

Postmodern Challenges to Theology:
A study of sociological and hermeneutic factors in theological pluralism

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ABSTRACT

Postmodern Challenges to Theology: A study of sociological and hermeneutic factors in theological pluralism

Marie Campbell

This study explores the complexities of theological pluralism in the postmodern context, with a particular focus on the distinct but inter-related sociological and interpretative dimensions of theology. The theologian's internalisation of multiple plausibility structures (social and religious) necessarily influence contemporary theology, while traditional theology is influenced by centuries of internalised historicity and philosophical thought, which is brought to bear on its interpretation of fundamental theological principles. Postmodern theology, rejecting concepts of universality and objectivity, challenges these traditional principles while proposing new possibilities for interpreting the human being in relationship with the Transcendent. Given the exploratory nature of the study its conclusion is necessarily tentative, leaning towards a middle ground in a situation that is intrinsically conflicted. Deeper and more extensive analysis of this middle ground would be required before firm conclusions on its potential to respond with integrity to the postmodern critique could be reached.

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1. 1. Introduction

To be engaged in public theology in postmodern culture is to understand that its pluralist challenge exists on two distinct, but inter-related levels. The social reality might be considered the ‘front line’ level, where the theologian’s task requires an ongoing, interactive relationship with all elements of that reality. The theoretical level, which ultimately influences the social, is concerned with maintaining theological integrity in the face of cultural and theological pluralism. Within each of these levels, there exists a network of complexities, theories and competing worldviews, in which all theologians are implicated in some capacity. The task of this project is to identify these elements to the extent that they are fundamental to the overarching interest of the thesis that theology needs to participate in public discourse. Theology has the potential not only for enriching community and culture, but can itself be enriched and revived by a new understanding of culture, yielding ultimately a continuum of mutual development and growth. At the level of praxis, theology can bring to the public agenda new dimensions of ethical discourse, as well as theological perspectives on peace and social justice, inter-religious and interdisciplinary dialogue. Its voice affirms the intrinsic value and dignity of every human person.

There are, however, substantial challenges posed by postmodern philosophy to classical theology. Underpinned by inherently conflicting – even polarised – worldviews, the two are largely irreconcilable as the situation currently stands. Postmodernism is characterised by its espousal of fragmentation and provisionality, while the premise of classical theology is universality and certitude. The dichotomy is underscored in Pope John

Paul II's challenge to postmodernism's rejection of objective truth and universal reason in the opening statement of his encyclical letter, *Fides et Ratio*: "Faith and reason are two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth" (FR 1). This statement reflects the traditional stance that there is a universal truth, towards which the knowledge derived from faith and reason leads the seeker. In this same vein, the traditional approach to revelation, formulated in doctrine as the permanent foundation of Christian knowledge about God, is anathema to the postmodernist.

Postmodern philosophy, with its critique of knowledge as having foundations, of universal reason, of objective knowledge, and of absolute truth is clearly in conflict with the precepts of traditional theology. Yet, this philosophy is now emerging as an important influence in theology, giving rise to the question of how theology is to be done in postmodernism. Revelation, for the postmodern theologian, is not contained (or containable) in a doctrine that resists new interpretation of God revealed. Put differently, the formulated doctrine of revelation is not the foundation upon which the search for knowledge of God begins. Rather, God is revealed through the ages by ongoing interpretation of the event of Jesus Christ recounted in Scripture. The thesis proposes to establish that the nonfoundationalist theology of postmodernism as it stands is an inadequate alternative to traditional ("foundationalist") theology given the propensity of the former to relativism. This does not suggest, however, that the latter is beyond critique, and to this end, it is being proposed that theologian David Tracy makes an important contribution in his understanding of the "doctrines" of early Catholicism (the content of *kerygmatic* confessions) as playing a corrective role in New Testament interpretation.

A different, but related challenge is posed to theology by the pluralism that characterises postmodernism. If theology is to assume an effective role in public discourse, the theoretical dimensions of the social reality must be apprehended, for this has significant implications for theology and for the theologian. Sociology is important to the theologian from three perspectives. It first serves to locate religion (and hence theology) in society. Second, it serves to heighten sociological self-consciousness – a matter of some importance in the pluralist context. Finally, in its striving for understanding of the nature of the human being, sociology has much to offer theology by way of dialogical opportunity. Its importance to public theology, then, cannot be over-emphasised. Understanding something of social theory is the first step towards grasping the complexity of a social reality in which theology must interact with three disparate yet overlapping elements of society. While active in the wider society, theology must also be irreproachable in its obligation to meet academic standards (or public criteria) for its presentation of truth claims. Finally, and perhaps of greatest sensitivity, is the responsibility of Catholic theologians to respond to a hierarchy often far removed in thought from the social and academic space in which the public theologian must be in dialogue. There is, inevitably, a requirement for the theologian to hold in tension conflicting perceptions of the social-academic and ecclesial realities. To achieve this at the level of competence required by the theological enterprise, the theologian cannot afford to be naïve about the complexity of the social reality and the self as socially conditioned being. The thesis examines the social theory of Peter Berger, and seeks to adapt this to the needs of the theologian, whose horizons go beyond functionality, but who is nevertheless influenced by social perceptions, and by social self-perception. Approaches to theological-sociological dialogue are also sought here.

1. 2. Rationale for Proposed Study

The two areas of study in this thesis – sociology and postmodern philosophy / theology – are of vital concern to theology today. The rift that has developed between contemporary philosophy and theology renders a co-relational approach with another relevant discipline essential if theology is to be interpreted within a common framework of cultural understanding. Sociology, it is suggested, offers such possibilities. Further, as society itself develops in a more complex pattern, the theologian's grasp of that complexity becomes urgent – a circumstance rendered even more pressing when theologians are engaged explicitly in public theology in a climate of cultural pluralism. Theological discernment in the matter of pluralism would be greatly facilitated by sociological self-awareness, so that internalised plurality can be recognised and properly examined, its negative effects in the form of random theological pluralism mitigated.

The postmodern epistemological critique gives rise to the question of whether fruitful dialogue between traditional theology and postmodern culture is possible. The question is double-edged, for if, on the one hand, theology fails to secure a participating role in the public realm through its adherence to a rigid foundationalism, then it is in danger of invisibility, and by default sets the stage for privatised religion. This is to betray the intrinsic publicness of Christianity. If, on the other hand, a public theological voice is achieved at the expense of Christian identity, then theological integrity is at risk. This will be the subject of extensive discussion in the final chapter of the thesis, in which nonfoundationalist theologies will be discussed.

The question of theological integrity is the concern that ushered in the movement towards nonfoundationalist theology in the first place, and common to all such theology is a renewed emphasis on the centrality of Scripture to theological claims. For nonfoundationalist theology, it is here, in a process of ongoing interpretation that the truth of Christian faith is to be found. Given the gathering momentum of this movement, a study of its arguments against the traditional approach is needed. The value of this study lies in its exploratory interest in new thinking about the very foundations of Christianity. If the nonfoundationalist critique can be brought to bear on traditional theology while retaining theological integrity, then the face of Christianity could be altered forever. If, however, the integrity of theology is lost to relativism or exclusivism, then so also is authentic Christianity. Exploration of this increasingly influential thinking is, therefore, a matter of some urgency.

1. 3. Statement of the problem

An authentic public theology in postmodernism implies not only an engagement with sociology, but also and crucially, an engagement with the social and philosophical response to the ‘failed’ project of modernism. Certitude, belief in universal rationality, and faith in the myths of progress are removed from the social and cultural landscape. In their place is a new, smaller landscape of contingency, fragmentation, and contextual knowledge, legitimated in language and culture. At stake in this smaller world is the ancient doctrine that constitutes “the deposit of the faith” – revelation on the nature of God. The permanence and unchanging identity of revelation is guarded zealously, while the sanctioned plurality of form in its expression contains a weakness inasmuch as the

combination of unity of content and plurality in form can be demonstrated to be unworkable. While interpretation of the *content* of doctrine may threaten the identity of revelation, the current practice of plurality in form will, arguably, have the same effect. The problem is to identify an approach that mitigates the risk of relativism present in the nonfoundationalist urging towards interpretation of *content*, while recognising the limitations of a formulaic rendering of revelation. It will be argued here that David Tracy offers such an approach.

1. 4. Thesis Outline

The second chapter is concerned primarily with sociology, focussing on the work of theorist Peter Berger. While amenable to dialogue with theology, aspects of Berger's theory suggest a society bound to the status quo, and thus in need of some form of corrective, which will be considered in Chapter 3. Options to be considered in respect of sociological-theological dialogue are offered in the second chapter, followed by a brief discussion of some relevant aspects of John Milbank's work on the deconstruction of social theory. The third chapter moves into the realm of theology's three publics as defined by David Tracy, and discusses the specific problems of cultural pluralism, including the theologian's internalisation of multiple social locations. Using Bernard Lonergan's approach to self-appropriation as a corrective to Berger's theory, an attempt is made to demonstrate how that theory might facilitate the sociological self-awareness that Tracy seeks for the theologian. The fourth chapter moves from pluralism in the explicitly social context to the hermeneutics of theological pluralism sanctioned by the Catholic Church, in which the unchanging identity of revelation may be expressed in a plurality of conceptual

systems, referred to as the form/content hermeneutical schema. The line that separates modern from postmodern (nonfoundationalist) theology, commensurable from incommensurable pluralism, is defined by Thomas Guarino as (respectively) the acceptance or rejection of form/content as an adequate mode of interpreting revelation. The fifth chapter discusses the foundational philosophy of modernism as originating in Descartes, and offers a postmodern response to modernist thought in the work of Richard Rorty. Chapter Six examines the nonfoundationalist and pluralist influences in theology, with a focus on theologians George Lindbeck and David Tracy. In addition to Lindbeck's "cultural-linguistic" model of theology, this chapter is concerned with the implications of Lindbeck's hermeneutics in his approach of "intratextuality," and picks up the hermeneutic problem of form/content raised in Chapter 4 through a study of relevant aspects of Tracy's work.

1. 5. Delimitations of the paper

1.5.1 Religious confessional affiliation directly affects the theological response to nonfoundationalist theology. For example, the Protestant Reform denominations are generally less concerned with the epistemology critique and the preservation of the "deposit of faith" than is the Catholic tradition. It is important, therefore, to state that this thesis is concerned primarily, but not exclusively, with the Roman Catholic tradition. Catholic theology places greater emphasis on the timelessness of revelation and on the irrevocability of doctrine than most other confessions. Its sacred Tradition (including its doctrine) is considered one of the sources of Catholic theology, and is thus a serious obstacle for theologians seeking to get beyond it to a

new Christology, and a new understanding of revelation. Roman Catholicism, then, offers a more active dialectical engagement for the thesis.

1.5.2. The traditional reliance of theological reflection on philosophy is implied in the thesis; engagement with this topic would exceed the scope of the thesis. It may be sufficient to say only that philosophy has long provided contexts of prevailing thought through which theology could be interpreted in culture.

1.5.3. Theologies of religious pluralism are of vital importance in the current debates of theological pluralism. The topic is not included here, however, as its dimensions exceed the scope of the thesis.

1.6. Definition of Terms

1. 6.1 Foundationalism: (epistemological) This is a pejorative term coined by postmodern philosophers, who deem knowledge as purely contextual and without foundations. The term is directed towards the traditional philosophical stance which advances the notion that beliefs must have a very certain base or foundation requiring no justification. The long and close co-relation between philosophy and theology has resulted in the use of the term in the theological context, intending reference to those theologies explicated through the metaphysics, anthropologies or epistemologies offered by pre-modern and modern philosophies as “the defensible consequences of reasoning” (Thiel 40). Christian theology, then, with its foundation in God’s revelation, and its attempts through faith and reason to arrive at truth

claims is implicated in the postmodern critiques of epistemology, of metaphysics and of objective truth.

1. 6. 2 Nonfoundationalism: The term expresses opposition to foundationalism. In theology, epistemological and metaphysical claims are rejected as unwarranted beliefs, this rejection bringing in its wake the inevitable questioning of the permanence ascribed to the *content* of the doctrine of revelation as formulated in the trinitarian and christological affirmations of Nicaea and Chalcedon. It is to be noted here that the use of ‘nonfoundationalism’ in respect of theology is something of a misnomer, its usage by certain theologians and religious scholars notwithstanding. The so-called ‘nonfoundationalist theologians’ fully endorse Scripture as the foundation from which one begins to seek understanding of God, and cannot in the strict sense be considered ‘nonfoundationalist.’
1. 6. 3 Postmodernism: For purposes of the thesis, the term refers to the contemporary movement in philosophy and the humanities that rejects the modernist epistemological claims.
1. 6. 4 Where possible gender language is avoided; where fluidity in writing requires it, the pronoun ‘she’ has been employed in reference to both genders.

Christian theology, erstwhile Queen of the Sciences, has of recent times been consigned to the fringes of public discourse. While the objective of theologian John Milbank is to restore the regnant status of theology (TST 380), such is not the intention of this thesis. Rather, it advocates theology's movement from the margins of discourse to a seat around the analogous table. In other words, theology is being proposed as a worthy partner in public discourse, and not the predominant voice from a medieval past. The question that begs to be asked here is why, in secular, pluralist postmodern society might there be a need for theology in the public realm. It will be argued in this chapter that human concern with questions of ultimate meaning, otherwise designated as 'religious questions,' is an integral part of the human condition, and that theology, which formulates and responds to these questions, needs therefore, to be a vital presence in society. The chapter addresses how theology might situate itself in society to give authentic public voice to questions of ultimate meaning in the contemporary reality. More specifically, the interest of the chapter lies in dialogue with social theory, where an empirical perspective on the individual in society can illuminate the theological understanding of the human being in the creation.

The chapter will begin with an overview of the task of public theology in contemporary society and follow with a brief description of the theological method best suited to that task. The necessity for dialogue will emerge from these two discussions, which will lead into an exploration of the tensions that often constrain dialogue between social theory and theology. In the interests of establishing possible areas of co-relation

between sociology and theology, the chapter presents a theoretical perspective on social formation, from which emerges the contour of the human person, whose whole being is directed towards the search for meaningful existence.

2. 1 Use of Sources

Bernard Lonergan's insight that the task of contemporary theology is to mediate between religion and culture influences the background information which briefly defines the public role of the theologian, and the next section which discusses the relationship of theological method to culture (Method in Theology). A descriptive approach to theorist Peter Berger's sociological perspectives will be offered here through his volume The Sacred Canopy, in which the author presents the model of society as a unique dialectical relationship between the human being and constructed society (of which religion is understood as a product). The wide acceptance of Berger's theory¹ together with his (qualified) interest in dialogue with theology renders his work valuable to this project. An argument offered by theologian Charles Davis in response to the notion that society is a human construct will be used as a counterpoint to Berger's argument (Religion and the Making of Society). With the intention of introducing a viewpoint that opposes the notion of public theology and the dialogical activity that this implies, a summary of the "radical orthodox" position in respect of sociology will be presented through the work of postmodern theologian John Milbank (Theology and Social Theory). Finally, a paper presented at a faculty seminar (Centre for Catholic Studies) by sociologist William J. Kinney, will be used for the possibilities it offers for co-relational and interactive dialogical approaches suggested by theologian David Tracy and by Berger. By the end of the chapter,

it should be clear that while important areas of incompatibility between sociological and theological thought do exist, authentic dialogue – the essence of public theology – is possible, and without it, theology will remain on the fringes of public life.

