Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology. David Tracy. New York: The Seabury Press, 1976.

PART ONE

Chapter ONE: The Pluralist Context of Contemporary Theology

Introduction: Pluralism and Revision

> Two principal assumptions of this work:
>
> 1. The present pluralism of theology allows each theologian to learn incomparably more about reality by disclosing really different ways of viewing both our common humanity and Christianity.
> 2. Each theologian must attempt to articulate and defend an explicit method of inquiry, and use that method to interpret the symbols and texts of our common life and of Christianity.
>
> *Cognitive*, *ethical*, and *existential* crises confront any theologian who finds himself/herself personally committed to both the *modern experiment* and to the *Christian vision of human possibilities*.

The Crises of the Christian theologian in the Modern World: The *Disenchantment with Mystification*

> Critical rational thought set loose the forces for the demystification of the Western religious worldview.
>
>> The struggle of modern theology has been largely to see in what fashion the modern modes of rational analysis could both eliminate the merely mystifying components of the basic Christian vision of the world and yet restore with contemporary integrity Christianity's central vision of God and humanity.
>>
>>> The struggle reached three realms:
>>>
>>> 1. Cognitive
>>> 2. Ethical
>>> 3. Existential
>
> 'The crisis of *cognitive* claims' resulted from the modern development of historical study and of the natural and human sciences.
>
> The cognitive crisis discloses an *ethical* crisis.
>
>> The 'morality of scientific knowledge' challenges the morality of 'fidelity to tradition.'
>>
>>> The modern theologian finds that his ethical commitment to the morality of scientific knowledge forces him to assume a critical position towards his own and his tradition's beliefs.
>>>
>>>> "… a willingness to follow the evidence wherever it may lead."
>>>
>>> The Christian theologian's basic loyalty to his Church tradition can be formulated as his honest resolve to study that tradition critically and thereby aid its self-understanding.

Existential crisis: the contemporary theologian can no longer allow belief in a 'supernatural' realm of ultimate significance – rather, he shares the fundamental faith of secular man which affirms the ultimate significance and final worth of our lives, our thoughts and actions, here and now, in nature and in history.

> The Christian theologian holds that a proper understanding of the explicitly Christian faith can render intellectually coherent and symbolically powerful that common secular faith which we share; he believes that neither secularism nor supernaturalism can adequately reflect or appropriately ensure our commitment to the final worthwhileness of the struggle for truth and honesty in our inquiry, and for justice and even agapic love in our individual and social practice.

The Crisis of the Modern Secular Mind: The Disenchantment with Disenchantment

The primary model for 'modernity' discloses an autonomous and lonely critic who rejects the oppressive tutelage of established authorities and dares to impose methods of rational inquiry upon any and all subject matters.

The 'post-modern' spirit challenges the modern model of the enlightened thinker as illusory and yet remains fundamentally faithful to the critical exigencies of the liberal period.

> Enlightenment thinkers were under the illusion that they were free from illusions.

> The Enlightenment's wholesale attack upon 'tradition' leads to both philosophical folly and human impoverishment.

> The modern formulae, which reified the human world, become too readily the tools of the dominant forces in society at large.

Chapter TWO: Five Basic Models in Contemporary Theology

Introduction: The Need for Models

Reemergence of interest in 'models' is caused by (at least) two factors:

1. In a pluralistic situation, it is imperative for a theologian to set forth his own model for theological judgment and to compare that model critically with other existing models.
2. Distinction (developed by linguists) between picture/scale models and *disclosure/analogue models.*

The major task of this chapter is to determine with some exactitude the *self-referent* (subject-referent) and the *object-referent* of each major theological option.

> Models provide intelligible, interlocking sets of basic terms and relations that aid us in understanding the point of view expressed in particular historical positions.

Any contemporary Christian theological position will consider itself obliged to interpret two basic phenomena:

1. The Christian tradition;
2. Contemporary understandings of human existence.

> Analysis by specifying what role each position gives to the apparent cognitive, ethical, and existential clashes analyzed above.

<u>*Orthodox* Theology: Believers and Beliefs</u>

The claims of modernity are not understood to have any inner-theological relevance; the theologian is to express an adequate understanding of the beliefs of his particular church tradition.

> Self-referent: a *believer* in a specific church tradition.

> Object referent: understanding the *beliefs* of the specific church tradition.

Strength: ability to develop sophisticated models for providing systematic understanding of the basic beliefs of his church community.

Weakness: theological inability to come to terms with the cognitive, ethical, and existential counter-claim of modernity.

<u>*Liberal* Theology: Modern Secularity and Christian Belief</u>

Explicit commitment to the basic cognitive claims and ethical values of the modern secular period.

Attempt to show how a proper **re**interpretation of modernity's most basic value commitments and a proper **re**interpretation of Christianity's historical claims to truth and value must be *reconciled*.

> Self-referent: subject-theologian's own *modern consciousness* as committed to the basic values of modernity, especially the value of insisting upon a critical investigation of all claims to meaning and truth, religious or otherwise.

> Object-referent: the *Christian tradition as reformulated* in accordance with such modern commitments and techniques.

Strength and legacy: they set up the proper *post-orthodox model* for contemporary theological reflection.

> The major task of contemporary post-liberal theology is to *maintain that formal ideal* without a continuance of the inadequacies of the specific material conclusions of the liberals.

