

# The Contribution of Cornelio Fabro to Fundamental Theology



# The Contribution of Cornelio Fabro to Fundamental Theology:

*Reason and Faith*

By

Marcelo Javier Navarro Muñoz

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To Mary, *Seat of Wisdom*  
To my parents, *in memoriam*  
To those I love, *in gratitude*

“Faith asks that its object be understood with the help of reason, and at the summit of its searching reason acknowledges that it cannot do without what faith presents.”

(John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, 42 §2)

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# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

## Thomas Aquinas

<i>De Ver</i>	<i>Quaestiones Disputatae De Veritate</i>
<i>SCG</i>	<i>Summa Contra Gentiles</i>
<i>S Th</i>	<i>Summa Theologiae</i>
<i>Sup. Boet. De Trin.</i>	<i>Super Boetium De Trinitate</i>

## Church Documents

<i>EG</i>	Francis, <i>Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium</i>
<i>FR</i>	John Paul II, <i>Encyclical Letter Fides et Ratio</i>

## Cornelio Fabro

<i>BIT</i>	<i>Breve Introduzione al Tomismo</i>
<i>Dall'essere</i>	<i>Dall'essere all'esistente. Hegel, Kierkegaard, Heidegger e Jaspers</i>
<i>Edith Stein</i>	<i>Edith Stein, Tra Husserl e Tommaso d'Aquino</i>
<i>La dialettica</i>	<i>Giorgio G. F. Hegel. La dialettica. Antologia sistematica</i>
<i>GIE</i>	<i>God in Exile, Modern Atheism</i>
<i>IAM</i>	<i>Introduzione all'Ateismo moderno</i>
<i>L'anima</i>	<i>L'anima, Introduzione al problema dell'uomo</i>
<i>L'Assoluto</i>	<i>L'Assoluto nell'Esistenzialismo</i>
<i>La Preghiera</i>	<i>La Preghiera nel pensiero moderno</i>
<i>L'uomo</i>	<i>L'uomo e il Rischio di Dio</i>
<i>Partecipazione e Causalità</i>	<i>Partecipazione e Causalità secondo S. Tommaso d'Aquino</i>

<i>PP</i>	<i>Percezione e Pensiero</i>
<i>SW1</i>	<i>Selected Works. Volume 1, Selected Articles on Metaphysics and Participation</i>
<i>SW9</i>	<i>Selected Works. Volume 9, God, An Introduction to Problems in Theology</i>
<i>SK</i>	<i>Søren Kierkegaard. Il problema della fede</i>

### **Other**

<i>ETW</i>	Hegel, Georg W. F., <i>Early Theological Writings</i>
<i>Phenomenology</i>	Hegel, Georg W. F., <i>The Phenomenology of Spirit</i>
<i>THN</i>	Hume, David, <i>A Treatise of Human Nature</i>
<i>CPuR</i>	Kant, Immanuel, <i>Critique of Pure Reason</i>
<i>OP</i>	Kant, Immanuel, <i>Opus Postumum</i>
<i>PPh</i>	Kant, Immanuel, <i>Practical Philosophy</i>

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

This work is an investigation of an original notion of faith present in the conclusion of Cornelio Fabro's book *Dall'essere all'esistente*. My aim is to offer fundamental theology a fresh perspective for the understanding of faith from a philosophical approach. The findings presented here may be well suited not only for the elaboration of a theological definition of faith in accordance with the transcendent nature of the Absolute, but also as a response to the request of fundamental theologians who claim the need to build a suitable metaphysical and epistemological framework for fundamental theology.

My research proposes Intensive Thomism as relevant to provide foundational elements for a new articulation in accordance with the guidelines of John Paul II's Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio* for said discipline. Considering Intensive Thomism as a philosophy of being with ample metaphysical range, I show how the understanding of intensive *esse* leads to a realistic comprehension of faith and the transcendent Absolute without the risk of immanentist connotations.

Inspired by Fabro's thesis that there exists an internal logic as an undercurrent to the external development of modern and contemporary Western philosophical thought, I search for this internal logic in regard to the act of faith. I conduct a recovery of existential aspects of faith from some key representatives of the philosophical tradition in order to establish this notion of faith as the faculty that leads to the conviction of reality, and consequently to the theological reality of the Absolute.

