

THE THEOLOGY OF DAVID TRACY

Going Public

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Introduction

It is an honor for me as a member of the ABS community to contribute to this *Festschrift* celebrating the long and distinguished service of Dr. James Cheung to this institution. One of the principal preoccupations of Dr. Cheung, both as a seminary president and as the pastor of a large and vibrant congregation, is to attempt to perceive the developing trends in society that would impact both church life and theological education. This is clearly reflected in his writings, speeches, and sermons. Such a preoccupation is especially noticeable in his works during the last decade, not only because of the unique political and economic moment that Hong Kong found itself in, but also because of the uninhibited pace of cultural transformation fueled by technological innovations and postmodern ideologies. Dr. Cheung certainly will not be remembered as an ABS president that was trapped within "the throes of 'dead orthodoxy' that comes from a blind adherence to tradition."¹ Yet

¹ Preface, *Jian Dao* 13 (Dec. 1999): v.

neither will he be accused of an indiscriminant openness to adaptations that so easily become the rallying points for those forever mesmerized by the lure of the current, without realizing how profoundly the hard-won grounds of biblical-theological integrity can be undermined by the untested presuppositions of ideological schemes under the pretence of "open-mindedness." Instead, an irenic, pragmatic spirit undergirded by an uncompromising commitment to the historic Christian faith that was once for all delivered to the saints appears to be the hallmark of his leadership.

It is in response to his cautious attitude amidst the flux of new and not-so-new ways of thinking and doing that I offer this study on an aspect of the thought of a theologian widely recognized for his commitment to theologize in the middle: David Tracy.² The force of Tracy's program is hermeneutical. It prescribes a way of seeing and understanding. Although Tracy is largely preoccupied with *theo*-logy in his works, it is in his Christology that one can most clearly discern how he is theorizing and where he is heading with his method. This paper is an attempt to struggle with the writings of Tracy and produce a reading that is hopefully understandable from the viewpoint of an evangelical. It will begin with a biographical sketch of David Tracy, locating him socially and theologically, followed by an overview of his major theological concerns divided into the traditional categories of fundamental and systematic theology.³ The paper will end with a critical reflection on Tracy's program and its implications for evangelical theology in today's world.

² The choice of the phrase "in the middle" is deliberate. Tracy in his approach to theological reflection has consciously tried to steer clear of relativism on the one hand and conservatism on the other. His work not only acknowledges but also welcomes the current situation of pluralism that is in our midst. Finally, to borrow an aspect for the use of the Greek middle voice, the theologian must function *consciously and deliberately* as a member of his "publics."

³ Represented respectively by *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (New York: Seabury, 1975), abbreviated as *BRO* below; and *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), abbreviated as *AI* below. Tracy has yet to write a volume on practical theology.

Biographical Sketch⁴

Martin E. Marty has called David Tracy "the most original of today's Catholic theologians, and one with whom other theologians, Catholic and Protestant, have to reckon."⁵ He went on to explain Tracy's significance in that he "is shaping the future of theological inquiry and of Catholicism because as a thinker of the first order he influences not only the seminary professors who teach tomorrow's priests but also professors at secular colleges."⁶ His influence is indicated by his prolific output in articles and essays published in a wide variety of journals.⁷ However, his real impact on the academic and theological circles is achieved by the publication of his widely reviewed books.⁸ The turgid prolixity and jargonistic nature of his works,⁹ nevertheless, would prevent anyone from benefiting too much from them who is without some background in contemporary theology/hermeneutics and a will to persevere.

David Tracy was born on January 6, 1939, in Yonkers, New York. At age thirteen, he entered the preparatory seminary (equivalent to high school) at St. Joseph's in Dunwoodie, New York. Subsequently he was

⁴ Besides the usual sources for biographical information on a theologian, the following two interviews are useful: Eugene Kennedy, "A Dissenting Voice, Catholic Theologian David Tracy," *The New York Times Magazine*, Nov. 9, 1986, 23; T. Breyfogle, and T. Levergood, "Conversation with David Tracy," *Cross Currents* 44 (1994): 293-315. See also <<http://www.theology.ie/theologians/tracy.htm>> (accessed September 2000).

⁵ Kennedy, "A Dissenting Voice," 23. In a different context, Richard Bauckham called David Tracy "one of the most important of contemporary American Roman Catholic theologians. Indeed, this impressive book establishes him as a systematic theologian of international and ecumenical importance." (Review article, *Themelios*, 10 [Jan. 1985]: 42.)

⁶ Kennedy, "A Dissenting Voice," 23.

⁷ See the bibliography compiled by Stephen Webb at the end of W.G. Jeanron and J.L. Rike eds., *Radical Pluralism and Truth: David Tracy and The Hermeneutics of Religion* (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 286-93, which records over 120 essays and articles published between 1968 and 1990. The results can be easily updated using CD-ROM databases.

⁸ The most significant of which are three: *BRO*, *AI* and *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), abbreviated as *PA* below.

⁹ To quote the comments of two of his reviewers: Gerard Loughlin, *Modern Theology* 7 (1991): 483; and Bauckham, Review Article, 42. This is true especially of Tracy's earlier works. For example, it is not too difficult to locate a sentence that would run for ten lines in *BRO* (e.g., 108).

ordained a priest for the diocese of Bridgeport, Connecticut, in 1963. He went on to receive the Licentiate (1964) and Doctorate in Sacred Theology (1969) with a thesis on Bernard Lonergan¹⁰ at the Gregorian University in Rome during the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). The experience is formative for his later thought.¹¹ From 1967 to 1969 he taught at the Catholic University of America, and then went on to become the first Roman Catholic priest to take a position teaching systematic theology at the University of Chicago Divinity School, where he is currently the Andrew Thomas Greeley and Grace McNichols Greeley Distinguished Service Professor of Roman Catholic Studies and also a member of the Committee on the Analysis of Ideas and Methods. He was President of the Catholic Theological Society (1977) and is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Tracy felt called to the academic life as a priest,¹² and as such is fully aware of and shares the "conflict of moralities" induced by the loyalties demanded by these roles.¹³ He continues to exercise his priestly

¹⁰ David Tracy, "Lonergan's Interpretation of St. Thomas Aquinas: The Intellectualist Nature of Speculative Theology" (S.T.D. diss. Rome: Gregorian University, 1969).

¹¹ Tracy identifies himself as a continuation of one of the two streams flowing out of Vatican II formed by the generation that produced the council, which is regarded as an alliance between modernity and Catholicism. On the one hand, there are those like Rahner, Lonergan, Schillebeeckx, etc., who forged this alliance and remained committed to the continuing self-reform of Catholic thought and its institutional life, and are proponents of a post-modernist model of theology by insisting on the necessity of a critical correlation between an interpretation of the tradition and an interpretation of the contemporary situation (leading to various political, liberation, and postmodern theologies). On the other hand, others like de Lubac, Balthasar, and Ratzinger, etc., consider these kinds of correlational theologies as failing to yield a new Catholic unity-in-diversity and even threaten to destroy the earlier uneasy alliance between Catholicism and the modernity of Vatican II itself. Tracy embraces the first stream (see David Tracy, "The Uneasy Alliance Reconceived: Catholic Theological Method, Modernity, and Postmodernity," *Theological Studies* 50 [1989]: 552-56).

¹² Breyfogle and Levergood, "Conversation with David Tracy," 306.

¹³ *BRO*, 6-7. Tracy maintains the tension by stating that the Christian theologian must be characterized by the ethical stances of autonomous judgment, critical reflection, and properly skeptical hard-mindedness that characterize analysis in other fields. This is called the *common faith* shared by the secularist and the modern Christian because such a stance comes from the full affirmation of the ultimate significance of our lives in the world, an affirmation shared by both secularists and Christian alike (*BRO*, 8). Thus one's own – or one's tradition's – beliefs cannot serve as warrants for his arguments. Nevertheless, the theological enterprise is not cancelled altogether precisely because Tracy insists that "a proper understanding of the explicit Christian faith can render intellectually coherent and symbolically powerful that common secular faith which we

functions by presiding and preaching regularly at the Calvert House (the Roman Catholic chaplaincy at the University of Chicago).¹⁴ However, he considers his primary "public"¹⁵ to be the academy. This is overwhelmingly reflected in his writings which display his regular conversation, either directly or vicariously, with scholars in other fields such as Gadamer, Heidegger, Ricoeur, Eliade, James, Kierkegaard, Whitehead, and Habermas, to name a few.

Theologically, Tracy's roots are in the transcendental Thomism of Bernard Lonergan.¹⁶ After coming to the University of Chicago, he took up process theology and preferred its metaphysics in clarifying the meaning of God language in *Blessed Rage for Order* (1975). The Chicago connection is further evidenced by the influence in Tracy's writings by Paul Ricoeur, Langdon Gilkey, Schubert Ogden and Mircea Eliade.¹⁷ His hermeneutical insights are derived primarily from Ricoeur, Heidegger (via Gadamer), and more recently, Jacques Derrida. His critical stance is shown early when in 1968, he was one of twenty faculty members at Catholic University of America who were put on trial for publicly criticizing Pope Paul VI's encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*. His commitment to pluralism is evidenced by his concern for ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue, although he is certainly concerned with intra-Roman Catholic issues as well.¹⁸ One of the consistent hallmarks in all of Tracy's

share" (*BRO*, 9). The criteria justifying such an insistence will be discussed later in this paper.

