

# Theological Foundations

Concepts and Methods for  
Understanding Christian Faith

REVISED AND EXPANDED

J. J. Mueller, SJ, editor



Created by the publishing team of Anselm Academic.

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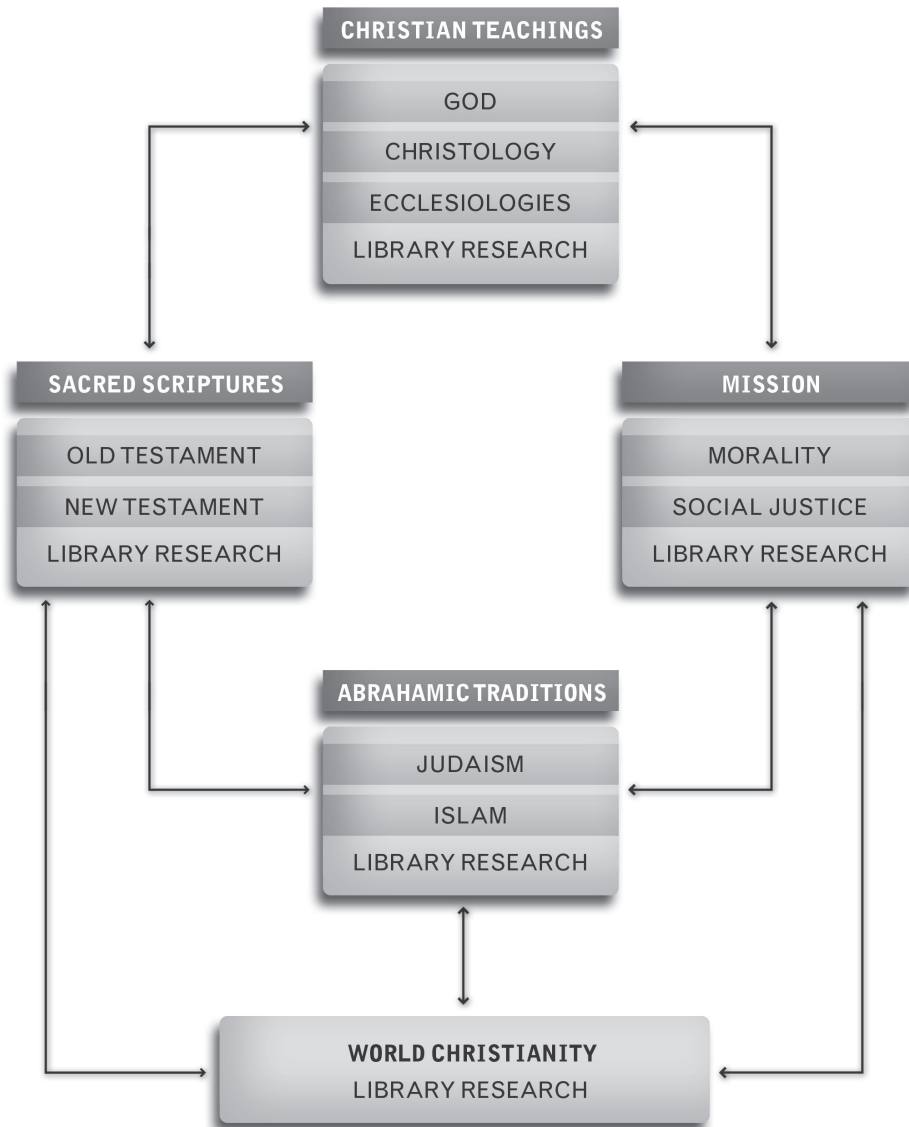
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## THE STRUCTURE OF THE CONTENT AND ITS RELATIONSHIP





## from the EDITOR

*J. J. Mueller, SJ*

### PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK

This book is about how to successfully study theology. Nothing is foreign to the domain of theology and, because theology pursues the deepest questions of being authentically human in God, why should there be any limit? Absolutely everything is grist for the theological mill. As an academic discipline, theology is not insular, exclusive, or a foreigner in the academy; it is in conversation with the best results, discoveries, and methods of every academic discipline's pursuit of truth. Theology takes up the most important questions for every human being: who we are and who we want to be, the meaning and purpose of life, good and evil, death, suffering, love, family, humanity, society, our human differences, the role of governments and authorities, poverty and wealth, the marginalized and the vulnerable. Theology takes up cosmic questions as well: Why am I here? What is worth living for? Why is there a blue planet spinning in this galaxy among billions of other galaxies? What is it all about?

Theology above all addresses what it is to live in God's mystery, and that even though one cannot adequately answer all these questions there is purpose to being in this universe. The Christian believes what Jesus said and did and in what he asked of his followers: to love God above all things and one's neighbor as oneself.

Christian theology teaches, to put it bluntly: God is love.

### AUDIENCE

This book is intended primarily for college students; however, it is also for people of the Catholic faith and other Christian denominations in general; for people of other religious traditions; and for people of no particular tradition but who are seekers. All are welcome to sit at the theological table.

This book provides a solid foundation for this theological discussion. The text is designed both for people with little or no background in theology and those with quite a bit of background but who seek a solid explanation of the subdisciplines involved. *Theological Foundations* is designed as a "first book," to be read all at once or by individual chapters, selected to introduce theological material pertinent to a particular course. In reading each chapter, students will receive an overview of the subdisciplines of theology. They will come to understand terms, concepts, vocabulary, and the development of the tradition through the ages and across cultures. Students will build a basic understanding of the whole of theology through its parts. They will be capable of building upon this base



immediately, as well as be able to relate new material to this foundation.

## ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK AND REVISIONS

This expanded edition of *Theological Foundations* has been revised to better reflect the diversity of the college classroom, whether that classroom is at a Catholic college or university, or one sponsored by another religious denomination, or one without a specific faith orientation. This text also is written with awareness that many schools have a diverse student body that is global and that includes many religious beliefs and practices (e.g. Islam, Buddhism, Confucianism, and so on). This revision respects the religious plurality of the college audience, regardless of where it is found. Our hope is to encourage religious dialogue.

The book begins with an important new introduction by Daniel Finucane, entitled “Religion, Spirituality, and the Question of God.” The reader will want to read and respond to this introduction first in order to discover his or her inner questions, to engage the text, and to invest in the pursuit of answers. Christianity professes that God works in and through each person’s humanness, and that belief is a presupposition and important starting point to engage the topics in this book.

Two new chapters have been added to this new edition, giving the book twelve chapters representing subdisciplines of theology. The first of these, chapter 1 by Brian D. Robinette and titled “Discerning the Mystery of God,” places the “God Question” front and center as the ground of theology and necessary for talk about God. Because God is woven through the entire book and, Christian theology would argue, life itself, this chapter is key to all the other ones, and thereby a good way for students and teachers to begin the book. In fact, it might be eminently

worthwhile for students to read this chapter at the beginning of the course and again at the end, noting how one has developed over the course of reading the text.

Also new in this edition is chapter 6, “Protestantism, Evangelicalism, Pentecostalism—Changing Contours of Christianity in the Modern Era.” In this chapter, Michael J. McClymond explores these three historic paths of Christian belief and practice, and how and why they developed. His presentation is a necessary inclusion for a fuller consideration of churches and individuals that call themselves “Christian” and who participate in the Christian tradition. Catholic, Protestant, Evangelical, Pentecostal: all stem from the Judeo-Christian scriptures and belong to the Christian tradition.

Note: In further consideration of this broad understanding of the Christian tradition, this revised text has adjusted its approach to capitalizing the word *church*. In this text, *church* is used to mean a number of things: a local congregation or all Christians everywhere (e.g. the “universal church”), or a specific Christian denomination (e.g., “the Roman Catholic Church,” “the Methodist Church”). Only in the last use is *church* capitalized in current accepted practice and in this text. In quotations, however, this book retains the use of capitals in quoted sources. We hope that by observing this convention we can avoid confusion between statements that refer to beliefs or practices common to the universal church and those that apply specifically to Roman Catholicism, for example, but not necessarily Christians of other denominations.

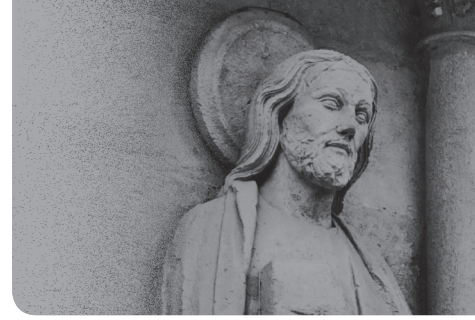
## ARRANGEMENT OF EACH CHAPTER

Each chapter is set up the same way. It begins with an introduction from the editor, then the area specialty, or subdiscipline, in theology is

presented, followed by questions about the text and also questions for discussion. The chapters conclude with an integrated research component, “From the Research Librarian.” The research skills provided in this section are progressive and programmatic, so they are best done in order from chapters 1–12. These skills are summarized at the end of the text. In the course of these sections, the student will learn electronic research skills both for libraries and internet. Most importantly, this research component will build understandings regarding what the skills are, why they work, and how one might adjust when using a particular approach does not yield the desired results. The skills learned can be applied across other academic disciplines and will transfer to life situations during and after college as well.

### Library Revision

Finding reputable and reliable electronic data is the difference between information and scholarship. Research librarian author Ron Crown has pioneered the integrated library skill component provided with each chapter in this text. A number of schools using this text have remarked on the effectiveness of this approach. With today’s fast-paced reliance on electronic sources (and research at libraries today is primarily electronic, as few libraries use card catalogs), the methods provided in the library component are key to college research. Throughout this revised edition, Crown has further streamlined the research sections for easier use of resources, targeting needed skills to help students become “library literate for a lifetime.”



# INTRODUCTION

## Religion, Spirituality, and the Question of God

*Dan Finucane*

“I’m spiritual but not religious.”

A lot of folks say that these days. Maybe you, reading this introduction, have said it. But what does it mean? Granted, there are plenty of reasons to avoid the label, “religious.” Watching the imagery of some religious people in the media, in cable shows, and on line, it is not hard to find reasons to avoid being pegged as “religious.” “Organized religion” is often unorganized, disorganized, or over-organized. Sometimes it just seems beside the point. Hypocrisy, violence, stupidity, shallowness, boring rhetoric (add your own observations and experiences here) can come in religious packages, carried by religious practitioners.