Through this original contribution for the furtherance of theological knowledge from a Catholic perspective, I seek to arrive at faith, thus understood as the faculty that apprehends existence and the real, and which involves the total commitment of the person, to demonstrate that this notion is suitable to best explain theological faith and to assure the conviction of existence of a transcendent Absolute.

Finally, I suggest that this research could open the door for similar endeavors in studying revelation and its credibility within fundamental

theology as per *Fides et Ratio* 67. This is done in harmony with the spirit of John Paul II's document while being sensitive to the balanced circularity needed between reason and faith, thus showing that the philosophical thought of the Intensive Thomism of Cornelio Fabro is well-suited for theological work and for dialogue with contemporary philosophy and theology.

The understanding of the act of faith, once called "*crux theologorum*" because of all the various elements needed to explain its nature, is still an ample field for research.<sup>1</sup> John Paul II's *Fides et Ratio* describes fundamental theology as the discipline which studies the act of faith in the context of revelation and its credibility.<sup>2</sup> To contribute to the advancement of scientific knowledge, I will present and analyze faith under a new light, that is, by approaching the act of faith from the perspective of the Intensive Thomism of the Italian philosopher Cornelio Fabro, in the hope of generating interest and spurring new studies along the same lines.

The position I uphold originates from a close reading of Fabro's texts in which he speaks about the act of faith: the most important one for my research is at the conclusion of his book *Dall'essere all'esistente*.<sup>3</sup> Among other topics throughout the book, in this final section he presents an in-depth analysis of two types of faith: 1) *spontaneous faith*: sometimes called ontic, natural or immediate, and 2) *reflexive faith*: a) *scientific* (historical), and b) *theological* or *supernatural*. The insights contained in this brief conclusion are remarkable and could provide the subject for many future studies. My field of research rests within the confines of fundamental theology under the guidelines of *FR*; nonetheless, a reference to Fabro's gnoseology will be necessary to explain his own unique conception of faith.

Research in line with *FR* has led me to identify three main areas of concern among fundamental theologians, which indicate the current status of this theological discipline and delineate the problematic within it. These are the areas that have come to the surface:

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<sup>1</sup> Salvador Pié-Ninot, *La Teología Fundamental* (Salamanca: Secretariado Trinitario, 2009), 192.

<sup>2</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio. On the Relationship between Faith and Reason* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 1998), 67, cited in text as *FR*.

<sup>3</sup> Cornelio Fabro, *Dall'essere all'esistente. Hegel. Kierkegaard, Heidegger e Jaspers* (Genoa-Milan: Marietti, 2004), 415-43, cited in text as *Dall'essere*.

- a) The necessity of an adequate metaphysical and epistemological framework for contemporary fundamental theology after the discipline's crisis, suffered in the second half of the twentieth century. Some theologians speak of a new epistemology of faith.
- b) The importance of interacting with modernity and/or postmodernity, using a dialogical and pastoral approach.
- c) The elaboration of a philosophical and theological system which will help fundamental theology abandon the *impasse* in which it finds itself.

## 1. The Problematic of Fundamental Theology

The document *FR*, especially the guidelines found in the two paragraphs that form number 67, has defined the content and the tasks of the discipline, while research makes clear that the loss of identity of fundamental theology belongs to past decades. Currently fundamental theologians experience the need for more adequate settings, often called frameworks, for the articulation of the discipline, in order to come out of the crisis or *impasse* suffered by this branch of theology in the twentieth century.

The old frameworks do not satisfy contemporary demands for an explanation of revelation, of its credibility, and of faith together with the faith-reason relationship. It has become urgent to offer satisfactory explanations of the sacred, the Absolute, and of a God who has revealed himself, according to Christian teaching, within history. *FR* claims: "As the source of love, God desires to make himself known; and the knowledge which the human being has of God perfects all that the human mind can know of the meaning of life" (*FR* 7).