¹⁴ A responsibility which allows him an opportunity to catch up on works in biblical studies (Breyfogle and Levergood, "Conversation with David Tracy," 306).

¹⁵ An important concept that will be discussed in what follows.

¹⁶ As testified by his dissertation and his first book, *The Achievement of Bernard Lonergan* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1970). He is also inspired by Newman and Kierkegaard (Breyfogle and Levergood, "Conversation with David Tracy," 304).

¹⁷ Eliade will be very influential in Tracy's practice of inter-religious dialogue by providing a hermeneutical key to understand the other religions as the "archaic other," which makes authentic conversation with them possible, as opposed to the "projected other," which allows for only distortions and caricature (an example would be Tracy's understanding of anti-semitism as coming from a kind of Christian self-identity involving a notion of the Jews as this projected other). See the discussion in chapter three of his recent book *Dialogue with the Other: The Inter-religious Dialogue* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 48-67.

¹⁸ See his writings over the years in the journal *Concilium*, a number of which are now collected in a book titled *On Naming the Present: God, Hermeneutics, and Church* (New York: Orbis Books, 1994). See also his essay "Uneasy Alliance," and in particular,

writings is his attempt to correlate his Christian tradition with the contemporary experience, with the effect that he is constantly on the lookout for insights and analyses that he could incorporate, critically as far as his own stance requires it, into his own thought. One reviewer remarked that "Tracy is a truth-seeker who does not flee complexity, is not satisfied with unnuanced simplicity, and seeks to include as many voices as possible in the conversation that is contemporary theology."¹⁹ But as we will have occasion to see, there are voices that Tracy would exclude (sometimes summarily) and the kind of voices excluded and the criteria for inclusion or exclusion come straight out of his own particular brand of pluralism.²⁰

Fundamental Theology

*Postmodernism and Pluralism*²¹

The prime motivation for Tracy in doing theology is his search for an understanding of religious and theological truth.²² This search,

his presidential address in *Proceedings of the 32nd Annual Convention, Toronto, Ontario, June 15-18, 1977*, by 234-44.

¹⁹ T. Howland Sanks, "David Tracy's Theological Project: An Overview and Some Implications," *Theological Studies* 54 (1993): 699.

²⁰ This is why a nuanced pluralism is always necessary. Tracy always insists that pluralism should neither be a kind of consumer-tolerance which is inevitably repressive (no political-correctness here), nor should it be an eclecticism which only masks intellectual chaos, the Scylla and Charybdis of modern pluralism (see *BRO*, 3; *AI*, 366 n. 22; also, "Christianity in the Wider Context: Demands and Transformations," *Religion & Intellectual Life* 4 [Summer, 1987]: 7-20). Tracy's way out of the difficulty is to retain genuine conversation and argument and their attendant criteria. These will be discussed later in the section on Tracy's pluralism.

²¹ At the outset, one must distinguish between the difference in meaning (i.e., the referent) of pluralism and plurality. The latter in Tracy's writing simply refers to the phenomenon of diversity, of multiplicity. Thus "the plurality of language" is synonymous to "the pluralistic nature of language." The emphasis is on "nature," "fact," "phenomenon," with the phenomenon itself to be delineated in the context. "Pluralism," however, is perhaps more accurately translated by "a pluralistic attitude" (*PA*, 90). Thus Tracy can say that "The notion of 'pluralism' need indicate neither a 'repressive tolerance' or a 'bourgeois complacency'." (*AI*, 366, n. 22) Nevertheless, the distinction is not always strictly maintained, especially in Tracy's earlier works (e.g., *BRO*, 3). Moreover, note that the adjective "pluralist" rather than "pluralistic" is used in *BRO*.

²² See Jeanrond and Rike, *Radical Pluralism and Truths*, xii. To understand Tracy properly, one must beware of the danger of the all-too-common conservative claim that

however, is radically modified by the advent of the Enlightenment consciousness.²³ Tracy found in Descartes the embodiment of the modern experience: Descartes pleaded for certainty, and he pleaded for a method grounded in the subject's self-presence, a method, in principle, that would prove the same for all thinking, rational persons.²⁴ The most obvious epistemological consequence is that all *inherited* assumptions are questioned and only those beliefs are accepted which could be proven according to *universally* accepted criteria. In this case, the criteria constitute a new scientific morality which leaves room even for the overthrowing of present scientific methods, paradigms, and conclusions.²⁵ The result is what the Victorians called the "crisis of belief," or more appropriately, "crisis of cognitive claims."²⁶ The ethical dilemma of the Christian theologian is clear: he must revise his traditional understanding of his role as a theologian whose task has been construed as to simply offer a defense or an orthodox reinterpretation of traditional belief. Now he is ethically bound to assume a critical posture towards his own and his tradition's belief.²⁷ Thus the secular standards of knowledge and action initiated by the Enlightenment become also those

all theologians of the postmodern stripe have given up on cognitive claims. Most such theologians would have an epistemology more nuanced than many conservatives would allow them. Whether their positions are ultimately consistent is a different question, however. In the case of Tracy, it is obvious that cognitive claims of the Christian faith are utmost on his mind when he began his project on fundamental theology (see his "Why Orthodoxy in a Personalist Age?" in *Proceedings of the 25th Annual Convention in Detroit, Michigan, June 15-18, 1970*, by The Catholic Theological Society of America, 78-110; also *BRO*, 3-14; *AI*, 20).

²³ The assumption is of course that such a consciousness exists. It nevertheless is a basic tenet of the sociology of knowledge, namely, that changes in social structure inevitably modify consciousness (see, for example, the arguments advanced by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann in *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* [New York: Anchor Books, 1967]).

²⁴ David Tracy, "Theology and the Many Faces of Postmodernity," *Theology Today* 51 (1994): 104.

²⁵ *BRO*, 6, borrowing the language of Thomas Kuhn and the analysis of Van A. Harvey, *The Historian and the Believer: The Morality of Historical Knowledge and Christian Belief* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), 102-27. It must be noted that Tracy at this point has already entered postmodern analysis by adopting a Kuhnian terminology.

²⁶ *BRO*, 5.

²⁷ This seems to assume something akin to the typical Protestant theologian who is at once a believer and an academic at the secular university, an institution peculiarly affected by the modern experience. Elsewhere Tracy also labels this experience the emergence of historical consciousness into Western consciousness, resulting in generating the problematic status of all classical traditions and authorities ("Why Orthodoxy in a Personalist Age?", 81.)

of the Christian theologian.²⁸ This is the pluralistic situation faced by the theologian: there now exists competing claims to his rationality.

However, the modern secular mind itself is also in crisis. It is charged with the accusation that the autonomous, enlightened person capable of critical pronouncements is really an illusion. Modernity with all its trappings is no less a tradition than its pre-modern counterparts. In fact, modernity is precisely responsible for some of the most oppressive horrors of the twentieth century enforced by its modern scientific processes of demystification and rationalization.²⁹ The postmodern intellectual is aware of where he took his beginnings, except that he does not thereby give up the critical insights engendered by the Enlightenment because this insight was not self-critical. Instead, he is firmly committed this insight and a continuous examination of those illusions which cloud his real and more limited possibilities for knowledge and action. Thus he is a self who realizes his own radical limitations and possibilities and yet struggles to become a human being of self-transcending authenticity.³⁰ The model of self-transcendence Tracy receives from Lonergan: "Be attentive, be intelligent, be rational, be responsible, develop and, if necessary, change."³¹ This is translated by Tracy to mean that the fundamental faith in the ultimate worth of our life here and now which is shared by the committed secular thinker and the committed Christian alike is maintained, clarified, and deepened by the postmodern critics of

²⁸ Tracy's conclusion on this point is not shared by some of the other postmodern theologians, notably George Lindbeck (*The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984]) and his student William C. Placher (*Unapologetic Theology: A Christian Voice in a Pluralistic Conversation* [Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989]), representatives of the so-called Yale school, in contrast to the Chicago School, of which Tracy is its most articulate proponent. The most important difference between the two is that the Placher would assert that Christians ought to speak in their own voice and not worry about finding philosophical foundations for their claims (*Unapologetic Theology*, 13). This is quite congruent with Alvin Plantinga's now famous position that it is perfectly proper to start from what we know as Christians and work on our own projects for rationality does not require that we start from beliefs we share with everyone else ("Advice to Christian Theologians," *Faith and Philosophy* 1 [July 1984]: 264-65). Thus Plantinga would call Tracy's morality of scientific knowledge *caveat lector* ("Advice to Christian Theologians," 263).

²⁹ A Marxist critique (*BRO*, 13).

³⁰ *BRO*, 11.

³¹ Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972), 53-55, 231-32.

modernity.³² Tracy calls this stance revisionist, stemming from a commitment to continuous revision of one's interpretation of the Christian tradition in correlation with contemporary understandings of human existence.³³ The pluralist nature of Tracy's revisionist stance may be appreciated by a look at his commitment to the basic task of contemporary theology: "the dramatic confrontation, the mutual illuminations and corrections, the possible basic reconciliation between the principal values, cognitive claims, and existential faiths of both a reinterpreted post-modern consciousness and a reinterpreted Christianity."³⁴ Thus Tracy developed

³² *BRO*, 14.

³³ *BRO*, 23. Tracy regards it as a necessity for any contemporary theological position to interpret these two basic phenomena. What is different among the various positions will be whether a correlation between the two is taken seriously and how the correlation is done.

