David Tracy's Notion of Theology as Public Discourse[1]

By James O. Englert

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the most extraordinary theological voices which have emerged in the past twenty years is surely that of David Tracy, of the University of Chicago Divinity School. From his early work interpreting the methodological achievement of Bernard Lonergan to his own more recent methodological proposals, there is evident in Tracy's work a manifest concern for not only contemporary difficulties in religious reflection but for that wider cultural crisis which regards the possibilities of any and all rational reflection.

Among his central achievements has been grasping the dialectical relationships and differences among various movements of thought in modernity. This has enabled him to recognize the issues that are truly foundational for those relationships and differences, and to suggest possible methodological considerations that would enable the dialectic of positions to be one of creative conversation rather than one of "repressive tolerance" or destructive contentiousness.

In *Blessed Rage for Order*, he attempted to develop criteria for interpretation of the Christian tradition and also for the interpretation of common human experience that would enable the correlation of these interpretations. The fundamental effort was to disclose aspects of both academic inquiry and everyday living which open themselves to an authentically religious dimension which raises questions that might find a responsive chord in the meanings available in an explicitly religious tradition. *The Analogical Imagination* sought to expand the nature of what would be accepted as public reason to include "classical" events, persons, and texts which have formed a major tradition. The systematic task is the interpretation of such classics and the delineation of the disclosive and transformative possibilities they offer for the community whose imagination and commitments have been formed by that tradition. In

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reference to his current work, Tracy has indicated that he is seeking to extend the notion of classical religious traditions to investigate the possibilities for cognitive disclosure and practical transformation which such traditions can offer as genuinely public possibilities for the wider society that does not explicitly share any prior commitments to the traditions.[2]

The intent of the present essay is not to engage in systematic consideration of the full range of Tracy's methodological proposals. Such a task would be not only beyond the scope of a limited essay such as this, but also beyond the author's competence as well. The intent, rather, is to engage in a more restricted consideration of certain key themes which consistently emerge in Tracy's writings; the proximate motivation of such consideration is the hope of preparing for a serious reading of what Tracy has indicated will be a work on "practical theology."

The procedure which has been followed in this is to depend on the background of a prior reading of *Blessed Rage for Order* and *The Analogical Imagination*, but to focus on several essays[3] in which Tracy has explicitly considered themes, issues, and questions which seem directly related to the "practical" dimension of theology and which one would expect to form the foreground of his forthcoming volume.

2. THEOLOGY AS PUBLIC DISCOURSE

2.1 Privatizing Trends and Public Tasks

An evident concern in much of David Tracy's writing – shared with political/liberation theologians[4] and other critics of contemporary culture – is the fact of trends towards the privatization of human life, evidenced in the marginalization of religion, morality, art, and, in general, culture. As a theologian, his concern is specifically with the tendency for religion to be

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2 Tracy's major works are: *The Achievement of Bernard Lonergan* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970); *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975); *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1981).

3 The articles consulted in preparing the present essay are listed below in "Works Consulted," pp. 31-32.

4 Tracy frequently refers to this theme in the writings of Johann Baptist Metz, especially *Faith in History and Society* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1980), pp. 34-36.

reduced to being "a purely private option with merely private effects."[5] His contention is that this retreat of religion into the merely private sphere of personal taste and preference is disastrous not simply for religion itself but also for cultural, indeed human, life.

The danger to culture is that with the privatization of religion there also tends to emerge the marginalization of all human intensity,[6] so that all experiences of human depth are suspect and withdrawn from any possibility of significantly impacting social and cultural life. There results the referent of T.S. Eliot's evocation of our contemporary "wasteland"[7] and of Bernard Lonergan's analysis of "the social surd."[8]

> With thinking, art, religion, and action, indeed, all the classics, driven from the public forum, each may now retire into the sheltered privacy of a pure autonomy and hope that the social engineers will treat us kindly.[9]

Indeed, the Enlightenment value of "autonomy" has itself become problematic. What was once an authentic liberation of human subjectivity from monolithic, repressive traditions, has itself become a fundamental disvalue insofar as its achievement has promoted withdrawal from the authentic values of tradition and community.[10] The dialectic of Enlightenment necessitates recognition that any attempt at pure autonomy results in a social situation as inhibitive of

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5 "Defending the Public Character of Theology," *The Christian Century* 98 (April 1, 1981), p. 350. It is especially noteworthy that this concern is expressed here at the very beginning of what is a brief autobiographical-theological reflection on "how my mind has changed."

6 "Theological Pluralism and Analogy," *Thought* 54 (March, 1979), p. 34. The importance for Tracy of this notion of intensity will be considered with regard to his understanding of the process through which an authentic "classic" is produced.

7 "Grace and the Search for the Human: The Sense of the Uncanny," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 34 (1979), p. 67. Tracy refers to Eliot's "Wasteland" and Picasso's "Guernica" as having "evoked the bleak and frightening image of an ever more fragmented, more privatized self, struggling for an ever elusive authenticity."

8 Cf., e.g., *The Achievement of Bernard Lonergan*, pp. 118-119. Lonergan's treatment of "the social surd" is found in *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1957), pp. 229-232, 628-629, and 689-690. Tracy refers to Lonergan's "reflections on method and historical consciousness" as especially significant "formative influences" on his own thinking; cf. "Defending the Public Character of Theology," p. 351. Along with other notable influences, this reflects Tracy's ongoing concern to affirm the traditional Catholic position on the viability of reason in guiding theological understanding and human living.

9 "The Public Character of Systematic Theology," *Theology Digest* 26/4 (Winter, 1978), pp. 409-410.

10 *Ibid*., p. 403.

human liberation as were the repressive traditions against which Enlightenment battles were fought.

There results the marginalization not only of religious and moral traditions, but of the tradition of reason itself. Strictly positivist and instrumentalist notions of reason become dominant, and the realm of what is considered public "becomes more and more scientized and technicized."[11] Reasonable argument itself about rationally valuable goals and ends is reduced to utilitarian consideration of means, precisely insofar as a tradition of shared norms for the exercise of substantive reason fragments and is disallowed as authentically "public discourse." Reason itself threatens to exit from the public realm; "but the exit of reason is not the exit of power."[12]

Thus, modernity itself has become ambiguous, intrinsically embodying disvalues with its undeniably real values. Its fundamental ambiguity is evident in what Tracy terms 'totalizing' thinking,[13] in which economic and technological forces become so dominant and all-encompassing that they appear to be beyond human control. Their 'reality' appears so massive as to render individuals and communities impotent in the face of their overwhelming 'power.'

If substantive reason despairs of having truly public impact, so too does religion. And this is Tracy's concern: "the challenge of the Christian Gospel" must not be utterly isolated from the ambiguity of contemporary social life.[14] The dominance of totalizing thinking must be dialectically met with counter-trends of communities and traditions which have not despaired of the genuine possibilities of reason and value for transforming the contemporary situation. May not the Gospel be proclaimed as revealing the real vulnerability of what presents itself as overwhelming social 'reality' and revealing as well the possibility-as-gift of human persons and communities transcending their impotence and despair in the face of that 'reality?'

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11 "Religion and Human Rights in the Public Realm," *Daedalus* 112/4 (Fall, 1983), p. 240.

12 *Ibid*., 239.

13 "Correlation Between Theology and Catholic Charities," *Social Thought* (Winter, 1985), p. 26.

