

“Natalie Kertes Weaver has done those who teach introductory theology courses a great service with this accessible, engaging, and substantive text. Drawing on years of classroom experience, she makes theology understandable to a diverse student body. All students, from the super-devout to the religiously indifferent, from cradle Christians to non-Christians, will come to a critical, appreciative, and historically grounded understanding of Christian beliefs and practices. A fantastic text for the contemporary college classroom.”

—Mark J. Allman, Merrimack College, and author of *Who Would Jesus Kill? War, Peace, and the Christian Tradition* (Saint Mary's Press, 2008)

“Imagine an introductory college text on religious studies in Christianity that is amazingly readable both for Christians of all denominations and for those who simply want to know more about Christianity but do not want to be ‘talked down to.’ From the outset, the author of this brilliant little book (just 200 pages) demonstrates herself to be an experienced teacher of students from a range of religious and non-religious backgrounds. Natalie Weaver has listened carefully to her students and has struggled along with them to understand what Christianity is all about.

“Enhancing each chapter are down-to-earth examples from everyday life, as well as handy summary charts, maps, and lists of significant events, names, and dates. Each chapter concludes with a list of key terms and current resources for further study.

“This brilliant synthesis provides an important, accurate, and compact review of Christianity—its foundations, history, doctrinal expressions, diversity, prayer, and social outreach, along with its relationship to non-Christian religions and to the world of science and politics. As a professor of graduate students in theology, I will not hesitate to direct my students to this text.

“Natalie Weaver has done all of us who struggle to know and to teach the faith and practice of Christianity a remarkable service. Her book is balanced and learned, while at the same time, providing a timely and eminently accessible analysis so needed in an increasingly global context.”

—Conrad T. Gromada, professor of religious studies  
Ursuline College

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Christian  
Thought  
and  A Primer  
Practice

Natalie Kertes Weaver



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dedication

For Bertha and Patricia,  
who have taught Christianity foremost by their example.



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# Author's Introduction to Teachers and Students

Thank you for choosing *Christian Thought and Practice: A Primer* for your introduction to Christian theology. I would like to share a few words about why I wrote this book and how I think it can serve the college classroom and reader.

As a teacher, I have encountered thousands of students undertaking the study of Christian thought. I have used many different books, some of which are excellent and are referenced in this book as suggested supplemental reading. With so many good resources out there, you might ask, Why do we need another introduction to Christian thought? My answer derives from my teaching experience.

Today's classrooms are populated with a diverse student body. In my own classes, I find students of all ages, ethnicities, abilities, and aptitudes, as well as a range of religious backgrounds and beliefs. Although I am Roman Catholic and teach at a Catholic institution, my students include Catholic and Protestant Christians, as well as Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and adherents of other non-Christian religions. I also frequently encounter students with little or no religious background, as well as students who participate in a religious tradition but have had little opportunity to study their religion formally or academically.

With so much diversity in the classroom, teachers and students are tasked with multiple challenges. Teachers need to facilitate inclusive discussions and choose proper materials that avoid assumptions about what students might think or how they might have been previously taught. Teachers need to attempt to level the classroom through the cultivation of a working vocabulary of terms and ideas, so students of all backgrounds can proceed together in their work and conversation as a class. Teachers must ultimately speak to the comprehension and interest levels of their students, knowing that

many will not choose professional specializations in Christian theology and religious studies.

In teaching Christian theology, I have struggled to find materials that speak to my diverse students at an introductory intensity with sufficient breadth. Often books that claim to be introductions simply exceed in scope or depth the register of nonspecialist readers. This book, by contrast, was developed as a genuine introduction for all readers interested in Christian thought, whether Christian or non-Christian. It presupposes no theological background, so it is appropriate even for those who have had no prior study of Christian thought or religion. Although this book presents a thorough and broad architecture of Christian thought and practice, it does not inundate the reader with references, historical case studies, or tangential discussions. Moreover, the book endeavors to be ecumenical in tone and friendly to a broad range of Christian communions as well as other, non-Christian groups.