2. 2 The task of public theology

The role of the contemporary theologian in society is perhaps best apprehended in Bernard Lonergan's succinct definition of theology as "mediat[ing] between a cultural matrix and the significance and role of a religion in that matrix" (xi). In the pluralism of Western postmodern culture, this understanding of Lonergan carries sociological and theological implications, which can be ignored by theology only at the risk of its increased privatisation and diminishing hope for its participation in public discourse. The overarching challenge in the current historical context is the need for Christian theology to speak in many voices, yet, speak of only one central truth.

The term 'public theology' is in the strictest sense, tautological, for theology is never a private enterprise. The central argument of theologian David Tracy's text The Analogical Imagination, is the intrinsic "publicness" of theology. For Tracy, faith and trust in the universality of the divine reality precludes a privatised theology, or references to a particularised God (51-2). The theologian makes a claim to public attention as bearer of the meaning and truth of human existence; therefore, however unique and personal theological reflection, it necessarily intends an audience of "any fellow human being" (4-5). An intended audience does not, however, translate into an attending audience, and public interest in religion cannot be presupposed in pluralist culture. Hence, the theologian must self-consciously observe the 'signs of the times,' interpreting them in theology, while also

¹ For notes on theological usage of Berger's theory, refer David Tracy. Blessed Rage for Order (p 252 n 13).

seeking to interpret religion in today's public square. The task of contemporary theology, then, calls for continual mediation of meaning and truth from culture to religion and religion to culture.

2. 3 The relationship of culture to theological method.

In the pre-Enlightenment era where religion was so closely bound to the social structures as to be indistinguishable from these structures, the theologian's task was relatively uncomplicated. Classicist culture embodied the universal and permanent norms and ideals to which all might aspire, and similarly (affirming Bernard Lonergan's understanding that theology mediates between religion and culture) theology was understood as a permanent achievement, requiring only discourse on its nature (Lonergan xi). In the aftermath of the second world war, when war itself, as well as the indelible stain of the Holocaust marked Europe's descent into barbarism, the pre-modern notions of Western cultural superiority that had lingered in the Catholic Church were irrevocably shattered. Spearheaded by such theologians as Karl Rahner and Bernard Lonergan, there began a shift from the influences of classicist culture towards a new awareness of world consciousness and historical consciousness in theological thought. Discourse on the nature of a permanent theology was clearly at odds with the need for theological recognition of the cultural diversity in the world, and of the cultural changes wrought by history. A contemporary way of doing theology was essential if the Church was to achieve some means of interacting with the modern world. Culture is increasingly characterised by its propensity to change, at times inclining towards "progress" and at others towards "decline" (Lonergan xi). Contemporary theology needs, therefore, to be alert to the nature of cultural

change, and positioned to contribute to moral progress in society or to protest the signs of social decline. In short, theology can never be static; it must be ongoing (Lonergan xi).

Where theology is ongoing, a contextually appropriate theological method is mandatory. If theology is to mediate meaning and value between religion and culture, its perspective must be comprehensive and its approach must address the concrete realities of human beings (including the theologian) in culture. If it is to meet the empirical sciences on their own ground, and credibly question their methods and findings, then theological reflection must itself be methodologically sound in the empirical context. Lonergan's seminal work, Method in Theology, is anthropological in approach inasmuch as it advances a methodology rooted in the procedures of the human mind, or more specifically in the capacity of the human mind to analyse its own operations. Lonergan describes the subjectivity of this "intentional analysis" as authentic, inasmuch as it permits the objectivity essential to fruitful dialogue: "[I]n a world mediated by meaning and motivated by value, objectivity is the consequence of authentic subjectivity" (265). Lonergan's theological method, which he describes as "a framework for collaborative creativity," conceives of the theologian's various operations as taking place in the context of "modern science, modern scholarship, modern philosophy, and of historicity, collective practicality, and coresponsibility" (xi). In sum, contemporary theologians are to strive for the authentic objectivity conducive to creative collaboration with their peers and to dialogue with other academic disciplines.

Theology's contribution to dialogue and to the progress of society depends on the effectiveness of its mediation between religion and the social realities in the cultural matrix, a circumstance which implicitly demands the theologian's informed engagement

with the discourse of these social realities. That is, the theologian's capacity to engage intelligently, rationally and responsibly in interdisciplinary dialogue is crucial to the success of public theology.

2. 4 Background to the problem of sociological-theological dialogue

Inherent tensions constrain dialogue between these two disciplines. On the one hand, theology is engaged in the study of the human being in relationship with the transcendent reality. On the other, sociology understands itself as one of the human sciences, engaged in the empirical study of human society. William J. Kinney, in his paper "Conflict and Complementarity," establishes the overlapping and conflicting foci of the two disciplines as the source of the epistemological and ontological tension. He identifies the overlap as deriving from sociology's concern with religion as a component of society, which, he notes, brings the sociologist into the academic domain of the theologian and "vice versa" (2). The conflict arises from the theocentric approach of the theologian on the one hand, and on the other, the sociological position that phenomena such as 'faith' and 'God' are no more than "collective, subjective, social perceptions" (2). David Tracy notes the propensity within theology to understand the church (appropriated here to reference religion) as a purely theological reality, while rarely acknowledging its sociological reality (AI 23). This, together with theology's fear of reductionism in sociology (AI 24), results in the theologian's inclination, as observed by Berger, to address sociological questions from a purely theological perspective (Berger 179). Berger quite correctly points out the irrelevance of dialogue that is not situated in the same universe of discourse, emphasising that the sociologist must speak about religion empirically and not theologically (179).

Writing more than twenty years after Berger, John Milbank takes Berger's concern to its ultimate point in his claim that sociology has its origins in theology, or more correctly in an anti-theological stance (3, 52). The divergence of thought between the two disciplines is, then, substantial and problematic.

2. 5 Peter Berger: A sociological perspective

The enduring question (or antinomy) of sociology – whether human beings make society or whether society makes the human being – is the crux of its problem for the theologian. Sociology's analyses permit no room on either side of the question for an operative transcendent principle, hence creating some defensiveness in the theologian. Perspectives on this question, given its sociological thrust, should properly begin with the sociologist. Peter Berger's unique response introduces and underpins the argument of his volume, *The Sacred Canopy*: "Society is a dialectic phenomenon in that it is a human product, and nothing but a human product, that yet continuously acts back upon its producer" (3). The author's objective in this volume is to co-relate his earlier theories on the sociology of knowledge² to the phenomenon of religion. Thus, as an element of the social reality, religion too is conceived as a human construct, dialectic in nature. Berger's dialectic of human interaction with the processes of social formation, takes place in three steps or "moments:" externalisation, objectivation and internalisation.

Externalisation describes the fundamental outward-reaching nature of the human being – the vital expression of the human self in the world, and as contributor to the "world-building" enterprise (4-6). Berger understands externalisation as an anthropological

² Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann. *The Social Construction of Reality – A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. New York: Doubleday 1966.

necessity, the human condition being one of incompleteness at birth, requiring the continuing process of externalisation for its completion. Unlike the non-human animal, which enters a “species-specific environment” largely determined by instinct, the human being lacks instinctual specificity, and enters a world that is not ready made: “man must *make* a world for himself” (5). The need to counter the absence of a stable, prefabricated world gives rise to the unceasing human activity of world-building, through which the human being achieves completion. Culture, the world that the human being produces, necessarily lacks the stability of the natural world, and so must be “continuously produced and reproduced” (6). Thus, culture is characterised by inevitable and continual change even as it represents the consummation of human striving towards stability (6). The anthropological structure of the human being, therefore, would appear to be marked by a great inconsistency inasmuch as human activity is constantly directed towards a fundamental yet unattainable goal. Only a perception of permanence and security exists in the “man made” world, and that achieved through cultural formations such as social structures.

Society is that aspect of culture which structures and orders the manner in which human beings live together (6). It is, as an element of culture, a human construct “constituted and maintained” only through human action. If merely an aspect of culture, society is nevertheless of singular importance inasmuch as it responds to the anthropological dictate of human living as a communal enterprise. In isolation from her species, the human being loses her humanity; and in the absence of collective human activity, culture would be non-existent; the development of languages, the establishing of

values, and the building of institutions are collective achievements. Society, then, is both the outcome of culture and the vital means of its survival (7).

Objectivation, the second step of Berger's dialectic, is the process by which the constructed society of externalisation is perceived as an objective reality. That is, society is not discerned as a human construct. Rather, it is taken for granted as something "out there," unconnected to human activity (8). Through the process of externalisation, therefore, the constructed social world is empowered with control over its human producer, whether exercised implicitly or explicitly (9). Language, for example, is a human product, yet its rules must be mastered at the risk of social and intellectual impoverishment. Similarly, social institutions are produced by human beings, yet they come to represent the authoritative power of the external world (8-9). There is a double impact in culture as objective reality in that it is apprehended individually and collectively. Language while experienced individually is also common to everyone. "Culture is *there* . . . but culture is *there for everybody*" (10). Externalising consciousness, then, produces a world of social objectivations, which in turn "confronts consciousness as an external facticity" (15). Apprehending the social world as objective reality does not, however, constitute internalisation.

Internalisation, the third step in the dialectic is achieved in the re-appropriation of the objectivated world into consciousness to the extent that "the structures of this world come to determine the subjective structures of consciousness itself" (15). Elements of the objectivated world (for example, language, values or institutions) are absorbed into internal consciousness even as they are apprehended as part of the external reality (15). Hence, one might say, 'I am a wife,' and there occurs a process of self-identification with the socially

defined role of 'wife.' The criteria for successful human socialisation (thus the continuing viability of society) is understood by Berger as the achievement of a sense of balance between the objective world of society and the subjective world of the individual (15-6). While internalisation is one of the influences in the forming of human consciousness, Berger cautions us to remember that it takes place as part of the larger and ongoing dialectic, which includes externalisation and objectivation. Further, the process of socialisation does itself take place in dialectic inasmuch as the individual ("not molded as a passive, inert thing") actively appropriates the social world in ongoing conversation with others (18).

The most important function of the social world, Berger continues, is its imposition of meaningful order or "nomos" on human experience, achieved objectively through social institutions, and subjectively through socialisation (22-23). Inasmuch as it sustains the nomos, society is the response to the "human craving" for meaning, a force Berger equates with that of instinct (22). It might be said, then, that the 'nature' of human nature is defined by the need for meaningful existence, which manifests itself in the construction of a social world. To be radically detached from society, "the guardian of order and meaning," (21) is to become "anomic" or "world-less," and thus, to be exposed to the "disorder" and "madness" of meaninglessness (22-23). When the nomos is internalised to the point that its meanings are perceived as "the universal nature of things," there occurs a projection of this reality into the universe, so that the social definitions of reality are apprehended as part of the cosmic reality (23-25). This projection of human meaning into the cosmos achieves the stability and permanence towards which all human world-building is directed. Thus,

religion emerges from culture as the means by which the human need for stability and meaning becomes attainable.

Religion is defined by Berger as “the human enterprise by which a sacred cosmos is established” (26). The sacred cosmos at once transcends and includes the human being; a powerful external reality, which yet addresses itself to the human being and situates human life in an ultimately meaningful order (26). In its continuous battle against chaos, the sacred cosmos provides the ultimate shelter against anomy, or “the abyss of meaninglessness” (27). The zenith of all the nomic constructions, religion grounds the social reality, investing it with divine properties, hence keeping in abeyance the innate fear that governs human existence. The social reality is, in effect, legitimated by its deemed relatedness to ultimate reality (32).

Berger describes legitimation as the “socially objectivated ‘knowledge’ that serves to explain and justify the social order” (29). Legitimations, can be both cognitive (“what *is*”) and normative (“what *ought to be*”) and as they are largely representative of “what passes for knowledge” in a society, they are often pretheoretical in nature (30). This does not, however, preclude the development of highly complex theories developed with the specific intention of justifying the nomos of a society (32). Thus, while “man” may make a world, its continuation would appear to rely on religious legitimation. Religion, the link that binds society to the sacred cosmos, is a powerful, authoritative voice in legitimation of the social order. Its particular effectiveness, Berger claims, lies in a long-established approach of strengthening social institutions by concealing their constructed nature. As would-be founder of a society (a “Moses / Machiavelli” combination) he posits: “Let that which has been stamped out of the ground *ex nihilo* appear as the manifestation of

something that has been existent from the beginning of time or at least from the beginning of this group” (33). The ‘taken for granted’ reality of social institutions is thus re-enforced; belief in its *a priori* sacred nature entrenched and unquestioned.

In addition to its legitimation of a social nomos, religion plays a vital role in its legitimation of anomy, or the “marginal situations” that call into question the reality of “everyday life” secured through the nomos. Religion legitimates anomy by integrating it into the nomos, so that, for example, death (the most radical threat to the nomos) is apprehended as having a place in the universe (42-44). This extends beyond the experience of the individual to encompass the collective experience of entire societies or social groups where the ‘taken for granted’ reality is seriously threatened. Berger uses as one example the importance of religious legitimation in war, where some portion of a society’s members must be persuaded to place themselves in an extreme marginal situation: “Men go to war and men are put to death amid prayers, blessings, and incantations” (45). The anomic elements of fear, violence and death are thus given a ‘legitimate’ place within the nomos. The “sacred canopy,” then, is religion’s protection of the meaningful nomos against the forces of anomy, achieved through its legitimation of both. Put differently, it is the ultimate human “product,” rendering human life not only universally meaningful but also tenable in the face of inherent fear of a chaotic reality.

There exists a further aspect of the dialectic between religious ideation and religious action that requires discussion here, as it will be referenced quite extensively in the next chapter of the thesis. A social-structural pre-requisite to legitimations, and to the nomoi being legitimated has implications for all constructed “worlds,” and has a particular importance for religion. As discussed above, the continuing objective and subjective

reality of the socially constructed and socially maintained world depends on specific social processes; that is, the processes that continuously reconstruct and maintain the constructed world. Disruption to these social processes poses a threat to the reality of the world in question. Thus, a world's continuing existence as a subjective and objective reality requires a social base, which Berger calls a "plausibility structure" (45). Social interest in maintaining a particular world will ensure its viability as part of the social reality; loss of interest will weaken the plausibility of that structure (or "world").

In a conciliatory gesture towards theology, Berger makes a distinction between what he calls "methodological atheism," and "atheism *tout court*." Sociological theory "by its own logic," he says, must consider religion as a human projection, and by that same logic cannot address the possibility that the "projected meanings may have an ultimate status independent of man" (181). He offers the possibility that human projection of ultimate meanings into reality stems from the ultimate meaningfulness of that reality; and that "[man's] own being (the empirical ground of these projections) contains and intends these same ultimate meanings" (181). Interpreted in terms of classical theology, "man" may indeed be made in the image of God. It must be said that such an affirmation, however proper to theology, is not conducive to dialogue with sociology, and indeed, exemplifies Berger's concern with theological responses to sociological theory. For Berger, authentic dialogue must be grounded in the theologian's acknowledgement that the content of all religious tradition, including Christianity, is comprised of socially and historically conditioned human projections, from which, ultimately, "signals of transcendence" may emerge (186-7).

2. 6 Theological perspectives on society as a human construct.

2. 6. 1 Critical theology

Charles Davis endorses the notion that the formation of society is achieved through human agency. His argument is concerned with *how* human agency is to be conceived. Rejecting the “natural necessity” thesis, he argues that social formation results from human freedom, governed by human rationality (Religion and the Making of Society 23-4). In responding to the notion of society as the “product” of human agency, Davis states unequivocally: “That thesis is characteristic of the modern period” (1). The inference here is to the utilitarian presupposition of modernism that human activity is *poiesis* (making)³ requiring only *techne* (or skill). Davis’ concern with this thinking is its reduction of society’s formation to “a series of techniques,” their merit determined in terms of usefulness or success as judged by instrumental rationality (23).