In response to the search for a suitable metaphysical and epistemological framework, I have delved into the essential or intensive Thomism of Fabro, to offer an explanation of faith that leads to the affirmation of the Absolute in a manner which better satisfies contemporary demands. This contribution could be considered a fresh perspective within the discipline, and I hope it will inspire more research along the lines of this type of Thomism. Convinced that Thomism could still offer potential contributions to philosophical and theological studies in dialogue with modern sciences, he expressed his belief that "modern philosophy has brought on the bankruptcy

of thought as theoretical reason,”<sup>4</sup> and that there is a “Heideggerian” necessity of going back to the starting point to do philosophy:

The specific and primary task of philosophy is indeed as Heidegger constantly admonishes, to go back to the foundation. It must discover and establish the original insight of reason; it must make the first affirmation of truth that is presence to being, the locus primus able to accommodate every quest for truth. The cause of the total failure of philosophy to contribute to the contemporary needs of the spirit lies in this total collapse of the philosophy that gave up the real for the possible and forgot being in favor of essence. (*SWI*, 29-30)

The “first affirmation of truth that is presence to being” corresponds to Fabro’s reference to faith in the conclusion of his book, where he considers faith as “the conviction or certainty of existence” (*Dall’essere*, 420). Faith is thus conducive to the affirmation of reality, and particularly theological faith is the highest form of knowledge that affirms the reality of the Supreme being. In harmony with the Heideggerian request for the beginning of philosophy, Fabro affirms that “an essential Thomism should probe deeply into the ‘problem of the starting point’ of thought using his original concept of *ens*” (*SWI*, 37).

Granted that one adheres to this reading of contemporary philosophy, as it will be presented later, one can affirm the need to go to the very philosophical foundations of truth and being prior to elaborating a theological epistemology of faith. The problematic of fundamental theology is thus seen against the backdrop of the real transcendence of the Absolute: certain explanations of faith in the Absolute, or God, that begin with immanentist philosophies end up reducing the existence of this Absolute to mental void concepts.

I have researched a solution to this problematic from the position of intensive Thomism, mindful both of the demands of modern philosophy and the request of important fundamental theologians.<sup>5</sup> I embraced the invitation

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<sup>4</sup> Cornelio Fabro, *Selected Works of Cornelio Fabro, Selected Articles on Metaphysics and Participation*, vol. 1, (Chillum, MD: IVE Press, 2016), 39, cited in text as *SWI*.

<sup>5</sup> Fabro claims that secularism or secularization has taken “all intentionality or significance from the name of God,” which has become “an empty name or vacant semanteme,” and this indicates “the absence of God from the sphere of conscience.” Cornelio Fabro, *L’avventura della teologia progressista* (Segni, RM: EDIVI, 2014),

from the conclusion of Fabro's work *Dall'essere all'esistente*, containing the main text on faith that I explore, to recover some aspects of faith "in reverse" from contemporary philosophy to Kant and beyond, seeking to recover the vein of "faith as organ of the apprehension of existence and faculty of the real" (*Dall'essere*, 434).

## 2. Methodological Approach

*FR* 31-33 inspire my general methodological approach, particularly as to the evaluation of truths by an inquisitive mind, since the human being in search of truth is one who lives by belief:

Yet personal growth and maturity imply that these same truths can be cast into doubt and evaluated through a process of critical enquiry. It may be that, after this time of transition, these truths are "recovered" as a result of the experience of life or by dint of further reasoning [...] Who in the end could forge anew the paths of experience and thought which have yielded the treasures of human wisdom and religion? This means that the human being—the one who seeks the truth—is also *the one who lives by belief*. (*FR* 31)

This doubt is obviously not to be taken as the radical doubt of the Cartesian *cogito*, to which Fabro often refers. Doubt here is understood as the point of departure of an inquisitive mind in search of truth. I have used an inquisitive mindset methodology through the textual analysis of some crucial writings of Cornelio Fabro to answer the said problematic. I aim to respond to the request for an adequate metaphysical and epistemological framework for fundamental theology. The analysis of the act of faith from the Fabrian mindset, and its implications regarding transcendence in the search of the Absolute, is my contribution to the fundamental theological discipline.

The legitimate request articulated by some contemporary scholars in the field also orders my work's structure. In many instances, the translations

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43, cited in text as *L'avventura*. He argues more specifically that the *sola fides* of the *Death-of-God Theology* as negation of its relationship with reason has left conscience alone with the revealed Word (that is, without reference to any external authority), and then also alone with the modern principle of conscience (*ibid.*, 54).

from the original Italian texts are my own, either because English versions are completely lacking or because the text requires a greater philosophical precision than the current translation provides, as is the case for Fabro's *God in Exile: Modern Atheism*. In many cases, even if an English translation exists, I have still offered my own where I have often opted for it to sound unrefined rather than lose the nuances of the original.<sup>6</sup>