<u>*Neo-orthodox* Theology: Radical Contemporary Christian Faith and the God of Jesus Christ</u>

A continuation of the liberal enterprise by means of a two-pronged critique:

1. Insistence that the liberal analysis of the human condition was utterly unable to account for those negative elements of tragedy, of terror, indeed of sin in human existence.
2. Insistence that the liberal reinterpretation of the event of Jesus Christ was a failure.

"Fundamentally, they argued that only an explicit recognition of the unique gift of faith in the Word of God could provide an adequate foundation for a truly Christian theology."

> Strength: recognition that the discipline of contemporary Christian theology had to come to terms with the post-modern understanding of liberal illusions and had to develop more adequate hermeneutical tools to disclose the profoundly transformative meanings of the central Christian symbols.

> Weakness: did not analyze with critical and deliberate hardmindedness the central revelational, theistic, and Christological doctrines of the Christian tradition.

Subject-referent: the radical model of the *human being of authentic Christian faith* (i.e., the basic existential attributes of Christian faith, trust, and agapic love).

Object-referent: 'the *wholly other God of Jesus Christ*'.

Radical Theology: Secular Affirmation and Theistic Negation

Central thesis: a conscience committed to the struggle for _human liberation_ cannot really affirm a radical faith in and dependence upon the God of orthodox or liberal or neo-orthodox theology.

> Self-referent: a subject committed to post-modern, contemporary, secular intellectual and moral values.

> Object-referent: an explicit reformulation of traditional Christianity which negates the central belief of that tradition in God and affirms Jesus as either the paradigm of a life lived for others or as the decisive Incarnational manifestation of a liberated humanity.

The _Revisionist_ Model: A Critical Correlation

The revisionist theologian is committed to the dramatic confrontation, the mutual illumination and connections, the possible basic reconciliation between the principal values, cognitive claims, and existential faiths of both a reinterpreted post-modern consciousness and a reinterpreted Christianity.

> Attempt to articulate new _methodology_ and substantive resources for fulfilling the liberal ideal for the theological task.

> > Need for a method of interpretation that can make the permanent achievements of the past models of theology more readily available for present reflection.

Subject-referent: a subject committed at once to a contemporary revisionist notion of the beliefs, values, and faith of an authentic secularity and to a revisionist understanding of the beliefs, values, and faith of an authentic Christianity.

Object-referent: a critical reformulation of both the meanings manifested by our common human experience and the meanings manifested by an interpretation of the central motifs of the Christian tradition.

Chapter THREE: A Revisionist Model for Contemporary Theology

The two principal _sources_ for theology are _Christian texts_ and _common human experience and language_.

> A principal task of the theologian is to find _appropriate interpretations_ of the major motifs of the scriptures and of the relationship of those interpretations to the confessional, doctrinal, symbolic, theological and praxis expressions of the various Christian traditions.

> The Christian theologian is impelled to test the _universalist claim_ that the Christian self-understanding does express an understanding of authentic human existence as such.

The theological task will involve a _critical correlation_ of the results of the investigation of the two sources of theology.

> The method must develop critical criteria for correlating the 'questions' and the 'answers' found in both the 'situation' and the 'message.'

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.

> The task is demanded both by the universalist claim of Christian self-understanding and by the otherwise inexplicable character of our shared experience itself.

> Two reasons for the choice of "phenomenological" method:

1. Demonstrated effectiveness in explicating the ultimate horizon precisely as a 'religious' one.
2. Refined sophistication of the method.

Phenomenology must be in continual conversation with the human sciences and other philosophical methods

The principal method of investigation of the source 'the Christian tradition' can be described as an historical and hermeneutical investigation of classical Christian texts.

Theology *needs* and history and hermeneutics; a historical reconstruction of the central texts of the tradition is imperative.

If the historian can reconstruct the texts in question, then the next problem becomes the need to discover what discipline will allow one to determine the meaning of those metaphors, symbols, and images used in the text to express religious significance.

Recent developments in *hermeneutics* are significant:

1. Process of "*distanciation*;" i.e., a written text, precisely as written, is distanced both from the original intention of the author and from its original reception by its first addressees.
2. Distinction between the "sense" and the "referents" of the text.
   a. *Sense* = internal structure and meaning of the text (determined through the ordinary methods of semantics and literary-critical inquiries).
   b. *Referents* = that mode-of-being-in-the-world which the text opens up for the intelligent reader.

   Four related methods are needed for understanding the existential referent:

   1. *Historical* inquiry: reconstruction of texts.
   2. *Semantics*: determination of internal structure of the images and symbols.
   3. *Literary-critical* methods: determination of the particular character of the literary genre by means of which the images, metaphors, and symbols are structured, codified, transformed.
   4. Explicitly *hermeneutical*: seeks to determine the mode-of-being-in-the-world *referred to* by the text.

To determine the truth-status of the results of one's investigations into the meaning of both common human experience and Christian texts the theologian should employ an *explicitly transcendental* or metaphysical mode of reflection.

The reflective discipline needed to determine the truth-claims of the religious meanings manifested by the prior investigations must have certain characteristics:

1. Capable of articulating *conceptual* and not merely symbolic categories.
2. Capable of explicating its *criteria* for precisely those cognitive claims.