³⁴ *BRO*, 32. At this point it may be helpful for our purpose to locate Tracy's position regarding the orthodox model of theology (one of five basic models he examined in contemporary theology: orthodox, liberal, neo-orthodox, radical, and revisionist; *BRO*, 24-34). The orthodox model distinguishes itself by disallowing the claims of modernity to have any inner-theological relevance (i.e., all norms for theological statements are to be found in the "authorities" affirmed by the particular faith community, not by "outside" communities of inquiry). As a result, the task of the orthodox theologian is to express an adequate understanding of the beliefs of his particular tradition, not by proving those beliefs or simply restating them, but by providing an analogous understanding of those beliefs and a reasoned defense on their behalf. Within this framework a wide spectrum of options would be regarded as orthodox. The strength of the orthodox theologian is precisely his ability to develop sophisticated analogies for providing systematic understanding of the basic beliefs of his church community. The weakness, however, is his inability to come to terms with the cognitive, ethical, and existential counter-claims of modernity (*BRO*, 25). One realization of the orthodox model is fundamentalism, which, according to Tracy, is primarily characterized by an embrace of the products of modernity (particularly scientific and industrial products, but also various social artifacts) with a simultaneous rejection of all the authentic (ethical and political) values of the modern experiment as far as its theology is concerned (*On Naming the Present*, 12). That is, it recognizes the human need for meaning rooted in communal values and traditions, but denies the historical relativity of its favored traditions and the need for the continual, critical, and constructive reappropriation of these traditions to ensure their relevance and validity (Jeanron and Rike, *Radical Pluralism and Truths*, xvii). Tracy regards fundamentalist orthodoxy as reactionary, a loss of nerve in face of the force of the modernist claim to rationality. On this count he is careful to distinguish between fundamentalist versions of antimodernity and non-fundamentalist versions of antimodernity. The latter (including strains of conservative evangelical Christianity, Roman Catholic traditional theologies, and non-Khomenian Islamic thought) recognizes the historical relativity of its traditions, but still fails to be radical in its self-critical reappropriation of these traditions. However, the distinction remains undeveloped, and it appears that the distinction is only a matter of degree. Tracy regards orthodoxy mode of theologizing as *passé*, and does not even bother in engaging it in dialogue, a puzzling thing given the fact that orthodoxy, if anything, retains strong continuity with the past,

the Enlightenment "turn to the subject" into a hermeneutical one, for now the knowledge of the real (i.e., truth) can only be attained through the cognition of the skilled knower,³⁵ and so is relative to the personal and historical perspective of that knower. Yet truth is not totally relative, since the real at the same time exists independently of the knower,³⁶ and the nature of the data, as well as the insights used to organize it and the judgments made to determine it can all be tested repeatedly.³⁷ Truth can be said to be both objective and shared (i.e., it is public), and the relative adequacy of various formulations of the truth can be adjudicated.³⁸ What is denied, however, is the claim that an absolute viewpoint upon the whole is possible. Only a moving viewpoint, relative to its past predecessors and open to its future evaluations, is in our possession. Thus to understand is to interpret. Certainty is given up for understanding, and knowing is replaced by interpreting.

This understanding of the hermeneutical character of all understanding and the resulting pluralism of our time form the cornerstone in Tracy's theological reflection and method. As a result, theological reflection is the mutually critical correlation of an interpretation of some dimension of the Christian fact (tradition) with an interpretation of some dimension of human experience or human situation.³⁹ However, to be

and part of Tracy's program is to achieve a recollection of the past through the hermeneutics of retrieval. See below.

³⁵ A conclusion that no one can escape: To understand at all is to interpret, to experience in other than a purely passive sense is to interpret, and to be human is to be a skilled interpreter (*PA*, 9).

³⁶ An assertion to avoid falling into the trap of solipsism, a vicious circularity that denies all and any possibility of genuine knowledge.

³⁷ Both independently by the knower and intersubjectively through dialogue with others.

³⁸ Jeanron and Rike, *Radical Pluralism and Truths*, xiv.

³⁹ This task of theological reflection was originally formulated in *BRO* (ch. 3) in terms of five summary theses: (1) The Two Principal Sources for Theology Are Christian Texts and Common Human Experience and Language. (2) The Theological Task Will Involve a Critical Correlation of the Results of the Investigations of the Two Sources of Theology. (3) The Principal Method of Investigation of the Source "Common Human Experience and Language" Can Be Described as a Phenomenology of the "Religious Dimension" Present in Everyday and Scientific Experience and Language. (4) The Principal Method of Investigation of the Source "the Christian Tradition" Can Be Described as a Historical and Hermeneutical Investigation of Classical Christian Texts. (5) To Determine the Truth-Status of the Results of One's Investigations into the Meaning of Both Common Human Experience and Christian Text the Theologian Should Employ an Explicitly Transcendental or Metaphysical Mode of Reflection.

genuinely public in its claim to truth, the theological method must develop criteria of adequacy to adjudicate the relative adequacy of different interpretations of each source of theological reflection so that the model of Lonergan's self-transcendence (see above) is maintained. Such criteria are developed in *Blessed Rage for Order* for fundamental theology and in *The Analogical Imagination* for systematic theology.⁴⁰ Salient features of each will now be examined. But before we do that, one must realize that the hermeneutical focus is really a corollary to the primary thrust of Tracy's theological quest: a kind of foundationalism based upon a philosophical reflection on the meanings present in common human experience and the Christian fact.⁴¹ As one critic notes, Tracy's path to fundamental "provides a method which is nothing if not an appeal to experience."⁴²

The two sources of theology

Regarding the source of common human experience, three criteria are needed: The first one is "meaningfulness" as disclosive of our actual experience.⁴³ The second one is internal coherence for this theological

⁴⁰ *BRO*, 64-87; *AI*, 99-178.

⁴¹ *BRO*, 43. As we will have occasion to see, part of the difficulty in reading Tracy is his rather idiosyncratic use of language. For example, "fact" here carries the idea of "re-presentation" and refers to what is "ritual, fictional, and symbolic representation of a real possibility" (see *BRO*, 215-18). The same applies to the term "experience," see below.

⁴² John K. Downey, *Beginning at the Beginning: Wittgenstein and Theological Conversation* (Lanham: University of America Press, 1986), 118.

⁴³ Experience here refers to "common human experience" and is not confined to mere sensory experience, but also extended to that immediate experience of self-as-self which can be mediated through art, history, cultural analysis, human scientific analysis, and philosophical analysis (*BRO*, 69). For example, one may argue through cultural analyses that the Thanksgiving holiday is clearly meaningful in the sense of disclosing a direct relationship between an event (the Thanksgiving dinner) and the lived-experience of the American people. However, the idea goes deeper. Experience is what defines our existence. Tracy claims that the source and core of both religious symbol and philosophical thought is pre-reflective and even pre-linguistic, and meaning is possible only when we are able to reflect critically upon our root experience of existence (hermeneutics of suspicion), which is essentially a function of being able to simply reflect this experience in a more differentiated contexts (hermeneutics of recollection). In this Tracy is heavily indebted to Ricoeur (see *BRO*, 210, referring to Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970], 20-37). Ricoeur believes that "symbol gives rise to thought," and the intellectual disciplines of philosophy and theology deal with the conscious thematization (the belief level) of an essentially pre-reflective experience (the faith level), leading to the conclusion that the standard for

reflection to have meaning.⁴⁴ To adjudicate the truth-value of cognitive claims, the third criterion of "adequacy to experience" is necessary.⁴⁵ Regarding the source of the Christian tradition (typified by the Christian Scriptures), criteria of appropriateness are needed.⁴⁶ This in turn requires a theory of interpretation in order to show the appropriateness of the theologian's categories to the Christian Scriptures. For Tracy, such a theory is based primarily on the work of Gadamer and Ricoeur. The basic recognition is the fact that the Scriptures are historically distanced from the contemporary interpreter. To get at the meaning of a historically distanced text it is not sufficient merely to determine the author's intended meaning or the socio-cultural situation of the text. Rather the referent of the text expresses the meaning "in front of the text" by virtue of being encoded in a certain literary genre.⁴⁷ The message of the implied author must be extracted, and an adequate interpretation occurs when there is a fusion of horizon between the reader and the implied author of the text, not by empathizing with the psychic state or cultural situation of the author.

the correct analysis of beliefs is always fidelity to the basic experience from which they are derived. Tracy will complement this hermeneutic epistemology with an analysis of this grounding experience based on Ogden's presentation of our most basic experience: the pre-linguistic origins of religion and philosophy as found in the non-sensuous experience of the self as a self which yields a basic trust and sense of unity with something greater (*BRO*, 101-104, 153-56). A corollary is immediately apparent: a theologian need not be an explicit believer (*BRO*, 36 n. 16).

⁴⁴ For example, Tracy maintains that the classical theistic notion of the impassability of God is incoherent with the assertion that God is really affected by human actions. This will be further developed in the section on systematic theology. There we will see the rationale behind Tracy's adoption of a process theology in his understanding of God (i.e., panentheism, *BRO*, 172ff).

⁴⁵ Thus a particular experience or language is "true" when transcendental or metaphysical analysis shows its "adequacy to experience" by explicating how a particular concept (e.g. God) functions as a fundamental belief or condition of possibility for all our existence (e.g. via a version of ontological proof, cf. ch. 8).

⁴⁶ That is, the Christian theologian is to show how his present categories are appropriate understandings of the Christian understanding of existence (*BRO*, 69-71).