I have taken the necessary steps to build this framework by finding inspiration in the works of Fabro, for instance:

The religious problem is inseparable from the philosophical one: one cannot arrive at the summit and conquer it but by beginning from the base. Similarly, for the *dialectical structure of the spiritual act*, it is not simply possible to consider and above all to put the base without “projecting” the vertex and it is, maybe, the secret impulse of the ascent and the need of salvation of the spiral of the finite which spurs man throughout the centuries, outside and inside philosophy, to search God as the infinite Good.<sup>7</sup>

At the base of the structure, we place the intensive *esse*, which comes from a philosophy open to transcendence in the very notion of being and its perception by the human conscience open to the infinite. The opening or transcendence of *esse* is explicated in the vein of intensive Thomism. If the beginning, instead, is the Cartesian *cogito*, then the problematic emerges, and the so-called principle of immanence of modern and contemporary philosophy is in dire straits to make a link with a transcendent Absolute.

By moving up step by step on building this structure, one can reach the vertex of the act of faith and perform the application of this notion of faith to fundamental theology, and thereby show the transcendence of the Absolute in the very act of faith. This transcendence can be clearly explained having the notion of intensive *esse* as its foundation.

My methodology in the second part of this work consists of the selection of some of the most representative Western philosophers to identify

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<sup>6</sup> *God in Exile* is a book of extensive dimensions, but I compare with the original *Introduzione all'Ateismo Moderno*, for accuracy. The *Cornelio Fabro Cultural Project* in the United States is currently working on a new English translation.

<sup>7</sup> Cornelio Fabro, *La Preghiera nel pensiero moderno* (Segni, RM: EDIVI, 2015), 5, cited in text as *La Preghiera*.

“resolutive vertices” that correspond to the “internal logic” of philosophical thought:

[I]t belongs to man to make a decision for a presence of *Essere* that does not delude. Philosophy, wiggled out of the soft cushions of their systems, lives on the asperity of the battle in the “faith” for existence and aims at *essere*. The essays collected in this volume insist on some of the most resolutive vertices of this tension of contemporary man.<sup>8</sup>

Following Fabro’s invitation in *Dall’essere all’esistente*, within the current situation of modern philosophy, I worked on discovering those representative vertices of thought in order to retrace the path of faith “in reverse,” to arrive finally at a notion of faith consonant with the apprehension of existence (*Dall’essere*, 434). Fabro describes the situation of Western philosophy that proposes “a new beginning that would allow man to touch being and to present the Absolute through a single process in which rationality would open to freedom the itinerary of salvation that reason alone cannot attain and the sole liberty of man cannot cling to” (ibid.).

This methodology, which begins with some fundamental building blocks and passes through the appraisal of paradigmatic philosophical moments, can provide a fresh perspective of faith applicable to fundamental theology. It will show, from this lens, faith’s capacity to grasp the existence of the Absolute through the realist point of view of the Intensive Thomism of Cornelio Fabro. To provide a more specific understanding of the methodology, I analyse faith and the Absolute in three component elements present in Fabro’s works and which are the buttresses against which my research finds support and originality.

The first element or foundational thought is Fabro’s reading of the Cartesian *cogito* as it is addressed in the second part of my book: in *God in Exile*, he speaks of the stages of the *resolution* of the *cogito* or the development of the evolution of this principle. The second element is the internal history or logic that he believes lies beneath the external history of modern Western philosophical thought; this complements the reading of the *cogito* as the root of the principle of immanence. The third element is taken from *Dall’essere all’esistente* and is the identification of some of the most

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<sup>8</sup> Fabro, *Dall’essere*, foreword 5-6.

resolutive vertices of this internal history of contemporary man (the existent), in search of the meaning of Being that does not delude.

I argue that the person's search for the transcendent Absolute can be accomplished only through the theological dimension of faith based on a philosophy of being, "and this in harmony with the demands and insights of the entire philosophical tradition, including philosophy of more recent times, without lapsing into sterile repetition of antiquated formulas" (*FR* 97 §2). In the First Part, Chapter One, 3, dedicated to intensive Thomism, I consider at length this philosophy of being.