   Criteria: ⟶ *Ground* in experience.

   ⟶ *Coherence*, internally and with other essential categories of our knowledge and belief.

Only a reflective discipline capable of explicating criteria for the '*conditions of the possibility*' of *all* experience could really resolve the question of the meaning of the meaning and truth of authentically religious and theistic claims.

Chapter FOUR: The Search for Adequate Criteria and Modes of Analysis

Common human experience and language: modes of analysis

"An appeal to *experience* may involve either an appeal to the hard data of sense-experience or to the more elusive but somehow more primordial and important immediacy of the self's non-sensuous *experience of the self* as the latter is expressed in feeling, mood, tone, bodily awareness and is *mediated* by various kinds of consciousness raising.

> 'Meaningfulness' of an appeal to experience = the appeal 'resonates' to our inward experience as a self.

We attempt to understand, judge, and evaluate that immediacy by various modes of critical *mediation*:

- Cultural analysis
- Historical analysis
- Human scientific analysis
- Philosophical analysis
- Theological analysis

Phenomenological analyses: they mediate the meaning of my experience as a self-in-a-world.

"Meaningful" refers to the intrinsic relationship between a mediating symbol, image, metaphor, myth, or concept and the immediate *lived experience* of the self.

'*Philosophical reflection*' involves two principal moments: ⟶ phenomenological

⟶ Transcendental

> Philosophy is a '*problematic*' discipline: its first principles cannot strictly be proved but can be indirectly validated.

Transcendental: philosophy is a rising-above/going-beneath any phenomenon to discover the most basic presuppositions of 'conditions of possibility' of that phenomenon.

Phenomenological: philosophy must analyze any phenomenon (in the most basic sense of that which appears to human consciousness) as exactly, as carefully, as explanatorily as possible.

Both philosophical moments are two intrinsically related moments in a single methodological task for any philosopher who wishes to determine the basic and grounding presuppositions of any given phenomenon.

> A phenomenological moment to disclose the meaning and meaningfulness of common human experience.

> A transcendental moment to disclose the true conditions of the possibility of that experience.

Philosophical reflection may aid analysis of religious meaning and meaningfulness:

1. Clarify the exact philosophical meaning of the symbol, concept, image, metaphor, or myth, and the experience each discloses (i.e., the criterion of meaningfulness as *disclosive of our actual experience*).
2. Criterion of '*internal coherence*.'

3. Criteria of '*adequacy to experience*' to consider the 'truth' of religious cognitive claims.

> Transcendental/metaphysical analysis is needed to show adequacy to experience to show how a particular concept functions as a fundamental 'belief' of condition of possibility of all our experience.

Christian Texts: the possibility of their interpretation

The need for *criteria of appropriateness*:

> The Christian theologian's responsibility is to show his/her present categories are appropriate understandings of the Christian understanding of existence (as distinct from the philosopher of religion).

> The "Christian fact" (as a category) refers to the meanings involved either explicitly or implicitly in the significant texts, actions, gestures, and symbols of the entire Christian tradition, (p*rimarily*, but not exclusively, expressed in the texts of the Christian *Scriptures*).

>> Ergo, it becomes imperative for the theologian to seek an adequate method of interpretation for texts.

Interpretation theory:

> *Historical consciousness* is the primary factor behind both the central achievements and the crucial difficulties for contemporary Christian theology.

>> Psychological tendencies of historical consciousness can lead to the 'hermeneutical circle': i.e., the task of interpretation is the effort of one subjective consciousness to understand another consciousness:

>> - By determining the author's original intention;
>> - By determining the original discourse situation;
>> - By explicating the first historical addressee of the text.

>> These enterprises are legitimate and fruitful, but they do not actually give the theological meaning of the text.

> Certain major recent developments in contemporary interpretation theory seem to be corrective of earlier psychological formulations of "Romantic hermeneutics" and to be of considerable importance for the formulation of the present fundamental theological task of the interpretation of the meaning of Christian texts.

>> Understanding the terms 'event' and 'meaning' in discourse.

>>> The '*speech-event*' refers to the moment of actualization of any language system into discourse.

>>> However, it cannot be assumed that this 'speech-event' is *the* meaning of the text.

>>>> Written language is an intending because it suppresses the original speech-event in order to fix and retain the meaning intended (i.e., it is the text that bears the meaning, not my intention in writing it).

>>>>> That *meaning* refers to a certain mode-of-being which precisely as 'fixed' is also noematic or ideal.

>>>>>> The meaning undergoes a process of *distanciation* from the author's intention, from the original dialogue

situation, and from its first audience, and is not available in these texts for any intelligent interpreter to understand upon reading them.

The reformulation of the "dialectic of explanation and understanding" (Paul Ricoeur); i.e., the method of interpretation must relate the semantical and literary-critical explanation of the 'sense' of the text with the properly hermeneutical understanding of the 'referents' of the text.