⁴⁷ The example Tracy gives comes from parable interpretation in the Gospels. The history of parable from earlier allegorizations through Jülicher's one basic moral point to Dodd and Jeremias' *Sitz-im-Leben* approach demonstrates that the meaning of the parables is not obtained by understanding either the author's intentions, or the community's, or Jesus' life-situation. Rather, the interpreter must explain the structure and nature of the literary genre of parable and the nature and structure of metaphor itself as a linguistic expression, inasmuch as parables are narrative expansions of a basic metaphor (*BRO*, 77).

The idea of the "classic"

In *The Analogical Imagination* Tracy further underscores the necessity for the theologian to develop public criteria for his affirmation of truth claims, for all authentic theology is public discourse, meaning "discourse available (in principle) to all persons and explicated by appeals to one's experience, intelligence, rationality, and responsibility, and formulated in arguments where claims are stated with appropriate warrants, backings, and rebuttal procedures."⁴⁸ This is no longer simply driven by the hermeneutical character of understanding, but also by a concern that religion, like art, has become so privatized in contemporary life that it has become only a matter of taste, thus trivializing and erasing all its truth claims on the experience of mankind.⁴⁹ The corollary of this concern is the "universal character of divine reality," for the God as understood by the three great monotheistic religions is either "universal in actuality or sheer delusion." Thus any speech on the reality of God which is private or particularist is unworthy of that reality.⁵⁰

The key to Tracy's whole argument for the possibility of public theological discourse from a peculiar religious tradition centers on the phenomenon of "the classic."⁵¹ In short, a classic is a text, work of art, symbol, event, person, etc., that mediates truth.⁵² It is a classic if we recognize in it nothing less than the disclosure of a reality that cannot

⁴⁸ *AI*, 57.

⁴⁹ *AI*, 13.

⁵⁰ *AI*, 51. This is where Tracy and Lindbeck diverge, with the latter holding the position that theological discourse is only available to those within a particular confessional tradition. See Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974) in addition to Lindbeck's *The Nature of Doctrine* and Placher's *Unapologetic Theology*.

⁵¹ The sense of the "public" is really more nuanced, for Tracy distinguishes the public for fundamental theology as the academy and the public for systematic theology as the church itself. The classics are public in the second sense. This equivocation on the notion of "public" allows for two markedly different theological tasks. Tracy is careful not to allow fundamental theology to usurp the role of systematic theology and become an external judge of conversation with the religious classics. Instead, he regards fundamental theology as buttressing the importance of systematic theology by demonstrating the existence of religious dimension in human experience, thereby legitimating the engagement with a particular religious tradition. Nevertheless, the existence of a reason necessarily informed by the second public in terms of particular symbols, texts, and events of a tradition creates a tension for the plausibility of the model of reason reflected by the first public addressed by fundamental theology.

⁵² *AI*, 68.

but be named truth.⁵³ Two characteristics define the classic: permanence and surplus of meaning. That is, it can never simply be repeated or rejected but rather demands interpretation.⁵⁴ The most important characteristic of the classic is thus its radical particularity. The primary analogue of the notion of classic is, then, a work of art. Tracy argues that classics in both art and religion achieve a genuine publicness "because of, not in spite of, an intensified particularity."⁵⁵ The reason being that "although radically particular in origin and expression, the classics are public in our second sense: grounded in some realized experience of a claim to attention, unfolding as cognitively disclosive of both meaning and truth and ethically transformative of personal, social and historical life."⁵⁶

The task of the systematic theologian then is to interpret these classics of a particular tradition in such a way that they become disclosive of truth and transformative of the individual and society. Like all interpretation, the theologian brings with him some preunderstanding to the classic. A willingness to dialogue with the classic is thus indispensable, thereby allowing the subject matter to take over, and widening the dialogue to include other interpretations in the conversation, hermeneutics both of retrieval and suspicion. This will result in "a new application of a particular religious tradition's self-understanding for the current horizon of the community" (i.e., the method of mutually critical correlation proposed earlier).

Still, a religious classic is not like classics in art, morality, science, or politics because it speaks not of those particular areas of human existence but of the "whole." It helps us to understand the limit-experiences of life.⁵⁷ This intensification experience of the whole of reality is called revelation.⁵⁸ It is experienced as something that has happened to a person, as a gift, a grace, not as an event of one's

⁵³ *AI*, 108.

⁵⁴ *AI*, 154. Thus a pluralism of readings exists for the classics.

⁵⁵ *AI*, 353.

⁵⁶ *AI*, 132.

⁵⁷ The limit dimension of life is the religious dimension of our experience and language (*AI*, 160), which limits life within a fundamental horizon and gives us our sense of finitude, mortality, estrangement, order, justice, and the like.

⁵⁸ *AI*, 173.

achievement. The positive response to such an experienced religious classic is commonly called "faith."⁵⁹

The classic itself, however, is only relatively adequate for two reasons.⁶⁰ One is the dialectical nature of intensification. The theologian always comes to the moment of disclosure with particular experience. The dialogue of truth is therefore necessarily individual, this contrasting with the religious dimension of universal human experience.⁶¹ The other is more significant, namely that the classic is always embodied in a genre, a form, a structure, etc., that always and necessarily stands at some distance from the disclosure. This distancing is subject to certain criteria of adequacy proposed by Tracy. No theology, however, is fully adequate, not even the Scriptures. Interpretation is always needed.⁶² The only fully appropriate, fully adequate expression of that event is the event itself.⁶³

Tracy contends that interpreting the Christian classic ultimately means employing "the analogical imagination." Reflecting on the focal event (the Christ event) as the disclosure of the truth of universal grace and the response of grace as found within the Christian tradition, the theologian then employs one or another set of philosophical principles to develop a system of thought.⁶⁴ The mode of reflection is analogy, defined as "a language of ordered relationships articulating similarity-in-difference ...," whose purpose is to produce some order, the similarities-

⁵⁹ In part 2 of *AI* this method for systematic theology as public discourse will be applied to the specifically Christian tradition, and an outline for a Christology will be developed. This will be discussed later in this paper.

⁶⁰ *AI*, 248-49.

⁶¹ Thus both Lindbeck (*The Nature of Doctrine*, 38) and Placher (*Unapologetic Theology*, 12, 155-59) accuse Tracy of ambiguity in his religious and hermeneutical theory at this point.

⁶² This rules out the hermeneutical practice of Scripture interpreting Scripture. Distanciation is not removed by such a practice. Tracy does affirm that Scriptures, as expressions of the apostolic witness to the Christ event, serve as normative for Christian self-understanding. They are also normative as that set of inspirations, controls, and correctives upon all later expressions and events that claim appropriateness to the classic witnesses to that event itself. Thus the Scriptures of Tracy is not normative in the evangelical sense of the word, only in a hermeneutical sense.

⁶³ *AI*, 310.

⁶⁴ The definition of theological analogical imagination given by Tracy himself is, as usual, dense and jargonistic: "a production produced by the power of an analogical imagination released by the religious event and reflected upon by the critical powers of each theologian (*AI*, 410)."

in-difference, constituting the whole of reality.⁶⁵ One should not construe the analogical imagination to be a method of synthesis which is symptomatic of eclecticism. Rather, the particularities of the classic can only contribute to human understanding if the integrity of the differences in readings is respected. Thus the analogical imagination is a "teleological vision of genuine pluralism that unites unique and particular individuals in transformation toward the proper and desired end of what it means to be human."⁶⁶

Systematic Theology

Who is God?

Following the methodological section of part one of *Blessed Rage for Order*, Tracy proceeds to apply his revisionist theological method to the two sources for theology, namely, common human experience and language and Christian texts.⁶⁷ In particular, his attention turns to the truth claims of the religious language in the Christian tradition. Christian religious language not only makes claims to existential meaningfulness, it also makes claims that are cognitive. Recall that the revisionist theology calls for both a phenomenological analysis (thesis 3 in n. 39 above) of the source of "common human experience and language" and a transcendental/metaphysical analysis (thesis 5 in n. 39) of the truth-status of the resulting investigations of the two sources. The criteria for determining the truth claims of a metaphysical system are internal coherence and adequacy (fidelity) to experience.

Based on these criteria, Tracy finds the concept of God in classical theism internally incoherent, inadequate to our experience, and inappropriate to the fullness of the Christian tradition. It is internally incoherent because it cannot explain how the classical changeless, non-relative God can ever be love.⁶⁸ It is inadequate to experience because "all authentic Christians live and pray and speak as if God were really affected by their action" and because change reflects genuine perfection,

⁶⁵ *AI*, 408.

⁶⁶ Emery A. Percell, "Theology and Pluralism," *Quarterly Review-UM* 3 (1983): 105.

⁶⁷ *BRO*, 64-87; *AI*, 99-178.