You will find in this book an orderly discussion of topics, beginning in chapter 1 with an introduction to the term *theology* and a survey of ideas that will surface in any theological investigation. Building on the first chapter, chapter 2 then explores the classical foundations of Christian theology, equipping readers with basic information about Christian uses of the Bible, tradition, reason, and experience. Because these foundations of Christian theology are always encountered contextually, chapter 3 turns to a discussion of key periods in Christian history. Following an established sensitivity to historical context, chapter 4 discusses mainline Christian doctrines. Recognizing that doctrine may vary among Christians of different creeds, chapter 5 explores the history, variety, and differences among major Christian worship communities. Chapters 6, 7, and 8 deal topically with Christian worship and practice, Christian relationships with non-Christian religions, and Christian relationships with secular society. These chapters aim at understanding Christian belief and practice in the world at varying levels of interaction with Christians, other religions, and the polis, or civil society at large. The chapters may be read sequentially, individually, or whatever order best complements your needs. Each chapter concludes with discussion questions, terms for review, and references for additional reading and research.

I hope you will find this book useful in a number of ways. For example, this book may be used as the following:

- the principal textbook for a course on Christian thought. In a traditional 15-week course, students will benefit from reading a chapter from this text every other week, interspersed by reading primary source materials and exemplars for each of the chapter's themes.
- one among several principal textbooks to provide content on Christian thought in a comparative religions course
- a leveling tool, a refresher, or a reference guide in intermediate or advanced theology courses, where knowledge of basic Christian terms, beliefs, practices, varieties, and historical periods are presupposed
- a complement to any advanced study of Christian history, the Bible, ethics, ecclesiology, philosophy, and so on

The study of Christian thought and practice is as important today as ever. Christian thought dialogues with questions of religious pluralism, religious conflict, politics, public policy, medical ethics, legal practice, social sciences, natural history, physics, astronomy, and more. Christian thought has been an indelible contributor to the shape of Western culture for the past two millennia, and it underlies many broadly held assumptions and norms. Christianity continues to inform the faith of more than two billion people worldwide. Readers will find a solid foundational understanding of Christian thought and practice beneficial for any line of work and any discipline of study.

**WHAT TO EXPECT**

This chapter introduces theology by discussing the following key areas:

- a functional understanding of Christian theology
- aspects of Christian theology
- types of theology
- the audience for theology

**A Functional Understanding  
of Christian Theology**

*Christian theology* has been defined in many ways throughout Christianity's roughly two-thousand-year history. A simple definition might be "the systematic study of Christian beliefs." Other definitions might begin with the word's Greek origin: *theo-logia* means "God-talk," so theology may be thought of as "talk about God." One example of such God-talk is the following biblical description of how and why one ought to relate to God: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" (Proverbs 1:7). Saint Anselm in the eleventh century classically defined theology as "*fides quaerens intellectum*," usually translated as "faith seeking understanding."

Although defining theology is important, it is equally critical to understand the function of theology, to comprehend what theology does as a way to grasp what theology is. An analogy is helpful. A student in my class reported that she had had a bad car accident. Her

car was destroyed, as was a telephone pole. Thankfully, she walked away from the accident with only a bloody nose. In class she said, “I am not a very religious person, but I could have died in that accident. The fact that I survived uninjured made me think there is a God. I have been much more religious ever since.” This student was theologizing about her accident as she grappled with the meaning it held for her life. She reevaluated her priorities in light of the belief that God had a purpose for her.

Many of us have had similar moments when something dramatic happened that subsequently reshaped our sense of meaning and purpose. Not only do individuals respond to such experiences in this way, but so do groups. When whole communities of people have shared experiences of great import that define them, they sometimes interpret a divine hand at work in their lives. One sees this phenomenon in the literature that Christians hold sacred, namely the Bible (also called sacred scripture; the terms are used interchangeably in this text). For example, the book of Exodus in the Bible details the Israelites’ process of becoming free from slavery in Egypt. Exodus opens with a discussion of how the Israelites had become slaves to the Egyptian pharaoh sometime in the mid-thirteenth century BCE. The Israelite slaves were roughly treated, and because they had no army or resources, it seemed unlikely their situation would improve. The story goes on to tell of the rise of the prophet Moses, a man appointed by God to lead the Israelite people to freedom. Moses foretells a series of unprecedented natural events (see Exodus chapters 7–11) that eventually persuade the pharaoh to release the Israelites. As the Israelites celebrate their freedom, they determine that God alone could make such wondrous things happen. The events constituted the central story around which the Israelites formed their identity as God’s chosen people.

Stories about a people’s defining experiences are powerful; witness, for example, the continuing effect of stories of the American Revolution and the civil rights movement for American children today. When such stories have a theological meaning, they often become the core of religion, underlying a religion’s sacred rituals, books, calendars, holidays, and prayers. For Christians, shared stories of the life and work of Jesus of Nazareth—a first-century Galilean Jew executed under the rule of the Roman governor Pontius

Pilate—became the core of their religious beliefs. These stories, first shared orally, later became the subject of the New Testament of the Bible and the glue that held together an array of culturally, religiously, linguistically, and ethnically diverse people of the first-century Roman Empire.