Berger’s theory, in which “man must make a world for himself” and where, ultimately, the “product” acts back on its “producer,” might be contrasted with Davis’ position that society is formed through *praxis* or ‘doing’ (hence ultimately ‘being’), which requires *arete* (virtue) as well as skill. For Berger, human beings are virtually enslaved by their own “product.” For Davis, human freedom allows the “agent” to choose the ends and thus the nature of the ‘doing,’ which may be “virtuous or vicious” with commensurately good or evil consequences for society (24). Davis argues that as individuals choose and follow norms, they are simultaneously engaged in a process of “conversation,” which

³ The distinction between *poiesi* and *praxis* is Aristotelian, the former referencing a tangible product, the latter intending such actions as “moral or social conduct, which have their meaning and end in themselves” (Charles Davis. Theology and Political Society p 21).

ultimately leads to agreement on the norms to be institutionalised. Judgement of human action is thus measured against the moral norms represented in the human conduct intrinsic to social interaction (24).

The forming of the social order as manifested in its articulation of common interests and in its institutionalising of moral norms, leads Davis to conclude that society is a work of human rational intelligence,⁴ its foundations beyond the scope of the empirical scientific method to apprehend (31). Concerned with ‘what is’ rather than with ‘what ought to be,’ the instrumental reason of the empirical method is unsuited to questions of value – the very source of social ‘norms.’ Attempts to address such questions within the limited capacity of instrumental rationality, presents an inherent danger of ‘success’ being equated with moral goodness. “[E]fficient goal-attainment” then becomes the ordering principle of society, and public discourse on the moral nature of the goals themselves is rendered ineffective. There is no longer a base from which social critique can take place (31-2). Davis argues that the foundation of human rationality, that is, the foundation of society, cannot lie in empirical fact alone, but rather in a “higher order of truth” (32). He proposes that the authentic search for understanding of this truth must begin with fundamental questions about human existence, which are best sought in the arguments of religion and philosophy (32).

Davis’ argument, while not a specific response to Berger, highlights some of the contentious issues that constitute the challenge to sociological-theological dialogue. From the central question of whether the formation of society is achieved by ‘doing’ or by ‘making’ there arises in the theologian concern with fundamental difference. For example, the difference between human freedom and its absence, between a governing principle of

⁴ Davis draws on Jürgen Habermas’ theory of communicative action (or the “paradigm of mutual understanding”) of which reason is a function (The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity pp 311-6).

human rationality and the exigencies of anthropology, between the judgements of ‘success’ and the judgements of value, and between uncritical acceptance of the status quo and critical reflection on social institutions and structures.

Acceptance of the status quo is more implicit than explicit in Berger’s text. It is, nevertheless, of sufficient importance to merit brief discussion here inasmuch as it exemplifies Davis’ concern with the limitations of instrumental reason. Berger’s contribution of a three-fold dialectic as the fundamental organising principle of society is of great value to the extent that it permits important insights into a sociological understanding of “man” in “his” world. The difficulty, I would propose, lies in the containment of its potential for social critique, and hence social development. While Berger is at pains to emphasise the human being’s *appropriation* of the nomic structures as opposed to the passive internalisation of their objective reality, he allows for no inherent structure or principle that would permit social critique. In other words, one may question elements of the nomoi, but there is no provision for the social ordering of such questioning. The dialectic, which is the very foundation of the nomic structures, is in effect, a series of conversations taking place at the common sense (or utilitarian) level. There is no capability in Berger’s socialisation process to move beyond the self-limiting framework of instrumental reason into an expanded horizon of theoretical and critical thought. Society is thus bound to acceptance of the status quo, and the human being rendered powerless in the face of the entrenched and self-made nomoi, which cannot be transcended.

From a theological perspective, then, Berger’s theory is limited by its reliance on instrumental reason. His text does, however, reveal important sociological insights that could prove beneficial to the theologian, whose task in contemporary pluralist culture

requires an understanding not only of the social reality but also of the 'self' within that reality. In mapping out the process of social conditioning in his dialectic, Berger offers an opportunity for sociological self-understanding. While internalisation of the social reality renders human conditioning to that reality inevitable, Berger opens a door towards some understanding of the process. If analysed through a method (such as Bernard Lonergan's) that would permit an authentically objective assessment of the influences of social conditioning, the fundamental dialectic could prove a valuable tool in opening up the theological mind to the influences that have shaped and may even constrain it.

2. 6. 2 Radical Orthodox (postmodern) theology

Postmodern theologian John Milbank's volume (Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason) is of interest to this chapter to the extent that the author advances the notion of theology's separation from "the secular," hence obviating concern with dialogue. Milbank's thought offers a different perspective on theology and its relationship to 'the world,' and provides an opportunity to reflect on the implications of theology's withdrawal from that 'world.' In this extensive work, Milbank undertakes the deconstruction of "the secular" through social theory, this field having been chosen as "the most obvious site of the struggle" that marks his effort to reverse the "secular positioning" of theology by other discourses. This reversal would see theology as a "metadiscourse," the "ultimate organising logic over all discourse" (1-2). Milbank's position in respect of sociology, and indeed of all "the secular," is fundamentally opposed to that of the theologian concerned with public discourse, with dialogue and with understanding the human person as social being. It is important, therefore, that Milbank's perspectives be

subject to some review, particularly in light of his increasing stature in some theological circles. The discussion of this chapter will exclude Milbank's theology as such, for this would exceed the scope of the chapter, and would deviate from the overall direction of the thesis. The interest here lies in discussing briefly his intention to deconstruct sociology and replace it with ecclesiology.

Before addressing Milbank's specific concerns with social theory, it may first be appropriate to consider his views on theology as it stands today in relation to "the secular." That stance of theology, it would seem, is one of subservience, occasioned by its subordination to the discourse of secular reason. Milbank chides theology for its "false humility" positing that unless its earlier status as a "metadiscourse" is recovered, theology is destined to be the idolatrous, "oracular voice" of other disciplines and fields of knowledge (1). Milbank notes the propensity, especially evident in political theologies, to defer to the social scientists on "social processes in general and the socio-historical aspects of Christianity . . . in particular" (2). He makes an observation meriting attention here when he notes that this deference to social theory often results in 'theologies' constructed around sociology, with Christianity occupying some residual space. This is a very real danger, and one to which theology should be alert in its dialogical activity with sociology, and indeed, in all areas of public discourse.

In mapping out a complex history of theological and sociological positivist discourse, Milbank points out theology's felt need to solve the antinomy of "secular social science" – the human being as product or producer of society (51-2). While discussion of the antinomy persists (as we have seen in Berger and Davis) Milbank proposes it as something fundamental to human existence, apparent on examination of infinitesimal social

action (70). Every human action pre-supposes a cultural-linguistic context, and every action (or “project”⁵) has “always already passed over” from the particular into further, more general outcomes, which although beyond the reach of the individual, are nonetheless partially formed by the individual’s action. The individual and the social are thus “entirely contingent, and constantly being modified, the one by the other” (71). Milbank uses these elements of contingency and change to deconstruct the ‘science’ of sociology.

Probably the most intriguing element of Milbank’s project is the manner in which postmodern thought is deployed to the service of Christian orthodoxy. Contingency is privileged over certainty, universal reason is rejected in favour of language and narrative, and the narrative itself is privileged over argument (while, it must be noted, Milbank’s own thesis appears to be flawlessly argued). Having deconstructed the ‘science’ of sociology, Milbank later rejects the legitimacy of its claim to render a “universal rational” account of all human societies; the universal rationality that undergirds sociology’s claim, does not exist (380-1). He proposes instead a Christian sociology, which is “first and foremost,” an ecclesiology, with its concern limited to other human societies only to the extent that the Church understands itself to be “in continuity or discontinuity” with these societies (380). For purposes of Milbank’s argument, the Church is a distinct society, which explicates “a socio-linguistic practice,” or constantly re-narrates the practice as it developed in history (381). Milbank goes on to outline a four-level task for theology as a social science: *First*, is the “sketch[ing] out of all history from the perspective of the Christian emergence; this implies the pre-Christian narratives and the relation of creation to the Godhead. The *second*

⁵ Term is Adam Ferguson’s (Milbank 41, 48 n 62). In the context of an essay on the heterogenesis of ends, Ferguson draws parallels between “the non-planned character of social outcomes and the non-planned character of individual works and actions.” He proposes that “all reason consists of ‘projects’ in which action precedes a knowledge that is always a coming to know what exactly it is we have done.”

level, eschewing the notion of reason and morality as ahistorical universals, asks how Christianity changed human reason and human practice (ethics). At the ontological (*third*) level, theology develops (“always provisionally”) the frame of reference implicit in the Christian narrative and action. The *final* level is ecclesial self-critique: why did the Church fail to bring about salvation, and instead open the door to the “modern secular” (381). We come full cycle.

Milbank’s conception of ecclesiology as a form of social theory is consistent with the specific direction that his project takes – the separation of Christianity from “the secular,” indeed, from all that is not Christian. His project raises an important question for this chapter inasmuch as his concern for establishing a harmonious Christian elite, untouched by “the secular,” appears to ignore the gospel edict that would make missionaries of Christians in the world (Lk. 24:47). Further, Milbank’s equating of “the secular” with the “Church’s failure” to bring about salvation, appears to disregard Christ’s promise of the Spirit as an operative force in the world (Jn. 16:8). Thus, Milbank’s reader is confronted with the paradox of a theologian bereft of hope.

It must be said that the limited scope of this chapter precludes an adequate response to Milbank’s work in its entirety. Its inclusion here is intended to offer a perspective that differs from the dialogical thrust of the chapter – and his is a dissenting voice in this respect. Theologians pursuing possibilities for dialogue in pluralist culture will find cause for concern in Milbank’s stance. The negative emphasis on “the secular” seems curiously out of tune with our time of dramatically altering social and theological landscapes, and of conciliatory movement between religion and science. This is not to suggest that pluralism is without risk, and Milbank’s concern with theology’s deference to the social sciences,

while perhaps overstated, is a legitimate one. A commitment to theological pluralism demands critical reflection and discriminating judgement if loss of Christian self-identity is to be avoided. However, a self-imposed separation of Christian theology from ‘the world’ is a regressive step, likely to marginalise and privatise Christianity, while somewhat paradoxically, creating a Christian elitism.

Milbank’s stance contrasts with that of Pope John Paul II, articulated in his 1988 letter to the Director of the Vatican Observatory on the relationship between science and religion (this assumes the inclusion of the social sciences):

“[T]he church and the scientific community will inevitably interact . . . [We] shall make our choices much better if we live in a collaborative interaction in which we are called continually to be more. We need each other to be what we must be, what we are called to be.”
(Origins 377-8).

This is a position that is constructive in its urging towards collaboration as opposed to competition or mutual rejection. From this latter stance, a climate of ignorance and distrust is likely to emerge on both sides, ultimately hardening into overt hostility. If theology again isolates itself from ‘the world,’ then religion will again be relegated to the realm of superstition, and the voice of temperance will cease to influence science. Pope John Paul II’s position is, therefore, more in keeping with the balanced approach essential to the mutual benefit of both theology and science (which, for purposes of this chapter includes sociology).

2. 6. 3 An approach to dialogue from a sociological perspective

Milbank’s concern with the threat of encroachment by sociology into theology (2-3) is a point of complexity identified (less vociferously) by sociologist, William J. Kinney in

his paper, “Conflict and Complementarity Between Sociological and Theological Approaches to Religion”(1). The sociologist enters the academic domain of the theologian, and vice versa, with varying degrees of uneasiness with the overlapping and conflicting nature of their disciplines. In addition to the epistemological tensions, there are also ontological tensions, given the “high level of secularisation” in the social sciences (2). In seeking out sociological paradigms amenable to dialogue, Kinney elaborates the “value neutral” symbolic interactionist model, which most closely describes the approach of Peter Berger, and is the model advocated by David Tracy.

The interactionist perspective takes the position of objective inquirer, interested “simply [in the examination] of the social processes that lie behind the structures of religion and religious faith” (7). Kinney and David Tracy both ascribe an interactionist tendency to the work of Max Weber, for example. Controversial as Weber’s work has been (The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism xxii-xxvi) the direction of his research does not suggest pre-conceived notions about religion. Rather, he is largely concerned with objective examination of the influences of religion (and religious denominations) on its adherents to the extent that this may have shaped the social-economic sphere. In a section of his volume dealing with the religious foundations of worldly asceticism, his approach is made clear:

We are naturally not concerned with the question of what was theoretically or officially taught in the ethical compendia of the time [17th century] We are interested rather . . . in [how] the influence of those psychological sanctions which, originating in religious belief and the practice of a religion, gave a direction to practical conduct and held the individual to it. 97.

While scepticism of religion and its structures is not absent in the interactionist, some sociologists in this category are receptive to the possibility of a transcendent principle

operative in “the creation of religious structures” (Kinney 7). One such thinker is Peter Berger. While Berger is punctilious in “bracketing” theological questions from his analysis, he nevertheless acknowledges the possibility of a transcendent principle operative in the forming of society, and in religious structures (180-1).

In addition to the sociological self-awareness that an understanding of social theory can offer the theologian, other opportunities for enriching theological understanding of the social might be considered. For example: the social processes that have helped to shape religious faith, the aspects of social structures and of social psychology that lie behind the acceptance or rejection of particular religious faiths (or components thereof), and the social outcomes of adherence to religious faith (9). Kinney observes that the benefits of such knowledge to theologians extends beyond the “confines of the faith itself” to encompass a deeper understanding of the nature of faith, and a deeper appreciation for the reciprocity between religious faith and the social order (10).

Sociology in its turn, Kinney notes, would be profoundly enriched by a deeper understanding of the acknowledged theological influences (cognitive and normative) at work in cultural formation. He posits that irrespective of the sociologist’s position on theology’s “supernatural grounding,” an understanding of the processes that lie behind theological “debate” in the social-cultural sphere contains the potential to inform and enlighten the sociologist as to the “nature and possible outcomes” of such debate. There is, then, for the sociologist, a “useful” aspect to being informed about the nature of theology in society (10). Much more challenging, however, is Kinney’s suggestion that the sociologist retain “some degree of openness” to metaphysical examination and insight. While the common response of sociology to the metaphysical is generally one of discomfort, Kinney

cites Peter Berger⁶ as a sociologist who proclaims the fundamental worth of such examination. The insights offered by Kinney are valuable in establishing an approach to dialogue that might at the very least sensitise each side to the limited perspectives of the other. At their best, they would lay the groundwork of mutual understanding from which rich and fruitful dialogue could ultimately unfold.

This chapter has demonstrated the legitimacy of and the necessity for theology's participation in public discourse. Whether viewed from a sociological or theological perspective, religion is an integral part of society – instrumental in its formation, and responsive to the inner human 'self' for whom meaningful existence is the essence of life. Changes in culture have altered the relationship between the human being and religion as Peter Berger describes it, and religion has now ceased to be an ordering principle of society. Charles Davis recognises the opportunities this presents when he observes that this circumstance liberates religion, permitting it to "relate to society as a critical principle" (46). As mediator between religion and society, theology will best fulfil its task by engaging with sociology in a climate of informed collaborative interaction, which implies (as will be discussed in the next chapter) the theologian's understanding of the social reality, and the 'self' in that reality. Dialogue with sociology is, therefore, a matter of some urgency, and as a first step calls for serious consideration of Kinney's approach to the fundamental issues and concerns that have, in the past, presented major obstacles to dialogue.