14 "The Role of Theology in Public Life: Some Reflections," *Word and World* 4 (Summer, 1984), p. 267.

Tracy insists that this question is first raised on strictly theological grounds, insofar as the universality of divine Reality ultimately impels every theology to attempt truly public speech.[15] To withdraw to some private "reservation of the spirit" is to engage in a misconstrual of the fundamental Reality of God; for if divine Reality is truly universal/absolute, then any discourse about that Reality must attempt to be speech-about and –to all dimensions of existence. In short, such discourse must be genuinely public; if Christian thinkers would make claims to universal meaning and truth – which the universality of divine Reality would seem to demand – then it follows that they must announce that meaning and truth in a manner that makes it available to a public wider than the church. Indeed, true *theo*logy could be restricted to the church only if divine Reality could be so restricted. But if the claim that God is restricted to nothing is recognized as fundamental to Christian faith, then theology must dare to speak of all reality – persons, history, society, self, all – in relationship to the Whole of Reality. And theological discourse subsequent to such recognition will face the demand that it "speak in a manner that can be disclosive and transformative for any intelligent, reasonable, and responsible human being."[16] Accordingly, on strictly theological grounds it must be recognized that the retreat of religion to the purely private sphere of personal preference is radically destructive of Christian faith.

Consistent with Tracy's insistence on truly public discourse, however, this argument is not merely presented as an *a priori* theological position arising necessarily from the particularity of Christian revelation. Rather, the contention is that religious questions are questions which any reflective human being can ask. Tracy refers to the phenomenon of limit-experience and limit-question which he has analyzed at length in *Blessed Rage for Order*.[17] Questions of the

15 "Defending the Public Character of Theology," pp. 353-354; "The Role of Theology in Public Life: Some Reflections," pp. 231-233; and "Theological Classics in Contemporary Theology," *Theology Digest* 25/4 (Winter, 1977), pp. 347-348.

16 "Defending the Public Character of Theology, p. 351. The adjectival triptych "intelligent, reasonable, and responsible,' which recurs throughout Tracy's essays, is indicative of the considerable and continuing influence of Lonergan on his thought; the three terms stem from Lonergan's delineation of intelligent (understanding," rational (judgment), and existential (decision) consciousness as constitutive of human subjectivity. Cf. also, "Theological Classics in Contemporary Theology," p. 348.

17 Tracy's analysis of limit-questions and limit-experiences is found in chapter five of *Blessed Rage for Order*, pp. 92-109.

Whole are "questions that will not down," and cannot be answered within the parameters of instrumentalized reason. They are questions which emerge both from "ecstatic" experiences of creativity, fundamental trust, friendship, and solidarity, and from "boundary" experiences of anxiety, mortality, suffering, and oppression. Such experiences break the routines of everyday existence and the massive factuality of social order; from them questions emerge as to the meaning and worthwhileness of personal and social existence. And in disclosing limits-to present 'reality,' these questions raise the possibility of there being a limit-of that 'reality' which transcends it, and the further possibility that engagement with this transcending limit-of might enable real transformation of 'reality' now recognized as limited.

A key development in Tracy's thinking in this regard is found in his acknowledgment that his earlier analysis had been largely confined to a consideration of those limit-situations and –questions "that are likely to become the focus of the reflections of a twentieth-century, educated, middle-class Euro-American."[18] His subsequent reflections are much more attentive to the lived conditions of all oppressed persons and middle-class "'contrast'-experiences" as boundary-experiences which enable recognition of the limit-character of our social situations. But also the experience of a positive demand for justice can be disclosive of transformative possibilities experienced as not-from-ourselves.

These are, Tracy insists, genuinely religious questions; but they are also questions that any reflective human being can ask. They are questions on the Whole, and, as such, are questions worthy of any free mind. They are genuinely theological questions; and yet, he ironically insists, they are questions far 'too important to be left to theologians."[19] The initial theological task is to help formulate the questions. In principle, they are available to any person; in fact, the marginalization of intensity, the privatization of art, and the decline of a tradition of substantive reason effectively restrict the very emergence of these questions. And

> since we do not receive answers to questions we never asked, it is important for any culture to find ever more helpful ways to formulate the peculiar kinds of questions and experiences to

18 "Christian Faith and Radical Equality," *Theology Today* 34 (January, 1978), p. 373.

19 "Correlation Between Theology and Catholic Charities," p. 24.

> which religions typically appeal. This is especially the case in a culture where religion can become privatized and thought to be a matter of merely personal preference, with no public stand.[20]

To the extent that it resists privatizing trends, theology is thus able to engage in the public task of keeping limit-questions alive, especially on behalf of people who are suffering and oppressed. It raises questions about the limits of every situation, and in doing so opens the possibilities for transcendence beyond those limits. This is a truly public task in that it promotes not only the authentic faith of believers, but also the authentic humanity of all persons.

2.2 Methodological Considerations

Initially, then, the public character of theology follows both from the absoluteness of divine Reality, and from the fact that the fundamental questions of theology are fundamental to all persons. As will be seen, Tracy certainly holds that the public task of theology extends beyond the raising of questions to making a contribution toward answering those questions; but the emergence of the questions precisely as common human questions is the foundation upon which religious/theological contributions to public conversation rests. Accordingly, there arises the methodological issue as to how theology can assist in the emergence of fundamental human questions and make a contribution toward answering those questions.

David Tracy's proposal is a method of correlation, in which theology can be described as

> the attempt to establish, in both theory and practice, mutually critical correlations between two sets of interpretation: an interpretation of the Christian tradition and an interpretation of contemporary experience.[21]

A basic element of this method is recognition of "tradition" as a possibly enriching, rather than necessarily repressive, reality. Any person who realizes the radical finitude of her/his experience, understanding, and reflection, knows the potential enrichment made possible by

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20 *Ibid*., p. 25.

21 "The Role of Theology in Public Life: Some Reflections," p. 235. Tracy's revisionist method of correlation is presented in *Blessed Rage For Order*, pp. 64-81. In "Particular Questions Within General Consensus," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 17 (Winter, 1980), p. 34, Tracy indicates that he has come to prefer the expression "mutually critical correlations" to more clearly express the dialectical character of the method than had been evident in his earlier formulation.

enculturation into a major tradition.[22] Questions that would not have arisen for me – because, e.g., of the restricted range of my personal experience and/or the degree to which my imagination is conditioned or structured by social patterns – are made possible as real questions for me because of my being formed by a tradition which itself has been shaped by a much broader range of experience and a more pluralistic interplay of divergent imaginations. Symbols, stories, and rituals embodying the imagination and insight of other persons at other places and times may allow the occurrence of the event of insight in my mind at this time and place, in a manner that would not have been possible on the basis of purely contemporary resources.

In this sense, Christianity is a tradition. Its foundational experiences were expressed in stories, texts, rituals, doctrines, institutions, and human lives. For any person formed in the tradition, these expressions exist as sheer fact; yet they are a fact standing in continual need of interpretation and reinterpretation. A text may make possible a question, but only if that question is raised in a human mind. And because of new experiences and a new situation which stand ever in the foreground of that mind, the question – however traditional – is a new question. Further, to the extent that insight emerging from the question is expressed in human action or in a new text, that itself can become part of the tradition, which itself will stand in need of reinterpretation by other persons at other places and times.