> The meaning of the text is fixed in the text as ideal and not as a psychic event of the author.
>
>> The *sense* of the text is the ideal object which is intended; as ideal this meaning is purely *immanent*.
>>
>>> Semantical, structuralist, literary-critical explanations.
>
>> The further task of understanding the extra-linguistic *referent* of the text.
>>
>>> An object-referent of some existential import; that mode-of-being-in-the-world which the text opens up for the intelligent reader.
>>>
>>> A subject-referent; the personal vision of the author implied by the text.
>>
>> The final moment of interpretation is the 'fusion of horizons' (Gadamer); the reader overcomes the strangeness of another horizon not by empathizing with the psychic state or cultural situation of the author, but rather by understanding the basic vision of the author implied by the text and that mode-ob-being-in-the-world referred to by the text.

Consequences for the theologian's interpretation of the meanings of Christian texts:

1. Commitment to an understanding of the objectivity or ideality of meaning fixed in written texts and even in oral texts.
   > Reversal of priority from the 'historicity' of religious texts to their 'logicity'.
   >> Sense = limit language
   >> Referents = limit experience
2. Hermeneutics is highly important but *cannot encompass the entire field of theology*.
3. Primary appeal is to the *imagination*, rather than to the will.
   > Disclosing a possible way of being-in-the-world as a project for our imagination to envision rather than an ethical enterprise.

The Task of *Critical Correlation*

The meanings discovered as adequate to our common human experience must be compared to the meanings disclosed as appropriate to the Christian tradition in order to discover how similar, different, or identical the former meanings are in relationship to the latter.

The dominant criteriological concerns of an investigation of various symbol-systems is to show the relative experiential adequacy of one symbol-system both to the meaning and truth of religious theism and to the meaningfulness of this particular symbol-system for the human situation.

PART TWO

Chapter FIVE: The Religious Dimension of Commun Human Experience and Language

The Concept of *Limit*:

Schleiermacher: religious experience is a 'feeling of absolute dependence.'

Geertz's concept of religion:

a) A system of symbols which acts to
b) Establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by
c) Formulating conceptions of a general order of existence, and
d) Clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that
e) The moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.

All significant explicitly religious language and experience and all significant implicitly religious characteristics of our common experience will bear at least the 'family resemblance' of articulating or implying a limit-experience, a limit-language, or a limit-dimension.

1. *Limits-**to*** our ordinary experience;
2. Disclosive of certain fundamental structures of our existence beyond that ordinary experience (*limits-**of***).

Limit Questions in *Science*:

Science and religion: their relationship.

The 'two-languages' approach is the most common among contemporary thinkers.

Linguistic philosophers: religious language is 'self-involving' whereas scientific language is 'spectatorial.'

Neo-orthodox theologians: theology is solely concerned with revelation and is neither encouraged nor distressed by the 'neutral' discoveries of science.

Many thinkers reject the two-languages approach, preferring a '*mediating* position' which concludes to what may be interpreted as a 'religious dimension' to the scientific enterprise itself.

Presupposed in this approach, however, is a careful articulation of the significant *differences* in methods and data in science and theology.

The discipline of *metaphysics* is needed to mediate the cognitive claim of any horizon-factor labeled the 'religious dimension' of science.

The religious dimension of science: self-transcendence as scientific authenticity.

Self-transcendence: one lives authentically insofar as one continues to allow oneself an expanding horizon (this possibility is understood best by reflecting on *our ability to ask questions*).

Scientific questioning impels one past an experienced world of sensitive immediacy to an intelligibility mediated and deliberately constituted world of meaning.

Scientific judgments really are examples of *cognitive self-transcendence*.

When science raises questions of *value* for deliberation, evaluation, discussion and action, it has moved past a level of merely cognitive self-transcendence to one of real, moral, existential, and communal self-transcendence.

The religious dimension of science: self-transcendence and limit questions.

Unless he wishes to abandon the search for authentic self-transcendence, the scientist cannot silence the question of the final horizon of scientific inquiry.

Questions for intelligence raise the question of the very possibility of scientific inquiry.

Scientific judgments raise the question of whether there can be any virtually unconditioned judgments unless there exists also a formally unconditioned.

Deliberation about the scientist's need to evaluate his findings in accordance with ethical values raises the questions as to whether our goals, purposes, and ideals are worthwhile and whether we can understand and affirm such a demand for worthwhileness without affirming an intelligent, rational, responsible source and ground for them.

Limit Questions in *Morality*:

Religion and morality: identical or distinct?

Classical liberalism and modernism failed to sufficiently distinguish between religion and morality.

The category 'limit-questions' provides a means by which one may best distinguish religious from moral discourse and experience.

The logic of limit-questions in moral discourse.

Principal resources are Ogden (process) and Toulmin (linguistic analysis).

Limit-questions in morality:

The moral use of argument is not entirely self-contained; i.e., we cannot really produce a moral argument for being moral.

Toulmin: we recognize that the logical peculiarity of all such 'limiting questions' is logically correct when our own instinctual drive for *reassurance*, for a general confidence about the future impels us to *use* religious language and to develop theological arguments.

Ogden maintains that all religious language bears the linguistic form of re-presentation; i.e., religious language is an effect (ergo a re-presentation) of an already present basic confidence and trust.

Religious language discloses an already present basic confidence which has been threatened and needs the reassurance which religious *re*-presentative language may bring.

The 'form of life' disclosed is the experience of a 'limit' confidence which, when threatened, can find the reassurance it seeks from neither science nor morality but only from those attitudes we name religious.

"The recognition of fideism's unacceptability as a theological option is the clearest reason to attempt to develop a revisionist model for fundamental theological reflection."