The crucial text for my research is precisely the conclusion of *Dall'essere all'esistente*, where Fabro's unique description of faith is found. In this conclusion the author launches an invitation for a new beginning for a recovery in reverse of aspects of faith that have been lost in modern and contemporary philosophy (to which I would add theology), that is, faith's apprehension of existence and faith as faculty of the real. The originality of my own research consists in identifying these resolutive vertices or paradigmatic moments within the development of the internal logic of Western thought and their impact on the understanding of faith and the Absolute through this recovery in reverse (once again, without a direct reference to history in a linear sense).

In order to conduct the recovery by tracing these resolutive vertices of existential elements of faith and the Absolute so as to arrive at a transcendent Absolute, the *Essere* that does not delude or deceive, in Fabro's own words, I analyse Descartes, Hume, Kant, Fichte, Hegel, and Heidegger, and introduce a refreshed notion of faith in fundamental theology from the Fabrian perspective. I gather that this 'new' approach to faith, from this viewpoint and in the context of fundamental theology, has not been done before. This reverse recovery is in a sense an undoing of the evolution of the *cogito* in these paradigmatic moments or vertices to recover faith as a faculty that apprehends reality and to avoid further oscillations between reason and faith, showing that these two faculties are complementary (the sense of the circularity of which *FR* 73 speaks).

The First Part of my book addresses some foundational elements to understand the scope of the research. These building blocks are taken from Thomistic gnoseology already present in Fabro: the notion of intensive *esse* and its openness to the Absolute, the importance of the cogitative power in

connection with the persuasion of reality and therefore the affirmation of reality operated by faith, the explanation of spontaneous, historical and theological faith, and the influence of Kierkegaard in Fabro's own notion of faith.

The research could not be done without reference to Fabro's Thomistic gnoseology, whose originality resides in his understanding of the apprehension of existence which he applies to the notion of spontaneous faith (First Part, Chapter Two, 2). He claims that faith is a "totalizing conviction" of reality (*Dall'essere*, 438), a synthetic function or "synthesis in act of the person" in her or his entirety (*ibid.*, 416), which already takes place within spontaneous faith. This also involves the existential choice of the subject in performing the act of faith, operated by the will. The strength of the argumentation lies in the fundamental conviction of existence operated by spontaneous faith, and which carries all the way up to theological faith.

In the Second Part, where the originality of this research surfaces, I perform the task of identifying the paradigmatic moments or resolute vertices of the development of the idealistic cogito which have an impact on the understanding of faith. I prepare for this approach by explaining the principle of immanence as per Fabro and the possible meanings of immanence and transcendence. I then introduce the reverse recovery, that is, through the study of each of the philosophers or developments of philosophical thought. Each of these could generate a great deal of material for study, but in order to limit my own within the boundaries of my research question, I only address faith and the Absolute in the context of fundamental theology.

### **3. The Current Status of Fundamental Theology**

Assessing the status of this discipline is not an easy task. Gerald O'Collins refers to it as a "continuing debate" in an article written in 2014; in furthering fundamental theology he emphasizes the areas of apologetics, the genesis of faith, and the role of tradition as collective memory, holding that the "interdisciplinary nature of fundamental theology calls for constant updating."<sup>9</sup> Some fundamental theologians, including O'Collins, still advocate for the recovery of the identity of fundamental theology, even after

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<sup>9</sup> Gerald O'Collins, "Fundamental theology: The continuing debate," *Pacifica*, 27, no. 1 (April 2014): 110.

*FR 67* has clarified the subject. Antonio Sabetta has manifested the same tendency.<sup>10</sup> Others, such as Giuseppe Tanzella-Nitti and Simone Billeci, crystallize with great accuracy the current status of the discipline particularly after *FR*; Tanzella-Nitti continues to work on a comprehensive project that comprises several volumes.

I would maintain that conversations have arisen from a new camp of theologians who consider *FR* to be a watershed event between prior uncertainty and loss of identity of the discipline and its current defined nature. Almost twenty-five years have elapsed, and oceans of ink shed on both *FR* and fundamental theology may offer abundant depth and clearer perspectives. I endorse the position that *FR* clarifies the boundaries of fundamental theology, even if summarily as is evidenced by the two brief paragraphs which make up number 67, and which are good parameters for the study of fundamental theology in the twenty-first century.