Theology does not invent "the Christian fact," but it does interpret it. Thus, Tracy insists, mere repetition of past formulations (*tradita*) does not constitute theology. Demanded, rather, is real concentration on the subject matter of the tradition's texts, symbols, and rituals, which involves "allowing the question to take over."[23] Only then can understanding truly occur as event; and only insofar as this event occurs is the tradition a living, contemporary reality (*traditio*). Then not only new ways of imagining and understanding, but new ways of living become possible. In that sense, the past is mediated in the present in a manner which contributes to shaping the future.

22 Tracy frequently refers to Hans-Georg Gadamer's insistence that belonging to a tradition is unavoidable, given the intrinsic historicity of our constitution as human subjects.

23 "The Public Character of Systematic Theology," p. 404.

To be a Christian theologian is to stand within the Christian tradition, affirming that there are resources given within this tradition which are of inestimable value for the project – personal and communal – of living human life. But those resources must be appropriated by persons and communities, and for this appropriation there are needed criteria for judging the fidelity of one's interpretation; these would be criteria which could assist in making the determination of whether one has truly 'heard' the tradition's resources. A first task of what Tracy delineates as "fundamental theology" is the development of such criteria for determining the appropriateness of contemporary Christianity to the expressions of meaning which have shaped the tradition.

The further task stems from the realization that, as interpreter, I myself enter into every interpretation. Every interpretation I venture is a mediation of the tradition in the context of my own socialization and my own accumulated experiences, insights, and judgments; it is, thus, a correlation of the tradition's meaning with contemporary experience. But that mediation or correlation happens only in persons who are situated in personal and social histories; this 'situation' influences both the questions we ask and the answers we hear. Our own hopes and sufferings, insights and blindspots enter into our interpretations of Christian meaning. And it is this fact that demands a constant dialectic between the tradition and contemporary experience. Contemporary insights and sensitivities can both retrieve lost dimensions of the tradition and reverse distortions that have emerged in the tradition's history. But contemporary oversights can also create their own distortions, which conversation with the texts, events, and persons of the tradition may be able to reveal and reverse.

But for this correlation to be truly dialectical, or "mutually critical," it is essential that the theologian attempt to recognize both the genuine insights and the distorting oversights of her/his contemporary situation. This demands a critical understanding of that situation, which is possible only through facility with the methods of the social sciences. Criteria are needed for understanding and evaluating the situation which enters into our interpretation of the tradition. These criteria can be developed only through collaboration with such disciplines as sociology,

psychology, economic and political theory.[24] In other words, in order to engage in truly dialectical correlation, theology must enter the public realm. And in doing so, it makes use of the authentic achievements of modernity in interpreting the tradition; but those very interpretations, possible only because of modernity, can also give rise to questions, insights, and judgments critical of modernity. In both directions, theology is engaged in public discourse.

In developing these criteria of relative adequacy, Tracy argues, theology must be in dialogue with three publics: the academy, the church, and the wider society. He insists that "any genuine theological proposal that really means what it says about God implicitly addresses all three publics."[25] And yet the specific 'location' of any particular theologian will generally relate her/him most directly to one of the three publics. This leads to a delineation of three related but distinct theological disciplines: fundamental, systematic, and practical.

There are two related insights in this delineation. The first stems from the sociology of knowledge, which has convincingly demonstrated that the social location of any thinker radically affects her/his thinking. A theologian must be critically attentive to the manners in which her/his academic, ecclesiastical, and social location has formed the imaginative foreground operative in any and all interpretation. Such critical attention may reveal both authentic insights/questions/commitments which can be consciously carried into one's interpretation, and also distorted perceptions which, if not recognized and acknowledged, would render any interpretation simply an affirmation of academic/ecclesiastical/social 'reality' as it has imposed itself on contemporary consciousness. Such recognition of the inevitably ambiguous character of the theologian's *locus* is essential if the theological task is to be exercised critically.

Secondly, if theology is to offer disclosive and transformative possibilities, it must do so in a manner which truly makes those possibilities available to the public being addressed. One

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24 "The Role of Theology in Public Life: Some Reflections," p. 237. Elsewhere, Tracy contends that "a 'sociological imagination' is slowly transforming all theologies;" cf. Defending the Public Character of Theology," p. 35.

25 "Defending the Public Character of Theology," p. 351. The three theological disciplines correlate with Tracy's 'trilogy:' fundamental theology, *Blessed Rage For Order*; systematic, *The Analogical Imagination*; practical theology, the yet to be published work on public theology.

needs to know clearly what counts for publicness in the particular situation in which one hopes to mediate the disclosive and transformative meaning of the Christian tradition.[26] This mediation will necessarily take different forms in addressing the academy, the church, and the wider society; accordingly, distinct methodological criteria need to be elaborated for each of the theological disciplines.[27] Fundamental theology will interpret and correlate the meanings of common human experience and the meanings of the Christian tradition; it will advance public criteria, warrants, and arguments, and will make explicit the experiential appeal of all religious symbols and theological doctrines. Systematic theology will presume the commitment of its addressees to a common tradition, and will attempt to articulate the disclosive and transformative possibilities of that tradition for personal and communal understanding and living. Finally, practical theology emerges centrally from the recognition that a religious tradition exists as one dimension of a wider pluralistic society/culture;[28] if it is to truly address that wider society, it must do so without presuming the society's commitment to the meanings of its own particular tradition and without relying solely on the modes of argument proper to the academy. And as "practical," such a theology must seek to mediate the real transformative meanings of the Christian tradition to and for society in its technological/economic, political, and cultural dimensions.[29]

The task, David Tracy insists, is to accept the challenging full meaning of public discourse. This involves avoiding the temptations both of withdrawing into private religiosity and of coercively or manipulatively imposing a private religious vision without engaging in the rigors of truly public reflection and living. Tracy's commitment to transcending these deceptively simply options appears to the existential undergirding of his theological endeavor.

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26 "Religion and Human Rights in the Public Realm," p. 238.

27 A succinct presentation of the nature of these distinct disciplines is given in "Ethnic Pluralism and Systematic Theology: Reflections," *Concilium* 107: *Ethnicity*, edited by Andrew M. Greeley (New York: The Seabury Press, 1977), pp. 92-93.

28 The potentially enriching nature of pluralism is a consistent theme in Tracy's writings. His insistence is that this need not generate into a "lazy pluralism" of "repressive tolerance" of purely privatized options; but in order for this to be avoided there are needed common norms for public discussion.

29 "Ethnic Pluralism and Systematic Theology," pp. 91-92.

> Of this much, I feel sure: no theologian can long avoid these kinds of issues if the character of theology as serious speech about God is to survive. A culture can abandon metaphysics, marginalize art, and privatize religion – but it will eventually pay a heavy price. Our increasingly splintered society has begun to recognize how heavy the price can be. Consider the disturbing witness of our present American spectacle: a popular and privatistic gospel of self-fulfillment lines up against the deceptively "public" gospel of the "Moral Majority." Can these really be our only choices: the pathos of privateness or coercive theological nonsense? For ethicists, philosophers, artists and theologians, both alternatives should be unacceptable.[30]

3. PUBLIC POSSIBILITIES OF THE 'CLASSIC'

3.1 The Nature and Interpretation of Classics

If the key problem posed by Tracy is the need to find a way in which to take seriously the intensity of commitment to the meanings of a particular tradition while at the same time recognizing the need for truly public engagement and discourse, the central element of his contribution to the solution of that problem is his consideration of the category of "the classic."