It is helpful to consider that at the beginning of the Christian era, there were no Christian church buildings or administrative offices, there was not yet a Bible, and there was no formal system of beliefs about who Jesus was or why his life was so important. All people had at the time of Jesus was an experience that transformed their notion of life's purpose and meaning, coupled with faith that Jesus was responsible for that transformation.

Theologians in the beginning centuries of Christian history (often called the patristic era) interpreted this experience of transformation and articulated its meaning. The first function of Christian theology was to develop clear statements of faith, called creeds (derived from the Latin word *credo*, meaning "I believe"), and to begin to pronounce basic Christian doctrine. These early theologians had to look to the foundations, which were the developing books of the Bible, the experiences of the community, their own reasoning and logic, and the emerging tradition. As they sorted through these materials, they developed in councils (or church meetings) creeds that stated what Christians actually believed. Over time the work of Christian theologians in the first and second centuries became increasingly part of the tradition of faith, eventually becoming part of the material that later generations would consider foundations to be interpreted and evaluated in light of their own contemporary experience.

Then, as now, theology is always situated in a particular historical and geographical context. Different questions and challenges engage the community of believers in every era. As a result, theologians are continually challenged to make sense of the faith anew. Influential twentieth-century theologians have thus suggested that theology is best understood by its function as a mediator or interpreter between tradition and culture. Theology serves as the translator and interpreter of the sources of the tradition (such as the Bible or works of earlier theologians) for the broader public, ensuring that the faith is accountable and meaningful to people's present-day experience. By



way of example, theologians today must address a range of bioethical issues related to new reproductive technologies that did not exist even twenty years ago. As another example, theologians who investigate “church” as an area of study are tasked with considering whether, how, or to what degree online forums may legitimately constitute church communities.

## Aspects of Christian Theology

If the function of theology is to interpret or mediate between the tradition and its present-day context, then one must ask what aspects of the tradition theology interprets. Theology attempts to interpret, study, and integrate systematically such areas of Christian belief as foundations, the Bible, philosophy, morality and ethics, doctrine, church teaching, and application to human experience.

*Foundations* in this context refers to the basic sources that theology uses to ground and support Christian belief. Foundational theological questions include, What can we know about God? and, How are people able to experience God communicating with them? Another foundational question might be, Can God be found in nature? Theology requires dependable sources or foundations in order to begin answering even the most basic religious questions. In the Christian belief system, the Bible, tradition, reason, and experience are the principle foundations of theological inquiry.

*Study of the Bible* refers to the study of the writings that Christians believe are holy and inspired by God. Most Christians believe that God reveals Godself throughout the books of the Bible. The idea that God is revealed in the Bible is called revelation. Although most Christians believe in revelation, the meaning of the term *revelation* can vary. Possible meanings include the literal word of God, the unfolding of God’s actions in history, personal insight or inspiration, and the record of God’s direct self-disclosure. Those who study the Bible attempt to understand many things about it, including what the text actually says, how to understand the claim that it is God’s revelation, how Christians should best interpret the Bible, and how it should direct the lives of Christians today.

*Philosophy* refers to the ancient discipline that investigates epistemology (the study of the nature of knowledge), metaphysics (the study of the nature of the world), and morality (how people should act). Philosophy and theology are closely related, so much so that philosophy has been called the “handmaid of theology.” Individually, theology and philosophy are interested in the pursuit of ultimate truth, but they use different foundations. Where philosophy relies on human reason alone, theology uses the Bible and Christian doctrine, as well as human reason. Throughout Christian history, Christians have been in dialogue with the major philosophies of the day.

*Morality and ethics* are dimensions of philosophy that overlap with theology. Both philosophy and theology are interested in understanding not only what is right and wrong (ethics) but also how people should act based on what they believe to be right (morality). Christian moral theology investigates the question of right action with respect to its faith-based commitments. For example, a Christian moral theologian might consider a question of medical ethics by beginning with the belief that God creates all human beings with inalienable dignity and purpose. One might bring many considerations to the question of medical ethics, but a Christian medical ethics will be guided by the moral principle of dignity of life. The study of both morality and ethics straddles many facets of society. Christian investigation of ethical questions and moral living will be guided by a faith-based understanding of the meaning, purpose, and value of human life.

