely natural knowledge of God. As I wrote, ‘God has freely called all men and women to the supernatural destiny of eternal life; that call affects every human act, including the activity of reflecting on the knowledge of God available through created reality. In that sense, those who practise natural theology are always engaged with supernatural theology.

23 O’Collins, Rethinking, 52–55.
24 See O’Collins, Rethinking, 12–15. In particular, I should have drawn attention to a partial overlap between natural theology and fundamental theology. The Oxford Handbook never mentions this overlap, apart from a brief reference made by Denis Edwards to the efforts of René Latourell and Rino Fisichella at renewing fundamental theology, ‘Catholic Perspectives on Natural Theology’, 182–196, at p. 192. But in general those who practise natural theology do not seem to be aware of their allies in fundamental theology, and vice versa.
25 O’Collins, Rethinking, 15.
As regards (2), the study of world religions continues to prove a spectacular growth industry. Numerous recent publications supply resources for the fundamental theologians who reflect on the universal revealing and redemptive activity of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Here any up-to-date bibliographies should include works by Stephen Bullivant, Francis Clooney, Catherine Cornille, and others. Bullivant stands out for observing how many authors, when writing about ‘the salvation of non-Christians’, consider only the ‘members of world religions’. But taking as equivalent ‘non-Christian’ and ‘non-Christian religions’ is, he rightly argues, ‘unfortunate’, and neglects ‘the existence of millions of non-religious unbelievers’. Rethinking Fundamental Theology should have adverted to these millions, at least in Chapters 1–4 and 12.

As regards any dialogue between fundamental theologians and the followers of world religions, the contributors to The Oxford Handbook prove very relevant with their pervasive conviction that some knowledge of God is available to all human beings simply on the basis of their being human. In fact, this collaborative work aligns itself with the teaching of St Thomas Aquinas that all human beings can share in the knowledge of God. Human minds, whether aware or not of their being illuminated by divine grace, can recognize the signs of God’s presence and activity coming through nature and culture. Early on in Rethinking Fundamental Theology, I dedicated several pages to this ‘natural’ knowledge of God. But its relevance to thinking about ‘other’ faiths could have been taken up again in Chapter 12, and led me to expound something about the relations between such ‘natural’ knowledge and the ‘special’ knowledge of God communicated through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. But such reflection, as I have argued above, should incorporate the truth that there is no such thing as purely natural knowledge of God. The universal, supernatural call to eternal life affects the thinking (and acting) of all human beings, right from the start of their lives.


27 Bullivant, The Salvation of Atheists, 2, 115.

28 Aquinas, Summa contra Gentiles, 1. 4. 6.

29 Here one might well apply, at least in some adapted from, St Augustine’s conviction that all human intellectual activity depends upon divine illumination; see Robert Dodaro, ‘Light in the Thought of St. Augustine’, in O’Collins and Meyers (eds), Light from Light, 195–207, at p. 201–205.

30 O’Collins, Rethinking, 58–61.
A chapter by William Schweiker in *The Oxford Handbook* opens by observing that ‘in many cultures and societies there has been, at least intuitively, some connection between what is believed to be sacred and divine and the highest ideals of the good, justice, and the right’.

This widespread sense that morality implies or even embodies an ultimate significance suggests that the foundations of moral systems should be considered when pondering the question of God, and vice versa. Does the moral life necessarily involve or even postulate God? Should dialogue between different faiths call for a careful comparison between their systems of morality? Questions like these point to the need to provide some place in fundamental theology for reflection (comparative or otherwise) on morality. *Rethinking Fundamental Theology* touched on this when, for example, it cited Kant on the moral law and conscience. But more could well have been said.

The second section of this article has sampled contributions to the work of fundamental theology that have appeared after *Rethinking Fundamental Theology* was written. One could also refer to some literature that had appeared before the text was completed but was not taken into consideration: for instance, a study of the principle of sufficient reason by Alexander Pruss. I cited an essay Pruss co-authored on the cosmological and teleological arguments for the existence of God. But what I said about the place of the principle of sufficient reason in the cosmological argument would have been strengthened by using Pruss’s magisterial study of that theme.

**Apologetics, the genesis of faith, and tradition**

But let me press on to some concluding reflections on three topics that I considered in *Rethinking Fundamental Theology* but that could have been developed further: (1) apologetics; (2) the genesis of faith; and (3) tradition. My response above to Marsh’s review introduced (1), at least in the sense of the credibility of sources for knowing Jesus. But more should be said. Apropos of (2), Marley’s review made me regret not mentioning the role of love in the genesis of faith. Here, once again, there is more to be said. (3) Tradition provided the subject-matter for an entire chapter of *Rethinking Fundamental Theology* (Chapter 8), as well as being discussed elsewhere. However, this treatment of tradition should have incorporated insights coming from recent studies of memory by historians, philosophers, sociologists, and others.