Sabetta claims that there is still some uncertainty about the identity of fundamental theology, its method, content, and interlocutors. Hence, the discipline can avoid falling back into positions of past decades, such as its loss of identity, “sacred pantheology” (Ambroise Gardeil), or a discipline without a definite identity (Rino Fisichella), which seem discourses today of inexactitude.<sup>11</sup>

Though I do not question the accuracy of Sabetta’s statement, it would be perhaps more fruitful to take as a point of departure *FR 67*, which addresses the nature of the discipline and its content, in order to elaborate its method, content, and articulation or framework. After decades of speculation about the identity of fundamental theology, the brief clear outline provided by the encyclical on the nature of this theological discipline offers clear parameters for further studies.

Whether fundamental theology is considered the “doctrine of theological principles,” a “fundamental theological research,” or a “rational defense of Christianity,”<sup>12</sup> its articulation and method can benefit from the solid

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<sup>10</sup> Antonio Sabetta, *Un’Idea di Teologia Fondamentale* (Rome: Studium Edizioni, 2017), 14. Sabetta speaks of the uncertainty of the discipline; in spite of the excellent quality of the volume, the author uses authorities in this regard which, in many cases, are prior to the 1998 encyclical letter.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-14. One of the references the author cites is from 1992.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

foundation of a philosophy of being as required for the *intellectus fidei*, quite independently of the model adopted (*FR* 97 §1 and §2). This approach could strengthen the circularity of faith and its inseparable partner, reason.

I argue that the research for a fundamental theology suitable for the twenty-first century can benefit from its openness to a metaphysical, and therefore epistemological, framework within a well-established “philosophy of being” as the *FR* requires:

Set within the Christian metaphysical tradition, the philosophy of being is a dynamic philosophy which views reality in its ontological, causal and communicative structures. It is strong and enduring because it is based upon the very act of being itself, which allows a full and comprehensive openness to reality as a whole, surpassing every limit in order to reach the One who brings all things to fulfilment. In theology, which draws its principles from Revelation as a new source of knowledge, this perspective is confirmed by the intimate relationship which exists between faith and metaphysical reasoning. (*FR* 97 §2)<sup>13</sup>

Theological progress must be grounded upon a metaphysical foundation that allows both theology and reason to develop and flourish. A metaphysics of being appears to provide a proper framework for future decades of theological research within which to safeguard the interdependence of faith and reason. One of the merits of *FR* in this regard is to have offered a brief but clear description of the contents and tasks of fundamental theology, which sets the parameters for future studies. Once we pass the stage of uncertainty as regards to the identity of fundamental theology, it is not difficult to concentrate on its future progress.

I have adopted the foundation provided by the Fabrian Intensive Thomism for the study of one of fundamental theology’s specific topics: the act of faith in its openness to the Transcendent or the Absolute, and the faith-reason relationship as per *FR* 67. Other realist approaches open to being, as phenomenology for instance, since they are different from any idealist philosophy inspired by Cartesian principles, would certainly cooperate to

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<sup>13</sup> See also Francis, Encyclical Letter *Lumen Fidei* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2013), 32-34.

the advancement of the discipline guided by *FR* and are worthy to be explored.

The research I conducted on the status of the discipline has led me to identify the necessity of an adequate epistemological framework in which faith, in its openness to the Absolute and based on a philosophy of being, could offer satisfactory answers to contemporary audiences. Furthermore, I discovered the need to reinforce the research on a suitable epistemological framework with a strong metaphysical underpinning. Indeed, any theory of knowledge is based on a metaphysical foundation: the metaphysical approach one adopts necessarily influences the gnoseological or epistemological dimension of the subject matter.<sup>14</sup>

Benedict M. Ashley, O.P. writes that in *FR* “Pope John Paul II opposes the antirational tendencies of our postmodern times and urges the importance for faith and theology of a sound metaphysics [...] he means ‘the need for a philosophy of *genuinely metaphysical range*, capable, that is, of transcending empirical data in order to attain something absolute, ultimate and foundational in its search for truth.’”<sup>15</sup>

This small but important contribution to the forefront of the discipline, namely, a strong metaphysical foundation based on a philosophy of being, as suggested by *FR* 97 §1 and §2, forms the base of the requested epistemological framework, and elements offered from the perspective of the Intensive Thomism could be significant. “We face a great challenge at the end of this millennium to move from phenomenon to foundation” (*FR* 83 § 2). The living and breathing Thomism of Fabro offers essential elements to build such a foundation.