Then again, some people are spiritual *and* religious. They might still have questions, of course. They might still argue with aspects of their religion. They may feel pulled to explore, to step out of what they have been handed, to expand their religious world. They may be intrigued by aspects of other faiths, by other religious practices of people they know, or by mysterious (or just strange) things they have heard or seen connected to religion. Even deeply religious people have religious questions. But they may wonder whether it’s okay to question what has been handed them. They may wonder whether it’s okay to challenge religious beliefs.

If you are reading this introduction, the chances are pretty good that you are studying

theology and that this is a textbook for a course. Maybe you have been forced to take a core requirement course for college. Maybe you are intrigued by the possibility of doing academic theology. But maybe you are suspicious of a theology textbook. You might feel that you have had enough theology, and can’t believe you are taking more. Or maybe you have never studied religion or theology formally and think everyone else in the class already knows a lot more than you. The backgrounds, attitudes, and opinions of your classmates may be very different from yours, yet here you all are, stuck together in the same classroom. Then again, there could be value in having a diverse group of people with different experiences looking at theological questions together.

Wherever you are coming from, whether you are spiritual, or religious, or both, or neither, whether you are struggling to find God, or struggling with the idea of God, I would like to invite you to take a chance, to take the topics in this book seriously. You might be surprised by something new, by a new angle on some old religious themes, and maybe even something that helps you to ask better questions and find helpful insights to act on.

In this book, we invite you to consider several specific theological perspectives. The authors know religion can be corrupted by unspiritual influences. We also believe it doesn’t have to be. If you are spiritual but not religious, the authors

here will not ask you to be less spiritual. We ask that you take another look at what it can mean to be religious.

## WHAT IS RELIGION?

We begin with a definition rooted in an etymology, a “root” meaning. (This is a textbook; what did you expect?) Religion comes from the Latin root *religio*: to bind or tie together. If we were asked to fill out a form that asked our religion, we might fill in “Christian” or “Catholic” or “Lutheran” or “Baptist.” We might answer “Buddhist” or “Moslem” or “Hindu.” Maybe we would write “Agnostic” or “Atheist” or “None” in the blank. We might just blow off the question and write something humorous (any Reformed Druids out there?). Maybe we would rather write “spiritual.”

The etymology of “religion” invites a different approach than mere labeling. It invites a more subtle reflection. Maybe being a Hindu or Christian or agnostic is what ties my life together. That is my religion in name and in reality. But for some people the real thing binding my days into a life is something not ordinarily called a religion.

For some people *family* is the biggest thing in their lives. Do you know a grandmother who lives for her children and grandchildren? All of her time and energy are spent on them. Or maybe *work* ties a person together. If you go to law school, you may work for a couple of years afterwards, spending 80–90 hours a week, learning your trade, paying your dues, earning the respect of senior partners, making a place in a firm you were happy to be hired by. Even if you make it to church on Sunday, your real religion may be “Lawyer.”

*Power* can hold a person’s focus; power can hold one’s life together. Accumulating and then protecting power can take all of one’s time and

energy. *Money* can be a religion. Money can draw us in, inspire us, surround us. Buildings erected with it and monuments created to it form as big an image on our cities’ skylines today as medieval cathedrals ever did in the past.

A lot of things can tie our life together, forming a *de facto* religion.

Now notice the subtle point here. Family, work, power, money—these are not evil things. A loving family is where we are nurtured and grow, where we are safe, where we are *loved*. Work can be satisfying at a deep level; I have friends who are lawyers and they are terrific people. Power gets things done. Power can be used well or poorly. It can be shared, it can be used by those “on top” to create, to support, to infuse meaning into the lives of others. Money comes in handy when it is time to pay the bills or to open up new possibilities (*tuition* could even fit here).

The question is not whether these things are good. It is whether they can work as a *religion*. Sometimes it takes being successful in one of these areas, or in something else of central importance, for us to realize that they cannot be the whole picture. We end up asking, is that it? Is that *all*? We might then be tired enough, discouraged enough, in pain enough, or maybe creative or intrigued enough, to ask a different question. What *can* tie a life together?

## WHAT IS SPIRITUALITY FOR?

Humans are spiritual beings. Human history illustrates a pervasive yearning and expression of that part of us that looks beyond, that seeks transcendence, that wants to go beyond our own experiences and ourselves. From cave paintings tens of thousands of years old to tens of thousands of sites on the Internet today, human expression shows that humans seek a depth and transcendence that is spiritual. Modern astronomy offers

us tremendous views of the cosmos by the Hubble and Chandra telescopes. As we probe the expanse of the universe more deeply, we have reason to probe more deeply inside ourselves too. We may be haunted by the sense that we are part of something more.

Exercising our deepest spiritual potential is not easy. Ancient religious texts and modern efforts alike testify to spiritual frustrations, false attempts, failure, and practices that draw on religious discipline to further our efforts to be what we most want to be.

In addition to such internal challenges we face distractions and confusions from outside. The sheer plurality of beliefs and religious expressions around us can discourage us from consulting outside guides and resources. Given that some religious voices spend a great deal of time yelling at each other, the temptation is great to cut them all off. Quieter, wiser voices are harder to find. Trusting genuine, proven sources takes time and discernment, and a style of spiritual understanding that won't fit readily into a sound bite or a blog.

Much in the spiritual and religious landscape works to tear us up or throw us apart, rather than tie us together. If humans are capable of spiritual depth, we are also able to wreak violence on fellow human beings, other living creatures, and the earth itself. Natural disasters may make us wonder about what powers there might be above us, causing pain even while nature also reveals its striking beauty. Wars, pollution, and countless personal stories of tragedy make us wonder what is going on, and whether there are powers that might be able to help us.

Such obstacles raise a challenge for those of us who perceive ourselves as transcendent, spiritual beings, and who choose the spiritual path: will we put our *trust* in the spiritual, even in the face of dramatic challenges? Will we put our *faith* in transcendence and hope, or will we fall back into fear and doubt, settling for a lesser

version of being human? Are we willing to *work* at being spiritual?

## Independence and Interdependence

Few people would equate genuine spirituality with isolation, though we know if the reasons are strong enough and the situation important enough, we may have to stand alone at times. But that sort of strength is what makes us able, when we are at our best, to interact well with others too. Spirituality is not the ability to stand aloof, to ignore or avoid the fate of those around us.

What makes us genuine and what can lead us to a genuine sense of religion (what *can* tie us together) is an integrity that draws out our openness, our concerns, our talents, our understanding of the world and our desire to care for others, and that draws on our deepest self to grow and make an impact on those around us. Personal integrity and caring for others are linked in the deepest spiritual instincts.

People can experience this even in “small” ways. Have you ever volunteered your time to help someone? Ever tutored a kid? If you have ever worked with an eighth grader who is having trouble with math, you know it is a genuine spiritual experience. You are not going to have much opportunity to think about yourself while you are trying to explain what a variable is to a kid who is scared of equations. Chances are, if this student is this far along in school and is not a fan of algebra, there is more going on than mathematical ability or inability. Fear is big. Frustration is a habit. Are you a psychology major? You are now. You have to figure out how to use your relationship with this kid (and maybe you just met her) to try to pry open some little window where you can sneak in some self confidence, maybe a small math step or two, and maybe at least an hour spent on homework that she will not completely hate. Ever pull off something like that?

There is no greater feeling than helping someone. You don't mind not getting paid. You might feel like others should know you accomplished something (you might tell your friends), but that is beside the point. What really matters is that you know, and the kid knows, that you *helped*. And it was because you were selfless. You gave away time and energy. Even if you didn't turn the child into a math genius, you cared enough to work with her.

Specific attitudes, skills, commitments, and even discipline, go along with this sort of work. These overlap in a huge way with the spiritual life. They involve effort. They require a willingness to see what is front of us, to not be in denial. Our efforts can take time, and may lead to failure, causing us to question whether to keep at it. At some point they lead us to the realization that being satisfied is related to being comfortable, to being open to relating to others. Such experiences call us to tie together what is in us and what is in the world.

Spiritual integrity is a balance of internal and external elements. Certainly the spiritual life has subjective elements: we must interpret our own experience, follow our deepest insights. But are our subjective resources enough? Do we grow spiritually if we are isolated? We are drawn to relate to others. Spiritual honesty includes the need to guard against our ability to kid ourselves. Our deepest instincts and questions draw us out of ourselves to self-awareness, even self-criticism. Such questions come from the deepest centers of our souls and make us restless until we confront them. Not to face them is to lose our best humanity.

Our cultural identity is deeply rooted in independence. Our spiritual instincts invite us to interdependence. Put simply, interdependence is a good way to live life's challenges.

## A Self Through Others

Have you ever felt part of something bigger than yourself? I recall vividly being on a football field

decades ago. It was a bright, crisp, sunny Midwestern autumn afternoon. My team had the ball. We ran a screen play to the right. Each lineman picked up his block. The back read the field, cut, saw an opening, and made it into the end zone. We had practiced this screen play countless times. Each time we ran it we wanted to score. This time we did—and a few other times, too. What remains palpable in my memory is the feeling that in that moment I was part of something bigger than me. As a team we “came together.” There was almost a slow-motion perception, a clearer level of realization of what was happening. Each person was needed, each person performed his role, and the touchdown was the work of the entire team. And I had an awareness during the play that I was part of something bigger than myself.

This sort of experience can happen in other places. Certainly it occurs on other fields and floors in sports. Something like it happens in theaters. Have you ever performed in a play? Have you ever felt the lines you had practiced flowing so naturally on stage that you weren't playing a part, you *were* the character? When a production “works,” the audience is drawn into the scene, suspending their role as observers, entering the moment. Musicians, too, can experience such transcending the self. Several parts come together and each voice contributes to the song, but the result is more than different voices singing at the same time. It is no coincidence we use the word *harmony* to describe both this musical reality and other occasions when something big happens that joins people together as one. In these “zones” of experience, there is a deepened expression of what we are individually. We don't lose our identity; yet we are deepened as we become part of something else. There is a paradox here. We go beyond ourselves, in a sense we lose ourselves, to find ourselves in a deeper way.