He defines a classic as

> any text, event or person which unites particularity of origin and expression with a disclosure of meaning and truth available, in principle, to all human beings.[31]

The paradox involved in this is the tension of particularity and universality. There is a quite different meaning to "publicness" with regard to classical expressions, than that which had characterized Tracy's notion of fundamental theology; that prior discipline had appealed to forms of argument which rendered them public in the same way that philosophical discourse claims to be publicly available to all intelligent and rational persons. His contention is that such argument does not exhaust the possibilities of rationality; indeed, there is need for a far more comprehensive notion of reason.[32] In this wider notion, religious and other cultural expressions can be recognized as public insofar as they are capable of transforming personal and social life. Tracy refers to the empirical fact that classic literary texts have proven themselves disclosive and transformative for readers of very different times and places than the particular situation in which the text was written. This is the case even though there is no attempt at explicitly

30 "Defending the Public Character of Theology," p. 353.

31 "Theological Classics in Contemporary Theology," p. 349.

32 "Religion and Human Rights in the Public Realm," p. 240.

universal argument. Two questions arise. Why are those cultural expressions which are recognized as classics able to exercise this disclosive and transformative power? And might not classical religious expressions be recognized as exercising that same cognitive and practical/existential power?[33]

Tracy proposes three components of the classic. First, a classic originates in a person's particular experience and understanding. Secondly, there is a unique intensity and integrity to the originating experience and understanding. Thirdly, an appropriate mode of expression (e.g., a text, work of art, action, style of life[34]) is found to express the experience and its meaning in its intensity. He argues that it is precisely the effective expression of the intensity of the original experience and insight into its meaning that distinguishes classics from mere "period pieces."

The notion of intensity relates to the previous consideration of limit-experience. To the extent that one experiences profound depths of human existence in particular moments of friendship, creativity, beauty, or of illness, suffering, oppression, and gains insight into those experiences, it becomes possible that – for persons of other places and times – the expressions of these particular moments may strike a resonant chord in their own depths. But the expression itself must be adequate for enabling this. When such an expression is achieved, it embodies not merely concepts and/or feelings, but actually the meaning of a possible-mode-of-being-in-the-world. Accordingly, the encounter with classical expressions demands more than conceptual grasp and/or affective empathy; it demands real engagement which challenges the reader's present forms of imagining reality and structuring existence. A new horizon may be disclosed, and possibilities for transforming one's self and one's living-in-society may be offered.[35]

It is this possibility of transformation that makes the act of interpretation a risk. For the very subjectivity of the interpreter is engaged in that act. From that engagement there may

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33 "Theological Classics in Contemporary Theology," pp. 349-350.

34 E.g., in "Reflections on the Challenge of Marxism," New Catholic World 220 (May/June, 1977):, pp. 116-117, Tracy refers to the "classical witness" of the lifestyle of Dom Helder Camara.

35 "Theological Classics in Contemporary Theology," pp. 350-353.

emerge images that demand pondering, questions that demand inquiry, insights that demand reflection, and judgments that demand practical implementation in personal and social living. In engagement with a classic one must be open to the risk of facing this alternative: either allowing one's horizon and lifestyle to be transformed, or remaining in one's former horizon but no longer innocently. This is what it means to allow the subject-matter of the classic to 'take over.' One's concern is not simply with determining the historical/social situation which lies 'behind' the text; the concern, rather, embraces a possible way of thinking and living that engagement with the text opens up for an intelligent, reasonable, and responsible interpreter.

In this sense, systematic theologians "risk a life upon interpreting a religious tradition,"[36] recognizing that genuine classics are characterized by an excess of meaning; they are capable of producing new questions and new insights in new situations. Thus, every interpretation is a reinterpretation, an actualization of the event of understanding here and now – an event that is not a mere repetition, but rather an emergence of a possibility that is both new and traditional. The theological task becomes the mediation of the tradition's resources for transforming our present horizon, with this very transformation itself entering into the tradition.[37]

From this, Tracy's manifestly Catholic trust in the value of tradition is evident; his hermeneutical proposals, in fact, can be seen as a contemporary transposition of Leo XIII's program for theology, *vetera novis augere et perficere*. But he also recognizes the ambiguity of any and every tradition, insisting that the 'authority' of a tradition must not be understood in any extrinsicist sense. A tradition's authority is precisely its ability to provoke questions and insights, to demand judgments and decisions within interpreters' conscious subjectivity. It is, in short, "a non-authoritarian notion of authority."[38] And insofar as the images, questions, insights, judgments, and decisions that emerge from engagement with a classical expression themselves become expressed, the disclosive and transformative possibilities of the classic become genuinely public in their ability to challenge ordinary ways of thinking and living.

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36 "The Public Character of Systematic Theology," p. 404.

37 *Ibid*., pp. 403-410.

38 *Ibid*., p. 403.

3.2 The Public Availability of Classics

Our contemporary situation, Tracy suggests, is distinguished by "a conflictual pluralism of worthwhile questions on the very meaning of the human."[39] The reduction of reason to instrumental rationality, the marginalization of human intensity, and the privatization of culture all serve to minimize the resources available for dealing with those questions and negotiating that pluralism.

There is need, accordingly, to "provide a more adequate list of candidates for public discourse."[40] Recognition of the phenomenon of the classic provides precisely such candidates, because the successful expression of intense experience and insight speaks to all human beings. Such expressed intensity can disclose a vision of the 'meaning of the human;' and, Tracy asks,

> Who would deny public meaning to these classical disclosures of our common humanity – a humanity at the end of its resources?[41]

We need new resources in our search for the human, and cultural/religious classics could provide them.

But in order for these resources to be publicly available, genuinely public status must be accorded not only to the abstractly universal, but also to those highly particular experiences and insights whose intensity renders them paradigmatic,[42] and which are expressed in cultural/religious classics. The suggestion is that by reflecting on the empirical reality of classics, their public character can be recognized. For while classics may be particular in origin, they are very public in their effects. They are public in the sense that they make disclosive and transformative possibilities available for all. That disclosure/transformation need not – indeed, will not – be accepted by all; nonetheless, it is present "as a communicable, shareable, public possibility – a possibility, that is, about which the public can converse and argue."[43]

39 "Grace and the Search for the Human," p. 68.

40 "Religion and Human Rights in the Public Realm," p. 239.

41 "Theological Pluralism and Analogy," p. 30.

42 Tracy frequently cites Mircea Eliade's dictum that "only the paradigmatic is the real."

43 "Religion and Human Rights in the Public Realm," p. 240.

This is true of all classics, including those whose origin is explicitly religious and whose reinterpretation is made available in a specific religious tradition. For essentially, religions are expressions of some limit-experience and of some response to limit questions. And as has been seen earlier, Tracy argues that such experiences and questions are, in principle, available to any person. 'Questions on the whole' are the fundamental religious questions, yet are universally available. As "expressions of the whole disclosed through the power of the whole," religious classics can offer resources for our common search for the human.[44]

There is a full spectrum of possible responses to such classic disclosures. Thus, the response of those who have made a commitment to the meanings of a religious tradition and whose consciousness has been formed by that tradition will differ from the response of those who encounter a tradition's classics as relative strangers. Nevertheless,

> Insofar as there exists a full spectrum of possible responses to the disclosive power of any classic, shareability – or publicness – is achieved across the entire spectrum of responses despite all other differences in response. Anyone who both experiences and expresses an interpretation of any disclosure of any classic thereby shares that possibility with *all* others – whether those others prove to be ones for whom a full shock of recognition (as, religiously, "faith") has occurred or those who have only sensed some resonance.[45]

In this sense, religious classics join other cultural classics as candidates for public conversation; indeed, a public realm is public precisely insofar as this conversation can occur.