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34 O’Collins, *Rethinking Fundamental Theology*, 30 n. 14, 32.
Apologetics

Early in *Rethinking Fundamental Theology* I was concerned to relate apologetics to fundamental theology but, even more, to establish the differences between the two disciplines. Later in the book, however, without saying so, I acted in part as an apologist by putting the case for believing in God, recognizing our access to the historical Jesus, accepting the apostolic witness to his resurrection and establishing the credibility of the Christian Church. Apologetics sets itself to justify such basic beliefs. While they maintain their own proper identity, there is more overlap between apologetics and fundamental theology than I initially indicated.

Furthermore, I briefly drew attention to some modern writers who have developed their case for sharing faith in God, following Jesus Christ and belonging to the Church. They have responded to objections raised by atheist or agnostic critics, made basic Christian beliefs intelligible and acceptable, and so given ‘an account of their hope’ (1 Pet 3:15). I might also have drawn attention to the ‘apologetical’ function of the Second Vatican Council (1962–65); it contributed to the work of defending and commending Christian faith and hope.

When responding to the call of Pope John XXIII to update and renew Catholic Christianity, Vatican II faced some long-standing objections: for instance, the claim that science and religious faith are incompatible (*Gaudium et Spes*, 36; see 57 and 62). The Council probed the causes of atheism and, specifically the false notion that belief in God threatens the proper autonomy of human beings and their commitment to earthly affairs (*Gaudium et Spes*, 19–20). The Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, appropriated the widely accepted scheme of three stages in the transmission of testimony to Jesus’ words and deeds: (1) the initial stage in his earthly life when his disciples and others listened to him, saw him in action, spoke about him, repeated his teaching to others, and began interpreting his identity and mission; and (2) the handing on (by word of mouth or in writing) of testimony to him after his death and resurrection; and (3) the authorial work of the four evangelists later in the first century. Through the Gospels, contemporary readers have access to the Jesus of history (*Dei Verbum*, 19). In general, this Vatican II text, by deftly relating revelation to its climax in Jesus Christ and transmission through tradition and the inspired scriptures (in particular, the four gospels), produced a coherent and credible account for the grounds of faith in Jesus Christ.

The Council’s constitutions on the church, *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes*, the former by retrieving biblical testimony and the latter by engaging in

37 O’Collins, *Rethinking*, 4, 5.
38 In *Rethinking Fundamental Theology* I proposed the essential credibility of the Gospels’ witness to the historical Jesus (97–106), but did not relate this to what *Dei Verbum* had to say. For a full-scale and persuasive treatment of the historicity question, see Eddy and Boyd, *The Jesus Legend*. 
dialogue with the contemporary world, fashioned a more attractive and believable image of the church. By rejecting all anti-Semitism and, more broadly, by its positive and respectful teaching on Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and other living faiths (*Lumen Gentium*, 16; *Nostra Aetate*, 1–5) – a teaching that massively encouraged interfaith dialogue on a national and international level – Vatican II retrieved the authentic and appealing attitudes of early Christianity (see also *Ad Gentes*, 11 and 12). Likewise, by repudiating the polemics that for centuries distorted relations with other Christians and by officially initiating dialogue and collaboration with their churches and ecclesial communities, the Council firmly endorsed a credible and truly Christian reversal of attitudes (*Lumen Gentium*, 8 and 15; *Unitatis Redintegratio*, passim; *Gaudium et Spes*, 92). In these ways Vatican II endorsed teaching that serves as an ‘apology’ for a more believable Christianity. Implicitly it produced an apologetics that complements what I wrote about the founding of the Church in *Rethinking Fundamental Theology*.39

**The genesis of faith**

As we said above, in his review Cattoi understood me to emphasize ‘the inner congruence between the gift of God’s self-disclosure and the deepest aspirations of the human spirit’. In *Rethinking Fundamental Theology* I wrote of a certain ‘convergence’ between (1) objective and (2) subjective factors in the genesis of faith.40 Under (1) attention was paid to such factors as the preaching of the Church and light of the Holy Spirit, whereas (2) pointed to the needs and disposition of the human heart.

When discussing (2), I might have recalled what had been said much earlier about the human spirit’s drive towards meaning and truth.41 I could also have cited evolutionary ‘explanations’ of belief in God. Scientists have argued for ‘natural mechanisms that predispose human beings to believe in God’. Some scientists discredit these mechanisms as leading to delusions about the existence of God. Nevertheless, many agree that human evolution has produced a natural tendency to believe in God.42 The witness of the Christian community interacts with some kind of ‘natural’ predisposition to faith, which has been examined not only by philosophers and theologians (like Pascal and Rahner) but also by evolutionary scientists.