Is this sort of tying together of selves the stuff of religion?

## Who Can You Trust?

We are in this together.

We may experience this phenomenon in “peak” moments, whether we literally climb to the top of a mountain, or scuba dive in the depths of a coral reef; we feel ourselves coming together in exhilaration, when our individual efforts have succeeded. Or we may experience the rightness of not focusing on ourselves alone, when we help another. In experiences such as these we know that we are more truly ourselves when we don’t isolate ourselves. But if we recognize the fulfillment in such interdependence, we still must face the fact that not every interaction is a peak experience. Not every play works. Not every song harmonizes. When does it work? Who can we trust? We need the skills to face that challenge, to face some very real questions. A big one is, if we wish to follow a spiritual path, who do we want to travel with?

## The Value of Questions

It is healthy to ask questions. It is healthy to question companions in the spiritual life. Questioning people, and religion itself, is healthy. It is normal and important to do so; don’t the best of friends do it continuously?

Depending on what we have been through, what we have been taught, what we have experienced, many of us realize we have to question, especially with regard to spiritual and religious realities. We may have been told not to question. This may have made sense at certain points in our development, for example, when we were young and learning the basics. But at some point we probably began to ask questions—and made our teachers uncomfortable.

Now we reach a crucial issue for adult believers, or nonbelievers, in religion. Is questioning a problem? Is questioning inconsistent with faith? Does questioning put one at odds with one’s

church, one’s faith? More specifically, is questioning welcome or unwelcome in the Christian tradition, or within particular Christian churches? Is this theology text to be questioned? Is this a text that questions itself?

The answer on both counts is yes. Not only is it okay to question in the area of religion, it might be vital. It could even be one of the most important things you do. Compare the instinct to question with the experience of other relationships, perhaps with friends. How do you get to know someone? How do you deepen a relationship? How do you know how much to commit to someone?

Again, I will use myself as an example. After my wife and I met we knew each other from a distance for some months, because we worked at the same place. I knew a few things about her, because I knew some of her friends and I could ask. One weekend we had our first big “cosmic” date. We had lunch together. We talked. Then we had dinner together. We talked some more. We stayed up until 2 a.m. talking. We asked each other about where we went to school. We learned bits about what made us laugh, what we took seriously, and what our families were like (which, by the way, also fit the previous two categories of seriousness and laughing). After knowing each other for three decades we are still talking, still learning about each other. But somewhere in the first months, we knew enough to enter a serious relationship together. We answered questions about each other that led us to deeper places in our conversations, in our understanding of each other, and in the realization that we shared deep goals. Trust and love grow out of such deeper questions and realizations. We got married not because we knew each other completely, but because we knew each other well enough to know we wanted to spend the next five or six decades deepening our relationship, deepening what we knew about each other, deepening what we could be and do together.

There is a metaphor here for human relationships with God.

How can a person know God without questioning what God is like? What sort of relationship is it possible to have with anyone, God included, if we don't probe and question?

What if God loves us to explore, challenge, and ask questions as a step into better relationships? In human relationships questioning becomes more important the older we are, and the more we *choose* our relationships. Early on, we find ourselves in a family. Parents, siblings, relatives, and friends just show up around us as we realize we are here. When it's working right, the older we get, our parents open our world more and more, letting go of us more too, so that we can explore relationships ourselves. (As a parent, let me add that this process is tough on us too.) We learn, sometimes by trial and error, who to trust, who to spend more time with. Although we start out life being "handed" a family, home, safety, and love, eventually our own responsibility kicks in. We develop an openness: our own independence and interdependence.

The longer we live, the more we may ask questions. That includes asking questions about God. The more years and experiences accumulate, the more one is able to relate to other people—many people would say that their relationship to God has deepened over time as well. Many religious traditions assert that God made us; if that is true, then does it not logically follow that one's relationship to God can become as deep as one's own identity?

## TRADITION

Here is another etymology. "Tradition" has the Latin root *traditio*, meaning "to hand on." Religions live by handing on traditions, just like every other human activity that lasts more than one lifetime or one generation. A lot of things

are handed to us. "Tradition" may or may not be the word we use to describe what we learn about medicine, literature, the golden days of our school's sports teams, mathematics, geography, World War I history, genetics, or family stories about our great-grandfather who missed his ride on the Titanic, but these are all traditions if they are handed to us. Do we want to accept delivery? That may depend on what is on the list. There is a wise saying, "If you do not know history, you are bound to repeat it." We are not interested in merely repeating the business of life; we are moving on in the constantly changing circumstances of this world to create a life of our own.

Although we certainly should learn things for ourselves, much of what we know is interwoven with what we are given by others. We benefit from the experience and wisdom of others. And of course we will, in turn, offer what we know to others. Just as important, we should examine carefully what we are handed. Thinking critically, asking questions, is not necessarily to deny the importance of what we are being offered. It means we are taking it seriously. How else could the genuine wisdom of others become our own? How else could we improve on what others have learned, if not by adding our own experience to theirs? How else could we expect what is handed on to *live*?

If it is to be healthy, religion must be a *living tradition*.

When pursuing spirituality, we do well to listen to the depths of our own spiritual instincts. We do well to choose worthy companions and try to understand them. Following the spiritual path could take a while. There can certainly be distractions and pitfalls. We should look for good guides, for people who have a sense of depth, who have integrity, who are not manipulative. Do they have a sense of centeredness, even peace? We should seek companions and guides who have what Aristotle would call *phronēsis*, a word that means



*practical wisdom.* We do well to look for companions who are serious and also have a sense of humor. A guide should be someone you can trust with the right sort of questions. Look for a guide who will listen. Look for a guide who knows something, who will challenge you, not just tell you what you want to hear. Are you being challenged to deeper integrity, to be more honest with yourself?

When we pursue spirituality, we will meet people who claim to know God. It is quite legitimate to question whether their claim is genuine. If it is, then it makes sense to ask them what they know!

The chapters that follow are meant to be challenging. One of those challenges is the invitation to look—maybe to look again—at some *traditional* religious resources from those who have gone before. The texts and practices, the experiences and beliefs, the revelations and the mistakes in religious traditions are a laboratory where we can question and learn. Question the authors here. Are they worthy guides? What are they handing on?

## HOW BIG IS (MY) RELIGION?

My beliefs are unique to me, since I am a unique person. But can beliefs be shared too? In a study of American beliefs and culture, especially concerned with the theme we have here called “independence and interdependence,” Robert Bellah and his coauthors describe a very individualistic form of religion. In the book, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* they relate how they met a practitioner of “Sheilaism.” Sheila Larson has named her beliefs after herself. She chooses not to be a member of a religion. She describes her faith as rooted in her “own little voice” (p. 221). She believes in God, and lives out her concern for herself and others, rooted in that faith.

It would be intriguing to probe more into this type of religion, to consider what Sheila has been through that supports and challenges her Sheilaism. But I introduced her religion here for another, very specific reason: to suggest a thought experiment.

What is your reaction to hearing of her sort of religion? Do you wonder who Sheila Larson is? Are you intrigued by her, or by the notion of naming a religion after yourself? Do you feel a twinge of jealousy, thinking, “My name could be in that book, I could have been interviewed by Bellah?” In some sense, each of us could be there. If religion is tying our life together, each of us *is* there in a sense. But, unless we choose to focus solely on ourselves, there is more.

While there is integrity in taking responsibility for oneself, here we also pose the question: at what point should responsibility be shared? If we are in this together, how do we work on “tying things together” *together*? If I discover worthy ideas and practices on my spiritual path, wouldn’t I want to share them with people I care about? Wouldn’t I be excited if those I cared about made discoveries too? How wide should the path be? The world is a big place. If we’re interested in spirituality at all, how big should our spirituality be?

## Worldview

What is your worldview? What is your basic approach to the world? How do you organize and make sense of what you know about the world? How do you process new experiences, knowledge, and insights? How do you relate to science and art, music and politics? What tools connect you to world events? What connects you to your friends? What basic vision do you have that makes sense of your life?

Are you consistent? Are you the same person at work or school that you are at home? What sorts of things tend to cloud your vision? What does it mean for you to “think outside the box”?

What shapes your sense of what is dreadful, wonderful, humorous, or holy? What inspires you to act well? What pulls you down? What urges you to get involved in work that needs to be done? What do you do to relax and regain your energy? What do you enjoy doing with friends, with family? What do you want to accomplish today, or over the next few years? What do you want to accomplish over the span of your life?

Or course, creating a worldview that has depth and consistency does not happen all at once. The sheer depth and breadth of human knowledge is such that no human being can know everything. Even though we are “all in this together,” the scope and plurality of what humans know and care about makes us pause; does the enormous variety of views mean that humans cannot possibly, really come together? Fortunately, even from a practical point of view, we can see that this is not the case. We can see people from different places, backgrounds, and faiths working cooperatively—not always, not enough, perhaps, but it does occur. The media show us disasters and human misery, but they also show us human courage. They show us examples of people who work cooperatively, even in a world of plurality. Not just challenges, but resources can be global and varied and powerful in their impact.

The challenge for each of us is to embrace a worldview that is open to others, and that also gives us the foundation to ask the right questions. The challenge is to live with a worldview that can understand and respect the views of others, even while connecting us solidly to our own roots.

Any worldview must face key questions. How can humans get along with each other? Can our life be lived well with those with whom we agree and disagree? Does our worldview address basic human hopes? Can I trust other people? How do I deal with evil? What needs do I have,

if I am to be fully human? What resources can I draw on? Is there a God? Is God a Creator who is in relationship with creation? Will God help us? Who is wise enough for me to trust, or follow? Ultimately, are my hardest efforts worth it? Is the world a good place?

The modern world certainly provides a wealth of (sometimes mixed) blessings. The time we spend with television, radio, phones, and Internet tools that link us to our surroundings and our friends can make our heads spin. How can I keep up with all that I can access, that I can connect to? Modern cultural pluralism brings several temptations. At times we may want to dig in and not listen to others. We might want to give up when we feel washed over by an ocean of information. But we also want to find ground to stand on. Can we be embedded in a point of view that nurtures us but that remains open to challenge and growth? Where can we gain a foothold, a base from which to develop our view of things?