In a significant 1983 essay, "Religion and Human Rights in the Public Realm," Tracy tentatively explored the implications of this analysis in a truly 'practical theological' effort to contribute to public conversation about social questions concerning the foundation and prioritization of human rights. He argues here that religious symbols, even if not "believed in," can disclose possibilities for dealing with these questions to the extent that an interpreter experiences even some tentative sense of resonance to the symbols. He recalls the creative use of religious symbols by, e.g., Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mohandas Gandhi to disclose new societal possibilities; believers and non-believers have responded differently, but insofar as they

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44 "The Role of Theology in Public Life, pp. 232-233.

45 "Religion and Human Rights in the Public Realm," p. 241.

shared some response of recognition there emerged possibilities for truly public conversation and action.

The contemporary conflict of questions on the meaning of the human raises the issue of the very nature and foundation of human rights. The core of Tracy's extended suggestion is that the major Christian symbols and doctrines all evoke and insist upon a radical human solidarity: "creation by the one God, the universal graciousness of God toward all, the redemption of all by Christ, the demand for radical neighbor love."[46] Such classical expressions may prove disclosive of the human person as intrinsically related to society, history, and nature. And this disclosure may warrant truly public conversation.[47]

There is further noted the contemporary conflict between liberal affirmations of civic/political rights and Marxist affirmations of social/economic rights. Again, Tracy's brilliant argument is far more extended than can be indicated here. But the religious classics to which he refers are the Hebrew prophets, whose texts may evoke a truly transformative response of preference for the poor, and thus come acknowledgement of the priority of social rights. Again, a wide spectrum of response is to be expected; but insofar as some response is shared, there emerge public possibilities that are not simply cognitive, but practical as well.[48]

Because of the contemporary need for more profound resources in envisioning 'the meaning of the human,' the Christian theologian must attempt to recover classical expressions from her/his tradition which could offer liberating disclosures for our situation.

> We are responsible for retrieving the authentic past in our memories and our tradition for the present; we are responsible to the future in our hopes and our promises to those future generations. If memory and hope, nostalgia and fantasy are to live at all, they must live as real, live options for the situation which encompasses us.[49]

A central preoccupation of David Tracy has been the attempted retrieval of such possibilities in the Catholic tradition.

46 *Ibid*., 244.

47 *Ibid*., pp. 244-245.

48 *Ibid*., pp. 250-252.

49 "Grace and the Search for the Human," p. 66.

4 THE CLASSICAL CATHOLIC LANGUAGE OF ANALOGY

4.1 Retrieving the Analogical Imagination

David Tracy indicates that one of his central concerns has been an attempt to retrieve "analogical language as the one classical theological language of my own Catholic tradition."[50] He regards this as the "language" employed by Catholic theologians in the patristic and medieval periods, as well as by Karl Rahner and Bernard Lonergan, among others, in our day. The structure of this language was formulated at the First Vatican Council, which posited theology as the partial, incomplete, analogous but real understanding of the mysteries of the Catholic faith. Tracy highlights two aspects of that definition. First, the focus on understanding liberated Catholic theology from the concern for deductive proof in a by-then decadent scholasticism. And secondly, that understanding was affirmed as being analogous but real. This provides a significant key: theology become the working out of a series of ordered relationships, all focused on the central meaning of God's self-manifestation in Jesus Christ. Faith in the truth disclosed in the incarnation-crucifixion-resurrection of Jesus provides the focal meaning from which reason operates to establish analogous understanding of the order to be found in all reality. Accordingly, faith and reason are neither identical nor antithetical. There is trust that reason can discover a real order in the universe and in history, guided by the disclosure of God's self-manifestation.[51]

For Tracy, this means that there is always a Catholic *expectation* of some final order to reality.

> You can and should in faith imagine reality *as if* the order of God, of humankind, and of the cosmos as a whole disclosed in Jesus Christ were really the secret to the present order in each of us, the ordered relationships possible for all of us and to the final, trustworthy order of the whole wherein the final word is trust because the final reality is that always ordering, because incarnate, love.[52]

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50 "Theological Pluralism and Analogy," p. 31.

51 Tracy's exposition of the doctrine of Vatican I and the implications he draws from it are found in: "An Analogical Vision: Some Reflections on the American Roman Catholic Bicentennial Social Justice Program," *Criterion* 15 (Autumn, 1976), pp. 13-14; and "The Catholic Analogical Imagination," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America 32* (1977), pp. 237-239.

He is keenly aware of the danger of drawing ideological conclusions from this focus on order, and precisely for this reason sharply distinguishes between analogy and identity. There is an expectation of ultimate order, never its proximate full achievement.

This language is evident, for example, in the Catholic social justice tradition, in the distinctions it makes between general principles, middle axioms, and specific policies. There is an order that relates the principles among themselves, and the axioms/policies to the ordered principles. Yet the axioms are never merely deduced from the principles, nor the policies from the axioms. The event of practical insight is needed to understand the policies for order in concrete situations; and this necessarily involves the recognition of disorder as well as order.

The point seems not to be the adequacy of traditional general principles – much less axioms and policies – the present situation, but rather that there seems to be fundamental vision underlying that entire tradition which continues to hold disclosive possibilities. Tracy notes how modern social encyclicals have been retrievals of Thomas' thought on principles of justice, which was itself a retrieval of both biblical and Greek thought. These were authentic reinterpretations, which engaged the subject-matter of classic texts and expressed subsequent disclosures of truly new insights and new demands.[53] Needed now is not a mere repetition of previous principles, but an engagement with the questions they might surface for our time.

The concern is to delineate certain basic orientations, or horizons of meaning, which have constituted the Catholic tradition of reinterpretation. Discernment of such an orientation could disclose a Catholic mode-of-being-in-the-world, an imagination structured toward certain patterns of expectation in feeling, thinking, and living. For prior to any set of beliefs and pattern of actions is a basic symbolic imagination informing all belief and action. Such an imagination grounds fundamental attitudes, focuses the questioning of mind, and predisposes toward patterns of social engagement.[54] This underlying vision is primarily expressed in the participatory language of image, symbol, and narrative; theology is a second-order language of

52 "The Catholic Analogical Imagination," p. 240.

53 "An Analogical Vision," pp. 10-13.

54 "The Catholic Analogical Imagination," pp. 234-235.

reflection on this more primary reality. Tracy's contention is that the theological language of analogy is a faithful development of a prior shared vision which he terms "the analogical imagination;" it is a vision in which graciousness finally prevails, and therefore reality is experienced as ultimately trustworthy.

4.2 'Practical' Implications

Analogical imagination and language stand behind the theological method of correlation, which presumes the possibility of ordered relationship between a religious tradition and common human experience. This can be distinguished from two other structures of religious/theological expectation, which are also real possibilities for thinking and living.

A "confrontational" model holds that there is no correlation between our ordinary human lives and the life of faith; it is a methodological extension of the doctrine of 'the two kingdoms.' God's revelation is pure gift, and has nothing whatsoever to do with the 'natural' strivings of our personal and social lives; it addresses us in another realm of existence.