*Doctrine* refers to the specific Christian beliefs or teachings that theologians study and sometimes help to develop. Examples of Christian doctrine include that Jesus is God incarnated (from a Latin term that literally means “enfleshed”) in human life, that God is three in one, and that Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary. Many key beliefs of Christian faith are complex. For example, Christians typically proclaim that Jesus’ death saves humanity from sin. This statement raises many questions. Why did Jesus die? Was it necessary, or did it just happen? What is sin? Why do human beings need to be saved from sin, and what does salvation look like? What is the scope of salvation: is it for everyone, or just Christians, or just very good Christians?

Theologians in every age study doctrine to evaluate and make sense of the basic claims Christians hold as truths of their faith.

*Church teaching* in the form of documents and the written resources of the tradition (beyond the Bible itself) are one way that doctrines and teachings are preserved and passed down from one generation to the next. Examples of such written documents include letters and treatises by notable Christian thinkers and leaders, papers and records of church councils and synods throughout the ages, statements of the faith called *creeds*, and biblical commentaries. Theologians study written documents to see how statements of Christian faith have developed over time. Though a doctrine itself may not change, the way it is communicated or described in church documents may change from time to time based on cultural contexts. For example, modern thought has entertained a number of questions about the origins of the natural world since the theory of evolution was first proposed in the nineteenth century. While Christians had always maintained that God creates the world, it was unnecessary to deal with the theory of evolution before its introduction. Faith that God creates the world has not changed, but the way many Christians talk about creation today now acknowledges evolutionary theory.

*Applications of Christian faith to human experience* is an important component of Christian theology. To grasp this idea, it is useful to recognize that all knowledge is located in human “knowers.” It is people who think about mathematics, who perform scientific experiments, who theorize about the purpose of literature, and so on. Even the most abstract ideas need human beings to think them. Take the various scientific disciplines, for example. Through scientific studies, people attempt to know and understand the world to the best of humanity’s ability at any point in time. Scientists share this task across disciplines and perspectives. An urban planner and an ecologist, for example, look at the problem of pollution differently, but both are evaluating the same phenomenon. All disciplines of science use special methods, principles, and instruments.

Theology is no different in this way from science and other types of human knowing. It, too, derives from human ability and experience. If God reveals, it is human beings who receive that

revelation within the context of ordinary human life, contingent on personal and social contexts. Theologians are interested in the same world that scientists study. Theologians might also be interested in the problem of pollution in urban settings, but their approach to it would be informed by assumptions specific to the theological discipline. So theologians might see the problem of pollution as a justice issue, as a violation of God's creation, or as an issue of human dignity. In a sense, theology might be thought of as the work of ordinary people reflecting on ordinary experiences made extraordinary by the insights the experiences reveal about human beings, their world, and the meaning and purpose of life.

### A NOTE ON THEOLOGICAL METHOD

All academic disciplines use methods of inquiry, and theology is no different. Paying attention to the method one uses when doing theology is key to doing theology well. Thinking about method reminds theologians that they are making choices about what to study, what to attend to, and what temporarily to set aside. An awareness of method also reminds theologians that they are not value-neutral observers making objective interpretations about the material they are studying. People in twenty-first-century America, for example, largely assume that women and men should be treated equally under the law and in most or all areas of society. This assumption affects how theologians today view women in the Bible or in historical theology. By contrast, people in fifteenth-century Europe did not assume gender equality, so their readings of the Bible or doctrine would have been different. Being aware of method means understanding that one's approach to theology is itself an ethical judgment about oneself as an interpreter and about what one thinks is necessary and important about theology. Theologians may employ many methods, but every method involves a choice (even if unconscious) about how to engage the material being studied.

## Types of Theology

Just as there are many aspects of the work theologians do, so also are there many types of theology. In a sense, it is more proper to speak of Christian *theologies* than of a single Christian theology. The type of theology that one does reflects the specific function that theology serves in its role as interpreter and mediator. It will also shape the method one uses for practicing theology and the foundations a theologian prioritizes. Some of the most important theologies people do today include biblical theology, systematic theology, historical theology, pastoral theology, liberation theology, natural theology, and mystical theology.