⁶ Rumour of Angels. Garden City NY: Doubleday & CO. Inc., 1969. (p 75).

The focus of the previous chapter was primarily sociological, concerned with an exploration of sociological thought, addressing the need for theological-sociological dialogue and identifying some of its obstacles as well its possibilities. Concern with the social continues in this chapter, now from the theological perspective, and referenced by David Tracy's 'publics,' which term essentially describes the division of the societal (or cultural) components into three major groups. From a viewpoint that is in accord with Tracy's insistence on the intrinsically public nature of theology, the chapter intends to explore the possibilities offered in social theory to elaborate the implications and possibilities in Tracy's urging towards "explicit recognition" of the theologian's social reality. This will entail a study of the elements that make up that reality and some discussion of its complicating factors, as well as a proposal for enhancing the theologian's understanding of the social complexity.

In his volume, The Analogical Imagination, Tracy is addressing the need for a theological publicness that is fully cognisant of, and authentically responsive to the reality of cultural pluralism. As a public enterprise in a culturally pluralistic 'world,' theology needs to meet the implied demands for academic competence, theological self-consciousness, and sociological understanding, of which the latter is the chapter's primary interest. Tracy's volume is addressing a two-fold concern with respect to theological pluralism. First, is the random, indiscriminate pluralism that is excessively localised or represents the appeals of special interest groups, and where the centrality of God's mystery is lost in the waves of privatism. Second, by making explicit the nature of pluralism as it is

manifested in the social structures (or “publics”) and in the thought processes that predominate in society, Tracy is identifying the complexity and the challenges of the theologian’s social reality. Theology’s inability to grasp and respond to these complexities will inevitably result in its further marginalisation. Indeed, Tracy warns that disregard for the social complexity “may well prove as damaging as an earlier theological generation’s refusal to face historical consciousness” (AI 6).

The chapter will begin by establishing the intrinsically public nature of theology, which is in a sense the theological response to the unending human quest for meaning as described by Berger. This will be followed by a brief introduction to the notion of theological pluralism and the sociological complexity that results in its abuses. Tracy’s description of the ‘publics’ that make up the theologians social reality will be followed by a brief analysis of the potency of plausibility structures, leading into a discussion that proposes Lonergan’s thought on “conversion” as the means by which the self-limiting implications of Berger’s social dialectic is overcome. Internalised plurality of social locations and plausibility structures, if analysed with the self-consciousness that Lonergan’s method requires, can be recognised and evaluated with discernment. Thus, Berger’s analysis on the social dialectic becomes the tool by which the social reality can be apprehended, and Lonergan’s method the means by which that reality can self-consciously be transcended. A critique (and my response to same) of Tracy’s work by Charles Davis will conclude the chapter.

3. 1 Use of Sources

In addition to Bernard Lonergan's Method in Theology, and Berger's The Sacred Canopy, the key resource for this chapter is The Analogical Imagination by David Tracy. As the foremost advocate for public theology in the (North American) Catholic tradition, Tracy has written extensively on contemporary theological pluralism. He is a strong advocate of sociological-theological dialogue, and of theology's utilisation of social theory as the gateway to theological authenticity and integrity in pluralist culture. Charles Davis' critique of Tracy's "publics" is to be found in What is Living, What is Dead in Christianity Today?

3. 2 Theology: an authentically public enterprise

Through the Gospels – in its teaching and in its recounting of a ministry – the commitment to publicness is made clear. Underlying this narrative, however, is the question of *why* people listened and then followed Jesus. *Why* this urgency to spread the 'good news.' Theology has long claimed, as does Tracy, that its task is the formulation and responses to religious questions, the "most serious and most difficult" questions of human existence: Why am I here? What does my being here mean? Is there a reality that can be recognised as truth, and can be trusted in the midst of the fears that mark human existence? (AI 4). Jesus' response to these questions was to offer the gift of new life – life filled with meaning and with hope. The theologian might say that Jesus understood the human heart and its needs. The social theorist (Berger) says that the need for meaningful existence is as powerful in human beings as is the instinct that means life or death to an animal. Berger considers the possibility that the human being can conceive of ultimate meaning because

“these same ultimate meanings” are constitutive of human ‘beingness.’ (181). While dialogue would require that this topic be subject to proper analysis, in the theological context, it speaks a truth of what it is to be human. When Jesus spoke to the crowds he was addressing that fundamental need to which *all* human striving is directed. Hence the need to spread the ‘good news.’ How the questions of human nature and human destiny are addressed in theology is the implicit or explicit concern of all human beings. To the extent that theologians “strive for a clarity to illuminate . . . the mystery of God’s reality,” (AI 54) theological claims are implicitly or explicitly public; they cannot be authentically private.

3.3 Theological pluralism

As shall be discussed in more detail in the following chapter, the Church has officially recognised since Vatican II that while the fundamental mystery of revelation is constant and unchanging, the ways in which it is expressed in the historical and cultural contexts is subject to change. This liberation from the pre-conciliar adherence to neoscholasticism resulted in an explosion of pluralist theologies. Difficulties arose in respect of the integrity of many of these theologies, inasmuch as they often lacked the focus on the central mystery of revelation. Suffering from inadequate scholarship, which disregards hermeneutic principles; concerned more with a localised or special interest variety of biblical interpretation, and finally, a concern primarily with human experience as a theological source, with a relative disregard for Scripture, doctrine and Tradition, theology became something of a privatised consumer product. This unwieldy state of affairs has been exacerbated by the uncritical reception of such ‘theologies’ in theological circles. This situation is of deep concern to Tracy, who cautions against the “repressive

tolerance” or “genial confusion” that underlie a “simple [uncritical] affirmation” of pluralism (xi). Rather, he proposes that any responsible affirmation of pluralism “must include an affirmation of truth and public criteria for that affirmation” (xi).

The submission of a theology to public scrutiny, requires not only a highly disciplined approach in its development, and publicly adjudicable criteria in its argumentation, it requires also an understanding of the ‘public’ being addressed (AI 3-5) and by implication an understanding of the ‘self’ in relation to that ‘public.’ The difficulty arises where neither the specific nature of the pluralist social reality nor the internalisation of its multiple structures is explicitly recognised by the theologian – the sociological circumstance on which Tracy is raising a warning flag. His concern with the correction of this trend towards indiscriminate, cacophonous and ultimately privatised theology is implied in his appeal to contemporary theologians that explicit reflection on “the several publics . . . indeed [on] several internalised selves, may aid us all at least to hear one another once again” (AI 6). In the “renewed conversation” that Tracy envisages as the outcome of this reflection, the public role of theology would be reaffirmed in the theologian’s “profoundly personal but not private” reflection on ultimate issues (AI 6).

3. 4 The theologian and the “publics” of pluralism

The theologian, as Berger correctly reminds us, “was not born a theologian . . . he existed as a person in a particular socio-historical situation before he ever began to do theology ” (183). Tracy’s analysis of the theologian’s social reality assumes this pre-theological relationship to a specific social location (AI 25). His concern lies with a deeper level of social complexity in which the theologian internalises multiple (and often conflicting) social locations, represented externally in the “plurality of publics” (AI 3) to be addressed. For Tracy, the theologian is less of “a single self” than a pluralism of “selves” in whom “distinct social locations and therefore . . . distinct plausibility structures ⁷ [are] present . . . ” (AI 5). Sociological self-understanding in this pluralist context requires as a first step that the contemporary theologian “recognise explicitly” the “publics” she addresses, defined by Tracy as “the wider society [with three sub-divisions], the academy, and the church” (AI 5).

4.1 The public of society: The three realms of society

Tracy’s “public of society” is a public whose discourse is defined by the outcome of technological success. The appropriate utilisation of instrumental reason in technological advancement has led to its inappropriate utilisation in formulating and resolving questions of value, a circumstance that has its effect on all realms of society (11). Drawing on a

⁷ As discussed above (p 22) this term is Berger’s and refers to the social base (or location) upon which depends the continuing existence of religious (or other) definitions of reality. Weakened plausibility structures (or diminished social concern with the building of a particular world) will result in the disintegration of that world, just as a strong plausibility structure will ensure its continuing effectiveness.

“standard” description of instrumental reason, Tracy describes it as “a use of reason to determine rational means for a determined end” (AI 8). As does Charles Davis, he insists that a purely technical process of reasoning is singularly unsuited to establishing “the ends” for questions of value, and of what constitutes ‘the good’ within a society. Tracy describes only summarily the three realms of society, his main interest being the depiction of the complexity common to all three – the pervasive and damaging influence of instrumental reason (10-11). His insistence that theologians explicitly recognise the social reality implies their explicit recognition of the inadequate and dangerous reasoning principle at work within society and its “frightening” implications for all. He thus defines the broad nature of the challenge to contemporary theology in the social realms, while also establishing a sense of urgency in meeting this challenge through an authentically public theological presence.

Tracy divides ‘the public of society ‘ into the realms of the technoeconomic structure, the polity and culture.

- A. The technoeconomic structure “forms the occupation and stratification systems of the society, and uses modern technology for instrumental ends” (AI 7). The danger with which theology needs to be concerned here is as discussed above, the inappropriate utilisation of instrumental reason beyond the immediate realm of the technical and into the realm of the polity. The implications of this for society are manifested in the attempted resolution of value questions that take the form of the “unexamined and naïve intuitions” of a technological and bureaucratic elite, or of “the conflict of special interest groups” (8). In either event, authentic public discourse on value issues and on the common good is circumvented.

- B. The realm of the polity in a democratic society is concerned with “the legitimate meanings of social justice and the use of power” (7). It is the realm of public discourse, represented in the civil government and legal systems charged with the achievement of a society’s conception of justice “embodied in [its] traditions or its constitution” (7). Tracy’s primary interest here is the need for the authentic public discourse of an ethical polity, grounded in “comprehensive notions of rationality and the demands of practical reason” (9). The absence of such foundations in ethical discourse seriously jeopardises value in a democratic polity, where the common good is related, yet often in conflict with individual “liberties.” Tracy is emphatic that the resolution of such conflict (or value questions) “cannot be left to either the technical and bureaucratic elite, nor to the happenstance of special interest groups” (9). A social reality in which questions of value are not accorded the professional competence demanded of other major areas of communal life, is one that clearly dismays Tracy. He notes that the “highly unprofessional” sense of ethics common to technocrat and bureaucrat is “often some form of personal intuition heavily influenced by bureaucratic imperatives” (10). Tracy ends this description of the polity by laying out a scenario of society’s complexity in which the polity is ruled by technocracy and bureaucracy, and where “mediating structures and institutions”⁸ along with more comprehensive notions of rationality” are considered “frivolous options.” In this scenario, culture is marginalised (10-11).
- C. In the realm of culture, “intuitive and developed senses of values may be found in classical symbolic expressions of the major traditions informing the culture” (11). It is to the realm of culture, Tracy says, that theologians will principally relate, and

⁸ By this term Tracy refers, for example, to family, church, neighbourhood, school (11).

through it and “its notions of practical reason,” to the polity (11). He maps out the marginalising effects of a technocratic-bureaucratic polity on the realm of culture, and most especially on religion – an important index of culture – and concludes that the centralisation of power in the polity has the effect of levelling “the power and role of mediating institutions.” Tracy finds the consequences of this to be three fold: a common inclination to privateness, diminished expectations of authentic public discourse, and forms of exclusion in the polity of those principally associated with the realm of culture (11). Religion is thus privatised, and the interpreters of its symbols (theologians) virtually excluded from the polity. There is, however, another danger to which Tracy draws our attention, and that lies within theology itself. It is one thing for the wider society to view religion as a private affair, it is quite another when privatisation can be deemed “all too possible” in many contemporary theologians, who, Tracy tells us, eagerly move “to some local ‘reservation of the spirit’” (13). The nuanced approach so characteristic of Tracy’s writing fails him in his stinging rebuke of theologians who withdraw from the “current almost desperate” social impasse on reflection on values, to the ease of a small public “of equally charming, equally private selvesWith luck one might even find a religious Bloomsbury” (13-14).⁹

It is clear, then, that Tracy is greatly concerned with the pervasive influence of instrumental reason on the wider society, and with its insidious fallout over all social

⁹ While Tracy’s more recent thought is explicitly directed towards the unity of spiritual practice and theology, the observation he makes here should not be construed as inconsistent with his current thinking. In a recent interview, Tracy makes clear that the practice of spirituality must be a “a turn to the other” and not to “the self.” (“An Interview with David Tracy” by Lois Malcolm. *Christian Century*, Feb. 2002).

realms. It is to that danger he alerts the theologian in his insistence on “explicit recognition” of the social reality; and it is with the intention of resolving the impasse on questions of value in public discourse that he exhorts theologians to assume their “public responsibilities” (14). These responsibilities include active resistance to the narrow conception of reason that governs the polity and has resulted in the marginalisation and the consequent privatisation of culture (31).

Clearly, Tracy is deeply concerned with the impoverishment of public discourse and its inability to adequately address questions of value. With his indefatigable commitment to its enrichment, he has identified the source of the problem in instrumental rationality, and has established the direction in which theology must move to achieve change. He seeks to reclaim a public space for theology (and indeed for all culture) to the ultimate benefit of society as a whole.

3. 4. 2 The public of the Academy: Theology as an academic discipline

For Tracy, theology's status as an academic discipline is of vital importance, making the difference between theology as a vibrant, authentically public endeavour and an activity that is for all serious, intellectual purposes, dead (21). The demands of the academy for publicness – “for criteria, evidence, warrants, disciplinary status” – is where theology benefits most, Tracy notes, for these standards impose a necessity on theology to search out and reflect deeply on “criteria of adequacy” for its claims. This term is used by Tracy to describe 3 sets of criteria by which philosophical verification of events in human experience attest to the adequacy (or otherwise) of such experience as legitimately religious. They are, “meaningfulness, meaning and truth” (Blessed Rage for Order 64-71). All three must be present for the event to be deemed “religious” (71). Only when the “logical limit-character” of any *meaningful* experience and language is verified in philosophy, can it be considered religious. By the term “logical limit-character” is meant the point where the experience transcends the limits of what might be considered logical (69-70). Philosophical reflection assists again where criterion of “internal coherence” is required, that is, when a cognitive claim to the religious *meaning* of a symbol or concept is being made (for example God is “one necessary existent in reality”). The two sets of criteria will not alone suffice philosophically. Verification of its truth must be made by appealing to a “criteria of adequacy to experience,” (71). This latter calls for “philosophical reflection of the phenomenological-transcendental type,” which is to say an analysis of consciousness in the Lonergan tradition.

While the disciplinary status of theology in the academy would not belong in the category of the “hard” sciences, Tracy nevertheless recognises “genuine possibilities” as well as difficulties in its “diffuse”¹⁰ status. The tendency to fragmentation, to only minimal collaboration, to inadequate processes for establishing standards and criteria for evaluating theological performance – all contribute to the problems of theology’s disciplinary status. In terms of its possibilities, however, the absence of pre-defined processes permits significant opportunities for identification and analytical verification of “criteria of adequacy,” and the construction of theological paradigms. The need to reflect on these, as well as on the disciplinary character of theology itself is a matter of some urgency for theologians. In respect of these challenges, Tracy proposes as a major contribution Bernard Lonergan’s theological method, given its recognition of theology as a collaborative, field-encompassing enterprise, as well as its provision of specific and publicly adjudicable criteria for each of its fields, or functional specialties (AI 19).