⁶⁸ *BRO*, 176.

not an imperfection.⁶⁹ It is inappropriate to the Christian Scriptures because it renders the Scriptural attributes of God as a loving, caring, and personally related God mere anthropomorphisms.⁷⁰

In contrast, a process metaphysics which portrays God as the only one who is eminently temporal and social affords a conceptually clear and coherent account of the meaning of Christian theism (i.e., as panentheism). For Tracy, the point is how an already relational God can be understood as absolute, not the other way round. By redefining "absolute" as "absolute relativity" God is perceived as dipolar where the concrete God is the eminently social and relative one affecting and affected by all reality, and the abstract principle which renders coherent this concept of a divine self really analogous to our selves is the affirmation of God's absoluteness as the abstract principle of the divine concrete reality.⁷¹

Moreover, Tracy adopts Hartshorne's modification of Anselm's ontological argument and challenges the prevalent notion that the ontological argument fails because it attempts to make a fallacious inference from an idea (a "meaning") to a reality (a "truth"). In fact, Hartshorne insists that the point of the argument is quite the opposite, in that not just any idea warrants an inference to a reality. Only the coherently conceived idea of the radically monotheistic Judaeo-Christian God – precisely as the idea of a necessary existent – warrants that reality.⁷² Tracy does not embrace the ontological argument as another of the deductivist proofs from the pre-critical age. Instead, Tracy regards as a valuable insight the ontological component in such a classical argument for the existence of God, in that "only an affirmation of the reality of God as the one necessary existent can validate our very understanding of our selves as selves."⁷³ This is an affirmation in the basic faith (both secular and Christian) of the ultimate worthwhileness of our existence.

Tracy is aware of the shortcomings of the process picture, however. For one thing, the process tradition lacks a lasting internal consensus.

⁶⁹ *BRO*, 177.

⁷⁰ *BRO*, 180.

⁷¹ *BRO*, 182-83.

⁷² *BRO*, 185.

⁷³ *BRO*, 186.

For another, the process anthropology derived from such a process theology is overly optimistic, unable to be more cognizant of the ambiguity and sin involved in a truly contemporary model of humanity.

In a more recent exposition on the question of who God is, Tracy returns to a more traditional footing in his theology.⁷⁴ His understanding of God is Christological and Trinitarian, for he claims that a Christian theological understanding of God cannot be divorced from the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. However, Tracy sees the full understanding of God as occurring only in and through an entire systematic theology encompassing all the great symbols of the tradition (e.g., creation-redemption, Christ, eschatology, church, sacrament, revelation, etc.). More specifically, Tracy's approach is revelational, claiming that theological analysis on the "one God" should begin with God's self-revelation in Christ. The revelational principle is in reality then Scriptural-revelational. In line with his model of "the classic," the Scriptural-revelational stance is actualized by the principle of Scripture-in-tradition (not the Reformation principle of *sola scriptura*). That is, "We believe in Jesus Christ *with the apostolic tradition*" (italics his).⁷⁵

Forgoing a fuller scriptural understanding of God, Tracy remarks that the most profound New Testament metaphor of who God is comes from the metaphor of 1 John 4:16: "God is love," a love which is revealed in the incarnation, cross, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.⁷⁶ In more abstract terms, then, God is characterized by the radical relationality of that most relational categories, love. This is also the gateway to

⁷⁴ David Tracy, "Approaching the Christian Understanding of God," in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, Vol. 1, eds. Francis S. Fiorenza & John P. Galvin (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 133-48. However, Tracy does not thereby give up on process theism. The constraint of Tracy's concept of "experience" is too strong to allow him to take the ideas of classical theism seriously. A recent work sharing Tracy and other process theologians' critique of some of the notions of God central to the heritage of Christian theism may be found in Richard M. Gale, *On the Nature and Existence of God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). His thesis is critiqued by Paul Helm in "Gale on God," *Religious Studies* 29 (1993): 245-55. Gale's response may be found in the same issue (257-63). For an earlier evangelical appraisal of process theology, see Royce Gruenler, *The Inexhaustible God: Biblical Faith and the Challenge of Process Theism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983).

⁷⁵ "Approaching the Christian Understanding of God," 135.

⁷⁶ "Approaching the Christian Understanding of God," 138.

understanding the immanent Trinity in and through the economic Trinity by grounding the "identity" of the God disclosed as kenotic love in Jesus Christ.⁷⁷

Thus Jesus Christ is regarded as both the self-disclosure of God and God's quest for human beings in his radical relationality, and this understanding must be correlated with the human quest for God, where the term "correlation" logically allows for the categories of identity (in meaning), non-identity, or similarity-in-difference, opening the door to what he believes to be genuine interreligious dialogue with the other great traditions – theistic and non-theistic – which will teach Christians yet further ways to understand God, the end of all reality who is disclosed to us in Jesus Christ as pure, unbounded love.⁷⁸

Christology

Tracy's fullest Christological statement is found in the second part of *The Analogical Imagination*.⁷⁹ Again, Tracy's basic commitment to pluralism is at work, allowing diverse images of Jesus Christ in his system without an *a priori* suspicion of their mutual compatibility with respect to the witness in Scripture. This is reflected in his confession-like statement that "For the Christian to affirm 'I believe in Jesus Christ' is to affirm the reality of God's own self-manifestation in the person Jesus Christ" as mediated through the church and tradition.⁸⁰ However, Tracy's affirmation is a religious-existential one, bearing the character of a response. This understanding opens Tracy to accepting a diversity of

⁷⁷ "Approaching the Christian Understanding of God," 139.

⁷⁸ "Approaching the Christian Understanding of God," 147. It is clear that Tracy's principle of mutually critical correlation between Christian tradition and human experience will lead him to be far more receptive to "mutual transformation" between Christianity and other religions of the world. His starting point is still the historical trinitarian Christianity as reflected by the Roman Catholic tradition. But one suspects that the starting point is just that, namely, historically Tracy was a Christian before he was anything else religiously speaking. This is something Tracy could not give up without risking a thorough-going pluralism void of all normative religious anchors. See his *Dialogue with the Other*, 44-47, 95-100.

⁷⁹ *AI*, 231-338. See also ch. 9 of *BRO*.

⁸⁰ *AI*, 329. It is clear that Tracy's real focus is on the "event," not the "person," of Jesus Christ. For immediately following the above citation he continues: "*That event and that person, ...are mediated through the church and tradition which re-presents the Christ event paradigmatically in word and sacrament and keeps alive the dangerous memory of this Jesus who is the Christ*" (italics mine).

responses without raising the question of normativeness and compatibility. The overall framework of his Christological construction is that of the "classic."

The systematic theologian interprets the classics of a particular tradition. He must answer the question: What are the classic texts, events, symbols, persons, etc. in a tradition? For Tracy, the one classic event and person who normatively judges and informs all other Christian classics is the event and person of Jesus Christ.⁸¹ This explains the many traditional and contemporary christologies. Pluralism is inherent in the idea of a classic whose impact is regarded as primarily existential and interpretative, in relation to one's own situation. Nevertheless, pluralism does not imply arbitrariness and there are both internal and external correctives for religious belief.⁸²

Internally there is to be a conversation between the interpreter and the classic expressions within the tradition through which self-reform, self-correction, and self-clarification occurs. There is real cognitive progress in the hermeneutical approach of "understanding-explanation-understanding," an awareness of the first and second *naïveté*. Externally the interpreter should still hold on to the standard criteria of appropriateness for a tradition and intelligibility. The criteria are largely methodological. The whole array of critical tools like historical-critical methods,⁸³ literary-critical methods,⁸⁴ and social-scientific methods are all allowed and encouraged. The employment of these methods may clarify, reconstruct, and even replace "expressions" within a tradition.

⁸¹ *AI*, 233. Tracy claims he arrived at this conclusion on "inner Christian grounds." He clarifies his logic in an endnote: "Fundamental theology (as in *BRO*) starts with the logic of the question of religion, then the question of God, then the reasonableness of the Christ event as decisively representative of the event of God's love as here now. Systematic theology, on the contrary, starts with the concreteness of the event of Jesus Christ and expands through interpretations of that event to understand God and the human, church and world, etc. in the light of that focal meaning" (*AI*, 241-42).

⁸² *AI*, 238.

⁸³ E.g., form, source, and redaction criticisms, etc.

⁸⁴ Including, but not exclusive of, structuralism, deconstruction, formalism, New Criticism, and phenomenology, etc. Again, Tracy is not worried about mutual compatibility among these methodologies. He is more interested about the final product. And these methodologies are but criteria of appropriateness for a tradition and intelligibility before a public, dictated by the postmodern situation which is the situation of the contemporary interpreter.

The situation is allowed to challenge and change traditional interpretations for the sake of relevance.⁸⁵ Thus the individual interpreter may continue to believe in and with a given tradition, he only needs to be revisionist in stance.⁸⁶

The consequence of this framework is that the actual Jesus for Tracy is that which is remembered by the community and proclaimed by the church as the Christ.⁸⁷ The historical Jesus is a mere curiosity and could not serve as the standard or norm for the tradition. Moreover the New Testament is normative in that it codifies the original and normative responses to the Christ event. This type of normativity then allows and indeed demands an openness to new experiences and to reinterpretations which arise from new questions and new situations as history moves.⁸⁸ In this Tracy is consistent with the stance in his fundamental theology which emphasizes the universal meaningfulness and common human experience of religion. He has rejected an exclusivist Christology even before he started.⁸⁹

Tracy's fundamental Christological understanding was set early in *Blessed Rage for Order*. There his Christology depends on an understanding of the nature of religious language as "re-presentation," in the sense of making the present anew, through symbolic expression, a human reality which somehow had become threatened or forgotten.⁹⁰ Tracy calls such re-presentations "facts," not in the usual sense of "an

⁸⁵ *AI*, 240. Again, the utility of these criteria is pushed one step further as now the "situation" also demands genuine dialogical interaction with the other religions of the world as real religions, not projected ones. In this arena a modified set of criteria is needed. Insights from William James were solicited in this respect. See *Dialogue with the Other*, 27-47.