*Biblical theology* deals with scholarly study and analysis of the Bible. This fundamental study itself involves many areas of specialization. Some scholars study the Bible at close range, looking at such fine aspects as the condition and reliability of ancient manuscripts, study of biblical languages, study of literary forms used in ancient cultures, the historical context of the Bible, philosophical approaches to biblical translation and interpretation, biblical archaeology, and more. Other scholars study the Bible for its merit as a persuasive or rhetorical book, its doctrinal themes and teachings, its teachings about the nature of the church, and its teachings about Christian moral conduct. The basic assumption of biblical theology is that the Bible must be well understood (and what we cannot understand must be acknowledged) if it is to be a useful foundation for the rest of Christian faith.

*Systematic theology* is the study of the interconnections among theological doctrines and sources. The aim of systematic theology is twofold: to articulate the inherent reasonability of Christian theology and to present the whole system of teachings in a reasonable and clear way for educational purposes. Systematic theologians debate how best to structure the presentation of ideas. For example, some would begin with the notion of revelation in Scripture, while others would begin with the doctrine of God. In any event, systematic theology aims to assemble the pieces of Christian faith into a coherent whole, as one would fit the pieces of a puzzle together to make a complete picture. Some contemporary theologians prefer

the term *constructive theology* to describe the integrative study of doctrines and sources.

*Historical theology* is the study of how historical eras and contexts affect the development and articulation of beliefs. Because theology is always done within a specific time and place for a specific community of people, theology and its context of origin are indelibly related. In the early Christian era, for example, Christians struggled to negotiate cultural differences between Jewish followers of Jesus and pagan converts to Christianity. Jewish law forbade Jews from eating with non-Jews, which raised questions over whether both groups could celebrate Christian communion (sometimes called the Eucharist, the Last Supper, or the Lord's Supper) together. Although a prominent concern among the first Christians, this particular issue matters little to modern Christians. Modern Christians, however, continue to have questions about who can celebrate communion together. The concern today is not one of pagan or Jew but rather of different Christian groups. Since the time of the Protestant Reformation, Christians have separated themselves into different denominations, many of which will not celebrate the ritual meal together. Theology from both eras will reflect the concerns of the day, as both groups have attempted to understand the meaning and proper form for celebrating the Lord's Supper. Study of historical theology is also central in sorting out how and why some ideas came to be considered orthodox (correct), while others were determined to be heresy (unorthodox, corrupt, or incorrect).

*Pastoral theology* is concerned with the social application of theological statements. This theology ensures that Christian faith is not limited only to orthodoxy (i.e., thinking right thoughts about God) but also extends to orthopraxy (i.e., doing right things for people). Pastoral theology would note that it is one thing to worry over the proper form and meaning of the Lord's Supper and another to make sure that the people in one's local community actually have supper. It is one thing to theorize about why Christians should have hope in light of the claim that Jesus has saved them. It is another to help a person dying of terminal illness to actually find hope in the face of

suffering and death. Pastoral theology strives to bridge the academic and applied dimensions of Christian faith.

*Liberation theology* refers to numerous twentieth- and twenty-first-century theologies that take a strong interest in the political implications of Christian faith as a force for social liberation. Emerging from the abject poverty of Central and South America in the 1960s, liberation theology pointed out that the Bible reveals a God who is concerned about the plight of the poor. Contemporaneous with Latin American liberation theology was the black theology movement in the United States, which brought out the religious dimension of the civil rights movement. Beginning with these expressions, today's liberation theologies evaluate the condition of all manner of poverty and oppression. These include a wide range of social, political, economic, racial, and gender oppressions. Feminist, Hispanic, African American, womanist, *mujerista* (which blends feminist, Latin American liberation, and cultural theologies), third-world, and LGBTQ (lesbian, bisexual, gay, transgender) theologies are all expressions of liberation theologies seeking justice, inclusion, and voice for their constituencies.

*Natural theology* studies where God may be found in nature, even without the benefit of special revelation, such as that found in the Bible. Natural theology looks at things like beauty, design, order, and causality in the natural world and evaluates whether and how these aspects suggest a Creator. Modern cosmology and natural theology today engage in exciting dialogue about the origin, destiny, value, and meaning of the natural world.

*Mystical theology* focuses on the emotional experience of encountering God. This type of theology attempts to put into words experiences that transcend definition. Just as people attempt to describe the experience of falling in love, even as they realize that words cannot describe the experience, so also does mystical theology attempt to describe the conditions and the experience of falling in love with God, being touched by God in prayer and contemplation, or having a direct encounter with God. Mystical theology might thus be thought of as the study of Christian spirituality, prayer, and contemplative practice.