<u>Limit-situations in the world of the *everyday*</u>:

".. those human situations wherein a human being ineluctably finds manifest a certain *ultimate limit* of horizon to his or her existence."

- - 'boundary' (experience of limit-to)
- + 'ecstatic' (disclosive of limit-of)

The 'limit' world (*boundary*) of a final closure to our lives faces us with a starkness we cannot shirk and manages to disclose to us our basic existential faith or unfaith in life's very meaningfulness.

'*Ecstatic*' experiences are authentically self-transcending moments in our lives.

Experience of a reality simply given, gifted, happened.

Expressive of a 'world of meaning' beyond the everyday.

The human situation is intrinsically a limit situation:

a) A situation wherein we find ourselves not the masters of our fate but radically contingent/limited;
b) Yet we may also find ourselves radically our-of-our-everyday-selves as ecstatic, as gifted, even as 'graced'.

E.g., distinct from fear which has as its object some specific thing ready-to-hand or present-at-hand, *anxiety* (Angst) is a fear of *no-object*-in-the-world and is Disclosive of our often forgotten but never totally absent consciousness of our own radical contingency.

Initially, the language needed to express the experience of being grounded/horizoned by no other thing in the universe is *symbolic* limit-language.

<u>Chapter SIX: Religious Language in the New Testament</u>

<u>Background: analytical philosophy and religious language</u>

The issue: before anyone can begin to examine the truth-claims of religious language one must first see whether such language even has meaning.

Stages of the linguistic tradition:

1. 'verification principle' – religious statements are strictly meaningless.
2. 'falsifiability' – religious statements are strictly meaningless.
3. Investigation of the *use* and function of statements.

    Hare maintains that religious statements express our "bliks."

    Braithwaite maintains that religious statements are deeply internalized moral statements.

Ian *Ramsey* is principally concerned with two questions:

1. To what kind of empirical situations does religion appeal?
2. For such situations what kind of language is appropriate?

Religious language discloses a situation which involves an "*odd* discernment," a "*total* commitment," and a "*universal* significance."

For such situations, an "*odd* language" is needed; we find the need to qualify our normal object language to the point of infinity in order to express a *total* commitment, and a *universal* significance.

Ramsey does not, however, resolve the full problem of the cognitive status of religious language.

Frederick Ferre is explicitly concerned with the internal coherence of religious language.

The logic of religious language does manifest characteristics that may legitimately be described by the favored category "limit":

     a) Odd discernment
     b) Total commitment
     c) Universal applicability

<u>New Testament Language: The Breaking of Forms</u>

"The New Testament consistently modifies the traditional use of the language of proverbs, eschatological sayings, and parables through such procedures as intensification, transgression, and 'going to the limits' of language; these modifications allow the interpreter to propose that the sense of this language should be described as a limit-language of a genuinely religious character."

Proverbs: *intensification* of ordinary proverbial language by the linguistic strategies of paradox and hyperbole (cf. Lk 17.33).

Sense = the strange, jarring, paradoxical, and unnerving sense of a limit-language beyond the morality of traditional proverbial wisdom into the limit-domain of authentically religious speech.

Cf. Beardslee.

Proclamatory Sayings: break with all concern with 'literal time'.

This language intensifies the recognition that the everyday, even at its most significant, is utterly unable to disclose the final meaning of the everyday (cf. Lk 17.20-21).

A religious use of language which challenges, provokes, jars alike our wisdom, our morality, and our sense of every time.

Cf. Perrin.

Parabolic language:

The fundamental linguistic form operative in the narrative genre of parable is the *metaphor*.

Interaction/t*ension* theory: the key to any good metaphor lies in the tension between the key terms in a metaphorical statement.

Parables are narrative extensions of a basic metaphor.

Ricoeur finds a form of 'going to the limits' in the New Testament parables; the everydayness of the narrative heightens the eccentricity of those modes of behavior to which the 'kingdom' is compared.

The very ordinariness of the narrative form forces the tension of the underlying metaphor to a limit-vision of human possibilities.

"The parables, as stories, take the reader to the point where the course of ordinary life is broken; an intensification of the everyday emerges; the unexpected happens; a strange world of meaning is projected which challenges, jars, disorients our everyday vision precisely by both showing us the limits to the everyday and projecting the limit-character of the whole."

Clues to this limit-character are found in the 'extravagant' behavior of several of the characters which clash with the ordinary narrative.

New Testament Limit-Experience: a possible mode-of-being-in-the-world

"If we could hear – or 'over-hear' – the limit-language of the Christian gospel anew, we might experience again a dimension to life which renders it whole. It we could at least listen to the 'hints and guesses' disclosed to us in limit-situations, we might have some intimation of the odd, mysterious, indeed scandalous limit-experience which that gospel proclaims as an authentic human possibility."

Religious language *re-presents* that basic confidence and trust in existence which *is* our fundamental faith, our basic authentic more-of-being-in-the-world.

The 'religions' fundamentally ask us to allow the limit-experience of trust and confidence in the *final graciousness of reality* itself to provide the basic orientation to our lives.

Chapter SEVEN: The Question of God: Metaphysics Revisited

Introduction: Limit-language and Limit-concepts

The constitutive cognitive claim of Christianity is its articulation of the Christian God as the sole and single *objective ground of all reality*.