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<sup>14</sup> See, for instance, the reasoning Cristian Ferraro offers by following the Aristotelian hierarchical order of metaphysics which is the “first science” that regulates the rest. Ferraro states that no other science can impose a method to metaphysics “from the outside,” but once the method and intrinsic constitution of metaphysics is established, some disciplines that occupy themselves with methods, for example epistemology, then “can *present* and *indicate* which method and subject is proper to metaphysics.” Christian Ferraro, *Appunti di Metafisica. Un percorso speculativo, pedagogico e tomistico* (Vatican City: Lateran University Press, 2013), 68.

<sup>15</sup> Benedict M. Ashley, O.P., “The Validity of Metaphysics: The Need for a Solidly Grounded Metaphysics,” in *Faith and Reason. The Notre Dame Symposium 1999*, ed. Timothy L. Smith (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 2001), 67.

I second Fabro's own belief that essential Thomism surpasses the "historical figure" of Aquinas "in those respects in which he is bound by the cultural limitations of his time" and "should be able ... to fit into the problematic of modern culture." Then, "in this initial confrontation with modern thought what is needed is not a Thomism characterized by static and inflexible theses that impose a system" but one "which is dynamic and basically open to all that is validly acquired by the analyses and methods of science and modern culture" (*SWI*, 37-39).

#### **4. Some of the Main Key Players**

Below I offer a list of some of the most representative figures or schools in the fundamental theological field. They are influential because of the number of years of active teaching and academic writing, and the comprehensiveness of their approaches. The list is certainly not exhaustive, but it is extensive enough to indicate the most recent directions the discipline has taken, and the claims made by their proponents. At the end of this section, I will have arrived at the foundational problematic for the insertion of this new piece of research as my contribution in a highly populated field.

##### ***Salvador Pié-Ninot***

The author has recently mentioned the need to uncover the identity of fundamental theology. He clearly points out the two tendencies within the discipline, one more dogmatic and one more apologetic, which were present at the time of the Second Vatican Council, and which found expression in the post-conciliar years, for instance, in the curriculum of this discipline at the Gregorian University in Rome.<sup>16</sup> Pié-Ninot asserts that the manuals of the last fifty years present different focuses regarding Scripture, Magisterium, faith and theology. He thereby proposes a fourth tract of fundamental theology, which complements the traditional three that were centered

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<sup>16</sup> Salvador Pié-Ninot, "El doble origen y método de la teología fundamental," *Gregorianum* 99, no. 2 (2018): 337-78. The schema of the most recent Council served "to orient towards a theology of Revelation, similar to the other dogmatic theology tracts, beginning from the Bible, the Fathers, the Magisterium and the theological reflection" (*ibid.*, 341).

around the religious, Christian and Catholic demonstrations. The fourth is “Theological Epistemology,” included in Kern-Pottmeyer-Seckler’s prestigious *Handbuch der Fundamentaltheologie, IV*.<sup>17</sup>

Pié-Ninot identifies a profound crisis in classical Apologetics, as the dogmatic constitution *Dei Verbum*, he claims, reduced fundamental theology to Revelation and its transmission, depriving it of the element of credibility. He wishes to recover this dimension by considering credibility specific to the discipline; building on the epistemological/gnoseological and apologetic/contextual dimensions of fundamental theology, he advocates a proper method for each. The principle *fides quaerens intellectum* guides the first dimension, known as the theological-dogmatic method. The axiom *intellectus quaerens fidem* refers to the second dimension, which is called the fundamental-theological and is the method to be used in the apologetics component of the discipline.<sup>18</sup>

Then, reflecting on *FR 73* Pié-Ninot signals the *ontological* priority of revelation and faith but the *epistemological* priority belongs to the human historical-anthropological reason or intelligence. He heavily emphasizes the answer of the human being which elicits or not the question about God, a position he takes from Juan Alfaro. The former insists on this separation between ontology and epistemology, without mentioning that *FR* speaks of a relationship between theology and philosophy construed as a circle.

*FR 73* states, “what matters most is that the believer’s reason use its powers of reflection in the search for truth which moves from the word of God towards a better understanding of it.” In this context, Pié-Ninot mentions “critical realism,” with Lonergan as one of its greatest formulators, and states that one can submit one’s knowledge to critical reflection, and with its help is able to know true reality.<sup>19</sup>

Pié-Ninot also mentions the aspect of showing (“mostrar” in Spanish) as opposed to the classical notion of demonstrating (“demostrar”). The overall value of this view resides in its genuine interest in an epistemology and methodology based on “critical-realism,” which “unites the search of true reality with critical knowledge, always open to transcendence.”<sup>20</sup> Without

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 342.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 345-46.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 346-47.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 346.

being absolutely convinced of the surgical separation of the two dimensions, I nevertheless take up the claim of openness to transcendence as an important part for my research, albeit from a different perspective.