The contemporary university demands public criteria for the claims of all academic disciplines, a requirement from which theology is not exempted. Further, it provides the theologian with exposure to the nature of argument and criteria in all the relevant disciplines, to the ultimate enrichment of theology. The academic emphasis on much contemporary theology, Tracy concludes, has proven to be a “fully positive force” that has benefited theology, the university, and through the university, the wider society (21).

¹⁰ Refer: Stephen Toulmin. Human Understanding. Vol. I, 379. The Collective Use and Evolution of Concepts. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972. (Tracy, 40 n 58, 62).

3. 4. 3 The public of the Church: A sociological and theological reality.

Tracy makes a distinction between the church as a Christian theological reality, and the church as a sociological phenomenon, that is, as one of the three publics to which theological discourse is to be addressed – “a community of moral and religious discourses” (21). Both aspects of church constitute its reality for Tracy. It is the latter, with its potential for internal conflict and confusion in the theologian, that he is primarily concerned here. The complexity lies in the *theological* understanding of the church as “gift” and sacrament, irreducible to “just another social institution” (23), and related to this, the fear of reductionism in acknowledging sociological dimension of the church (24). Tracy argues that the church is both a theological and a sociological reality. The “voluntary association” of an individual with church “is a relationship to the church as an historically continuous body of persons known as Christians, whose common life is in part institutionalised in churches” (21-2). Such “voluntary association,” therefore, implies a relationship to both a social institution and a religious communion.

In developing the theological implications of commitment to both the institutional and the communal realities of church, Tracy draws a parallel between responsible participation in society and responsible participation in the church. Drawing on his own tradition of Roman Catholicism, he touches some very sensitive issues on making this point. The theologian committed to both realities of the church, he says, is more likely to demand theological reflection on its principal questions than the theologian committed only to the communal reality. He gives as examples such questions as, the Petrine ministry, the nature of the magisterium, the principle of collegiality, the relationship of the theologian to

ecclesially established authorities, the relationship of different theological models of the church to present ecclesial realities and so on (22). Whether committed to both realities of church or to the communal only, theologians, consciously or not, are engaged in continuous reflection on their commitment and loyalty to the church. That commitment and its “attendant responsibilities” must be related to their commitments and responsibilities to the wider society and the academy, and hence to the plausibility structures of these two publics. In other words, all theologians, even those uncommitted to the sociological reality of church, are inevitably faced with conflicts among the plausibility structures of all three publics, the adjudication of which, Tracy notes, “is the proper task of fundamental theology” (22).¹¹

Tracy advocates for fundamental theology a correlation approach between theology and the social sciences, in which attention would be paid to “distinct claims to publicness” in the plausibility structures embedded in the structures of society, academy and church (22). For Tracy, such a correlation model can account on theological grounds for “the full spectrum of possible relationships . . . from identity through transformation to confrontation” between church as a theological and as a sociological reality. On sociological grounds, Tracy cites Peter Berger amongst others who advocate some form of Max Weber’s interaction model to account for the sociological and historical evidence of the complex interrelationships of church and society (24). Tracy and Berger are of one mind on the correlation-interaction approach to be taken on dialogue, which suggests that

¹¹ Tracy defines two constants in any theological position: interpretation of the tradition and interpretation of the contemporary situation. Fundamental theology explicitly attempts to establish mutually critical correlations between the interpretations of the tradition and the situation. Where philosophy has traditionally served as warrants to theology’s truth claims, Tracy is proposing sociology here (AI 64, 79-80).

engagement with these approaches – acceptable as they are to both theologian and sociologist – may well yield fruitful results.

Having discussed the three publics of theology, and having suggested that the theologian, consciously or not, has commitments and responsibilities to all three, another element of the theologian's social reality – that of social conditioning – must now be discussed briefly. Elaborating on Berger's observation that the theologian was not born as a theologian, Tracy points out that like every human being, the theologian "has been socialised into a particular society and a particular academic tradition and has been enculturated into one particular culture" (25). One's relations to the public of church is therefore, conditioned by one's relationship to the other two publics of theology. The task of interpreting the tradition of the church will inevitably be conducted in "critical relationship to some implicit or explicit contemporary self-understanding," irrespective of whether the theologian is conscious of the social realities (represented variously in the "publics") that have formed this self-understanding. The theologian, Tracy concludes, is "an intellectual related to three publics, socialised in each, internalising their sometimes divergent plausibility structures, in a symbiosis often so personal, complex and sometimes unconscious that conflicts on particular issues must be taken singly . . . not globally" (26).

The social complexity of the theologian is thus constituted by internal and external pluralism, which is further complicated by the forces of marginalisation and privatisation of culture – the product of a narrow conception of rationality in the polity. Inevitably, plurality has positive and negative effects on theology, the latter more likely to occur in the absence of sociological and theological self-consciousness. The academy, with its demands for public criteria, plays an important (if not exhaustive) role in forcing out publicness in

theology, hence ensuring its continuing vitality and relevance in public discourse, and indeed, aiding the fulfilment of theology's own intrinsically public nature. The conservative tendency that attributes only a theological reality to the church adds yet another level of complexity inasmuch as it renders almost inevitable, conflict with the theologian who espouses the two realities. It might be deduced from Tracy's text that a solely theological understanding of church is likely to be the prevailing thought at the hierarchical level, where (in the Catholic tradition) such questions as the Petrine ministry would never be questioned. The issue of the institutional church, is therefore a matter of some sensitivity for the 'public' and dialogically minded Catholic theologian, a circumstance that will come under some discussion in the next chapter.

3. 5 Conflicting plausibility structures

Theological pluralism, then, emerges from an external and an internal plurality, represented variously in the publics that make up the theologian's social reality. In its negative aspect, where sound methodological and analytical practices, as well as sociological self-awareness are absent, there is a propensity to generate "internal confusion and external chaos" (AI 2). This 'confusion and chaos' might best be understood in the light of Berger's dialectic. Berger assumes that the externalisation, objectivation and internalisation of plausibility structures occur unconsciously (or at the pretheoretical level of common sense). The plausibility structures are a "taken for granted," unquestioned reality. In the absence of sociological self-awareness, plurality of social locations and

plausibility structures is likely to engender an undifferentiated (and often conflicting) plurality in the theologian, as with any other human being.

While the following example, as brevity and relevance require, is somewhat oversimplified, it may serve to illustrate the unquestioned ease with which conflicting plausibility structures are internalised. The potency of Christianity as a plausibility structure was such that from the time of the religion's inception, its genuinely devout leaders and teachers (and thus the faithful) internalised a hatred of Jews so powerful that it too became a plausibility structure of sorts. There seems to have been little, if any, recognition of the contradictory plausibility structures of love and hate residing simultaneously in individual and collective consciousness. Later, with the emergence of the nation states, and ultimately and fatally with the advent of Nazism, the contradiction between the religious and social plausibility structures continued to be unrecognised by the vast majority. Hope, however, lies in the fact that a *minority* existed; and their very existence in the face of personal risk affirms that the tendency towards uncritical internalisation of plausibility structures is either avoidable or reversible, irrespective of the power or tenacity associated with any one plausibility structure. The process by which one is able to transcend one's given reality, indeed oneself, is what Bernard Lonergan calls "conversion."

3. 6 Bernard Lonergan: The shifting of horizons

Conversion can be one or all of an intellectual, moral or religious nature. While its explicit acknowledgement may take place only in a "momentous judgement or decision," conversion is generally a prolonged process, in which an orientation towards development

and growth culminates in a change of direction (Method in Theology 130). Its characteristics are described below in Lonergan's own words:

[C]onversion is a change in direction and, indeed, a change for the better. One frees oneself from the unauthentic. One grows in authenticity. Harmful, dangerous, misleading satisfactions are dropped. Fears of discomfort, pain, privation have less power to deflect one from one's course. Values are apprehended where before they were overlooked. Scales of preference shift. Errors, rationalizations, ideologies fall and shatter to leave one open to things as they are and to man as he should be.
(Method in Theology 52).

The Christian culture of anti-Judaism and its later anti-Semitic mutation was, as Abraham Foxman (national director of the Jewish Anti-Defamation League) points out "part and parcel of what Western civilization was. The people who killed Jews during the day then went to Church on Sunday . . . were not aberrations" (Madigan, Cross Currents 495). Yet, in the face of this powerful and deeply embedded plausibility structure, there *were* "aberrations" (to use Foxman's term). We can never know the interior and profoundly personal experiences that were ultimately manifested in the transcendence of fear and hatred of the other. At some point, however, whether engendered by the evil of mass murder, or by an earlier encounter with 'the other,' it is likely that many of these "aberrations" experienced the moment of conversion that Lonergan describes – the moment where one's horizon shifts to reveal a new reality.

Because Berger describes the social human being in purely empirical terms, this human capacity for self-transcendence goes unacknowledged in his text. It is being proposed here that solution to the impasse of the social dialectic might be found in the human potential for self-conscious appropriation of the mental operations that lead to "conversion" and to the opening of horizons that it engenders.¹² The unexamined objective

¹² Refer: Bernard Lonergan. Method in Theology (3-25, 235-243).

reality need not become subjective reality. Rather, self-conscious engagement with the social dialectic through critical reflection on the (constructed) objective realities of society (and its plausibility structures) permits a differentiated internalisation of objective reality. Thus, the theologian in pluralist culture possesses the inherent potential for social and hence theological discernment.

3. 7 Response to Charles Davis' critique on The Analogical Imagination.

One might argue, as does Charles Davis, that Tracy's assumptions on the theologian's "three publics" present a more idealistic than realistic view of theology (What is Living, What is Dead in Christianity Today? 102-4). The argument, however, is little more than a restating of the obvious unless one seeks the author's intention in the text. With respect, I would argue that Davis has misread Tracy inasmuch as he has read literally what was not so intended. Indeed, Davis, himself, in his (unexamined) general impression of the work, inadvertently identifies Tracy's intention. In noting the latter's "failure" to examine the concrete, historical reality of theology's publics, Davis concludes that Tracy's analysis is rendered "the expression of a vague aspiration rather than a description of theology as it actually exists" (103). This response will argue that Tracy's intention is indeed to present an aspiration for theology, and that the relationship between theology and the "publics" such as he describes in his text is a device through which today's problems and tomorrow's possibilities are held in juxtaposition.

For Davis, Tracy's proposal of 'publics' as reference groups for theology is to ignore the social realities in which the development of monopoly capitalism and its exploitation of the mass media have prevented the formation of a critical public (103).

“What audience exists in society today for serious theology?” he asks; and then, “Is theology possible in a society without a critical public, where discourse is prevented?” He notes that while Tracy acknowledges the marginalisation of theology in our society, dominated as it is by the instrumental rationality of technology, “he does not seem to regard this as affecting the very conditions of possibility of theology” (103). In fact, Tracy does more than “acknowledge” the marginalisation effect of instrumental reason on theology. This is the predominating concern of the entire section on the ‘public of society.’ I would argue that far from being blind to this situation as “affecting the very conditions of possibility of theology” Tracy places such emphasis because he clearly understands this. It is in this context he is at his most scathing as he calls on theologians to be mindful of their public responsibilities, and to avoid a “religious Bloomsbury” (13-4). Tracy is saying that one cannot throw up one’s hands in despair, and resort to privateness; but rather, theology must be attentive to the social realities, and then intelligently, reasonably, and responsibly reclaim its public space. His emphases on developmental issues – sociological self-understanding, theological self-consciousness, adherence to academic standards, dialogue, publicness – constitutes responses to and not romanticised notions of theology today. Tracy is working towards the transformation of a society that will render Davis’ questions redundant. For there *will* be an audience for serious theology and there *will* be a critical public, if Tracy’s project is brought to fruition. For Tracy, theology must change, and theology must change society.

Davis’ comments on Tracy’s presentation of the Catholic Church are even more withering, and again, it must be said, misunderstood. For example, “The present institutional setup for the Church embodies a claim to moral sovereignty . . . To advocate a

critical public is precisely to deny the existence of such moral sovereignty” (103). I would argue again that this is ‘precisely’ Tracy’s intention. Tracy’s writing is extremely subtle and nuanced; overt critique is painstakingly avoided, or if present, delicately phrased, as with the “responsible citizen” / “responsible church member” analogy, where the latter would question the Petrine ministry.¹³ It is interesting to note that Tracy places himself squarely in the group that supports a sociological as well as a theological view of the Church; in other words as the responsible theologian who would (and does) pose the sensitive questions on the centralisation of power in the Vatican.

The subtleties of writing which characterise The Analogical Imagination are hinted at in the book’s title, and, in the case of the ‘publics’ are perhaps attributable to reluctance on the part of the author to address an essentially negative situation in terms that could be construed as haranguing. Little would be gained from engendering negativity in the very audience the author wishes to persuade. Harsh as Davis’ critique is, abstruse as Tracy’s writing is, it is clear that he and Davis are theologians of the same mind in respect of the ideal of public and the ideal of Church. It is with the particular sensitivities of the Church and the pluralist theologian that the next chapter is concerned.

¹³ Refer p 46 above. Also Analogical Imagination (22).

The previous chapter dealt with theological pluralism in the sense of its sociological genesis, the danger of random or indiscriminate pluralism, and the demands placed by publicness to ensure academic and theological integrity. In this chapter, the focus on socio-cultural influences on theology widens to encompass its effects on theological development within the Catholic Church. The Church's need to respond to the exigencies of historical consciousness resulted in the sanctioning of theological pluralism such as would permit the mystery of God's revelation to be expressed through forms and concepts that would ensure its intelligibility in all socio-cultural, historical and linguistic contexts. This sanctioning of plurality in form does not extend to the meaning (or content) of revelation. The unity and identity of revelation must remain forever unchanged; in other words, plurality of expression must always be commensurable with the Church's fundamental teaching on revelation. There are – as Italian theologian Battista Mondin equivocally acknowledges – limits to pluralism (“Legitimacy and Limits of Theological Pluralism” 9).

The primary task of this chapter is to identify and understand the nature of these limits, and to relate them in a general way to contemporary theology. This will entail a review of the ecclesial process through which theological pluralism developed, and will also involve some discussion of the rocky road that theology has travelled since the Second Vatican Council. In addition to a review of documents that permit some insight into pre-Vatican II thought, relevant documents of the Council as well as certain post-conciliar documents will be reviewed and discussed. The chapter will conclude with a discussion on the complexity associated with officially sanctioned (or “commensurable”) pluralism, and

will introduce the postmodern nonfoundationalism thought that is increasingly influential in theology.

In respect of this project, the issue of nonfoundationalism in theology will be the primary topic under consideration for the final chapter. This chapter serves to introduce the topic within the ambit of theological pluralism. Finally, the paradigm of the Catholic Church continues to be used here as its self-conscious concern with safeguarding the integrity of dogma is a major source of theological tension (one might even say dissension) between the church and many contemporary theologians.

4. 1 Use of Sources

In addition to certain relevant Vatican documents, Thomas Guarino's volume, Revelation and Truth, is a key source for this chapter. Guarino is concerned with revelation from the perspective of theological epistemology. The work is of interest to this (and subsequent) chapters, first for its analysis of the difficulties associated with theological pluralism as sanctioned in the form/content hermeneutical schema of Vatican II. Second, the author's perspectives on foundationalist and nonfoundationalist thinking in theology offers an unbiased view of the strengths and weaknesses of both, without losing sight of the issue at stake – the integrity of revelation. Works of Karl Rahner, as well as those of nonfoundationalists John E. Thiel and Ronald Thiemann will also be referenced briefly.