Two factors are involved in any attempt to judge the explicit cognitive claims involved in religious language:

1. Those cognitive claims should be articulated with as much *conceptual clarity* as possible;
2. An explicit cognitive belief in the objective reality of God has historically been central to traditional Christian religious language.

The revisionist theologian must develop *criteria* for meaning and truth which can validate or invalidate the cognitive claims for religious language.

Religious Language and Cognitive Claims: The Possibility and Necessity of Metaphysics

Ian Ramsey: the prospect for a 'theological metaphysics.'

General position: the word 'God' functions as the supreme 'integrator word' for the cosmic mapping of all experience.

The 'disclosure' of God is directly parallel to the disclosure of the non-observable "I" as the 'integrator word" of all my personal experience.

Frederick Ferre: the logic of theistic language and the place of 'metaphysical facts'.

Three basic modes of analysis for any adequate investigation of religious language:

a) "Syntactics" determines the 'internal language games' of 'first order' religious utterances.
b) "Interpretics" can analyze the non-cognitive uses of religious language as such uses disclose certain feelings or attitudes, certain affirmations of policy, or certain performances.
c) "Semantics" questions the meaning of and the ontological status for the referent of religious language.

       a. Specification of the 'metaphysical facts' referred to by religious and theological language.

       b. Specification of the criteria for metaphysics in critically investigating the cognitive claims involved in any genuine 'metaphysical facts.'

Syntactics and interpretics are dependent on semantics.

Certain factors are clear:

- Metaphysical facts are both '*given*' in and by experience, and yet *not simply given* but dependent upon our conceptual interpretations.
- The nature of this kind of interpretation is best described as '*conceptual synthesis*.'
- The criteria for determining the truth of any metaphysical fact are coherence and the adequacy of the metaphysical model for all our experience.

Schubert Ogden: Faith, Religious and Theistic Representative Language, and Metaphysics.

"Faith is a fundamental factor in the life of every human being.

    a) 'Existential faith': Instinctive confidence in the environment.

    b) Self-conscious 'reflective understanding' of that instinctive confidence, wherein existential faith can be represented in an express, thematic, and conceptually precise way.

The mode of reflective understanding is correctly described as 'metaphysical': *raising to full self-consciousness* those basic beliefs that are the conditions of the possibility of our existing or understanding at all.

Religion is basically a representative phenomenon whose cognitive claims can be investigated only by a mode of reflection whose task is precisely the investigation of all claims to represent our basic beliefs as the condition of the possibility of all our existing and understanding.

The concept of God is the central and the clearest expression of the general metaphysical character of religious language itself.

Religious Language and the Possibility of Metaphysical Language: *Anders Nygren*

Basic charge: all metaphysical language is involved in a *category-mistake*, especially the mistaken assumption that metaphysics is in some sense meaningful sense 'scientific' (and therefore either deductive or inductive).

Nygren delineates three basic *uses* for metaphysics:

1. Inductive metaphysics (which proceeds by constructing a world-view from the implications of the more particular results of one or several of the empirical sciences).

     Such world-hypotheses, however, cannot be tested/verified through any recognized experiential method of science and, therefore, are not actually scientific.

2. Deductive metaphysics: The problem is that no axioms are in fact self-evident.

3. Metaphysics as conceptual poetry.

     Metaphysical concepts are meant to express aesthetic meanings and not scientific meanings.

       Metaphysics is utterly meaningless as scientific language.

None of the meanings analyzed by Nygren as exhaustive of the 'uses' of metaphysics can be used to characterize the position advanced in this work.

The metaphysical mode of argument is transcendental in the exact sense that it shows that certain basic beliefs must necessarily be maintained as basic conditions of the possibility of our understanding or existing at all.

Such basic beliefs can be shown to be basic by demonstrating the self-contradictory character which their denial involves for any intelligent and rational inquirer.

The Uses and Abuses of Religious Language

Both phenomenological-linguistic and transcendental modes of analysis are needed in order to determine both non-cognitive and cognitive uses for implicit and explicit religious language.

Metaphysics and Metaphor

Metaphysical concepts should articulate the cognitive meaning of the religious metaphor in a manner which affirms rather than effectively negates the originating metaphor itself.

Metaphysics and Myth

Myths intend adequate representations of basic beliefs; as such they should be taken seriously but not literally.

Chapter EIGHT: The Meaning, Meaningfulness, and Truth of God-Language

The Philosophical Situation: The New Metaphysics

Two general criteria for metaphysical statements:

1. Coherence;
2. Fidelity to experience, fairly and broadly understood ("turn to the subject").

The constitutive principle of the process tradition insists that philosophers note their experience as experiencing selves rather than their sense-perception of objects as the fundamental experiential, and thereby metaphysical, ground of all their basic concepts.

The paradigm case for reality is the self's full range of unconscious, conscious, and knowing experience of the self.

Central categories: process, becoming, relation, sociality, and temporality.

Hartshorne: only the reality of God, itself reinterpreted in process metaphysical categories, can account for that original and ineluctable confidence in the worthwhileness of existence which the earlier analyses of the religious dimension of our common experience portrayed.