An "identity" model is the inverse of this, positing a complete correlation between the meanings of faith and common human experience. A given social/ecclesiastical order comes to be perceived as identical with the order disclosed in the self-manifestation of God. Psychological desires for self-fulfillment are posited as exhausting the reality of human striving. In such a model, there is little recognition of the ambiguity present in both our social and personal lives.

The analogical imagination gives rise to a correlational model of "transformation," which recognizes similarities-in-difference between the two correlatives which are dialectically involved in a mutually critical relationship. Both real similarity and real difference are acknowledged. The 'Christian fact' is not simply identical with our social/ecclesiastical 'fact,' yet there is sufficient similarity (viz., "analogy") for real conversation between the correlative poles

to occur. In both directions of the conversation, questions can be raised, insights evoked, judgments demanded, and decisive action made possible.[55]

In an essay of profoundly suggestive depth, "The Catholic Model of Caritas: Self-transcendence and Transformation," Tracy considers the existential/practical[56] meaning of life. He adverts to common distinctions-between and definitions-of *agape*, *eros*, *libido*, *philia*, *caritas*, and *nomos*. The basic correlation which he attempts is that between *agape* and *eros*, understood as follows:

- *Agape* – the gift of God's love in Jesus Christ; it is given; not our achievement – but pure gift, sheer grace, which enobles, empowers, elicits Christians to love God and neighbor in the self-sacrificial manner that God has first loved us in Jesus Christ.
- *Eros* – human striving, yearning of a self for some ideal of happiness as concretely experienced in all concrete human loves; classically expressed in Plato; reformulated in almost every age in accordance with some reigning paradigm in what constitutes authentic human love.[57]

The first methodological options are to expect either absolute non-identity or a total identity between the two, which Tracy understands to be the distinctive tendencies of neo-orthodoxy and liberalism, respectively. A confrontational model would insist on preserving the absolute transcendence of God by affirming the radical non-0correlation between God's gratuitous gift of

55 "The Role of Theology in Public Life," pp. 225-237. Tracy notes the possibility of interdisciplinary collaboration which this model enables. For example, between theology and psychology he refers to Bernard Lonergan's theological use of Antoine Vergote's psychological work to who how Christian interiority and psychological integrity do bear genuine analogies, yet remain different even in their similarity.

56 This word pair occurs at various points in Tracy's writings. As I understand his usage, the terms refer to the constitutive and effective (making") character of human praxis: existential insofar as the subject 'makes' her-/himself; practical insofar as s/he 'makes' her/his world.

57 "The Catholic Model of *Caritas*: Self-transcendence and Transformation," in *Concilium: The Family in Crisis or Transition?* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1980), edited by Andrew M. Greeley, p. 100. It is important to recognize that Tracy employs these models as ideal types which enable an understanding of the reality of theologians' activities, but do not give a conceptually exhaustive grasp of the reality. There is, in other words, no claim that pure identity-theologies of pure confrontation-theologies necessarily exist as independent realities in the practice of any given theologian; rather, these are typologies that enable us to understand the dominant emphases and general tendencies in differing theologies.

agape and any form of human striving. An identity model would posit a socially/culturally dominant paradigm of "love" as exhausting the meaning of God's self-gift of love for us in Jesus Christ.

The Catholic tradition, Tracy maintains, has consistently engaged in a dialectical synthesis of the two understandings of love into what Augustine named *Caritas*; he judges this tradition to be present in the New Testament itself. The core of the position is a recognition of similarity-in-difference between the divine gift of love and human striving. Accordingly, the strivings of human love and desire are posited as involved-in but not exhaustive-of the divine gift of love.

This imagination enables a reading of the New Testament (especially, for Tracy, the synoptic parables) in which love is presented as both gift and command. A confrontation model would insist that divine love is pure gift that offers acceptance and gracious forgiveness; an identity model would have difficulty accounting for divine love experienced as pure giftedness.

Tracy wants to argue that authentic love is both gift and command, and he notes that the paradoxical nature of this assertion is intensified in the New Testament, where the commands to love are extreme/extraordinary; such commands – as the love of enemy, and the love of every neighbor as neighbor – are clearly not simply identical with our ordinary experience of love. Yet such love is commanded; the classical witness of the New Testament demands an extraordinary 'life-at-the-limits.' Uncannily, the Christian experiences her-/himself empowered and graced to hear and respond to that command. Love is both pure gift and radical command.

This enables theologians both to affirm and to criticize any culturally dominant understanding of the meaning of love (*eros*) by correlating it with the extraordinary disclosure of agapic love. A Catholic theologian's hopefulness with regard to the presence of grace, tempered by a realistic awareness of ambiguity, enables both a cultural paradigm of *eros* and Christian witness to *agape* to be dialectically correlated into a higher synthesis. Accordingly, in every age, a Catholic theologian can bring critical resources from her/his tradition to bear on regnant cultural paradigms; at the same time, socially/culturally mediated experiences and

understandings of *eros* enter into the theologian's reinterpretation of the tradition, and insofar as those reinterpretations are expressed in texts and lives they can be transformative of the tradition itself.[58] The "*Caritas* synthesis" is an authentic *traditio* to which believers in every age and place make a contribution precisely from their cultural experience; and being formed by that tradition, in turn, renders possible their transformation of that cultural experience.

In contemporary Western culture, Tracy notes two common paradigms for incorporating *eros* into life. The first is a model of self-fulfillment, which focuses on experiences of joy, creativity, and ecstasy; this can be considered a secular analogue of the identity model. Secondly, and largely in reaction to the proponents of self-fulfillment, there has emerged a neo-conservative 'culture of control,' which insists on the necessity of repressing individual's desire for fulfillment in order to promote the common good; in this, there is a secular analogue of the confrontation model.

Tracy argues that it is possible to affirm values in each of these paradigms. Desires for ecstasy and creativity are enriching dimensions of the human spirit; but if self-fulfillment exhausts man's envisionment of the human project, Christopher Lasch's "culture of narcissism" results. Conversely, the need for self-discipline and reasonable social control are inescapable conditions – as the realism of an Augustine or a Freud recognizes – for the possibility of civilization; but the dominance of a control paradigm involves that "totalizing thinking" which suffocates human imagination. Might not the Catholic *caritas* tradition serve as disclosive and transformative classic, evoking a wide spectrum of response in a truly public fashion?[59]

Tracy argues that the contemporary reinterpretation of that tradition is the model of self-transcendence as developed, e.g., by Bernard Lonergan and Karl Rahner. Self-transcendence sublates the desires and demands of self-fulfillment and self-discipline.

> For self-transcendence preserves the reality of the self's drive to authentic fulfillment and the self's need for real discipline; it challenges and corrects the temptations of the first to narcissism and of the second to weak *ressentiment*; it sublates or transforms both into a model wherein the

58 The Catholic Model of *Caritas*," pp. 103-105.

59 *Ibid*., pp. 105-107.

> self's very fulfillment and most needed discipline may be found in the reality of authentic, consistent, and lasting self-transcendence.[60]

This model is faithful to the vision of human life offered in the loving self-gift of Jesus Christ. But it is available, with a permanent surplus of meaning, to evoke a wide spectrum of responses in a truly public fashion in any age. In our age, re-presentations of the classic story of Jesus may disclose the shallowness of living purely in pursuit of emotional and/or economic fulfillment, and evokes as well the "shock of recognition" in which that story resonates with stirrings from the depths of human hearts. More fundamental desires may be disclosed, desires to transcend every personal achievement and the givenness of social 'reality.' And these very desires may be experienced as event, happening – in short, as gift.