⁸⁶ This is the main reason why Lindbeck called Tracy's theological method "experiential-expressive." See Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 16f.

⁸⁷ *AI*, 238. This is encapsulated in his programmatic statement: "We believe in Jesus Christ *with* the apostles." See n. 75 earlier.

⁸⁸ *AI*, 248-49. Tracy portrays this understanding of scripture as the dominant one within the traditions of both Judaism and Christianity. Unlike Islam which regards the Quran as *the* revelation, *the* event, Judaism and Christianity both regard their scriptures as the authoritative *expression* of faith. The scriptures are the response to the source of authority, the event of God in covenant with the people Israel and in Jesus Christ. The fundamentalist doctrines of inerrancy are then parodied as "more faithful to Islamic principles of interpretation than to either Jewish or Christian ones" (*AI*, 287-88, n. 6).

⁸⁹ See *BRO*, 206. Also *Dialogue with the Other*, 96-97.

⁹⁰ *BRO*, 215.

actualization of a possibility," or as the original sense of *factum* indicates, "something done," but facts as ritual,⁹¹ as fictional,⁹² as symbolic representation of a real possibility.⁹³ The fundamental Christological fact, then, is that Jesus is the Christ as found in the words, deeds, and destiny of Jesus of Nazareth, and that in the proclamation through word and sacrament of the fact of Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ the truth of human existence is re-presented with factual finality. In other words, the important thing is not to "understand Jesus' own consciousness of his actions and teaching in order to formulate a christology grounded in fact,"⁹⁴ rather, the important thing is to "know what his words, his deeds, and his destiny, as expressions of his office of messiahship, authentically re-presented as real human possibilities for genuine relationship to God."⁹⁵ To encapsulate, the principal meaning of Jesus as the Christ is the "disclosure" of a new, an agapic, a self-sacrificing righteousness willing to risk living at that limit where one seems in the presence of the righteous, loving, gracious God re-presented in Jesus the Christ; and to confess Jesus as the Christ is then to accept the invitation to risk living a life-at-the-limits, a committed, a righteous and agapic life in the presence of the only God who is manifested as the "Father" of the Lord Jesus Christ.⁹⁶

Tracy arrives at such a focal meaning not so much from an examination of Jesus Christ the person but from an understanding of the event of Jesus Christ, particularly as defined by the three classic symbols of the cross, the resurrection, and the incarnation.

For Tracy the cross symbolizes the suffering love of God's self which supports the ultimate, eternal relationship of the divine and the

⁹¹ The example given here is the early catholic understanding of the sacrament as a re-presentation of a real possibility which God has made present to humanity in Christ.

⁹² The example here is the "larger-than-life" nature of fictional characters of, say, Hemingway's fiction, which is "more faithful to the meaning of our own experience than everyday experience itself," and which is independent of the author's own intention or his own actualization of the possibility which his text represents (*BRO*, 215).

⁹³ The example here is the American culture's own memory-image of Martin Luther King as a cultural fact, a symbol, a representation of "a particular authentic possibility."

⁹⁴ As in a "new quest" for the historical Jesus.

⁹⁵ *BRO*, 218. That is, it must address the situation.

⁹⁶ *BRO*, 221.

human. The cross is a manifestation of God's power as love, appearing as weakness to powers of the world.⁹⁷ The symbol of the cross discloses all the negations of human existence as pain, conflict, destruction, contradiction, and the suffering of love. The cross is the "great refusal" of the present order.⁹⁸ His hermeneutics of mutually critical correlation allows him to, through the symbol of the cross, legitimize the use of Marxist, Freudian, and Nietzschean critiques on contemporary society, church, and culture.⁹⁹ Here, as from the beginning, Tracy readily embraces his situatedness in the postmodern historical consciousness, the pluralism of sociological imagination, and the self-transcendence of modern science and technology.¹⁰⁰

The significance of the ministry of Christ is that the symbol of the cross and the symbol of resurrection are inextricably linked. For Tracy, regardless of the historical occasion for the resurrection-belief of the New Testament, the basic existential meaning of that belief remains the same: the representative words, deeds, and teachings of Jesus as the Christ can in fact be trusted.¹⁰¹ The resurrection vindicates, confirms, and transforms the negations of the cross through its appeal to a suffering love, and the Christian is called to learn living a life of trust which focuses, confirms, corrects, challenges, confronts, and transforms one's present questions, expectations, reflections on life and all one's attempt to live a life worthy of the name "human."¹⁰²

For Tracy, the symbol of incarnation comes after the cross and resurrection. It is primarily a symbol of decisiveness, in the sense that it

⁹⁷ *AI*, 282.

⁹⁸ *AI*, 311-16.

⁹⁹ Again, the issue of compatibility is not raised. The insight is what matters.

¹⁰⁰ *AI*, 349-51. See also David V. Cathey, *David Tracy's Aesthetic-Phenomenological Hermeneutic: Implications for Revisionist Christology* (Ph.D. diss. Forth Worth: Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1992), 204-209.

¹⁰¹ *BRO*, 220; *AI*, 279. Here Tracy would readily admit as legitimate the major theological interpretations of the resurrection belief, including Bultmannian existentialism, the process view of Ogden, and the alternative view of Marxsen. See *AI*, 234, n. 92. He does not deny the historical facticity of resurrection, just that the Bible is really a response to it. Again, the "facticity" has little to do with its common sense usage, but it actually refers to the web of cultural fact and symbolism actualized within a certain root experience of existence. See nn. 90-93 above.

¹⁰² *AI*, 326.

is fully adequate to the re-presentation of the actuality of God's love and the universality of God's grace to all, individuals, history, and nature.¹⁰³ As such it is tied in with the Pauline concepts of grace and gift.¹⁰⁴ But its real locus is in the logos theologies of John and all his progenitors up till the modern time. However, there is a paradox between the negations of the cross and the "graced creation" of the incarnation. He restates this paradox in terms of the "always-already" and the "not-yet." Thus the event and person of Jesus Christ is the primary classic informing and transforming all responses. To that event and to that person, "the final commentary is the risk of a life like that lived by Jesus of Nazareth; the final test is the future; the final confession is that this remembered Jesus is the Christ...the final disclosure is the paradoxical power of an always-already Love who is the final reality who even now, even here touches our always-already, not-yet humanity."¹⁰⁵

Critique

To read Tracy is to read an ongoing project, with all the interruptions, reversals, slippages, ambiguities, refinements, and developments associated with any open-ended intellectual endeavor. In more than one place Tracy has admitted to being unable to see what the future may bring as one proceeds through the research program as proposed in his major works.¹⁰⁶ In other places he has confessed to having made corrections and even contradictions to his earlier positions.¹⁰⁷ One must appreciate this kind of openness, and this is certainly consistent with his revisionist approach, which may be boiled down to a series of imperatives: be public in character, be open to revision, be faithful to common human experience and the Christian tradition as dual theological sources, and be attentive to the criteria for meaning, meaningfulness, and truth in thinking theologically. Whether such a methodology arises (negatively) out of a reaction against increasing withdrawal of religion to the private domain, or (positively) as an attempt to confirm the place of religion in

¹⁰³ *AI*, 326.

¹⁰⁴ *AI*, 282, also developed in "Grace and the Search for the Human: The Sense of the Uncanny," *Proceedings of the 34th Annual Convention, Atlanta, Georgia, June 13-16, 1979*, by the Catholic Theological Society of America, ed. Luke Salm, 64-77.

¹⁰⁵ *AI*, 329-32.

¹⁰⁶ E.g., *Dialogue with the Other*, 93f.

¹⁰⁷ See, for example, the preface to the 1996 reissue of *BRO*.

the public domain (now that the demise of logical positivism has been announced), it is, as Tracy puts it, "a response to a crisis of theological self-understanding" in face of the present condition of radical pluralism. As such, it is yet another stage in the age-old quest for the Christian theologian to articulate his faith/belief in a new situation. Tracy himself acknowledges the debt of his revisionist theology to formulations of the classical liberal task made in the nineteenth century.¹⁰⁸ Whether the effort succeeds will largely depend on both the formulation and the substance of the theology so formulated. It is obvious that the following comments do not pretend to do justice to the richness and complexity of Tracy's program. They do, however, reflect a concern from an evangelical perspective of how such a program may impact Christian tradition. In other words, with all due respect given to contemporary thought patterns and the present pluralistic situation, Tracy's foundationalism of experience and his re-visioning of tradition (Catholic tradition, in his case) do seem fundamentally arbitrary in what he retains and what he revises.

As complex and nuanced as Tracy's revisionist model seems, the imperatives captured above are reducible to a primary commitment to correlate the Christian faith with contemporary human experience. The catchwords for Tracy regarding religion are "situation" and "tradition," and it was the responsibility of the pastor, and the theologian(s) who taught him, to minimize the cognitive dissonance between the two. This is the starting point of Tracy's theological enterprise. His method is that of mutually critical correlation between situation and tradition. However, both the methodology and the substance of Tracy's arguments raise serious questions for the evangelical Christian.

To begin with, it is not clear how the postmodern consciousness and the Bible (as a Christian classic) can be both authoritative and normative at the same time and yet mutually critical of each other. The conflict is lessened, but not eliminated, if one takes the postmodern consciousness as normative in searching through the plurality of interpretations of Scripture and deciding the acceptability of each according to its own norms. That is, if the two function normatively in different spheres. But Tracy's position allows, indeed welcomes, interpretations of the Bible from both non-Christian theistic and atheistic traditions alike, including skeptics like Marx, Freud, Nietzsche, and

¹⁰⁸ *BRO*, 33.