## An Experiment

Try this. Tired of the rat race? Take thirty minutes alone, and step away from all the turmoil. Spend a half hour unplugged. Turn off the television, take out the ear plugs, set aside the phone and the pager, close down the computer . . . unplug everything. If you want to set a timer so that you will know when thirty minutes is up, okay. Now, sit with your self, with your own thoughts.

Go ahead, try it. Put this book down and come back to it later.

Depending on your lifestyle and your usual habits, this experiment could be very strange. I have had one or two students become angry when I assigned it: “How *dare* you put me out of touch with my friends?!” Most people have trouble adjusting at first, but then calm down. Maybe you found yourself going over your “to-do” list in your head. Maybe you thought

about your family and friends, about people you miss. Maybe you are used to this sort of exercise, or are just good at this sort of thing, and found a small island of peace and even creativity within it. Maybe you prayed.

What enters our minds when we are not distracted? What if we take time to clear out the layers of things that keep us busy? There could be some challenges here. The “to-do” list, or the list of what I can *stop* doing, might need adjusting in the light of a different, quieter place.

Of course no exercise of this sort is sufficient to create a worldview. But it is a step that can offer perspective. And it can be repeated.

## Another Exercise

Consider this question. When you die, what do you want in your epitaph, on your tombstone? This might seem like a strange, even rude question. We are not comfortable with the notion that we will die, yet each of us will. So what do you want on your tombstone? If you are planning to be cremated and won't have a gravesite, imagine someone will want to put up a plaque somewhere. What do you want on the plaque? In asking you to think about what you want said about you when you die, am I being ghoulish or macabre? No, but I am serious.

I have asked my students to write their epitaph on the first day of class in two different courses: a beginning theology course and a course on western civilization. It is the first thing I say to them on the first day, right after telling them my name and the name of the course so they know they are in the right room. Actually, I ask them to respond to two questions, each to be answered on one side of a 3 x 5 card. Not too much room there to get verbose. The first question is, “What does it mean to be human?” The second is what they want written on their tombstone. I explain that doing this at the very start of the course obtains what social scientists

see as baseline data. (Probably when I ask the questions, some students still wonder if they are in the right room.)

The value in posing these questions is that they force us to focus (and for these students the challenge comes quickly and out of the blue) on what our values are. Once we are done with our time here, how would we like to be known? What is the meaning of that one human life: ours? At the end of the course, three months later, I give the cards back.

A decent course in the humanities should help us work on the answer to both questions. My favorite course in college was a year-long look at art history. Each day, through the paintings and sculptures of different artists, our professor would ask us, “What does this work say about what it means to be human?” For the test we had to know names and dates; we had to be able to identify who painted what. But this professor was far more concerned that we wrestle with what it means to be a human being. Some art helps with this. Some seems to avoid the issue. Every time I left class I was arguing, either with other students or with myself, about what it means to be human. The professor told us we should be asking these questions every day for the rest of our lives. We should be thinking about western art on our death beds.

Asking students to answer the two questions on the first day is an idea I stole—perhaps I should say, “handed on”—from my art history professor. The two questions on the index card are related for me. To be human is to be finite. We have only a certain number of days. What we do with them matters. This fact can be sobering; it may make us anxious. Our finiteness is also what ennobles us. On each day, what we do matters. If it is possible to waste time, time we can never get back, it is also possible to fill our time well, to live well. It is possible to live well each day.

## A TRIP TO TUSCANY

One of my favorite places is a spot that I have visited only once; the Basilica of Santa Croce (Holy Cross) in Florence. I had read about it before going there. When I stepped inside I felt a strange connection, a familiarity, walking around the nave. On one side near the back of the church is the tomb of Galileo. Across the way is the burial place of Michelangelo. Up further are the bones of Machiavelli. Entering this church, on a day in late spring a few years ago, I stepped into the world of the Renaissance and the early stages of the modern world in Europe. I felt the challenges that are still with us. Even more importantly, I felt the strength, the resources that are still with us. In Santa Croce, I felt immersed in an incredible heritage of art and poetry, science and politics, deep traditions to which we now add our modern resources, our problems, and our technologies.

Where do *you* go to meditate, to get perspective?

Where can you return to in your mind, or visit by actually travelling, to connect to the people who nourish and enrich your world?

If you haven't done so already, why not try the index card exercise. Leave your music on this time while you think about the answers. Where would you like your plaque or gravesite to be located? Who would you like your life to inspire?

## THIS BOOK HAS A WORLDVIEW

The authors of this textbook are writing from a point of view. It may or may not resemble yours. Is it possible to take them seriously? Will they take you seriously? I believe they will be honest with you. Also, they will try to challenge you. In the imagery used by the editor of this book, J. J. Mueller, SJ, the following chapters are inviting you to “come to the table,” to look, listen, and

discuss the issues these authors present. There is real content here, and some of it is technical. This may surprise some readers, who have not experienced theology as a rigorous discipline. Digging for historical, philosophical, linguistic, and spiritual connections in the pursuit of theological understanding is hard work. It is also worth the trouble. Real theology will not fit well in the vehicle of a blog. Some topics cannot be covered in a talk show or a news story.

## What This Textbook Will Present

A major challenge for any of us is to create an honest, consistent worldview, a worldview that touches the entirety of our lives, loves, successes, failures, losses, and triumphs. A major goal of this book is to present a consistent worldview. The authors of this text believe in God. If you also believe, there may be food for thought to deepen and enrich your faith. The authors may challenge you too.

What if you are not sure if you believe there is a God, or if you are convinced God doesn't exist? Is studying theology then a waste of time for you? A fruitful exercise might be to pursue the question, how do you *know* there is not a God? Is this a matter of proof? Of assurance? Trust in God is not a matter of proving God exists. Is *not* believing subject to proof? Can you prove God does not exist?

Some modern proponents of atheism argue that religious belief is dangerous. Is it? Why? If you are open to the possibility of God being real, what clues might you expect to be worth taking seriously? Which questions would you ask?

At the root of the Christian faith, there is a foundational theological question about Jesus himself. Who *is* this man? As the chapter on the New Testament here will describe, this is the central theme of the Gospels. In this book several authors will pursue a set of questions that are all ways of getting at that central question: Who is this Jesus?

Here we will address questions of how we can read Christian Scriptures *critically*. This is necessary because people interpret the Bible in a variety of ways. Do these Scriptures therefore mean anything we want them to mean? What issues does the text itself present to us? What did the early witnesses to Jesus' life think of him? A chapter on Christology here will probe what happened when the Christian message entered a new culture. What happens when an Aramaic message encounters the language and thought patterns of Greeks?

In modern society, we still ask, "Who is this man, Jesus?" In novels, movies, and television specials we see different debates and claims. What happens when an Aramaic and Greek and Roman message encounters our contemporary wealth of languages and thought patterns? What questions matter to us? Did Jesus marry Mary Magdalene? Are there missing manuscripts that can tell us what he really was like? We are not so different from the people who created the Christological controversies of the first centuries. Academic theology engages these questions and others that are raised in each historical era. What can we take from earlier attempts to understand? What intellectual tools can we bring to such questions today?

While this text is written by Christians, they are Christians who know they live in a rich, pluralistic world. How did the church interact with the world in its first generations? How does it interact with people today, with the variety of cultures and faiths on this global stage?

We cannot understand the Christian message without understanding its mother religion, Judaism. In this text we find authors who probe the creation of the Jewish Scriptures and the experiences of a living Judaism today. Can we also come to understand another child of Judaism: Islam? Can we listen to the heart of Islam, and understand it on its own terms? Can we avoid the caricatures that too often are presented about it?

Regardless of your spiritual or religious beliefs or understandings, the chapters here will

invite you to examine the workings of an ancient worldview, a worldview that has encountered many historical questions and that still engages modern conversation partners. We are inviting you to this table, believing that the discussions you find here will be valuable.

The spiritual quest cannot help but raise questions about our relationships to others, and to the Other. This book addresses such questions. It sees God as relational. Christian theology talks about God as Trinity. The doctrine of the Trinity asserts that, at the most foundational level of being, God is *relational*, even as God is *One*. As we seek meaning, do we find we are "in this together"? The worldview presented here is not surprised by that. It is the conviction of the authors that we are relational because God is relational: we are made in the image of God.

Do we seek the Other? In this book you will find authors who believe the Other seeks us. In the Jewish and Christian Scriptures we find not just an encounter with the Source of human transcendence; we find humanity's Creator, initiating a relationship with human beings. Christianity embraces a God who enters into God's own creation, and meets humanity as one of us; through Jesus Christ the human and divine are joined. Christians also assert that, in the ongoing life of the church—in its sacraments, in its concerns for justice, in its concern for moral living—the living reality of Christ himself is handed on.

Christian tradition is no stranger to persons who seek meaning and spiritual depth. The questions and quest of Christianity are echoed in the words of Saint Augustine: "You made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they rest in you" (*Confessions* 1.1).

## Why Take a Theology Course?

One of my presuppositions and core insights into human beings is this: everyone does theology. We all think about spirituality, religion, and

the big questions. Many of us do it at 2 a.m., maybe in small conversations between two or three friends.

How many places are there to talk about such things? If you tell people you want to set aside a couple of hours over the next few weeks to talk about the “meaning of life,” chances are they will laugh at you. But who doesn’t, at some time, wonder where their life is going? Who doesn’t wonder what their life *means*? The reason I walk into a classroom every semester is to find out if we can take up those 2 a.m. conversations at 10 a.m., in groups that are a bit bigger, in a place where we can draw on other people, and where we can draw on resources that have proven to be helpful in the past. We can find wisdom in others. And we are in this together.

Too often, religious worship and, sorry to say, classes on religion are dull and static. That’s crazy. Everyone faces the task of figuring out how to tie his or her life together; how can we let this stuff be boring? Maybe we can work on *that* together. Others have done some of the work, some of the discovering before us. This does not mean just swallowing whole what they are serving up, but they do have insights we can work with. At its best, religion should mean grappling with meaning and meaningfulness. Religions were all originally created by acting and living, by not settling for unfulfilling answers, but desiring to live more authentically. Religion is more a verb than a noun. If it is done right, religion, like the spiritual life, will also at times be a struggle. But through struggle it will make us more alive.