4.2 Background: Vatican sanctioning of theological pluralism

The momentous words which gave wings to theological pluralism were uttered by Pope John XXIII in his allocution on the opening of Vatican II: “The substance of the ancient doctrine of the Deposit of Faith is one thing, the way in which it is presented is something else” (www.usccb.org).¹⁴ This was a far cry from the conceptual monism stipulated in Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical Aeterni Patris (1879) which imposed one conceptual system [neo-Thomism] as optimum for expressing the truth of revelation and doctrine (Guarino 21). One half of this encyclical is devoted to the great merit of “St. Thomas,” whose “golden wisdom . . . [must] be spread far and wide” (Article 31). Leo XIII’s stance was firmly re-enforced in Pius X’s 1907 encyclical Pascendi Dominici Gregis (Article 45), and in later encyclicals and decrees up to the 1950 encyclical of Pope Pius XII, Humani Generis. Here, “the Church demands that future priests be instructed in philosophy according to the method, doctrine, and principles of the Angelic Doctor” (Article 31), for “no Catholic could doubt” the falsity of the notion that the faith could be re-conceptualised in the modern philosophies (A. 32). This thought governed Catholic theology until the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965).

In a moment belonging to both the neoscholastic past and to the ‘open windows’ of the future, Pope John XXIII’s words were an implicit acknowledgement that the realities of history and human finitude require plurality in theological expression. The threshold moment that began Vatican II was one of vindication for some; John XXIII’s words resonated with those of earlier advocates of theological pluralism. Outlining the arguments

¹⁴ Gaudet Mater Ecclesia (See Guarino pp 24, 182 n 14). This statement is paraphrased in Gaudium et Spes (The Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World). # 62: 238-9.

of French thinkers such as Ambrose Gardeil ¹⁵ and Henri Bouillard, ¹⁶ Guarino demonstrates that the need for distinction between “the ‘content’ that one affirms and the ‘form’ (or context) in which one affirms it” had been argued (by Gardeil) some sixty years before Vatican II (24). In 1943, Bouillard made a similar distinction in his argument that while the church “held for” fundamental “*affirmations*,” over time the faith was expressed through “a variety of ‘*representations*’ or conceptual systems.” Going on to re-state Bouillard’s argument, Guarino notes that while the church’s fundamental affirmation (revelation) possesses a unity and identity, and while its integrity and constancy are unquestioned, it is yet mediated through the particular socio-cultural-historical situations in which it is expressed. As such “expressions of revelation are always limited by the horizons and perspectives in which revelation itself is received” (27). This does not bring into question the truth of revelation; it suggests only that this truth may be “appropriated, re-expressed, and reconceptualized” according to the exigencies of time, place, language and culture. If it is not (that is, “if ‘difference’ is not as important as ‘identity’”) then the meaning of the Christian message to contemporary men and women is lost in the ‘strangeness’ of the language and categories of Aquinas. It is the theologian’s task, Guarino concludes, to “re-think and reformulate the fundamental categories in which the faith is expressed” (27).

Addressing the concern of theological relativism, Guarino again draws on Bouillard, who has argued that Augustine, Aquinas, the bishops at Trent and others used various conceptual schemas and paradigms to express the same notion of justification. Yet, “in and through the various representations, one affirmation emerges: grace is a free gift

¹⁵ “La relativité des formules dogmatiques.” (1903) (Guarino p 182 n 17).

¹⁶ H. Bouillard Conversion et Grâce chez S. Thomas d’Aquin: Étude Historique. (Guarino 182 n 19).

from God by which human beings are justified and empowered to do the good” (26). Thus, while incommensurability may exist between the various forms of conceptual plurality, all are commensurable with the unity and identity of the faith. The Church insists on this fundamental commensurability in its sanctioning of theological pluralism.

The council endorsed and indeed utilised the form/content, representation / affirmation distinction in several of its deliberations. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) in its Decree on Ecumenism strongly affirmed conceptual plurality: “While preserving unity in essentials, let all in the Church according to the office entrusted to them, preserve a proper freedom . . . even in the theological elaborating of revealed truth” (Article 4). Bouillard’s argument that doctrinal and theological statements are “deeply conditioned by the philosophical, cultural, societal, and historical contexts” (Guarino 26) is further vindicated in the significant post-conciliar magisterial document, Mysterium Ecclesiae (1973). This document essentially acknowledges the locus of thought in culture, history and language in its admission of these influences in theological and dogmatic formulations – albeit somewhat equivocally in the case of the latter. For example: “With regard to [the] historical condition, the meaning of the pronouncements of faith depends partly upon the expressive power of the language used at a given time and under given circumstances.” The truths being conveyed in dogmatic formulas, while “distinct from the changeable conceptions of a given epoch may be enunciated by the sacred magisterium in terms that bear traces of such conceptions” (ME Article 5).

In Guarino’s words, the declaration “admits officially” that

there are factors that condition and limit the cognitive penetration of theological and doctrinal language into the mystery of revelation. There are, therefore, significant dimensions of absence, otherness, and difference at the heart of the notion of revelation itself. (31).

Ever mindful of the threat of theological relativism, this document (as with all other relevant documents) emphasises that the legitimacy of conceptual plurality notwithstanding, the *meaning* of the dogmatic formulas remains “determinate and unalterable” (A. 5). Commensurable theological pluralism, then, insists on the distinction between the unchanging substance of the “deposit of faith” and affirms the necessary plurality of its theological representation and reformulation. A further distinction exists between the historically conditioned formulation of dogma and the truth of revelation.

4. 3 Theological Pluralism: A renewed emphasis on unity

For reasons that are (of necessity) partly speculative, more recent Vatican documents relating to theological pluralism reflect a renewed emphasis on the unity and identity of revelation and a correspondingly reduced emphasis on plurality and difference. This may be due in part to the explosion of theological pluralism following Vatican II, some of which (as has been discussed above) is random and indiscriminate. However, it is being proposed here that the primary cause for the official shift in focus lies in the need for the church to respond to the nonfoundationalist theologies of postmodernism, which reject the notion of any ontological foundation from which one might begin to seek knowledge of God.¹⁷ It can be argued that the CDF document, Instruction on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian (1990) seeks, however indirectly, to respond to this concern.

In Guarino’s response to this document, he notes two “weaknesses” in the following excerpt:

¹⁷ Postmodern philosophies and theologies will be discussed at length in the following chapter.

As far as theological pluralism is concerned, this is only legitimate to the extent that the unity of the faith in its objective meaning is not jeopardised. Essential bonds link the distinct levels of unity of faith, unity-plurality of expressions of the faith and plurality of theologies. The ultimate reason for plurality is found in the unfathomable mystery of Christ, who transcends every objective systemization. (Article 34)

Guarino agrees that the mystery of God is indeed the “ultimate” reason for the limitations imposed on doctrinal and theological formulations. However, he notes, human finitude is another reason, which goes unmentioned here. The second weakness Guarino finds is the absence of discussion in respect of the complexity posed by the form/content distinction, a circumstance encountered in the theologian’s task of rendering the faith intelligible in contemporary life.¹⁸ He concludes: “The recent “Instruction” then, seeks to emphasize the unity, identity and integrity of revelation, but rather short shrift is given to those elements that ensure diversity, pluralism, otherness and difference” (33).

In a general sense, Guarino is correct in the omissions he observes in this document. However, I would suggest that the merely “short shrift” reading that he gives to the “theological pluralism” reference serves to understate the overall intention of this portion of the document. The contextual placement of the negatively phrased reference to “theological pluralism” is somewhat puzzling, and as shall be demonstrated here, suggests the possibility that it is meant to serve as a warning. The excerpt appears in a sub-section of the document entitled, “The Problem of Dissent” which in turn is placed in the broader context (section) of “The Theologian and the Magisterium.” The immediate context of the excerpt addresses two basic arguments that are used to defend dissension between theologians and the Magisterium. The first is in the order of hermeneutics, and takes the stance that that “the

¹⁸ The complexity associated with the form / content distinction will be discussed further down.

documents of the Magisterium . . . reflect nothing more than a debatable theology.” The second argument

takes theological pluralism sometimes to the point of a relativism which calls the integrity of the faith into question. Here the interventions of the Magisterium would have their origin in one theology among many theologies, while no particular theology could presume to claim universal normative status ” (A 34).

Given the overall context of dissension, it is proposed here that the second “basic argument” (reproduced above) is an allusion to postmodern thought, of which rejection of the “universal” is characteristic. As this provides the immediate context for the reference to “theological pluralism,” I would suggest that the theologian is being cautioned in this reference that commitment to the form/content schema is obligatory. There is to be no discussion. As shall be discussed more fully in the next chapter, rejection of the form/content schema constitutes the dividing line between foundationalist and nonfoundationalist, commensurable and incommensurable theology. A reading of relevant portions of the document as a response to (nonfoundationalist) postmodern theologies would seem to be borne out by its frequent references to those areas that characterise the conflict between traditional theology and postmodernism. An excerpt that contains all of these concerns, including an allusion to metaphysics, is reproduced here from the section dealing with “The Vocation of the Theologian.”

Despite the assertions of many philosophical currents . . . human reason’s ability to attain truth must be recognised as well as its metaphysical capacity to come to a knowledge of God from creation. The theologian’s proper task is to understand the meaning of revelation and this, therefore, requires the utilisation of philosophical concepts which provide ‘a solid and correct understanding of man, the world and God’ and can be employed in a reflection of revealed doctrine.

Article 10.

If this reading of the document as a response to nonfoundationalism is correct, then, its concern with protecting, through renewed emphasis, the integrity, unity and identity of

revelation is unsurprising, for this understanding of revelation is most certainly jeopardised by the nonfoundationalist theologies of postmodernism.

The question of human finitude becomes something of a moot point, if it is granted that the intention of the document is to defend the fundamental affirmations of revelation against postmodernism, of which it could be said that the notion of finitude is yet another primary characteristic. The document's several explicit references to the "divine assistance" which attends Magisterial deliberations has the further effect of obviating human finitude. It is being concluded, therefore, that the "Instruction" document includes Magisterial concerns with theological pluralism to the extent that such pluralism reflects nonfoundationalist thought, which, by definition deviates from the fundamental teaching on revelation, or put differently, from the form/content schema.

Nevertheless, in respect of historical conditioning, the document is somewhat consistent (if grudgingly so) with the generally more explicit and conciliatory Mysterium Ecclesiae. The "Instruction" refers to "the filtering which occurs with the passage of time" and continues:

The theologian knows that some judgements of the Magisterium could be justified at the time they were made because while the pronouncements contained true assertions and others which were not sure, both types were inextricably connected. Only time has permitted discernment and after deeper study, the attainment of true doctrinal progress.

Article 24.

Mysterium Ecclesiae states:

It sometimes happens that some dogmatic truth is first expressed incompletely (but not falsely) and at a later date, when considered in a broader context of faith or human knowledge it receives a fuller and more perfect expression. (Article 5).

A change of tone between the CDF documents of 1973 and 1990 is evident. The “Instruction,” while avoiding any negation of earlier documents, would seem to be self-consciously understating the earlier movements towards pluralism. Its allusion in Article I to the ‘faith seeking understanding’ model for theology promises a traditional approach, which the document ultimately delivers. In its essentials, however, a new emphasis notwithstanding, the document is consistent with earlier pronouncements with respect to commensurable theological pluralism.

4. 4 Commensurable pluralism: challenges and complexity

To re-state the conclusions of the previous section, officially sanctioned (or commensurable) theological pluralism is the response of the Catholic Church to the reality of historical consciousness. Specifically, the Church recognises the need for plurality in conceptual systems through which the faith is communicated, and recognises the historical conditioning (but not falsity) of dogma. Conceptual systems may be incommensurable among themselves, but cannot contradict fundamental teaching on the unity of revelation. That is, the *meaning* conveyed through conceptual systems (as for example, through philosophies or even sociology) must be commensurable with the fundamental credal and dogmatic affirmations of the faith. Plurality in form, therefore, must in all instances attest to the unity and identity of content.

Commensurable pluralism (or the form/content hermeneutical schema) contains elements of complexity for traditional theology insofar as there exists no adequate metaphysical-ontological philosophy through which the unity and identity of content might

be mediated in the pluralist context (Guarino 40-56). The demise of ahistorical neoscholasticism, and the formal sanctioning of pluralism with Vatican II brought to an end the long marriage of theology and metaphysical philosophy. However, new problems have arisen in the sanctioning of form/content inasmuch as the stance on the universality of revelation becomes difficult to sustain over time in the absence of philosophical grounding (42). That is, in the absence of a philosophy that grounds the claim to an overarching knowledge of being and Being as common to all human persons. The traditional use of metaphysical principles and categories to explicate the faith and to ground philosophically the truths of revelation had served also to unify human societies and cultures throughout Christianity's history. Questions of 'being,' of the soul, of the search for ultimate meaning are fundamental to all humanity, as Berger has argued. In its mediation of revelation, metaphysics facilitated theology's task in formulating responses to these questions. However, by mid twentieth century the metaphysics of neoscholasticism had proved inadequate to meet the needs of a contemporary approach to theology that sought to address the realities of historical consciousness, not least of which was the pluralist reality. In the absence of some form of metaphysical-ontological grounding, there are risks that Guarino makes clear:

If one is to posit the notion of a *stable content* of credal and dogmatic faith, manifesting itself consistently and with identity in the course of two millenia of Christianity – in and through every human culture society – in and through a variety of forms – then one must ground this . . . [or] universality would be 'swallowed up' by cultural particularity, difference, otherness, *lēthē*, alterity, and absence.
(42).

Adherence to the form/content schema thus requires that content be ontologically-metaphysically grounded if the identity and constancy of revelation is to be retained, and if

Christianity is to avoid a cycle of decline in which participation is ultimately constituted by a series of de-centred religious practices. In his encyclical Fides Et Ratio, Pope John Paul II is explicit that there is “a need for a philosophy of *genuinely* metaphysical range capable, that is, of transcending empirical data in order to attain something absolute, ultimate and foundational in its search for truth” (83). It is difficult to conceive of a stance more philosophically opposed to the predominant stream of postmodern nonfoundationalist thought, which posits that knowledge is derived only from the socio-cultural, historical and linguistic contexts. John E. Thiel captures the nonfoundationalist position quite succinctly in the following statement:

[K]nowledge and understanding do not rest on principles immediately experienced or certainly demonstrated, nor do they appear as universal truths that lend themselves to regional translation. Knowledge and understanding are not independent of context and its tightly woven fabric of epistemic, cultural and lived particularities, nor are the workings of reason that shape knowledge and understanding context-free. Nonfoundationalism (76).

Writing from a different perspective, Thiel nevertheless addresses what might well be the most serious dilemma for the contemporary theologian attempting to respect the form/content schema. Ronald Thiemann notes that on the one hand, a theological distinction must be made between ‘ordinary’ human knowledge and the knowledge that derives from God’s revelation. On the other hand, there is the question of whether that distinction is readily identifiable in human experience when “every act of knowing appears to be *our* act, *our* knowing” ¹⁹(Thiemann: Revelation and Theology 157). This point of Thiemann’s underscores the question raised by Thiel’s form/content allusion: can form realistically be distinguished from content where socio-cultural, historical and linguistic particularity is authentically recognised. To what extent can the autonomous expression of

a truth be distinguished from the *content* of that truth? The distinction would, as Guarino suggests, fade over time, with identity ultimately collapsing into difference.