Darwin. Such interpretations are not simply gratuitous events that occur without our being able to control the outcome. As dialogue partners they are the sources for both revision of the current tradition and retrieval from an earlier, perhaps repressed tradition.¹⁰⁹ Without clarifying how situation and tradition can both be normative in this sense without at least compromising one of them, the framework can only generate exercises of futility at best: the *Other* remains both unrecognized and unperturbed.¹¹⁰ At worst such a dialogical strategy may lead to an unsightly self-destruction, when commitment to the *Other* negates the core of the "home" tradition.¹¹¹ Despite his foundationalism, it is questionable, for example, how his commitment to an analysis of the basic experience of existence could safeguard the Christian tradition in face of the *Other*.¹¹² The question is not one of withdrawal into fideism, for Tracy explicitly rejects such an option.

In practice, however, Tracy minimizes the conflict by adopting the Roman Catholic notion of tradition and focuses on the "event and person of Jesus Christ" as the classic rather than the Scriptures. By saying that "I believe in Jesus Christ with the apostles" Tracy effectively reduces the normativeness of the Scriptures to one of witness. The function of this normativeness is then to allow the door to be opened by the key of a commitment to pluralism (the postmodern consciousness) to a variety of contemporary witnesses. That is, the Scriptures are normative as far as they are the response of the *early* church. They set up an example by

¹⁰⁹ *Dialogue with the Other*, 98.

¹¹⁰ Tracy's approach to inter-religious dialogue exhibits the same kind of tension. Tracy recognizes the necessity to enter the dialogue as a Christian theologian. At the same time, the Christian theologian is to have a "willingness to risk all in the questioning and inquiry that constitutes the dialogue itself" (*Dialogue with the Other*, 104).

¹¹¹ This seems to be Tracy's verdict of radical theology, represented by figures like van Buren, Hamilton, and Altizer, when he concludes against their positions: "can one really continue the enterprise of Christian theology if there is no meaningful way to affirm the reality of God" (*BRO*, 32).

¹¹² Although the notion of the *Other* is most prominent as an aspect of the praxis of Tracy's pluralistic approach *vis-à-vis* inter-religious dialogue, it is also inherent in the "public" that the theologian attempts to function as part of its essence. Tracy's portrait of the common experience of the human may seem a seamless continuity in its temporal development, ending up in a polycentric culture, but as he himself would readily admit, the problem of the *Other* makes its appearance fundamentally at the individual level. Thus Christians in a polycentric culture are better equipped to handle the otherness of, say, Buddhism, than Tracy himself (*Dialogue with the Other*, 94). The fundamental issue of what is normative, however, remains unresolved.

which all subsequent generations must emulate, namely, a response to the Christ event is necessary, in their own fashions. Tradition is retained, but domesticated by situation. More than one critic has questioned Tracy whether it would make any difference to his systematics if Jesus actually died or that he actually resurrected.¹¹³ Tracy does not consider it necessary to relate the subjective event in the life of the disciples to the objective event in Jesus' life (i.e., his death and resurrection). But as Anthony Flew remarks, the Christian belief that God is love dies "the death of a thousand qualifications" if God does nothing to halt human suffering (i.e., if historically nothing has happened). The ahistorical nature of Tracy's framework lends to the suspicion that Tracy's theology is only Christian by fiat (or alternately, by birth). At best Tracy may be risking docetism. His willingness to mix in non-Christian and atheistic insights makes one wonder just how the Christ event can still function as a normative or critical role in the end.

The dominance of situation over tradition also raises another criticism: why is one obligated to pledge loyalty to the present methods and knowledge of the field in question (the so-called new scientific morality)?¹¹⁴ Tracy does not address the question of why a Christian theologian should give ultimate allegiance to a set of methodological procedures rather than, say, to God, or to the fundamental truths of Christianity, or the Scriptures, besides the fact that the latter option is inextricably wedded to the orthodox model in his typology of Christian theology, an approach which he rejects summarily.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ See Fisher Humphreys, "The Most Dangerous Conversation: A Review Article," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 10 (1983): 71; and William M. Shea, "Review Symposium," *Horizons* 8 (1981): 318.

¹¹⁴ This is the criticism of Alvin Plantinga in "Advice to Christian Philosophers," *Faith and Philosophy* 1 (1984): 263.

¹¹⁵ Tracy might of course respond that the term "God" carries little content outside of a given historical situatedness, and what one may call "fundamental Christian truths" are precisely that which demand reformulation within his scheme of mutually critical correlation to ensure meaning-survival in the public arena (see for example, his treatment of the aspects of classical Christian theism in *BRO*, 175-87). However, this is conceding too much, both to the role of the public as the arena of meaning- and truth-adjudication, and to the post-modern consciousness regarding its resources to transcend its own trappings. Regarding the "inappropriateness" of the classical formulation of divine impassability/immutability mentioned above, Tracy is far too unnuanced in his reading of the classical doctors, driven presumably by an attraction to process theism. A much more sympathetic and accurate reading of the classical texts may be found in Thomas Oden's *The Living God, Systematic Theology: Volume One* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1987), 110-14.

The ahistorical nature of Tracy's framework is evidenced in his admission of the Saussurian arbitrariness of the signifier to the signified and the Gadamerian detachment of the text from the author. That there is a plurality of interpretations associated with the reading of any given text should not be taken to imply that a plurality of interpretation must be the result of reading. Simply because something is true as having factually occurred does not mean that it must also be true as prescriptively normative. All texts pass beyond their authors, but only authors are responsible for their texts, and as such the conversation remains with the author, not simply the text. The orthodox doctrine of inspiration of the Christian Scripture guarantees the normativeness of the Bible through its divine authorship and its corollary, its historicity. Tracy's reading of the Jewish and Christian understanding of their scriptures as witness to revelation rather than revelation itself is simply a misreading that will not stand up to historical examinations. While some version of inspiration theory may be retained in Tracy's "second" public via his formulation of systematic theology, it is difficult to see how biblical inspiration can survive in the "first" public.¹¹⁶

Tracy's inclusive Christology is based on his idea of the classic. But more importantly it is based on his idea of "canons within a canon," and Tracy's own canon excludes passages like John 14:6 or 1 Timothy 2:5.¹¹⁷ He chides fundamentalist and evangelical versions of Christology as exclusivist when he himself is not consistent in reading the Christian classic. Perhaps this is one reason why Tracy's notion of classic remains ambiguous. Critics have pointed out that Tracy's classic could be a text, "the event person of Jesus Christ," or simply a symbol. It is not clear how one can interpret a text the same way as one can interpret "the event and person of Jesus Christ," or a symbol. But such ambiguity does allow Tracy to ignore some of the central themes of the Scriptures and only discuss those relevant to his program. The same is true with his understanding of the reality of God. For Tracy, "the only God there is is the God who is Love."¹¹⁸ While love is recognizably a major (some would

¹¹⁶ Although not widely discussed due to a widespread concern for the loss of "publicity" of the theological enterprise, Tracy's idea of the three "publics" suffers from at least some degree of incoherence due to the simultaneous introduction of the idea of "classic." See Owen C. Thomas, "Public Theology and Counter-Public Spheres," *Harvard Theological Review* 85 (1992): 456-57.

¹¹⁷ *AI*, 248-51.

¹¹⁸ *AI*, 431 *et passim*.

perhaps argue "the major") biblical focus on the essence of God, the idea cannot be allowed to monopolize Christian theological understanding. Such a view simply short-circuits the multifaceted glory of the Divine as it is expressed in the Bible.

Finally, one must be puzzled by a lack of consideration of soteriology in Tracy's Christology. The cross is primarily a symbol of negation for Tracy, transformed by resurrection into a possibility of trust that life is indeed worth living. However, the logical connection between the two is missing, and it is not clear what relevance the death and resurrection of Jesus have to the individual other than that they could serve as an invitation for emulating the way of life of Jesus, which is in fact what Tracy argues for. This is surely a lame excuse for becoming a Christian. Indeed this is the whole problem with Tracy's program. There is no more reason to be a Christian than, say, to be a Buddhist. The postmodern consciousness dictates how one should understand one's faith, not the other way around. In the end all is one and one is all. Or in Tracy's own words, "Perhaps, as the Buddhist suggests, we are neither the same nor other, but not-two."¹¹⁹ It is comments like this that led some of his critics to dismiss his program as being inadequate despite its appearances and promises.¹²⁰

When it comes to theologizing, thoughtful Christians since the inception of Christianity have never stopped dealing with the issue of the rationality of the Christian message relative to the cultural *ethos* and *logos* at large. Both assimilation of contemporary learning to Christian truth and reinterpretation of Christianity through secular grids are nothing new. What the crisis of authority was to the fundamentalist-modernist controversy of the 1920s has returned with an even greater vengeance in the sixties and seventies with the crisis of foundations when theology was faced with the brute fact of pluralism. The "liberals" and "modernists" at the beginning of the century were typed according to the relative priority of their methodological starting point.¹²¹ A similar typology was offered for the pluralists of this later period. This latest round, however,

¹¹⁹ *Dialogue with the Other*, 94.

¹²⁰ See D.A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 82.