Our wisest predecessors knew this. Socrates wasn’t trying to become a famous philosopher when he walked into the agora. He argued with anyone who would listen because he wanted to understand what was true. Paul of Tarsus wasn’t posing for a painting or church sculpture when he preached. He wanted to present the message of Christ. He *had* to preach (see 1 Cor 9:16). In writing to his followers, he challenged them to

find a more sophisticated form of faith: “When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known” (1 Cor 13:11–12).

It is good to question. It is good to probe deeply, to use our minds as well as we can, to put into words what we can understand. “Theology” comes from two Greek roots; *theos*, meaning “god,” combined with *logos*, meaning “word” or “understanding.” Is theology possible? Can one put God into words? Theologians assert that we can never come to a final understanding of God. We are finite. But we can know enough of God to enter the relationship where we will learn more and more.

Theology is seeking: faith seeking understanding.

## Wrestling with God

I want to offer an image for doing theology, to bring to a close these introductory reflections and as a way of opening to the chapters that follow. I invite you to think about a passage from the Jewish Scriptures.

This will work best if you read the story first: Genesis 32:22–32. You might want to read this story in context too. Earlier material on Jacob can be found in Genesis 25:19–34; 27:1–32:21.

It is the middle of the night. Jacob’s family, everyone he has traveled with, is gone. He is alone. He is in the dark. It is not clear who he is wrestling with.

Jacob wrestles well; he holds his own until dawn is coming, and the foe has had enough. “Let me go for the day is breaking!” (Gen 32:26). Jacob will not quit. Is the opponent fair? He puts Jacob’s hip out of joint. Still Jacob does not let go; he will not let go unless he receives a *blessing*.

Now the opponent has a question. *Who are you?* Does Jacob know? He answers correctly, doesn't he? *Jacob*. Not anymore, Jacob. "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed" (Gen 32:28). Now he is someone new; this new name says who he really is. The people who will come from him will carry this new name, this new identity. They will struggle too, and limp as Jacob did.

Have you ever wrestled in the middle of the night? A decision has to be made. Which job? What direction of study? Am I headed for a breakup in this relationship? What am I supposed to do with my life? The hardest part can sometimes be forming the right question, let alone answering it. The image of wrestling is a powerful metaphor here. "Wrestling" well describes our down-to-earth, "hands-on" questioning. We struggle to *come to grips* with the next steps that face us. We understand what Jacob is dealing with. We wrestle too, to connect, to tie things together.

Jacob is returning to his home after decades away from his father, whom he has deceived, and his brother, who wanted to kill him. Jacob has returned to face his past, to face his decisions, to face the need to move ahead; he must return to be whole. He must sort things out. This one night it all comes to a head. He wrestles with the One who gives him life. He will not let go.

Is Jacob having a religious experience?

*Religio* has its own roots in another Latin word: *ligare*. From this we get the word "ligament." With his hip put out of joint, Jacob knows the pain of torn tissue, of destroyed connections. Is Jacob having a *religious* experience? He is being torn limb from limb. Is the opponent cruel or ironic? Why does Jacob become someone new? Even with a past torn by distrust and fear—he stole his brother's birthright, and his *blessing*—he comes back. He wrestles. And he will not stop unless he is blessed.

Who can give Jacob the thing that he could not steal? Who can give Jacob a new self? At the crisis point of the story, as light starts to seep into the scene, Jacob/Israel asks his opponent, "Please tell me your name" (Gen 32:29). And he doesn't get an answer. Everything in the story gets named. Jacob calls the place "Penuel," because there he struggled with God, face to face, and lived. He limps past Penuel. He has been to the Jabbok as Jacob and leaves as Israel. But he never gets the name of the one who *blesses* him.

So what is Jacob doing? Theology?

We cannot control the Other. But when we struggle to come to grips with ourselves and the One who meets us in our greatest depths, even in our darkest nights, we become someone new. We are blessed.

God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear” (Acts 2:32–33). Notice again the imagery of the risen Christ’s ascent, as well as the threefold pattern in characterizing divine activity: God raises Jesus from the dead, and from this “exaltation” the Holy Spirit is “poured out” within the community—that is, the church—which it then animates. The Spirit of God is therefore described as extending Christ’s historical mission in the world through the work of the church. In the conclusion of Matthew’s Gospel, this work of “sending” is crystallized in the Great Commission, as the risen Christ proclaims, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, until the end of the age” (28:19–20). Now given a new identity, and incorporated into the body of the risen Christ through the regenerating waters of baptism—baptism, within Christian practice, is a sacramental sign of participation in Christ (see chapter 7)—the members of the church are bonded together to share in and extend new life to others.

## Credal Formulation

Looking, finally, at the overall structure of the Nicene Creed, one sees just this descent-ascent movement at work. This is significant to observe, for although the creed bears within it doctrinal content that specifies what the church confesses and believes, it exhibits a narrative shape that characterizes the creative, redeeming, and sanctifying activity of God in a threefold way, as the work of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Nicene Creed tells a compact drama, one whose confessants are thoroughly self-implicated as subjects of and respondents to God’s triune activity.

In the first section, already detailed in this chapter, God is affirmed as one, as Father, as almighty, and as creator. In the second section, the creed affirms that this one God, through the eternal Word (or *Logos*), enters into human history by becoming human. Jesus Christ is, for Christians, the definitive revelation of God in the world, showing precisely in the warp and woof of creation the infinite compassion of God. There is no limit to God’s self-emptying love, not even the horror of death through crucifixion. (“For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate” highlights the historical specificity of the divine gesture.) God’s creativity cannot be squelched by death, but overcomes even that which would separate people from God and each other through the gift of Jesus’ Resurrection, the “new creation,” as Saint Paul often puts it. The risen Christ is “ascended into heaven”—that is, he opens up the whole of creation to new and eternal life in God—and is now the definitive standard by which all human life is judged. Jesus Christ is therefore not only the fullest revelation of God’s love for humankind (this is the “kenotic” movement of God towards us by assuming our humanity) but is also the fullest realization of human existence as made in the image and likeness of God (this is the “transcendent” movement of humanity towards God). And so, the self-giving of God to humanity and the self-giving of humanity to God utterly converge in the person of Jesus Christ. This convergence is what makes possible redemptive “participation” in divine life, namely, *theōsis*.

The third section of the creed speaks of the Holy Spirit and the ongoing life of the church in the world. By saying that the Holy Spirit “proceeds from the Father and the Son, with whom [the Spirit] is worshipped and glorified,” the creed affirms that it is truly God who indwells and animates the church in its worldly mission. The Spirit who hovered over the waters at the



dawn of creation (“the author and giver of life”); the Spirit who stirred the holy prophets of Israel; the Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead to renew all of creation from sin and death: this same Spirit draws the diverse members of the church into reconciliation with each other so that together they may become agents of transformation in the world. The “indwelling” of the Holy Spirit therefore does not imply a self-enclosed or exclusionary form of life, but opens up human belonging to an “outward” and self-giving mission of connectivity and embrace.

The entire drift of the creed affirms that Christian life, to the extent it is energized and shaped by divine life, is dynamic, relational, and self-giving. And as will become clearer in later chapters, such a life, insofar as it is lived well, has little to do with withdrawing into the backwaters of an elite club; it is a challenging, even risky way of life that entails two movements at once: ongoing spiritual formation with others in community, and a commitment to fostering reconciliation and justice in a world that desperately needs it.

## CONCLUSION: TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY TODAY

This chapter has traced a path of discovery that began with a consideration of divine mystery in terms of wonderment and perplexity. To follow wonderment and perplexity is a process of discernment, or what is called “theology.” Divine mystery is never exhausted by human discernment, which therefore makes us always beginners in its undertaking. Theological reflection is at its best when it continually rediscovers the original impulses of wonderment and perplexity that stimulate it. It is also at its best when it engages rich traditions of those who have lived and discerned the mystery throughout history. Theology can therefore be thought of as an ongoing

conversation, extending over many centuries and always broaching new experiences, questions, and insights, so as to assist its practitioner in the task of living the mystery in the present and towards the future.

As has been shown, the Old Testament gives distinctive shape to that task through, among other things, the elaboration of its primary narrative, which emphasizes the historical dialogue between God and the people of Israel through the themes of creation, exodus, and covenant. The Christian Scriptures are thoroughly steeped in this primary narrative, though they reframe its central features in response to the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, whom Christians affirm as God’s definitive self-manifestation to human beings. The church understands such self-emptying on the part of God as simultaneously the fulfillment of human existence, whose transformative (or “divinizing”) effects are extended in the church and the world through the work of the Holy Spirit. Christians therefore discern and live according to the infinite mystery of God in a triune way, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This language takes on a narrative shape, as both the New Testament and Nicene Creed show, though it is possible also to specify aspects of that language in more conceptually explicit ways. This close relationship between story and doctrine is crucial to remember, since too often doctrines can become detached or even isolated from the lived experience that first nourished them.

Significantly, this insistence on the close relationship between experience and concept, history and doctrine, narrative and theory, is a central feature of many contemporary theologians of the Trinity. Numerous theologians today continue to argue for the need to reconnect our sometimes abstract formulations of doctrine with lived experience and narrative reflection. This chapter concludes, then, by briefly

indicating four ways contemporary theology commonly seeks to make this connection more explicit and thorough.

### 1. The unity of transcendence and immanence in talk about God.

This chapter has stressed two seemingly contrary things at once, but which are not contrary at all when properly understood. On the one hand, it has spoken of God's otherness, or transcendence, and consequently the limits of human images and concepts in the attempt to apprehend divine mystery. Insofar as humans are creatures, we cannot grasp God like we might some common object of experience. Returning to the quote from Thomas Aquinas, the infinite actuality of God cannot be absorbed or comprehended by finite minds, and so in some sense God's excessive "light" appears to humans as a kind of "darkness." The influential, fifth-century mystical theologian Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite spoke of God's "dazzling darkness" to emphasize just this paradox. On the other hand, such insistence on transcendence in no way denies that God might be able and willing to enter into dialogue and relationship with creatures. On the contrary, many theologians would assert, it is just God's transcendence that makes it possible for God to be intimately near or involved with creation, which is what we mean by "immanence." This is one of the crucial implications of the doctrine of the Trinity. It affirms at once God's transcendence and immanence, God's otherness and nearness, God's infinity and loving compassion in becoming finite "for us and for our salvation." Trinitarian discourse means to keep these (apparent) opposites in creative tension. The transcendent God *becomes* human to share divine life *with* humans, to draw all creation more profoundly into God's infinite mystery. Such "outpouring" and "returning" is the rhythm of life in God, which the Holy Spirit continuously makes possible. Only by keeping transcendence

and immanence in closest unity is one able to avoid thinking of God as a remote and indifferent deity, or, conversely, as indistinguishable from creation. As presented in the creed, God is infinitely "more than" creation, yet this "more than" keeps creation in its triune embrace.