## The Audience for Theology

Now that we know something about what theology is and what it does, we might ask, Who is the audience for theology? The highly esteemed Roman Catholic theologian David Tracy has suggested that there are three principal and sometimes overlapping audiences for theology: the church, the academy, and the public.

*Church* refers to the collective body of Christians (as opposed to church buildings or institutionalized denominations, such as Catholics or Baptists). The church is the primary audience of Christian theology because it is Christians' beliefs that are being considered. Christians' modern experiences raise specific questions about the application of their faith to those experiences. Presumably, Christians are those most invested in understanding Christian thought and belief. For example, non-Christians may want to know what Christian theologians are saying about birth control or new reproductive technologies. It will be Christians themselves, though, who look to theologians for guidance on how to apply Christian beliefs and understandings into their family planning. Like the average Christian layperson (nonclergy), clergy, as well as church administrators, consult theologians on the key questions of the day.

The term *academy* refers to colleges and universities where theology is a discipline of scholarly research and teaching. Since the Middle Ages, theology has been an important part of university curricula. As part of a university, theology departments need to meet the same standards and requirements as other disciplines. These standards and requirements can be established in many ways: through licensure boards, criteria for publishing, national organizations, and so on. Standards and requirements also link disciplines. A sociology student, for example, needs to write papers according to the standards taught in the English department. The key to standards and requirements is that they are shared and public. This is how research, teaching, and publication in any discipline is made accountable and preserves the integrity of its methods and discourse. Like the sociology student mentioned above, students of theology must be intelligently and integratively in dialogue with people in other disciplines. Theologians cannot



well advance their discussions of, for example, natural theology if they are ignorant of biology, physics, or chemistry. By being accountable to and in dialogue with other disciplines, theology maintains its status as an important conversation partner in academia.

*Public* refers to the broad body politic, that is, people in general. Theologians cannot pursue their work with integrity if they ignore basic issues and situations in society. Theologians must acknowledge that Christianity and its ecclesial communions, or denominations, are part of the secular world. Although some Christian groups remain sectarian (or largely detached from the world), theology has a responsibility to understand the world at large and to attempt to hold a dialogue with it as much as possible. Apart from this dialogue, theology would bury its head in the sand, and this would be a failure to perform its basic function as mediator and interpreter between the religious tradition and society. In addition, if theology is not public and open, it risks becoming cultlike and unaccountable, with the added risk of exploiting the people who take direction from it. Being accountable to the public is a safeguard against untenable and detached ideas. It is also the way theology can engage and even persuade the broad public about its constructive and prosocial beliefs, values, and works.

## Conclusion

Twentieth-century Brazilian Roman Catholic theologians Leonardo and Clodovis Boff said of theology, “All who believe want to understand something of their faith. As soon as you think about faith, you are already doing theology. So all Christians are in a sense theologians, and become more so the more they think about their faith.”<sup>1</sup>

All people who think about their faith and try to understand what it means for their life are doing theology on some level. Professional theologians think, speak, and write about faith all the time. Practitioners and pastoral workers may use theology to help shape

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<sup>1</sup> Leonardo and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1987), 16.

their workplace ethics or their client care. Clergy may use theology to help them write poignant and timely sermons. Stay-at-home moms and dads may use theology to help them get through rough days with noisy kids and piles of laundry.

Although it can be highly academic and refined, theology is ultimately the Christian endeavor to make sense of the beliefs that the faith proclaims. People do theology across all levels of personal interest and professional practice. Theology may be done by highly educated scholars, but it is also the domain of average people attempting to think meaningfully and seriously about what they believe and how those beliefs should shape their lives.

## Questions for Discussion and Review

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1. How would you describe theology to a child?
2. Give an example of theologizing.
3. What are the poignant moments in life—joyful or tragic—that might prompt a person to think about God?
4. Describe the function of theology as mediator and interpreter and give an example of a current event or situation that could benefit from the mediation of theology.
5. What is the relationship between faith and reason?
6. What is theological method? Is it important? Explain.
7. Give an example of how historical and geographical context can influence theology.
8. Is every religious person a theologian? Explain.
9. Describe and compare two types of theology considered in this chapter.
10. Why is it important for theology to have a public character?

## Key Terms

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Bible	handmaid of	orthopraxy
biblical theology	theology	pastoral theology
church	heresy	philosophy
councils	historical theology	sectarian
creeds	liberation theology	systematic theology
doctrines	metaphysics	theological method
epistemology	natural theology	
function of theology	orthodoxy	

## Resources

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