¹²¹ That is, according to their starting point in revelation (evangelical liberals) or in science (modernist liberals). See Martin Marty, *Modern American Religion, Volume 1: The Irony of It All, 1893-1919* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 13-80.

is not about authority, but about foundations. A typology of the theologians of plurality moves between the radical (a)theologians like Altizer who regard the traditional understanding of the Christian God as standing in the way of the liberation of the authentic conscience of the illusionless, through revisionist theologians like Tracy to whom the forces of the ebb and flow of human experience are strong enough to mold God in its own image, to communitarians like the Yale school theologians whose theological response to the pluralistic situation is to name its own community. Evangelical responses are of course not lacking.¹²² They are, however, quite scattered and on the whole a-systemic.¹²³ Moreover, they are a bit slow in coming. Presumably their traditional adherence to some version of strong foundationalism on the one hand and a fideistic

¹²² For example, see Francis J. Beckwith, *Relativism: Feet Firmly Planted in Mid Air* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996); David Dockery ed., *The Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement* (Wheaton: Victor, 1995); Gary Dorrien, *The Remaking of Evangelical Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998); Millard J. Erickson, *Postmodernizing the Faith: Evangelical Responses to the Challenge of Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998); Stanley Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996); Roger Lundin, *The Culture of Interpretation: The Christian Faith and the Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993); Alister McGrath, *A Passion for Truth: The Intellectual Coherence of Evangelism* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996); Nancey Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1996); Thomas Oden, *After Modernity ... What? Agenda for Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990); Anthony C. Thiselton, *Interpreting God and the Post Modern Self* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995); David Wells, *Losing Our Virtue: Why the Church Must Recover Its Moral Vision* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); and Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999); etc. Note the ubiquitous presence of the postmodern-root in the titles.

¹²³ Three recent works buckle the trend. They are deliberate and strategic, aimed as engaging the post-modernist mindset at where it matters most to the evangelical Christian. D. A. Carson's work *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* is one of the most articulate statements to date on pluralism as a systemic phenomenon. In the area of hermeneutics and exegesis, Kevin J. Vanhoozer launches a sustained and penetrating punch at the increasingly relativizing practice of postmodern exegesis and its hermeneutical girding in *Is There a Meaning in This Text?: The Bible, The Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998). The third example comes from the area of systematic theology, which sorely needs a spokesperson. Thomas C. Oden's three-volume project (*The Living God, Systematic Theology: Volume One; The Word of Life, Systematic Theology: Volume Two; Life in the Spirit, Systematic Theology: Volume Three* [San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1987], 92, 94) is as audacious as it is well-conceived. By refusing to defer to the colonization of euphemistic language evident in much of the "contemporary theology" and insisting on "letting tested Christian language speak for itself in its own directly powerful way to modern minds," Oden has, in his own "post-modern" fashion, done more to effect retrieval of the Christian tradition than the consciously methodological hermeneutics of retrieval.

tendency when it comes to dealing with experience on the other hand encourage a rather swift dismissal of pluralism when they first became aware of it in this century. Historically the proximity of the fundamentalist-modernist debate also seems to have caused a reprieve of sorts in the cultural sensitivity among Evangelicals, at least on the North American scene. This is no longer the case, however. In the author's own context as a Chinese biblical theologian, no such reprieve is necessary (except perhaps in the collective memory of the vocation as inherited from the West). Still, historically, the East's theological inheritance from the West has meant a rather subtle undercurrent, at least among some theologians, to spin out of the Western hegemony instituted over the last two millennia. Faced with the fact of global pluralism, this ironically sometimes takes the form of indiscriminant utilization of Western techniques of criticism (social, literary, philosophical, or otherwise) upon a theological structure viewed as stable, and thus unwieldy and liable to mismatches in this particularized world. What is needed, in the East no less than in the West, is the ability to perform incisive and coherent assessments of the situation based upon a sound grasp of the biblical truth (or message, or plotline, as one would have it). The task in the East is even more daunting, given an already polycentric community where the Christian is at the same time the beneficiary of multiple heritages (ethnic, national, tribal, etc., in addition to the religious).¹²⁴ The challenge cannot be ignored. One may not want to adopt Tracy's particular blend of pluralism with its experiential-hermeneutical constructs, but one has to admire Tracy's spirit in his relentless forging ahead with the task at hand.

For the theologians in the Third World in general and for Chinese theologians in particular, the premise and method of Tracy's theology have allowed us another important glimpse into a related issue in the task of theologizing. Theological discourse had long been a significant component of social discourse in the West. Its steady decline from the public arena in the last one-and-a-half century or so and its struggle to regain entry has been a substantial shock for those who took its social role as a matter of course. In fact, institutional, or organized religion does continue to have a crucial role, often in the form of social praxis. It is participation in the discourse that has been dis-barred. In this sense the task before the theologians in the West and those in the East may be

¹²⁴ To put it glibly, the denominational flag does not always fly comfortably next to the national flag. Sometimes they do not fly together at all.

said to share at least a common stake, the former of re-constituting the theological substance of public discourse, the latter of amending the nature of public discourse. This already formidable task is rapidly complicated by the fact that more and more around the world, religion is not simply relegated to the private domain, but regarded as a nuisance in public life, a detriment to tolerance, and as a result, to harmonious social functioning.¹²⁵ For both the West and the East, in the words of Mark Noll, "The eon between the first coming of Christ to the world and the future second coming has never been the object of systematic evangelical attention. For evangelical commentary on public life there has been no Thomas Aquinas ... and no felt need for such."¹²⁶ One may not agree with the hermeneutical epistemology of Tracy, but the theologian will certainly be liable to the charge of professional negligence by burying his talents if he continues to be oblivious to public context of his vocation. We are not here simply talking about the construction of an evangelical philosophy of public engagement for the common good. We are also talking about raising among ourselves a generation of apologists, not construed in the narrower context of evangelism, but in the wider arena of a presentation and defense of the faith to the intellectual culture at large.¹²⁷

To end where one starts off, one cannot but be reminded of the task both fascinating and tremendous facing the theologian when reading Tracy.¹²⁸ This is even more so when one considers the collective responsibility entrusted to a seminary such as the ABS. In his own way, Dr. James Cheung has both preserved the tradition handed down to him and addressed the ever-changing situation that we find ourselves in today.

¹²⁵ George Van Pelt Campbell, "Religion and Culture: Challenges and Prospects in the Next Generation," *JETS* 43/2 (2000): 294.

¹²⁶ Mark A. Noll, "The Scandal of Evangelical Political Reflection," in *Being Christian Today: An American Conversation*, eds. Richard John Neuhaus and George Weigel (Washington, DC: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1992), 70.

¹²⁷ Examples are not lacking throughout Christian history of a concerted effort of this type, but the second-century apologists present an especially cogent exemplar of what can and is to be done in a situation where Christians are a minority and their voice marginalized. See Gerald Bray, "Explaining Christianity to Pagans: The Second-Century Apologists," in *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age: Theological Essays on Culture and Religion*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 9-25.

¹²⁸ Tracy's favorite phrase, *fascinans et tremendum*, when dealing with inter-religious dialogue.

It is our hope that, by God's will and in His grace, we will all be around to fight the good fight and push the task a bit further to its completion for another day.

ABSTRACT

The theology of David Tracy is, in his own words, "a response to a crisis of theological self-understanding." As such he is particularly attentive to both the contemporary situation which the theologian finds himself in, and the tradition out of which the theologian comes. The two must be correlated in a mutually critical fashion in order to respond to the present pluralistic situation. Tracy's eclecticism may be seen as a result of his efforts to track down such a correlation. However, it is not clear if his position can be stably presented, especially when the first two publics in his discourse actually belong to two separate language communities. The rationality of one would inevitably tend to overrun the other in the process, as is evident when Tracy puts forth his revisionist interpretation of the central tenets of Christianity. Tracy's linguistic garb may look the same as in traditional Christianity (in his case, Catholicism), but the substance has been subtly transmuted to provide adequacy for his first public. Tracy's approach is hermeneutical, but the key to his hermeneutical enterprise, namely experience, is notoriously inadequate as a guide through the maze of contemporary pluralism. This may be seen in aspects of his inter-religious dialogue with Buddhism. Despite Tracy's efforts and the promises of his program, evangelicalism must look elsewhere for a grounding of its interaction in and with the public.

撮 要

按照特雷西自己的說法，他的神學是「對現今神學無所適從的危機的回應」，因此他特別著重神學工作者所面對的現代處境和那孕育著他的神學傳統。特雷西認為二者必須透過相互的批判過程關連一起，以面對現今的多元觀，而特氏方法論的雜混兼容，亦可被視為要推敲出這個關連的方法之一。即使如此，這種關連能否落實本身仍是一個疑問，尤其是特氏書中所指的頭兩個「公眾」，根本是兩個互不隸屬的語言群體。在相互的批判過程中，其中一方往往無可避免地攻佔了另一方的空間。基督教的一些中心觀念在特氏的「重觀主義」下正正就產生了這種現象：語言表象和傳統基督教的語言（於特氏是指天主教）彷彿並無二致，但實質內涵卻被「第一公眾」的理念要求所取締改變。特氏以詮釋作為其方法論的進路，但他以經驗作為這詮釋工程的中心環節，面對當前多元化的現實迷宮，卻又顯得力不從心。這一點在其耶佛對話的嘗試之中可見一斑。特氏的神學工作及其努力都是有目可睹的，惟可惜並無法為福音派提供一個可行的「公眾」理論基礎。