### 2. The relational reality of God, and the communal character of Christian life.

Another key point of emphasis in contemporary theology is the relational character of God. Christians most certainly affirm God as one ("We believe in one God"). However, Christians should not think of divine unity as somehow opposed to relationship. Here too Trinitarian discourse means to keep apparent opposites in creative tension. In God perfect relationship *is* perfect unity. God is not an isolated, static, and supremely self-satisfied "ego" that surveys all things from an unapproachable perch; rather, the Christian tradition understands God as a relational, dynamic, and self-giving reality who freely wills to create out of superabundance. As Pseudo-Dionysius is also famous for asserting, "The Good is self-diffusive," meaning that God is an infinite fullness of relationship that is most itself when it gives itself away. God the Father eternally expresses the Word in the unity of the Holy Spirit, and so is an eternally dynamic flow of relationship. This is truly profound in its implications. If people are made in the "image and likeness of God," this means that humans are most truly themselves when they are self-giving with and for others. Concretely this means that the Christian lives more richly into his or her vocation insofar as it is lived in community. As many contemporary theologians argue, such an insight cuts at the heart of modern individualism. The human person is a thoroughly porous creature, one born out of and for participation in a broad array of interpersonal and social relationships. Though living in relationship makes Christians vulnerable to one another, the voca-

tion of the Christian is to heal damaged relationships, to bring reconciliation where there is hurt, and to bring justice and wholeness where there is suffering and alienation. To be so engaged is, in fact, to draw creation more richly into the heart of the triune God. By stressing this point, contemporary theology seeks to recover the practical, social, and even political implications of Trinitarian theology.

### 3. The awareness of metaphor in gendered language about God.

Recent decades have witnessed significant reflection and debate among theologians regarding gender-specificity in language about God. For many centuries masculine-based metaphors and pronouns were dominant, even “normative” when speaking of God, as is obviously true for the use of Father and Son in Trinitarian discourse, although the Holy Spirit has sometimes been thought of as gender-neutral or even feminine. But since the latter half of the twentieth century, increasing numbers of men and women have questioned the normativity of masculine God-language since it seems to imply that men are more “representative” of God than women. Citing the social inequality this allocation of language seems to reflect and underwrite, a growing number of Christian theologians argue that God language must become more “inclusive,” either by supplementation with feminine imagery and pronouns or, alternatively, through avoidance of gender-specification when possible. There are, as one might suspect, many possible stances to take on this highly complex and sensitive issue, which goes to show just how important social and cultural change is in how we imagine and talk about God. No doubt the question has arisen, and even become urgent, as a result of rapid and profound changes in gender relations over the last century or so. The issue is particularly challenging for Christians since Jesus himself, obviously a man living in a patriarchal society, used the term *Abba*

(“Father”) to address God—though, as is also pointed out by numerous feminist theologians, Jesus challenged many patriarchal sensibilities in his day, not least through his close association with women in his ministry. In any case, no matter where one finally stands on this issue of ongoing debate, the problems it raises require discernment about the limits of human imagination and language when it comes to the mystery of God. If, on the one hand, the ultimate vocation of language is to speak out of and to the reality of God, on the other hand, one must always do so knowing that no language, whether masculine, feminine, or gender neutral, manages to capture the transcendence of God.

### 4. The importance of engaging other views of God creatively and dialogically.

Finally, and related to the above point, contemporary theologians are intensely engaged in reflection over the unique challenges that arise when encountering persons from other religious and cultural traditions, and therefore when encountering differing (and sometimes radically alternative) views of divine mystery, including those who are indifferent or even hostile to notions of God. What makes our pluralist age unique is not that people now have so many differing views of God—such has always been the case—but that today we live in such close proximity with such differences due to the massive mobilization of populations made possible by advances in communication and transportation. More now than ever, we are aware of how distinctive histories and cultures shape the ways humans imagine their place in the world, and thus how context-sensitive one’s view of ultimate reality is. Faced with such ambiguity, people may buckle down and cling to their cultural and religious heritage; we might think of fundamentalism as one kind of response to growing pluralism. On the other hand a sense of futility or even cynicism regarding the search for truth can set in, making the

very notion of discussing “ultimate reality” seem hopeless or arbitrary. Relativism can be another kind of response to pluralism. Between rigid fundamentalism and ephemeral relativism, however, is the more challenging (though creative) path of seeking unity *in* difference. Without reducing all religions to an abstract unity in a way that ignores or falsifies legitimate differences, it is possible to be committed to a particular religious tradition while also remaining open to the truth, goodness, and beauty of other religious traditions. (See chapters 10 and 11 for more on Christianity’s relationship to other religions of the world.) If, for example, a Christian is convinced that Jesus Christ is the definitive self-disclosure of God in history, this will not mean therefore

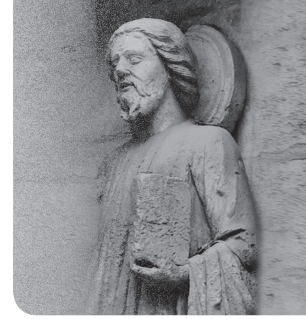
that the mystery of God cannot be found richly and compellingly in other religious traditions. Indeed, to remain hospitable to the mystery of God no matter where it is found is essential to any truly theological undertaking. For the Christian, the understanding of God as Trinitarian actually inspires and informs this openness to otherness, since the God it affirms is relational and dialogical. The idea of the infinite mystery of God has a corollary: people will always be able to discover more about God. For the Christian, the triune character of that mystery means that one will discover more about God in the context of relationship, even when (and perhaps especially when) one encounters persons very different from oneself.

## Questions about the Text

1. What is the central paradox of all Christian theology?
2. What three major points characterize the discernment of divine mystery in theological activity?
3. What is a *theophany*, and what two aspects are closely associated with its instance in Exodus 3?
4. What is Israel’s “primary narrative” in brief, and how does it shape Israel’s understanding of God as liberator and creator?
5. What is the meaning of *theōsis*, and how is it central to the doctrine of the Trinity? Explain your answer by referring to the “ascent-descent” pattern in key passages from scripture, as well as the structure of the Nicene Creed.
6. What implications follow from the Christian understanding of God as “relational” and “self-giving,” especially in terms of the church’s role in the world?

## Questions for Discussion

1. Have you ever thought of the question, “Why is there something rather than nothing?” What sort of feelings or thoughts does such a question elicit from you?
2. Do you think theological reflection is compatible with doubt? Why or why not?
3. What are some other examples of a theophany in scripture, or perhaps in other religious contexts? How do people today typically speak of encounters with the divine, and are such accounts similar or different from celebrated instances in the past?



# from the REFERENCE LIBRARIAN

## Researching Bible Topics—Old Testament

There are many possible topics of research for the Old Testament; let's try to categorize them. One category of topic is biographical. Is there a particular figure (Abraham, Moses, David, etc.) that you would like to study in depth? Another category would include subjects related to the Bible's "world of thought" and would include researching such biblical and theological concepts as "righteousness," "faith," or "covenant," or such biblical phenomena as "prophecy," "wisdom literature," "apocalyptic," and so on. Yet another category might be topics relating to the historical world of the Bible. This would include the study of the geographical setting of scripture, including archaeological investigation, daily life and customs, and so on. There is much more, but perhaps this is enough to get you started.

Whatever your topic is, remember your starting point is as follows:

### SKILL KEY #1

Use the library's reference collection to begin your research.

- a) Use a subject-specific encyclopedia to acquire specialized knowledge about a subject.
- b) Use a subject-specific encyclopedia whose scope is appropriate for both your topic and the approach you want to take to that topic.

What subject-specific reference sources should you use to study the Old Testament? A number of reference works are devoted entirely to the Bible. The most comprehensive are the two multi-volume encyclopedias listed below.

David Noel Freedman, ed. *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992.

Katherine Doob Sakenfeld, ed. *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*. 5 vols. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006–2009.

Don't let the word *dictionary* in the title throw you off. These are exhaustive encyclopedias containing articles on almost any topic imaginable relating to the Bible (both Old and New Testaments). Most articles have bibliographies, often listing both books and journal articles.

Some reference sources focus even more narrowly on the OT alone or on parts of it. For example, your library may own the following title devoted entirely to the five books of Moses:

T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker.  
*Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*.  
Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003.

Another type of reference tool, usually called a Bible dictionary or handbook, may also be useful. Bible dictionaries are usually one vol-

ume, so the articles will be shorter than those you will find in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*. The following titles are representative of this type of reference tool; your librarian can suggest alternatives if your library does not own either one.

Mark Allan Powell, ed. *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*. 3rd ed. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2011.

David Noel Freedman, ed. *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000.

Since, as you have already learned, study of the Bible entails the use of a number of technical terms (Tanak, Torah, Pentateuch, etc.), the following example of a concise dictionary, as described in the introductory chapter, will be helpful for quickly looking up the meaning of an unfamiliar term or expression:

Richard N. Soulen and R. Kendall Soulen. *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*. 3rd ed., rev. and expanded. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.

The one-volume Bible dictionaries may also be helpful for definitions.

Although almost all of the reference tools just listed will be helpful with specifically theological topics, some reference tools (including the three listed next) focus entirely on the theology of the Bible. Such reference tools usually contain articles on terms actually appearing in the Bible and theological concepts based on those terms.

Donald E. Gowan. *The Westminster Theological Wordbook of the Bible*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003.

Carroll Stuhlmueller, ed. *The Collegeville Pastoral Dictionary of Biblical Theology*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996.

Kevin J. Vanhoozer et al., eds. *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*. Cambridge, UK: Baker Academic, 2005.