In his brief analysis of the approaches taken by four important foundationalist theologians²⁰ who subscribe to the form/content schema, Guarino recognises Karl Rahner and Bernard Lonergan, as having successfully addressed the need to ground the form/content schema. Rahner's response has been the development of a transcendental theology premised on an epistemological and metaphysical structure, in which "man experiences himself as transcendent being" in the moment "his" questioning leads to recognition of finitude. In that precise moment, the finite horizon has been transcended, and the horizon of "man's" questioning is now infinite, constantly receding, as each answer gives way to a new question (Rahner Foundations of Christian Faith 32). For Rahner, to speak of "man" as transcendent being is to suggest that all knowledge and conscious activity "is grounded in a pre-apprehension (*Vorgriff*) of 'being' as such, in an unthematic but ever-present knowledge of the infinity of reality" (Rahner 33). Lonergan's approach has been unique, Guarino notes, inasmuch as he has developed his own theory regarding the invariant nature of human cognitional structure, "with its epistemological and metaphysical implications" (Guarino 49). Lonergan and Rahner, through different approaches to the transcendental subject have developed ontological foundations for the form/content schema. However, this does not obviate the need for a universally accessible foundation such as metaphysics might offer.

¹⁹ This question of Theimann finds its response in David Tracy's "criteria of adequacy" discussed in the previous chapter, and which ultimately distinguishes Tracy's nonfoundationalism with that of others.

²⁰ Theologians Walter Kasper and Hans Urs von Balthasar are the other two theologians whose approaches are considered by Guarino. Neither has developed ontological grounds for the form/content schema.

4. 5 Trinity and Pluralism

The question remains, then, as to how an inadequately grounded form/content approach to hermeneutics can maintain the distinction between plurality in form and the universal and transcultural truths that underlie interpretation. If the distinction between the two is to be maintained, Guarino concludes, it must be “on the basis of some metaphysical identity that grounds sameness and integrity in and through difference and multiplicity” (55). Guarino’s thought resonates with the opening remarks of a lecture given by philosopher Charles Taylor in 1996. Speaking of Catholicism and its authentic meaning in the context of religious and cultural pluralism, Taylor refers to the original word *katholou* “in two related senses, comprising both universality and wholeness.” He continues:

Redemption happens through Incarnation, the weaving of God’s life into human lives, but these human lives are different, plural, irreducible to each other. Redemption-Incarnation brings reconciliation, a kind of oneness. This is the oneness of diverse beings who come to see that they cannot attain wholeness alone, that their complementarity is essential, rather than of beings who come to accept that they are ultimately identical. Or perhaps we might put it, complementarity and identity will both be part of our ultimate oneness. . . . This unity-across-difference as against unity-through-identity seems the only possibility for us . . . [because] it seems that the life of God itself, understood as trinitarian, is already a oneness of this kind. (A Catholic Modernity? 14)

The “life of God,” then, is itself grounded in plurality, or put differently, the unity and identity of revelation is grounded in plurality and difference. In the wholeness and in the plurality of Trinity, revelation is “sameness and integrity” in the sense that God is revealed as One, yet more than One, as human beings are also – through Redemption and Incarnation – one and yet more than one.

The theological paradigm of Trinity would appear, therefore, to constitute the “metaphysical identity” which would ground the form/content schema. The question arises, however, as to whether this can be achieved with integrity when the *content* of revelation in respect of the Triune God appears to be inextricably bound to doctrinal language of overtly patriarchal metaphors; and when its interpreted meaning contains lingering intimations of hierarchical and sexist thought. The doctrine of Trinity is not apolitical. Feminist theologian, Catherine Mowry Lacugna, in her essay “God in Communion With Us” points out that any metaphysics influences directly and profoundly our understanding of “the nature of the human person and the shape of human society” (Freeing Theology 91). She posits that if metaphysical claims about God are to avoid the trap of projecting human values on to divine being (whether such values are hierarchical or egalitarian) then these claims must be rooted in our knowledge of God in salvation history. That is, God as made known to us through Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit; God as ruling by love, “in solidarity with the slave, the poor, the woman, the outcast, the uncircumcised” (92). This is the society of the trinitarian God, and the identity a trinitarian metaphysical position needs to articulate.

Lacugna notes the tendency of the doctrine towards “ungrounded speculation of God’s ‘inner life’” and argues that if tied to the economy of salvation, the doctrine can only reveal God as God chose to reveal Godself – through Jesus Christ. As shall be made clear in the final chapter, LaCugna’s stance has something in common with nonfoundationalist theology, in which God is revealed through Jesus Christ, made known to us in Scripture. Attractive as the doctrine of Trinity appears for grounding pluralism, it is fundamentally inadequate. From the perspective of hermeneutics, attempts to ground form/content in

Trinity would encounter substantial difficulty, for the problem of incommensurability is insurmountable. The expression of the doctrine, irrespective of its historical and cultural conditioning, has come uncomfortably close to being equated with *content*, and God has thus been rendered the legitimating force of human social and cultural projections. The concern of the Magisterium for the permanent identity of revelation, and for its integrity rings hollow in the inevitable reality of God as historically and philosophically conditioned by fourth and fifth century thought.

Vital as foundations and metaphysics have been for this discussion, the horizons of postmodernism offer very different epistemological perspectives, in which neither of these has a legitimate function. This element of postmodern thought is a cause of some concern to the Church; yet, to suggest its opposition to postmodernism *tout court* would be unwarranted. Pluralism, for example, has been actively encouraged until recently. In his essay, "The Cultural Vision of Pope John Paul II," Joe Holland identifies the Pope as a "conservative postmodernist," citing the Pope's writings on "the crisis of modern culture," "the exhaustion of the modern ideologies" and "the birth of a new global consciousness of human solidarity" (Varieties of Postmodern Theology 95, 97). The remainder of the thesis will, however, be more concerned with sources of tension between postmodernism and the Church.

The previous chapters – with the intention of establishing theology as a viable partner in public discourse – discussed its interactive role in the formation of society; its intrinsically public nature; the need for sociological and theological self-consciousness in pluralist society and finally, the theological complexities arising from the pluralist reality. In the case of this last, an emphasis was placed on the risk to the enduring identity of revelation where dogmatic utterances lack adequate metaphysical-ontological foundations. In several respects, this dilemma of traditional theology would be considered a favourable development by many postmodern thinkers. Concern with certitude when postmodern thought privileges provisionality, of universality as opposed to particularity and of foundationalism ²¹ as opposed to nonfoundationalism – are all indicative of the tension between theology and postmodernism. Nevertheless, engagement with the discourse of society necessarily implies some form of engagement with its prevailing philosophy; thus, in respect of today's postmodern context, it might be said that theologians live in interesting times.

'Postmodernism' is a somewhat elusive term, its reference less suggestive of a period in history than a state of transition between historical periods – entirely appropriate inasmuch the naming of this (or any) historical period lies more properly in the domain of posterity. For purposes of this project, it might be described as a moment in history where philosophy and the humanities have brought into serious question the entrenched modernist myths of sustained progress and human development through universal reason and the scientific method. True to its own philosophy, postmodernism is extensively pluralistic;

therefore, its reference here will be largely confined to its predominant characteristics to the extent that these ultimately influence theology. The most significant areas of discussion, then, lie in the implications of the postmodern critique of epistemology. An overview of modernism, which will take as its point of departure the writings of Descartes, will introduce the topic. The influences of modernism in society and in theology will then be discussed, and will be followed by an overview of postmodernism, including a discussion of its origins in the thought of Martin Heidegger. The introduction of nonfoundationalist thought will draw on Richard Rorty and John Thiel..

5.1 Use of Sources

René Descartes' Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy will be used to foreground the modernist thought that has engendered the postmodern critique. Richard Rorty's volume, Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature, will serve as a point of reference for nonfoundationalist thought. Rorty subverts the received wisdom of philosophy, and challenges the notion of foundations on which knowledge claims may be justified. John Thiel's text, Nonfoundationalism, will serve to supplement Rorty's text. Thiel provides an overview of nonfoundationalism, and advocates its value as a critique in theology. Heidegger's thought will be approached through Patricia Waugh (Postmodernism: A Reader) and Thomas Guaurino. In addition to David Tracy and Charles Davies, other voices will be heard in Nancey Murphy (Anglo-American Postmodernism) and Wentzel van Huyssteen (The Shaping of Rationality).

²¹ The term 'foundationalism' was coined in postmodernism and intends a pejorative connotation.

5.2 Modernism: An Overview

Discussion of postmodernism requires as a starting point some discussion of modernism, from which it emerged. An engagement with the full complexity of modernity far exceeds the scope of this project, thus, only those aspects that are most relevant to the paper will be addressed here. René Descartes (1596-1650) might be described as the progenitor of the modern period, so profound was his influence on philosophical thought for the generations that followed him. Descartes is of particular interest to this project because he has come to represent “a paradigm of foundationalism [to] many nonfoundationalist critics” (Nonfoundationalism 3). This section will explore Descartes’ insistence on the need to identify a common foundation for the justification of knowledge, and is interested too in establishing the roots of this thought in dualism. The far-reaching implications of Descartes’ dualism, particularly in respect of individual historical identity and experience will be introduced here.

In a moment of ‘reflection in tranquillity’ (to borrow Wordsworth’s phrase) Descartes, using an analogy of building structures and their foundations, contemplates the circumstances which necessitate fundamental change, the form that change may take, and the process by which it might be effected. At the beginning of Part II of his “Discourse on Method,” Descartes reminds us of the historical context of his writing; that is, he was in Germany, and the Thirty Years War (1618-1648) would have been almost twenty years in progress. The religious strife and bloodletting that marked this period of European history had gone on for almost one half of Descartes’ life at the time of writing, and no doubt had

some bearing on his thought. While his analogy is overtly linked with religion, he notes also its relevance to “the body of the sciences” (“Method” 8).

While insisting that he is concerned only with “building upon a foundation which is completely [his] own.” (“Discourse on Method” 9) Descartes, in the way he uses the analogy, implies the world-changing potential of the thought he is about to share.

Considering the unplanned growth of an erstwhile village into a city, he observes the asymmetric construction and apparently random location of citizens’ homes, noting how this jumble of structures despoil the landscape, composed as they are “of many pieces and made by the hands of various master craftsmen.” Irrespective of the good intentions of any city planner, efforts to render the city more orderly are hindered by the reality of myriad constructions of others’ making. This is unfavourably compared with the “well ordered” structures designed by only one architect and traced out by an engineer “on a vacant plain” (7). While these old structures may, individually, reflect more creativity than do those that emerge from the engineer’s “vacant plain,” the overall effect of the former is one of disorder. Descartes’ analogy is drawing a comparison between the disorder that has resulted in the Christian religion from its long, diverse and conflicted history, and the “true religion, whose ordinances were made by God alone [and] must be incomparably better ordered than all the others” (7). For Descartes, the “true religion” can be made known to “men” only through their use of reason, and not through the various and cumulative writings “of many different persons” (7). Neither plurality nor history is valued here. The implied espousal of an ahistorical approach is later underscored in Descartes’ rejection of the historical and the experiential in associating (if indirectly) disorder with social and cultural conditioning. As children, when the faculty of reason is yet undeveloped, it is

“necessary for us to be governed by our appetites and our teachers . . . [and] it is nearly impossible for our judgements to be as pure or as solid as they would have been had we had the full use of our reason from birth” (8).

Returning to the building analogy, Descartes is not advocating dramatic reform.

Rather the process is gradual and the choice (at least, theoretically) personal:

[W]e never see anyone pulling down all the houses in a city for the sole purpose of rebuilding them in a different style, but one does see very well that many people tear down their *own* houses in order to rebuild them, and that in some cases they are even forced to do so when their houses are in danger of collapsing and when the foundations are not very secure (emphasis mine). (“Method” 8).

In other words, change can only be effected through the individual; it cannot for all practical purposes be imposed. Descartes associates his own project with the analogous citizens who are forced to rebuild their houses, thus expressing some sense of urgency in the replacement of the unsteady ground of “opinions” with the certainty that is founded in reason. He will either “get rid of them once and for all” or retain them if they can be reconciled to reason (8). In other words, he will either divest himself of history and experience, or will use them selectively. Authority and tradition, which had grounded the ‘pre-modern’ world, and whose imperfection is “assured” by “the mere fact of [their] diversity” (8) disintegrated under the rigors of Descartes’ examination. With “*cogito ergo sum*” (“Method” 18) the foundation which would ground the justification of claims to knowledge for the next three hundred years or more, is found to reside in the reasoning capacity of the human subject.

This analysis finds its conclusion in a response offered by Nancey Murphy to the question of Descartes’ “anxiety” over the justification of all received knowledge. Drawing

on Stephen Toulmin, she proposes that the influence of the war on Descartes resulted in a need to produce the means by which a universal agreement on beliefs might be reached. If the faculty of human reason is shared universally, then a new structure built on the product of reason would yield universal assent. Thus, the modernist ideal of knowledge focused on “the general, the universal, the timeless, the theoretical – in contrast to the local, the particular, the timely, the practical” (Anglo-American Postmodernity 10).

Wentzel van Huyssteen notes the profound confidence of the classical period of modernity (from Descartes to Kant to Hegel and Husserl) in its claims of human reason as the foundation of knowledge. The cumulative effect of this philosophical thought manifested itself in “the subject-centred epistemological paradigm of modernity . . . mark[ing] the modern age as not only an age of representational knowledge, but also an age of individualism, rationalization, technical control and secularisation” (The Shaping of Rationality 23). Thus, ‘modernity,’ in addition to its identification with a widespread cultural understanding, has come also to be identified with a “meta-narrative strategy that describes the historical construction of the modern world” (23).

With scientific rationality as the grounding of the modern ideal, it is clear that religion would fall short, and its relegation to the social margins rendered inevitable. In a discussion of secularism as exemplifying the cultural dimensions of modernism, Van Huyssteen elaborates this point. As well as indicating the decline of religious belief and practice, secularisation privatises religion and intellectually marginalises theology by the separation of various realms of human life from religion and theology. In a polarisation of the “true” knowledge “yielded by a superior scientific rationality and the ‘mere’ opinions yielded by subjective religious belief,” theology is deemed “irrational” (23). Van

Huyssteen cites critical theorist Jürgen Habermas as an offender here, given the latter's differentiation of the cultural spheres of modernity as science, morality and art, to the exclusion of religion.

The individualism of modernity is something of a paradox inasmuch as the individual, the centre of all knowledge, is in some sense historically and experientially invisible. The root of Descartes' implied ahistorical approach in "Method" is to be found in the "Meditations," where a form of dualism emerges as the underlying principle which permits separation between mind (which becomes consciousness) and body. For Descartes, the "thing that thinks . . . [that is] doubts, understands, affirms, denies, wills, refuses and . . . imagines and senses" constitutes the "I," and is distinct from the body ("Meditation Two" 66). Descartes situates "the sensing" in "thinking" (66) which is to say that sense perception is located in 'thought' and not in the body. The mind is "wholly diverse from the body," the latter, an object, to be understood only intellectually as is everything else in the external world ("Meditation Six" 101).

Charles Davis underscores the significance of this mind-body split in respect of its denial of the historical character of thought, and of the movement away from the temporal world of lived human experience (What is Living, what is Dead in Christianity today? 36). He cites Albert W. Levi's elaboration of these implications:

. . . *the real process* of thinking disappears, along with its historical grounding and dialectical movement, and we are left with a consciousness *überhaupt*, impersonal and static, cut off from historicity, past time and memory, a pure mental act and center constituting the scientific observer, as clear and transparent a medium as a reflecting pool or the lens of a microscope. (36).²²

²² Albert William Levi. Philosophy as Social Expression (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press) 199. (Davis, 124 n 29).