Pié-Ninot has furthered the understanding of the discipline with an emphasis on its testimonial aspect, and more recently on the credibility of the Church, stressing compassion and mercy. In his most recent book on Fundamental Theology (2016), the professor emeritus of the Faculty of Theology of Catalonia and the Pontifical Gregorian University has added twenty-five conclusive theses based on his proposal of a fundamental theology that “bears witness,” responding to a new discourse on credibility and original apologetics inspired in *Evangelii Gaudium*, 132: “This means an encounter between faith, reason, and the sciences with a view to developing new approaches and arguments on the issue of credibility, a creative apologetics which would encourage greater openness to the Gospel on the part of all.”<sup>21</sup>

Thus, this author has offered his vision of fundamental theology from the truth of revelation as a sensible proposal of credibility and with a strong emphasis on the concept of testimony. The work of Pié-Ninot stands as a very good example of the reflection and development of fundamental theology after *FR*, in that his integrative approach connects to the notion of martyrdom or testimony: “giving an account of faith” is considered as “significant martyrdom” as a “testimony rooted in hope.” For him, “to give an account” is to bear witness to the universal and definitive word, which is the revelation of God in Jesus Christ through the Spirit. Christ is that “hope” (1 Pt 3:15) in the history of all times.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Salvador Pié-Ninot, *Teología Fundamental* (Madrid: BAC, 2016), 365; original quotation from Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel*, *Evangelii Gaudium* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2013), n. 132. The twenty-five theses follow a brief conclusive epilogue, which states that the *via of testimony* is the paradigm for the credibility of the Church and of all revelation, and its center and plenitude, Jesus Christ.

<sup>22</sup> Pié-Ninot, *La Teología Fundamental*, 660. To understand how his ecclesial vision of fundamental theology is inserted within the treatise of the Church, which he himself claims is his most significant contribution to the discipline, see 56-60.

### ***Giuseppe Tanzella-Nitti***

Tanzella-Nitti claims that due to the exhaustion of the neo-scholastic movement, practically all theologians have removed philosophical reflection from the programs of fundamental theology and instead have privileged the anthropological-existential moment. This indeed is most likely an accurate description of the current status of the discipline. He then asks what the elaboration of fundamental theology in the twenty-first century will be, after the philosophical-cultural contingencies indicated by *FR* in 1998. He is particularly interested in the role of reflection on religion, and the challenge that scientific knowledge brings to revelation. Finally, he holds that the foundational moment of fundamental theology is prior to its apologetic moment and that the apologetic dimension must accompany the exposition of revelation as it is announced to our contemporaries.<sup>23</sup>

My research which intends to re-elaborate the epistemology of the treatise on faith aligns well with this approach. Fabro's understanding of faith can offer, similarly to that of Tanzella-Nitti, elements of apologetic value for fundamental theology; the former understands theological faith as that "which expresses the supreme tension of the Singular regarding the determination of significance of its own being and all outcome of its destiny" (*Dall'essere*, 426). This affirmation stands on a strong philosophical background, yet even for contemporary interlocutors metaphysical and gnoseological elements can be a valuable contribution towards the understanding of the reasonableness of faith and revelation.

### ***Simone Billeci***

Billeci provides a very solid proposal for fundamental theology, while conducting a "search" of the manuals and being "mindful of some inaccurate settings of the Classical Catholic Apologetics." He considers the *preambula fidei*, particularly those with anthropological argumentations, and religion within the theological-fundamental reflection, that is, a comprehension of the theology of religion as propaedeutic for the theology

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<sup>23</sup> Giuseppe, Tanzella-Nitti, "Proposte e modelli di Teologia Fondamentale nel XX secolo," *Annales Theologici* 24, no. 1, (2010): 236-73. See also César Izquierdo review of *Teologia della credibilità in contesto scientifico* by Giuseppe Tanzella-Nitti, (Rome: Città Nuova, 2015) in *Scripta Theologica* 48, no. 3 (2016): 781-88.