Finally, another type of useful reference tool is a Bible atlas. Understanding the geographical setting of the biblical story is crucial to grasping the significance of the overall biblical narrative. Many atlases of the Bible have been published. If your library does not own one of the atlases listed below, ask the librarian if there is something similar available.

Yohanan Aharoni et al., eds. *The Carta Bible Atlas*. Jerusalem: Carta, 2002.

Marcus Braybrooke and James Harpur. *Collegeville Atlas of the Bible*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998.

Adrian Curtis, ed. *Oxford Bible Atlas*. 4th ed. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Remember also that it is possible to begin research on almost any topic, including the Bible, using the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (described in the introductory chapter). You can find articles for all three types of topics mentioned, including OT figures (such as Abraham, Moses, or David) or other aspects of the OT that you have read about in this chapter (e.g., see “Pentateuchal Studies,” 11:88–100, for a much lengthier discussion of the documentary hypothesis) or about important theological topics (such as righteousness, prophecy, etc.).

## Researching Individual Books of the Bible

One more way of studying the Bible is to study each individual book, asking appropriate questions: Who wrote it? When was it written? Why was it written? What situation was being addressed? What were the historical circum-

stances behind the writing of the book? What does the book (or certain sections of it) mean?

We will use this type of topic to illustrate the second of the key elements of using the library.

### SKILL KEY #2

Use the library's catalog to locate sources of information.

- a) Use subject headings to locate precisely books on your topic.

You can, of course, find articles on individual books of the Bible in almost all of the reference sources listed previously. The bibliographies from these reference sources as described in the introductory chapter will lead you to the appropriate subject heading(s) for a biblical book, but subject headings for the Bible have a unique format, so it will be worthwhile to see how they are formed.

Subject headings for OT books always begin with the root “Bible O T” (the “O T” stands for “Old Testament”) and follow the pattern given below. (Be sure to put a space between the “O” and the “T.”)

#### Search format:

<i>Subject heading “root”</i>	<i>Name of Book</i>
Bible OT	Genesis
Bible OT	Isaiah

As you will discover in the next chapter, the format for books of the NT is the same, with the difference that “N T” (for “New Testament”) is used instead of “O T.” We will have more to say about subject headings for biblical books in the next chapter. For now, you should have a good grasp of the importance of using a subject-specific encyclopedia.

## Student Tasks

1. Ask your reference librarian to show you where the Bible encyclopedias are located.
2. Select a book from the OT and use the correct form of subject heading to search your library catalog for books about it.

[Note: Most college and many public libraries allow electronic access to their catalog through the Internet. That convenience allows a student to work from home, dorm, or other places. This makes your computer a terminal connected to the library resources.]

Renaissance sought to recover the wisdom of the ancients, both sacred and secular. *Ad fontes* (“to the sources”) was the slogan of these scholars, who devoted their lives to uncovering and studying ancient texts. While Italian humanists promoted a more human-centered and secular version of the Renaissance, Northern European humanists offered a “devout humanism” that sought to combine the best of ancient pagan wisdom (Plato, Aristotle, Virgil, Seneca, etc.) with the wisdom of the Bible and the Christian tradition. Martin Luther’s compulsion to re-read and re-interpret the Bible during the 1510s should be seen against the backdrop of the Renaissance.

## The Eventful Life of Martin Luther

The early history of Protestantism mirrors the story of one man—Martin Luther. The origin of the Protestant movement is traced to a date and an event in Luther’s life—October 31, 1517, when Luther nailed the “Ninety-Five Theses” to the door of the Wittenberg Cathedral. This act was an overture to a formal academic disputation regarding indulgences (i.e., statements of remission of penalties for sin) that the Catholic Church was then selling to raise money for St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome. Neither Luther nor anyone else could have anticipated the wide-ranging theological, political, and social issues that were to emerge in the course of the indulgence dispute. At the Heidelberg Disputation (1518) and ensuing theological debates, Luther’s adversaries successfully pressed him to acknowledge that he was not only questioning the Church’s sale of indulgences but the pope’s authority as well. This was a damaging and dangerous admission on Luther’s part, since it aligned Luther with Jan Hus, who had died as a heretic.

1521 was a pivotal year, during which Luther wrote three major treatises: *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, *The Freedom of a Christian*, and *Appeal to the Nobility of the German Nation*.



IMAGE © FOTO MARBURG / ART RESOURCE

Luther posts his “Ninety-Five Theses.”

The first text argued against the Catholic system of seven sacraments, and marked Luther’s final rupture with his inherited tradition. Only rituals that were directly taught in the New Testament—baptism and Eucharist (and perhaps the confession of sins)—were authentic, Luther argued. For Luther, the Church had no intrinsic power to institute new sacraments (e.g., confirmation, last rites) or other practices (e.g., monastic vows) that were not mandated in the New Testament. In the second text, Luther presented the Christian life as characterized by freedom rather than rule-keeping, a major theme for later Protestants. In the third text, Luther called on the German nobles to assist the emerging Protestant movement. In Luther’s doctrine of the “two kingdoms,”



the church exists as an inward, spiritual kingdom, distinct from the political sphere, while the outward, physical reign of the kings and nobility exists alongside it. The church's task is the right preaching of God's word, while the Christian prince's task is to enable the church to fulfill its calling of preaching the word.

Luther debated the most famous humanist scholar in Europe: Desiderius Erasmus. The core issue was Luther's idea of human depravity. Since Adam's fall, Luther argued, all human beings were born into the world as slaves of sin and their darkened minds were unable to perceive spiritual truth. Only God's gracious initiative toward sinners could break the "bondage of the will" and bring spiritual understanding, so that faith in God and repentance from sin became possible. Erasmus asserted that, while salvation is entirely a matter of God's grace, individuals have free will and may respond to or reject God's grace. Luther told the humanist that "your thoughts of God are too human," and defended the idea that God has predestined some to be saved while leaving others in their sinful, condemned condition. It is not the part of mere mortals to question why God predestines some to one fate and some to another, argued Luther.

The term "Protestant" first arose after the Diet of Speyer in 1529, which upheld an earlier decision to condemn Luther and his teaching. The German princes who supported Luther wrote a letter of "protestation," and the term "protestant" has been with us ever since.

## "Magisterial" and "Radical" Protestantism

Early Protestantism was a vast simplification of Catholicism, a kind of housecleaning wherein everything deemed unnecessary was thrown out. Four slogans—*sola scriptura*, *sola fide*, *sola gratia*, and *solus Christus*—summarized core elements of Protestant theology. While Catholicism based

itself on scripture *and* tradition, Protestantism appealed to "scripture alone" (*sola scriptura*). Protestants held that the Bible was a sufficient guide to resolve all major questions of Christian faith and practice. While Catholicism taught that human beings are saved by faith *with* works, or by grace *with* merit, Protestants held to salvation by "faith alone" (*sola fide*) and by "grace alone" (*sola gratia*). While Catholicism insisted on the intercession of Mary and the saints, Protestants looked to "Christ alone" (*solus Christus*) as the mediator between God and humanity.

As the Protestant message spread to cities throughout Europe from the 1520s onward, it took different forms in different places. In Zurich (in present-day Switzerland), Ulrich Zwingli preached a more extreme form of Protestantism than Luther did. Rejecting almost all traditions that had emerged in the course of church history, Zwingli wanted to base every element of Christian faith and practice on explicit statements of the Bible. He took down statues and other forms of visual art from church buildings, calling them idolatrous. Zwingli's attitude contrasted with that of Luther, who felt that it was acceptable to retain Catholic practices and beliefs, so long as they did not directly conflict with the Bible. Compared with Zwingli, Luther was a conservative reformer. The two men clashed at the Marburg Colloquy in 1529. They divided in their understanding of the Eucharist, with Luther insisting that Christ's body and blood were truly present in the consecrated bread and wine (the view later known as "consubstantiation") and Zwingli viewing the bread and wine of the Eucharist as mere outward symbols that reminded the faithful of Christ and his atoning death. The falling out between Luther and Zwingli was a major disappointment for the early Protestants, since it meant that their movement would not remain internally unified.

Yet Zwingli's views were still not extreme enough for an emerging group during the 1520s

that became known as the Anabaptists (meaning literally “re-baptizers”), and more recently as Radical Reformers. Not finding any undeniable evidence for infant baptism in New Testament times, the Anabaptists rejected the practice and insisted that, since only adults are capable of making a profession of faith, only adults may be baptized. The Anabaptists believed that the true church should have no link to governmental systems or the political order. Believers were to meet at home, in face-to-face gatherings where they might put the Bible into practice and hold one another accountable for living as true disciples. Since the Sermon on the Mount forbade Jesus’ followers from retaliating against their enemies, the Anabaptists held that Christians should not bear arms—a position known as pacifism. Menno Simons—once a Roman Catholic priest—was among the Anabaptists’ most influential leaders. Surprising as it seems today, the Roman Catholic authorities and most Protestant leaders during the 1500s held that Anabaptists were not only theologically mistaken but were social and political subversives who deserved to die. In the year 1527, the civil authorities of Zurich tied up Anabaptist leader Felix Manz with stones and drowned him in the frigid waters of the Limmat River—in cruel mockery of the Anabaptist practice of baptism by immersion. Fierce persecution scattered the Anabaptists throughout Europe, where many more suffered ostracism or death for their beliefs.

The Anabaptists risked martyrdom for their convictions, and were among the first Europeans to argue for freedom of religion and complete separation of church and state. In this they represented a distinct minority, as Protestant and Catholic states squared off against each other, plunging Europe into a full century of religious warfare (ca. 1550–ca. 1650). Afterward, the thinkers of the emerging Enlightenment movement began to find themselves in agreement with what Anabaptists had argued long before. True

religion, the Anabaptists had said, was a voluntary matter. It could not be coerced by government regulations or by threats of persecution. Eventually the principle of religious freedom became enshrined in the First Amendment to the *Constitution of the United States* (1789) and later political documents. Yet during the 1500s this idea was not self-evident to most Europeans.