Insofar as this 'received' self-transcending power of human love is allowed to be transformative of human action, its effects are inevitably public/social. It would render one especially susceptible to those "contrast experiences" in which one perceives as fact that things are not as they ought to be – perceives that social 'reality' may not be real. Tracy refers to the lived conditions of all oppressed persons as enabling that disclosure. For to experience oppression is to recognize the negative limit-character of social reality which must be transcended. But there can be experienced a positive disclosure in this as well, in the self-transcending desire and demand that things be other than they are.[61]

It is again possible for a tradition's classics to evoke this recognition, and/or to provide resources for the transformative action demanded subsequent to such recognition. For example, Christian texts affirming the radical equality of all persons, such as Gal 3.28, may disclose that – however 'identified' ecclesiastical structures have been with cultural patriarchy – real personal and communal transcendence is demanded insofar as that equality is recognized as not-yet-achieved. Such demands are "traditional" in a very radical sense; they emerge in the very act of allowing the tradition's conversation with contemporary experience to evoke questions that simply will not be repressed. This comes as no surprise, Tracy argues, to one formed by a tradition whose foundational classics disclose the radical command-as-gift to

60 *Ibid*., p. 109.

61 "Christian Faith and Radical Equality," pp. 372-373.

always go beyond even our finest achievements of personal and social living. But the meaning of that command is no "sentimental theology of love;" rather it emerges primarily in a profound disclosure of negativity that evokes a dangerous response.[62]

4.3 Interrupting the Analogies

David Tracy acknowledges that an intensified sensitivity to 'the negative' has been for him

> A sea-change in both sensibility and theological understanding. . . . I have come to doubt that the route from fundamental trust to religion and God can prove as direct or as unencumbered as I once thought. . . . The profound negativities of human existence – personal, societal and historical – seem so pervasive in this age that any route to fundamental trust must be far more circuitous, tentative and even potholed than I had once hoped.[63]

Recognition of such negativities as genocide, racism, economic exploitation, sexism, and irrational flirtation with the possibility of nuclear holocaust evokes an experience of not-at-homeness which is, perhaps, the central experience of our age. The authentic conservative experiences this as a profound sense of the 'no-longer' of real community and the 'no-longer' of enriching cultural traditions. And this is truly an intense experience of the reality of our homelessness.

But there is another sensibility through which the reality of being not-at-home is disclosed in even more intense fashion; this is experience of the 'not-yet.' And it is this experience that Tracy acknowledges as having been transformative of his own sensibility and self-understanding. Rather than a sense of nostalgia for a once-realized but no-longer humanity, the force of the not-yet discloses present bondage but also the possibility of a hope inexplicably given, but experienced as a demand for engagement. The mood of the no-longer is a profound sadness; that of the not-yet is an anger opening upon hope.

The future, accordingly, has assumed far greater prominence in Tracy's more recent reflections. The expectation of reality being ordered around the focal meaning of Jesus Christ is an order not-yet real. And that is precisely what we experience in our not-at-homeness.

62 *Ibid*., pp. 375-377.

63 "Defending the Public Character of Theology," p. 355.

Encountering suffering and oppression impels recognition of the radical contrast between what-is and what-would-be were reality really ordered around the focal meaning of Jesus Christ. Such "contrast experiences" are shocking because they interrupt our everyday patterns of imagining and engaging in 'reality;' they disrupt our assumption of what-is by abruptly disclosing what-is-not. In other words, encountering oppression and suffering can force a recognition of the radical non-identity between what-is and what we know – in reason and/or in faith – ought to be.[64]

This experience of interruption can enable the retrieval of dimensions of a tradition that had been forgotten and/or repressed, such as the eschatological and apocalyptic symbols of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. Such symbols can offer classic disclosures, "exposing the massive not-yet in the ideologies, the systematic distortions, not mere errors, pervading concrete historical actuality."[65] Such disclosure would be recognition of the fact that the future cannot simply be an unfolding of what-already-is. A 'No!' must be uttered. But it may also be possible to experience that very act of negation as itself empowered by an always-already present graciousness that enables hope without empirical grounds. And this may be an experience of participation beyond all homelessness.[66]

The analogies, indeed, come much less easily. He ultimately insists that the analogical imagination continues to affirm its expectation of reality ordered around the meaning of God's self-manifestation in Jesus – but that order is experienced by us as a not-yet that comes to us as challenge. And the initial response to affirming that future reality must be to negate elements of present reality. Any possible 'Yes!' will come through the power of some 'No!' That is why a fundamental task is to face contemporary negativities "in all their nameless horror." And a key aspect of that task for any Jewish or Christian theologian of our time must be facing "the demonic non-meaning of Auschwitz."[67]

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64 "Religion and Human Rights in the Public Realm," pp. 248-249.

65 *Ibid*., p. 250.

66 "Grace and the Search for the Human," pp. 73-74.

67 *Ibid*., p. 68.

5. FACING RADICAL NEGATIVITY

5.1 Christian Response to the Holocaust

Catholic theology has tended to emphasize the reality of continuity in its thinking about society, history, and the development of its own tradition; the theological focus has been on social, historical, and doctrinal order. This has enabled, as we have seen, a fundamental trust in the tradition and in the capacities of reason; from this trust, sets of analogies can be developed to express real understanding. David Tracy recognizes the deep manner in which his sensibility and understanding have been shaped by this tradition.

But there are other realities that also come to awareness when one is confronted with radical negativity: not only continuity, but interruption; not only trust, but suspicion; not only analogy, but recognition of the utter uniqueness of concrete human suffering and evil. These realities must be faced by any theologian who would engage in serious speech about God in our age.[68] Without facing such negativity, theology can posit only a too-easy harmony that ultimately stands unable to acknowledge the profound radicality of evil that has emerged in the concreteness of human history.

Tracy notes two ways in which Christian theologians have engaged in a flight from that history. It was, ironically, liberalism's discovery of historical consciousness, which encouraged a profound optimism and promoted a doctrine of 'Progress," that tempted liberal theology to retreat from the concreteness – and thus ambiguity – of concrete history. In reaction to this optimism which was shattered by the impact of the First World War, neo-orthodoxy responded with such focus on the utter transcendence and incommensurability of God that religion came to be more and more privatized and theology more and more withdrawn from history. It is essential in our time, Tracy argues, that theology return to history – to "the concrete struggles of groups, societies, persons, victims, who have been shunted aside from the official story of triumph."[69] Here one experiences a profound sense of the *tremendum*: a terrifying disclosure of the real history within which we have lived.

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68 "Foreword" to Arthur Cohen's *The Tremendum: A Theological Interpretation of the Holocaust* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1981), pp. xii-xiii.

The Holocaust is the central event of radical negativity and interruption that theology must fact; for until facing this event, Christian theology can never fully return to history. This event is without analogies; it must be faced in its concrete particularity, which interrupts all 'thinking and living as usual.'

> When facing that event, history theologically becomes interruption. Theologians come to the issue of the Holocaust not to 'explain' it but to face it – and to face it theologically. . . . Sheer linearity, pure continuity and evolutionary historical optimism are finished theologically. History – the real, concrete stuff – is now seen for what it is – interruption.[70]

The immediate impact on theology is twofold: trust in the tradition experiences a demand for suspicion; historical optimism is transformed by the experience of profound negativity. There is a properly theological demand for a hermeneutics of suspicion upon the tradition and the world.