The Theological Situation: The Search for an Appropriate Formulation of the Meaning and Truth of God

The process thinkers force the issue of God on two fronts:

1. They argue that precisely the modern affirmations of openness, change, and liberation demand a belief in God as the ground of these and all our other most particularly modern aspirations;
2. They affirm with the classical Christian tradition that the existence of God is the only possible final understanding of our human situation, but deny that the nature of God as understood and expressed by that tradition is sound.

Process thinkers affirm that God must be considered a *dipolar* reality.

In our experience, intelligent and responsible *change* is a positive factor.

We also experience ourselves as authentic selves only in direct proportion to our ability to be affected by and *related to* other selves.

God is absolute (as the one whose *existence* depends on no other being) and relative (as the one whose *actuality* is relative to all other beings).

- Supremely *absolute*: God alone among all realities is not dependent on others for his existence.
- Supremely *relative*: God alone affects all (by providing the relevant possibilities) and is affected by all (by changing as our actual decisions and actions occur and affect God).

Process thought claims to advance on classical theism at three levels:

- Coherence;
- Existential meaningfulness;
- Fidelity to Scripture.

The concept of God as the *eminently social and temporal one* seems both a coherent and a meaningful metaphysical concept based upon the analogy of the self's own temporal and social reality.

- The *concrete* God is the eminently social and relative one affecting and affected by all reality.
- 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 identity.

In terms of criteria for existential meaningfulness, the dipolar understanding of God's reality is as meaningful as its ability reflectively to articulate the objective basis of those limit-experiences and limit-languages found in both our common existence and the Christian faith.

By means of this metaphysics, one may render conceptually coherent the clear insistence of the Christian Scriptures that God is qualitatively distinct from creatures both as, in some meaningful way, absolute and as supremely related to, affecting, and affected by all reality.

In *Anselm's Discovery*, Hartshorne maintains that correct logical understanding of the meaning of the concept God is also an affirmation of its truth.

Only an affirmation of the reality of God as the one necessarily existent can validate our very understanding of our selves as selves, our primordial and unconquerable faith in the ultimate worthwhileness of our existence.

The Meaningfulness of Christian God-Language: The Search for an Adequate Limit-Language

Difficulties with process thought:

- Internal technical problems which need real clarification.
- Inadequate hermeneutical analyses of Thomas Aquinas.
- Need for a fuller process anthropology, more cognizant with and more articulate of the ambiguity, the tragedy, the sin involved in a truly contemporary as distinct from a modern model of humanity.

The present need is that of finding symbolic language which can allow the disclosure of the Christian God to 'happen' for the present actual situation.

Chapter NINE: The Re-Presentative Limit-Language of Christology

<u>Introduction: The Question of Christology</u>

'Over-hearing' the story of Jesus will still allow for those singular moments of a redescription of life's possibilities and a transformative reorientation of life's actualities which Christians have suggested by such traditional phrases as redemption and salvation.

Rediscovery and reappropriation.

God's action in Jesus Christ is represented in the limit-language of the New Testament by and about Jesus as the Christ.

Three facts need investigating:

1. The fact of our common human need for story.
2. The fact of 'evil' in the human situation.
3. The fact that facts are not exhaustively defined in terms of actualizations of possibilities, but also include re-presentation of possibilities.

Designation of a religion as universal implies two characteristics:

1. The religion arises from a *special historical occasion of religions insight*;
2. But the special religious experience and language are sufficiently evocative of our common experience to bear the claim of *universal meaningfulness*.

<u>The Fact of the Need for Fiction</u>

"Human beings need story, symbol, image, myth, and fiction to disclose to their imaginations some genuinely new possibilities for existence; possibilities which conceptual analysis, committed as it is to understanding present actualities, cannot adequately provide."

Fictions do not operate to help us escape reality, but to *redescribe* our human reality in such Disclosive terms that we return to the 'everyday' *reoriented* to life's real (if forgotten or sometimes never even imagined) possibilities.

The consequence often includes a reorientation of our own most basic moods, feelings, reactions and actions, our very way of living in this world.

Ricoeur: "The symbol gives rise to thought; yet thought is informed by and returns to the symbol."

'Second naivete' – return to the symbols themselves, to reexperience their transformative possibility anew.

Honesty demands that we bring to bear upon the reality-claims of even our most cherished stories the most penetrating tools of critical analysis presently available.

'Demythologization' is necessary in order to avoid the temptation of 'literalization' which beclouds/distorts the ways-ob-being-in-the-world disclosed in the myths.

Criteria for judging the explicitly religious uses of symbolic language:

1. For character-forming action we need metaphors, images, symbols, stories, parables, myths;
2. For an adequate praxis we need both rigorous theory and appropriate symbolization.

Validation of non-cognitive uses of religious language:

1. In accordance with the general criteria of metaphysics;

2. Criteria of 'existential verification.'

<u>The Fact of Evil</u>

Evil is *inevitably a fact*, though not a metaphysical necessity.

> A powerfully Disclosive existential description of the reality of sin and evil remains one of the permanent achievements of the recent philosophical and theological task.

>> One of the permanent achievements of the neo-orthodox theologians was their willingness both to face the fact of evil and to attempt to find authentic Christian possibilities for its transformation.

> Two admissions must be made:
> 1. The reality of that central fact of our own experience which we name 'evil/sin'.
> 2. That for character-forming action we need to study any symbols of transformation which both face and promise authentically to transform that situation.