## The Second Great Figure: John Calvin

Luther was immensely creative and yet also sometimes erratic. His followers, he had said, sought to make him a “fixed star” though he was a “wandering planet.” His humanness was often on display, as when he declared that “he who loves not wine, women, and song, remains a fool his whole life long.” Succeeding Luther, the most influential figure of the second Protestant generation was John Calvin. In fact both Luther and Calvin gave their names to divergent branches of Protestantism: the Lutheran and the Calvinist (or Reformed) traditions.

Calvin, who was trained both in law and in the best humanist traditions, showed a more systematic style than Luther. He wrote commentaries on nearly all the books of the Bible and summed up a lifetime of research in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559), to this day among the most influential Protestant works ever written. While Luther stressed God’s grace to the undeserving and the good news of God’s love for sinners, Calvin highlighted God’s sovereign power and inscrutable will. A doctrine that aroused debate was predestination, the teaching (based on various biblical passages) that God from eternity chose some, and passed over others, for eternal salvation. Christians had been wrestling with this idea for centuries—we have already seen that Luther, too, embraced it—but predestination would come to be one of the hallmarks of Calvinist thought.

For better or for worse, “Calvinism,” as it spread in England, Scotland, New England, Switzerland, and the Netherlands, was strongly associated with the doctrines of divine sovereignty and eternal predestination. A controversy among Calvinists in the Netherlands during the 1600s resulted in the decision of the Synod of Dort (1618–1619), which defined Calvinist orthodoxy in terms of “five points”: humanity’s *total* depravity in sin, the *unconditional* choice or election of some to salvation, the *limited* atonement of Christ (i.e., Christ died only for the “elect”), the *irresistible* grace of God that achieved its effect for those who were predestined, and the *perseverance* in grace of those who were en route to salvation. (Want to remember these five points? Note the first letter of each; combined they spell “tulip,” a flower associated with Holland.) Though there was much more to Calvinism than this, the five points summarized certain distinctive features of the Calvinist teaching on salvation. Later thinkers followed the broad contours of Calvin’s theology, including Theodore Beza, the Puritans of England and New England (later 1500s–later 1600s), Jonathan Edwards, the American Presbyterian Charles Hodge, and the Swiss authors Karl Barth (1886–1968) and Emil Brunner (1889–1966).

## Turmoil in Europe and in Britain

The Protestant movement did not equally affect all nations and regions of Europe. The French Protestants—inspired by events in nearby Geneva under Calvin—were growing in numbers and influence in the mid-1500s. Yet a series of bloody killings around St. Bartholomew’s Day in 1572 dealt a blow from which the Huguenots (French Protestants) never recovered. Thereafter, the Protestant movement was greatly diminished in France. Lutheranism found its heartland in Germany and Scandinavia: Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and Finland.

The Scandinavian nations, to this day, are all at least nominally Lutheran. Lutheranism later made its way to the United States through German and Scandinavian emigration.

Calvinism migrated further than Lutheranism, taking root in Scotland, England, New England, the Netherlands, Bohemia (today’s Czech Republic), and Hungary. Later there were Dutch Calvinist migrations to South Africa as well as the East Indies (Indonesia). Generally speaking, Protestantism was strongest in northern Europe, while southern and southwestern Europe (Italy, France, Spain, and Portugal) remained largely Roman Catholic, and southeastern Europe (Austria, Serbia, Croatia, and the Balkans) was divided between Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy. Germany after 1648 was a patchwork of small principalities, some of them Protestant and some Catholic, according to the preference of the local rulers. *Cuius regio, huius religio* (“whose is the region, his is the religion”)—so ran the slogan that summarized this policy of allowing local rulers in central Europe to determine the religion of their subjects.

Nowhere did the Protestant Reformation follow a more complex or circuitous route than it did in the British Isles. In 1534, King Henry VIII declared himself to be the head of the English Church. Thereafter, except for a brief return to Catholicism under Henry’s daughter, (“Bloody”) Mary, the national faith of England was Protestant—at least in the sense that it no longer recognized the authority of the pope. Yet for nearly a century and a half the question remained as to how much of the Catholic tradition the English Church would retain in its beliefs and practices, and how much of a moderate or radical Protestantism it would embrace. Later spokespersons for the Church of England would claim that it was a *via media* (“middle way”) embracing the best of both Protestantism and Catholicism. Over time a spectrum of

viewpoints emerged. *The Book of Common Prayer* (1549, with later revisions) was one of the few things that held together all the faithful in the Church of England. A few holdouts in England (especially among the nobility) remained Catholic and refused to acknowledge the English monarch as the legitimate head of the national church. Yet it was dangerous to be an English Catholic at the time. In 1605, the Catholic Guy Fawkes tried to explode the Parliament building in the so-called Gunpowder Plot. Popes in this period had sanctioned the idea that the English rulers—as religious imposters—might be killed with impunity. There were Spanish attempts to conquer England and make it Catholic again. As a result of these developments, most of the English were deeply alienated from Roman Catholicism and from the Papacy.

## The Anglican Settlement in England

The majority of English Christians—or “Anglicans”—went along with the idea of a state church independent of the pope. Yet among them there were some who had gone to Geneva to escape persecution under Queen Mary in the 1550s (“the Marian exiles”) and had returned more ardently Protestant and Calvinistic than ever. They were the foundation of a “Puritan” movement that sought to purify the English Church from within, embracing the Reformation more fully, and doing away with retained “Catholic” practices. The more extreme English Reformers broke with the Puritans and became “Separatists” or “Independents”; impatient with what they took to be the slow pace of reform, they thought it advisable to withdraw from the official Church of England to found separate fellowships. Their “conventicles” were declared illegal under Queen Elizabeth (reigned 1558–1603), and the persecution experienced by the stricter Protestant groups provoked some to emigrate to New England between 1620 and 1640. These

emigrants laid a religious foundation for the later United States of America. Among the Puritans and Separatist there were intricate theological debates over simplicity in worship style (e.g., the wearing of church vestments by ministers) and the proper form of church government. While the Anglican Church was governed by bishops, Presbyterians favored a kind of religious parliament (or “general assembly”) to make binding decisions for all local congregations, and Congregationalists wanted every congregation to be able to govern its own affairs without any interference from a bishop or general assembly. Not surprisingly, the Presbyterians and Congregationalists generally favored an imposition of strict limits on the power of the king. At the culmination of the English Civil War of the 1640s, Parliament, largely under the influence of Puritan radicals, put King Charles I on trial as the people’s enemy; he was publicly put to death in 1649.

This shocking execution of the monarch—regarded by some as a sacrilegious slaying of “God’s anointed”—was the first event of its kind in modern times and it foreshadowed later ideas regarding limited government. Protestant propagandists and pamphleteers challenged the idea of *Rex lex* (“the king is law”) with an assertion of *Lex rex* (“the law is king”). Basing their faith on the text of the Bible, Protestants had a natural affinity for a notion of human government based on a written constitution rather than the will of the ruler. John Locke’s *Two Treatises on Government* (1689) promoted limited government and popular sovereignty, arguing that all just governments ruled with the consent of the governed. These ideas were later integral to the American Revolution, as well as the *Declaration of Independence* (1776) and the *Constitution of the United States* (1789).

Scholars have argued that Protestantism was associated not only with modern representative government, but with the rise of a capitalistic economy in Europe (Max Weber),

with the scientific revolution of the 1600s and 1700s (Robert Merton), and with a trans-Atlantic tradition of literacy especially strong in Protestant nations. Protestantism was thus not only a religious but a cultural phenomenon, and it inculcated such values as personal freedom, capitalistic and entrepreneurial activity, a disciplined and productive life (the so-called Protestant work ethic), the importance of reading and education, and scientific and technological inquiry. These cultural values were especially associated with Britain and the United States from the 1700s through the 1900s.

## The Confessional Era

During the late 1500s and early 1600s, Protestant Christianity had entered into a “confessional” or creed-writing phase. On the Catholic side, the Council of Trent (1542–1565) brought a far-reaching reorganization and centralization to the Church. It also solidified Catholic opposition to Protestantism, condemning the idea of justification by faith, recognizing the Old Testament Apocrypha as authoritative, mandating the Latin Vulgate for reading and study (rather than the Hebrew and Greek originals), and sanctioning the reception of the Mass in one kind only (i.e., consecrated bread but not wine), indulgences, prayers to Mary and the saints, prayers for the dead, and teaching on purgatory. As the 1500s progressed, Roman Catholics and Protestants who had been hoping for agreement between the two sides found little to encourage them. Lutheranism formulated its confessional statements, including the Augsburg *Confession* (1530) and *Formula of Concord* (1577), Reformed or Calvinist Christians composed the *Heidelberg Catechism* (1563) and *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1646), and Anglicanism drew up its *Thirty-Nine Articles* (1563). These documents were widely used in instructing generations of Protestants in the distinctive tenets of their particular group.

During this era, leading Protestants engaged in extensive theological debates with Roman Catholic authors, like the redoubtable Cardinal Robert Bellarmine (1542–1621). Representative of these works is Martin Chemnitz’s *Examination of the Council of Trent* (1574). Though little read today, these polemical writings occupy impressive volumes of Latin prose. The writing, reading, and study of such works occupied the lifetimes of countless pastors and professors during the era of Protestant scholasticism.

Yet the strong focus on correct doctrine and theological orthodoxy brought dangers to the Protestant churches. Some leaders, perhaps more than the laity, had come to identify true Christianity with a precise set of doctrinal beliefs, while neglecting the *experiential* and *practical* aspects of Christianity. Moreover, the Protestant-Catholic theological arguments—and intra-Protestant debates that pitted Lutherans against the Reformed—slighted the common beliefs shared by rival confessional groups. Only the differences were highlighted in the midst of argumentation. The Lutheran scholastic Abraham Calovius is said to have prayed every morning, “O Lord, fill me with hatred of heretics!” In Continental Europe, theologically technical sermons sometimes lasted for two or three hours and included long quotations in Latin—though most congregants did not even know any Latin.

## New Stirrings: The Pietist Movement

A slender book, under the title *Pia Desideria* [“Pious Desires”] (1677), signaled a turn toward a more practical, experiential form of Christianity. The book’s author, Philip Spener, promoted a movement known as Pietism. The Pietists offered a program for church-based renewal that centered on small groups within the larger church, termed *collegia pietatis* (“fellowships of the godly”) or *ecclesiola in ecclesia* (“little churches within the larger church”). Such groups emphasized personal Bible