The most obvious factor is also the most painful: there is in the Christian tradition a recurrent teaching of contempt for the Jews and for the Jewish religion. Profound suspicions must be cast on "this revolting tradition," and this must involve both repentance and reform. Such suspicion would also allow a retrieval of the profoundly Jewish character of Christianity. But if this initial suspicion is the most obvious, it is surely not the only suspicion demanded by facing the Holocaust.

The frightening question emerges as to how it was possible that Christian persons, communities, and institutions did nothing in the face of such monstrous evil. That there were individuals that did-not-do-nothing only focuses the fact that something could have been done, but was not done. Why not? The question becomes one of needing to understand the nature of salvation in the world, and there must emerge attitudes of suspicion toward any theology and any spirituality which made this non-response possible.

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69 "The Holocaust as Interruption and the Christian Return to History" (with Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza) in *Concilium* 175: *The Holocaust as interruption* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1984), edited by David Tracy and Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, p. 85.

70 "Editorial" (with Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza) in *Concilium* 175: *The Holocaust as interruption* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1984), edited by David Tracy and Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, p. xi.

> Insofar as one kind of Catholic spirituality is spiritualizing (or unworldly) and privatizing (or nonpublic) and insofar as that spirituality aided individual Christians to avoid their historical responsibilities in the situation of the Holocaust, contemporary Catholic theological reflection on salvation and spirituality needs to become yet more suspicious of all nonworldly, nonpolitical forms of spirituality.[71]

Yet any religious/theological 'turn to the world' is itself ambiguous. The optimistic assessment of the world found, e.g., in *Gaudium et Spes*, in the evolutionary optimism of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, and even, Tracy acknowledges, in some aspects of his own *Blessed Rage for Order*, must be subjected to a chastening suspicion so that the profound distortions present in the world and history might be disclosed.

These dialectical suspicions of unworldly spirituality and secular optimism should enable the theologian to be "freed *from* the world *for* the world."[72] It becomes possible to affirm the necessity of action in and for the world, action in history. In this, engagement in suspicion again enables a retrieval; now of the this-worldly dimension of Christian salvation.

Suspicions emerge as well concerning pure fulfillment Christologies and pure realized eschatologies that imply the displacement of Judaism by Christianity. Such theological positions ignore both the unmistakable presence of the 'not-yet' in the New Testament, and the stark negation of fulfillment/realization in the concrete history of human suffering disclosed in all its horror by the Holocaust. Facing this horror engenders suspicion of identity-Christologies and identity-eschatologies in the tradition; yet is also makes possible the retrieval of forgotten/repressed dimensions of that tradition. The most fundamental retrieval, which is at the heart of any political theology, is the profound awareness of the eschatological not-yet. The always-already given self-manifestation of God in Jesus Christ is precisely the decisive manifestation of the *future* reign of God. There remains a sense of expectancy for what the Jewish tradition knew as "the Messianic times;" suspicion of the separation in Christian tradition

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71 "Religious Values After the Holocaust: A Catholic View," in *Jews and Christians After the Holocaust* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), edited by Abraham J. Peck, p. 96.

72 *Ibid*., p. 97.

of the Messiah from the Messianic times enables retrieval of the insistence that real, concrete history is what must be redeemed.[73]

The concrete meaning of faith can then also be retrieved as discipleship: risking a life of engagement, disclosed by the story of Jesus and experienced as possible by a power not-from-ourselves. The action of such a life in history and for the world is grounded in the transformative disclosure of the cross and resurrection of Jesus. It is a life of faith, risk, and hope.

The "problem of evil," accordingly, is not to be met by any too-easy philosophical reflection. Facing the Holocaust shatters any comforting theodicy. For the Christian, Tracy insists, the reality of suffering is not primarily a philosophical problem, but a religious one. It does not yield to conceptual solution; indeed it is not 'solved' at all. Rather, it exists precisely in its interruptive meaning as a disclosure of the religious fact that

> the unspeakable suffering of the six million is also the voice of the suffering of God. It is for us to hear that cry – the cry at once of our fellow human beings and the cry of God's chosen people become the cry of God. Like all the commands of God, this command to hear that lament and that suffering is a command which can enable and empower all who hear it to real action in real history. For all those who hear that voice – the voice of our suffering, betrayed God (betrayed by us) – that voice can become the bond that unites us all in calling out together, with them and with our God, "Never again!"[74]

5.2 Conclusion

In a review of Arthur Cohen's novel, *An Admirable Woman*, David Tracy reflects on the need for thoughtfulness in an age of rampant thoughtlessness. He sees in Cohen's protagonist a woman whose very commitment to thought in this age forces her "into a life of publicness: a life dedicated to thinking upon action, history, politics, the public realm."[75] He refers to a "Cohenian sensibility of thoughtfulness" in the recognition that: "this is the way we live in this place and time; this is the way we could live, if we would but dare, think."[76] Tracy surely shares

73 *Ibid*., pp. 95-100.

74 *Ibid*., p. 106.

75 "A Thoughtful Life," *Commonweal* 105 (February 10, 1984), p. 92.

76 *Ibid*.

this sensibility. His concern for thinking is that it be engaged-thought, with public antecedents and consequences.

He insists that the negativity of our homelessness "must first be lived through and only then reflected upon."[77] For from that living arise the questions which one brings to the tradition, and the resultant disclosures are expressed primarily in lives lived. Discipleship/ praxis is the primary mediation of Christian meaning. For only through the practical engagement of persons and communities in concrete history is salvation mediated as not merely disclosive, but transformative as well. Only through human action is the massive dominance of social 'reality' broken; and only then is the new, the not-yet recognized as possible. The future need not be – must not be – the simple working out of the present; it must be the arrival ("advent") of something new. But at some point and in some way that newness must begin; and "beginning, before it becomes a historical event, is the supreme capacity of human beings."[78] Engagement with a classical religious tradition may disclose questions, insights, and judgments that call for such beginnings; but the beginning itself occurs as event only through decisive action.

And it is in this that the analogical imagination is ultimately able to embrace dialectic within its fundamental trust. The final order of reality focused on the meaning revealed in Jesus Christ is most fully operative in Christian praxis grounded in hope. The recognition of the not-yet character of our existence impels us to action precisely because that recognition is always-already disclosed. The fundamental Catholic trust in the triumph of grace remains; but the triumph is present in an empowering hope in the not-yet realized kingdom of God, proleptically revealed in Jesus Christ.

Thus, Tracy's thoughtfulness leads to an acknowledgement of the centrality of praxis for all thinking, especially theology. His emphasis remains on insistence that praxis be authentically thoughtful, but his insistence is precisely for the sake of practical transformation. For fuller explication of this, one must turn to Tracy's continuing theological work. But the concern for

77 "Grace and the Search for the Human," p. 76.

78 "Correlation Between Theology and Catholic Charities," p. 27.

transformative Christian praxis has been fundamental throughout his work. It is expressed in his recollection of the remark of La Pasionara at the end of the Spanish Civil War: "They took the cities, but we had the better songs." It may be a consoling thought, but consolation is not necessarily what theology is about. We do indeed have the better songs, but in our day, Tracy insists, "it is time. . . to try again to take the cities."[79]

6. WORKS CONSULTED

"A Thoughtful Life." *Commonweal* 105 (February 10, 1984): 92-93.

"An Analogical Vision: Some Reflections on the American Roman Catholic Bicentennial Social Justice Program." *Criterion* 15 (Autumn, 1976): 10-16.

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