<u>Facts and Possibilities: Actualizations and Representations</u>

There are two ways by which possibilities may become facts:

1. A fact is an actualization of a possibility.
2. Representing a certain possibility in disclosive symbolic language and action.

> "A Christian sacrament is traditionally believed to be a fact as the representation of a real possibility which God has made present to humanity in Christ Jesus."

> 'Messiahship' may be said to refer to that office which represents a certain possibility.

>> The primary question becomes the 'factual' one of understanding the inclusive claim to meaning and truth represented in the affirmation that Jesus is the Christ; that in the proclamation through word and sacrament of the singular history of Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ the truth of human existence is represented with factual finality.

Two modern articulations of the factual status of the Christian claim for Jesus the Christ rest on the assumption that only an actualization-of-a-possibility secures the status of fact for Christological meaning:

a) A modern psychologizing of the ontological high christology of Chalcedon and the Johannine Logos tradition (Schleiermacher, Ritschl, Rahner, Tillich).
b) Psychologization of the low christology of the synoptics (Ebeling, Fuchs).

We need to know what Jesus' words, his deeds, and his destiny, as expressions of his office of messiahship, authentically represent as real human possibilities for genuine relationship to God.

<u>Christological Language as Re-Presentative Limit-Langauge</u>

Jesus' teaching is dominated by the powerful motif of the sovereignty of the reign ("the kingdom") of God which brings and demands a new righteousness.

> "As the reign of God and his promise of a new righteousness for humanity, a new, a faithful, an agapic mode-of-being-in-the-world is proclaimed with existential urgency in the limit-language of Jesus' teaching, so that reign and the new and liberating agapic righteousness – that limit-experience – seems re-presented in the actual deeds of the historical Jesus."

The fact that the central representative symbol of the cross is always joined to the symbol of the resurrection is the final existential clue to the central meaning of Jesus' words, his deeds, and his destiny.

Cross – God's very power seems weakness to the self-righteous, to secure, the established ones; the strangeness of Jesus' liberating freedom in his conduct, his representation of a new and agapic possibility for existence, finds appropriate paradigmatic representation in a destiny where his self-sacrificing love seems destroyed by the stupidity and sin of the unloving, the self-righteous, the self secure.

Resurrection -- the representative words, deeds, and teachings of this representative figure, this Jesus as the Christ, can in fact be trusted.

Jesus, as re-presentative Word, illuminates what an authentically human existence under the sovereignty of a living God may be.

The referent of this limit-language is the disclosure of a certain limit-mode-of-being-in-the-world; 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.

In the confession of Jesus as the Christ, in the further confession of Jesus Christ as Lord, Christians find a true, a limit-re-presentation of their lives as lives whose basic faith is grounded in the action of a loving God.

"For Christians, Christological language suffices because it fulfills certain factual understandings of human and divine reality: the fact that our lives are, in reality, meaningful; that we really do live in the presence of a loving God; that the final word about our lives is gracious and the final power is love."

Chapter TEN: History, Theory, and Praxis

Practical Theology: the praxis of a revisionist theory

The liberal and new-orthodox remain the two principal models for practical theology:

- The *liberal* theologian's nearly complete commitment to the modern Enlightenment view of humanity's rational possibilities prevented him from either grasping theoretically or employing practically the profound and transformative Christian images of man's actual situation of sin and grace, and, correlatively, the Christian image of a loving and just God whose acts are meant to transform that human situation beyond reasonableness and even beyond tragedy.
- *Neo-orthodox* insistence upon the real transformative power of the Christian symbols in their full existential meaning challenged the modern Enlightenment view of humanity's actuality and possibility.

Contemporary 'political' theologians of praxis have proposed new resources for the actualization of the new-orthodox model in the present situation:

1. Retrieval of the *societal/political* (not merely existentialist/individualist) meanings inherent in the symbols of Judaism and Christianity.
2. Rediscovery of and theological reinterpretation of the classical *Hegelian-Marxist* notion of praxis.
    Commitment to two fundamental Marxian axioms:
    a) The task of philosophy/theology is not to interpret the world but to change it;
    b) That task is best fulfilled when critical theory always informs and is informed by actual economic, social, and political practice.

    Praxis = critical relationship between theory and practice whereby each is dialectically influenced and transformed by the other.

Tool for analysis: *dialectical method* whereby one negates present actualizations of theory and practice in order to project future theoretical and practical possibilities.

Principal achievements:

a) De-individualization of the focal point of theological meaning;
b) Shows the radical dimensions of future possibilities disclosed by the limit-language of Christian eschatology;
c) Explicitly introduced the enduring Marxian insights into the centrality of praxis into the Christian theological context.

Criticism: *insufficiently critical* analysis of central Christian symbols.

The revisionist model for a practical theology, in consistency with its application in constructive theology, would attempt to continue the real achievements of the neo-orthodox theologies of praxis while negating their lack of critical rigor.

1. Strictly empirical analyses of our actual economic, political, cultural, and social situations.
2. Rigorous ethical analyses of the possibilities and limitations of the various infra-structural and super-structural components of our social reality.
3. Critical retrievals/inventions of various symbol-systems in accordance with their ability both to negate the oppressive forces actually operative in the situation, and to project those images of social humanity to which the authentic human being can commit himself/herself.