Expounding such a tendency to faith, Evans insists that this ‘propensity to believe in God, though strong, is far from irresistible’.43 Hence, together with what he calls ‘the Wide Accessibility Principle’, throughout his book he also develops ‘the Easy Resistibility Principle’. Translating this latter principle in terms of my argument,

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43 Evans, *Natural Signs*, 37.
I would agree that faith remains free and is not forced on anyone – a theme that surfaced but should have featured more in my chapter on faith.44 This free decision of faith is made possible because God’s grace overcomes human resistance. As Padgett commented in his review (see above), when human beings accept in faith the gift of God’s self-disclosure, this occurs because God has already broken down ‘barriers to genuine encounter and saving faith’. Alongside the principle of ‘Easy Resistibility’, we need to recognize also the principle of ‘Divine Overcoming’, that divine initiative that Augustine vividly pictures in his _Confessions:_

You called to me; you cried aloud to me; you broke down my barrier of deafness.
You shone upon me; your radiance enveloped me; you put my blindness to flight.
You shed your fragrance about me; I drew breath and I gasp for your sweet odour.
I tasted you, and now I hunger and thirst for you. You touched me, and I am inflamed with love for your peace._(Confessions_ 10. 29; trans. mine)_

Earlier in my book I cited this classic passage when discussing revelation.45 But it deserved to be quoted also when dealing with the human faith that the divine self-disclosure evokes.

**Tradition as collective memory**

Finally, when expounding the tradition through which in faith the Christian community hands on the experience of divine self-revelation, I went out of my way to stress the human reality of tradition.46 While Christian and, in particular, Catholic theologians have often continued to say very little about the human reality of tradition, some have introduced a valuable theme that overlaps with it by speaking of tradition as ‘collective memory’. In a work that appeared during Vatican II, Yves Congar wrote: ‘tradition is memory and memory enriches experience’.47 Jean-Marie-Roger Tillard argued that ‘as the memory of the Church, tradition represents the permanence of the word that is always alive’.48 George Tavard agreed: ‘one could analyse tradition from the point of view of memory, and define it as the Church’s memory’ – a view that I now wish to have incorporated in the treatment of tradition offered by _Rethinking Fundamental Theology._49

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44 O’Collins, _Rethinking_, 173; see also 83 n. 16.
45 O’Collins, _Rethinking_, 73.
46 O’Collins, _Rethinking_, 102–104.
A biblical theme about the Holy Spirit ‘reminding’ Jesus’ disciples of ‘all that I have said to you’ (John 14:26) obviously played a part towards encouraging a theology that explained tradition as collective memory. The 1994 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* could state firmly that ‘the Holy Spirit is the Church’s collective memory’ (no. 1009). In at least three documents, Pope John Paul II introduced the theme of tradition as collective memory: *Catechesi Tradendae* of 1979 (no. 22), *Orientale Lumen* of 1995 (no. 8), and *Ecclesia in Europa* of 2003 (nos. 7–8). But in all this promising and fairly widely shared interpretation of tradition as memory, one misses an interdisciplinary development.

Since the close of the Second Vatican Council in 1965, anthropology, history, philosophy, sociology, and other disciplines have experienced a boom of memory studies.50 Some biblical writing has drawn successfully on such studies.51 But with hardly an exception,52 theology, in particular fundamental theology, has not taken advantage of the very useful insights on memory (and forgetting) coming from other disciplines. If the notion of tradition as ‘collective memory’ is to be developed further, fundamental theology needs to engage in such interdisciplinary dialogue. Such probing will also affect something discussed in *Rethinking Fundamental Theology*: the interpretation of the relationship between tradition and scripture. As the Bible has been heard over and over again in the public worship of all

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Christians, how has the scriptural word shaped their collective memory? The *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the Scriptures or their ‘history of effects’ includes their impact on the church’s collective memory, and needs to be thoroughly investigated.

**Conclusion**

Four years have passed since I completed the text of *Rethinking Fundamental Theology*. This article began by responding to various questions raised by reviewers. Apparently without intending to do so, Marley encouraged me to recognize that the interpenetration of thought and love suggested a similar interpenetration between faith and love. This helps, I believe, to enrich a narrative theology of faith based on the Gospel of John, and was probably the most interesting insight I gleaned from all the reviews.

In a second section the article reviewed relevant publications that concern fundamental theology and that have appeared since mid-2010. There was much valuable literature to report in two areas: (1) natural signs of the existence of God, including religious experience; and (2) the theology of religions. *The Oxford Handbook of Natural Theology* stood out as the most significant publication for those who practise fundamental theology.

Finally, I suggested how some themes treated in *Rethinking Fundamental Theology* could be taken further. In particular, more could be developed in three areas: apologetics, the genesis of faith, and the role of tradition as collective memory. The interdisciplinary nature of fundamental theology calls for constant updating, and these three areas illustrate the need for and possibility of such updating.

**Author biography**

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