Nancey Murphy makes a similar point in her reproduction of an interesting observation of Alex Blair:

The modern view of the relations of individuals in society ought . . . to be called '*generic individualism*.' This to recognise not only the priority of the individual to society but also the fact that individuals are for such purposes all alike . . . Individuals in society are more like marbles in a bag than like parts in a machine (Anglo-American Postmodernism 16).²³

Descartes' universal foundation for the justification of knowledge is itself grounded in a fundamentally violent division of human wholeness. The transformation of the human being into subject, and the world into object renders the authentic foundations of human existence dangerously unsound. Where no value is attributed to personal history, experience, feeling or emotion, and where the full dimensions of spirituality and mystery are given no place; in other words, where all is sacrificed to the rational mind, what does it mean to be human? What does it mean for community, and what does it mean for communities who have been (and continue to be) casualties in the excesses of modern Western progress? Where does diversity find its place in uniformity? These are some of the important questions raised by the postmodern critique, and Descartes' thought provides a frame of reference within which such critique might be adequately considered.

²³ Alex Blair. Christian Ambivalence Towards the Old Testament: Corporate and Generic Perspectives in Western Culture. (PhD Dissertation, Graduate Theological Union, 1984). (Murphy 16 n 16).

5.3 Postmodernism: An Overview

Existentialist thinker, Martin Heidegger, to whom the genesis of postmodern thought is widely attributed, developed a critique of “Cartesianism” as the founding methodology of modernity (Postmodernism: A Reader 2). If Descartes and those who followed rejected temporality, Heidegger places it at the ontological centre – “Being-in-the world,” in full self-consciousness of its finitude constitutes the reality of existence. Given his influence on postmodern thinkers, elements of Heidegger’s critique, drawn from Patricia Waugh as well as Thomas Guarino will be highlighted here before engaging with the work of Rorty and Thiel.

Heidegger’s difficulty with Descartes stems from the implications of the {“subject-object”) dualism, which he understands as generating other dualisms, as for example, spirit-matter, reason-emotion, masculine-feminine. Descartes’ radical split between the knowing subject and the inert object of knowledge has yielded a world in which the detachment and superiority of the scientist has become “the model and ground for all existence.” This is manifested in the manipulation of nature by a self-serving, detached subjectivity, in which all relations are instrumental; and “behind each is an empty subjectivity swallowed up in calculative thinking, radically disembedded from world: a ‘Being-in-the-world’ founded in denial of world through its subjugation to a technological will” (Postmodernism: A Reader 2).

Thomas Guarino, drawing on Being and Time, notes how Heidegger uncovers the deep structures that are constitutive of thought and being. That is, structures so deeply embedded in humanness that their reality is in a sense forgotten or rendered “absent.” They

are, “historicity, thrownness, possibility, otherness, linguisticity, and immersion” (63). In their neglect of these horizons, classical metaphysics and Enlightenment thinkers have “left unthought precisely that which is ontologically decisive, viz., the basic state of the subject” (63). Thus, transcendental subjectivity (or *Vorhandenheit* thinking) in which temporality is ignored, represents for Heidegger, an impoverished ontology, inappropriate for revealing the “depths and dimensions” of Daesin.²⁴ By ignoring the horizons that encompass Daesin; by confining knowledge to the “twin boundaries of substance and subject,” Heidegger claims that Western philosophy has concealed the “radical finitude” implied in “thrownness” (63). In other words, it has ignored the radical historical reality of the human being. David Tracy explains Heidegger’s notion of thrownness as the human being’s awareness of the ‘self’ as a “thrown projection.” Thrown into the world, into a history, and into a tradition, human understanding is situated by a past that implicates the self in the “‘effective history’ of an ambiguous heritage of funded meanings. ‘My’ understanding must appropriate these meanings as possibilities for the future which ‘I’ project” (AI 103). Clearly, Heidegger’s ontological privileging of the temporal and finite horizons that constitute human understanding is incompatible with the notion of transcendental subjectivity. The underlying premise for much postmodern thinking might be traced in these strains of Heidegger’s thought.

²⁴ Daesin: ‘existence being.’ Heidegger’s term goes deeper than Descartes’ consciousness in that it implies a self-conscious relationship between a person and surrounding people and objects.

5. 4 Knowledge and its Foundations: A postmodern response

Richard Rorty is explicit and succinct in expressing the thesis of his volume,

Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature. He intends to

undermine the reader's confidence in "the mind" as something about which one should have a philosophical view, in "knowledge" as something about which there ought to be "a theory" and which has foundations, and in philosophy as it has been conceived since Kant. (7).

Rorty's text advances the notion that foundational epistemology is dead, that the "cultural vacancy" opened by its demise remain unfilled, and that hermeneutics (or conversation) should stand as guardian of the epistemological void. For Rorty, "the desire for a theory of knowledge is a desire for constraint – a desire to find foundations to which one might cling" (315). Within the larger pattern of these interconnected themes, the interest of this section of the thesis is the foundations of knowledge. Rorty's case against foundations, if one leaves aside his overall rejection of knowledge theories, rests on the premise that "foundations of knowledge" has its roots in the Greek (Platonic) ocular metaphor, that is, the analogy between perceiving and knowing. The assumption is that gazing at an object causes subjective dispositions of certainty, and that the immediacy of subjective-objective confrontation is the foundations of knowledge. For Rorty, "rational certainty" should be "a matter of victory in argument rather than of relation to an object known." Explanation of the phenomenon of knowledge would thus more properly derive from engagement with our interlocutors than from reliance on our faculties (156).

It may be appropriate to begin, as does Rorty, with a brief history of philosophy since Descartes through the Enlightenment period. Rorty identifies the seventeenth century as the period in which the notion of a theory of knowledge based on mental processes was

conceived. He places a particular emphasis on Locke's contribution to this thought, while to Descartes he ascribes the notion of 'mind' as a separate entity in which processes take place, and to Kant in the eighteenth century the notion of philosophy as the tribunal of pure reason. Rorty reminds his reader that Kant's thought presupposes assent to the "Lockean notions of mental processes and Cartesian notions of mental substance" (4). With the neo-Kantians of the nineteenth century, the notion of philosophy as a foundational discipline grounding the knowledge claims of science, morality, art and religion was consolidated.

With the twentieth century, secularism had taken firm hold, and the urgings of those who wanted to keep philosophy scientific were becoming increasingly irrelevant, as the perceived need to "protect men against superstition" dwindled, and the cultural influence of "the man of letters" became dominant. Theology and science were by then distanced from intellectual life, and philosophy, adhering to its "traditional pretensions" had become increasingly irrelevant and seemed even "absurd," its attempts to "ground this or criticize that" merely shrugged off. Against this background, Rorty points to Heidegger, as well as Wittgenstein and Dewey, as the most important philosophers of the century, all three eventually discarding the notion of philosophy as the foundation of culture and assessing notions of "foundations of knowledge" as untenable (3-5).

Rorty places significant emphasis on the ocular metaphor as the source of "foundations of knowledge." He argues that Plato invoked ocular imagery in philosophical contemplation, which he conceived as an act in which true knowledge could be reached by escaping the senses and "opening up reason – the Eye of the Soul – to the World of Being" (159). Substantial variations on this analogy or theme of "visual confrontations" have persisted in the Western metaphysical tradition (Descartes, Locke and Kant), its driving

force being a yearning for foundational immediacy. Rorty describes its essential feature as follows: “knowing a proposition to be true is to be identified with being caused to do something by an object [an “idea”]. The object *imposes* the proposition’s truth, rendering doubt impossible (157).

A brief description of Rorty’s understanding of the ‘foundations of knowledge’ may be appropriate here in the interest of making his terms of reference clear. Knowledge can be thought of in two ways. First, it may be thought of as a relation to propositions; its justification as a relation between the propositions in question. Put another way, in seeking to justify a proposition, we do so by relating it to another proposition from which the truth of the first might be inferred. If the second proposition is called into question, then it too must be justified by appealing to yet another proposition, and so on. The foundationalist position takes the stance that claims to knowledge must end somewhere – there cannot be an infinite regress. In the second way of conceiving knowledge, there exists a privileged relation of both knowledge and justification to the objects with which those propositions are concerned. Then there is a need to

get behind reasons to causes, beyond argument to compulsion from the object known, to a situation in which argument would be . . . impossible, for anyone gripped by the object in the required way will be *unable* to doubt or to see an alternative. To reach that point is to reach the foundations of knowledge (159).

The development of the ocular metaphor through modernity began with Descartes’ turning the Eye of the Mind from confused inner representations to those that were clear and distinct. This would be reversed by Locke’s focus on appearance as evidence for reality, that is, the foundations of knowledge were to be found in the senses (159). With the demise of the appearance/reality distinction, the inner/outer distinction took hold. The question of “how [to] escape from the realm of appearance” then became “How can I

escape from behind the veil of ideas?"²⁵(160). Kant's approach went "half way" between a propositional and a perceptual view, his theory contained within a framework of causal metaphors (associated with the ocular metaphor): "constitution," "making," "shaping," "synthesizing" and so on (161). Rorty concludes that foundational thought is a manifestation of the desire to have "reality unveiled to us, not as in a glass darkly, but with some unimaginable sort of immediacy which would make discourse and description superfluous" (378). Ultimately, Rorty advances the notion of hermeneutics as a new way of doing philosophy. It is, however, a negative hermeneutics inasmuch as it is directed to "the opposition – trying to show how the odd or paradoxical or offensive things they say hang together with the rest of what they want to say." He associates this hermeneutics of "polemical intent" with Heidegger and Derrida in their attempts to deconstruct tradition (365).

In a sense, Rorty's text is itself somewhat polemical in that foundationalism is vilified without the attribution of any compensating 'good intention' or redemptive value. His interest in the ocular metaphor intends to demonstrate the instability that marks the search for stability, in that the foundation of knowledge is understood as the product of an induced certainty resulting from the subject being compelled by the gazed-upon-object. It can be agreed that this is not a satisfactory metaphor, even as its references are pervasive in our common vocabulary (a circumstance that is oddly and strikingly evident in Rorty's own writing). Nevertheless, it is a metaphor. Rorty appears to be attributing a more literal meaning to the "Eye of the Mind" than was ever intended by Descartes. Further, the

²⁵ The "veil of ideas" is a term used to describe an epistemological problem attributed to Descartes and Locke where 'idea' (a mental object) was designated to an "inner arena with its inner observer." That is, to an "inner mental space in which clear and distinct ideas passed before a single Inner Eye" (Rorty 50). The veil of ideas

metaphor is presented in Rorty's text as part and parcel of foundationalism, when, as only one example, foundationalist theologian / philosopher Bernard Lonergan is emphatic in his rejection of this metaphor. Rorty's contribution to this discussion (indeed to the epistemological discussion generally) is weakened somewhat by the absence of contemporary voices that hold a different or even a more balanced position than his own. This might well be due to a self-conscious effort on his part to remain consistent with the stance he takes on hermeneutics: where there is no common ground ²⁶ "all we can do is show how the other side looks from our own point of view" (365). Other voices, would, nevertheless, have provided a wider framework within which Rorty's thought could be considered.

Nonfoundationalist thinker, John Thiel offers a more nuanced description of what differentiates the nonfoundationalist stance from the foundationalist. The former attempts to justify beliefs through providing sufficient reason for holding particular assumptions, arguing and offering reasoned conclusions. The foundationalist begins with a presupposition that "offering sufficient reason for knowledge finally depends on the existence of beliefs, that though justifying others, require no justification themselves" (29). Whether this "originary" belief is rooted in sense experience, ideas, or structures of the mind, the very possibility of knowing depends on its noninferential ²⁷ character. The argument is that if all knowledge claims are justified beliefs (or inferential) then none can satisfy the doubt that engenders the urge towards justification in the first place (29). The

thus stood between the perceiver and the external world. The question becomes, 'how can I acquire knowledge of the world behind the veil? or, how do I know the 'idea' correctly 'mirrors' the external world?

²⁶ "Common ground" here describes an area of shared agreement that permits the construction of an epistemology. The common ground may often be identified beyond the existential, in Being. (316).

²⁷ Noninferential is to say that the originary belief must not be posed as a defensible consequence of belief for which credible explanations have been given (Thiel 29).

noninferential beliefs stand as a warrant for inferential knowledge claims, thus enabling the justification of belief. The central concern of foundationalists with the absence of noninferential belief (or foundations) is that of relativism, where “genuine acts of knowing would be nothing more than vain hopes and philosophical justification of any sort a logical impossibility” (30). The objectivism of the foundationalist is the conviction that some permanent, ahistorical framework exists to which one can ultimately appeal to determine the nature of “rationality, knowledge, truth, reality, goodness or rightness” (30). Thiel cites Richard Bernstein’s position that objectivist expectations of knowledge are indicative of traditional philosophy’s “Cartesian anxiety,” which is to say that in the absence of foundations, knowledge can be no more than opinion. Justification would have to take place in “a network of mutually supportive beliefs” (31), which is, ultimately the position that Rorty and all nonfoundationalists argue. Where knowledge is deemed contextual, relativism is not an issue.

The nonfoundationalist view on infinite regress is addressed by Thiel through the writing of nonfoundationalist Michael Williams,²⁸ and merits brief discussion here. Justification of belief is inevitably finite, Williams argues, but the fact that justification ends “does not warrant the claim for a foundation on which knowledge necessarily rests” (33). For Williams, a finite regress would require only that at any given time there must exist a stock of beliefs, which are not generally open to challenge, although this possibility is not precluded. Williams understands as “fallacious” the notion that since justification must end somewhere, that termination point must be “some special kind of belief” (33). As a general statement in response to this (the philosophical implications exceeding my

²⁸ Groundless Belief: An Essay on the Possibility of Epistemology (Newhaven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1977) 83-4.

competence to identify) it can be said that while Williams' approach is more structured than Rorty's hermeneutics and "victory in argument," it raises two related questions. First, if this "stock of beliefs" is not open to challenge, is it very much different from foundational epistemology, does it not, in fact, become noninferential. The second question that emerges is how might a "stock of beliefs" be arrived at. What common ground would facilitate general agreement on a stock of beliefs? In this perspective, relativism (even if it were a concern) does not go away, but is likely to be compounded with the rapid irrelevancy of a stock of beliefs. Williams seems to want the best of both worlds.

This review of postmodern philosophical thought on the foundations of knowledge lays the groundwork for the next chapter in which its implications for theology will be considered. The foundation for Christian religious knowledge lies in revelation – the noninferential belief on which other beliefs are justified. Yet, contemporary philosophy is moving inexorably towards "groundless belief." The next chapter is concerned with exploring contemporary theological thought to the extent that it embraces at least some aspects of nonfoundationalism.

Chapter 4 explored questions associated with commensurable theological pluralism, that is, the pluralism sanctioned by Vatican II, which fully acknowledges the cultural, social and historical contexts in which the constant and unchanging identity of revelation is to be expressed. This mode of interpreting revelation, where plurality in form is undergirded by stability in content is referred to as the form/content hermeneutical schema. Chapter 5 discussed the nonfoundationalist critique of the notion that knowledge has foundations. In a reversal of Descartes' thinking, knowledge is *not* a universally accessible and invariant structure resting on a permanent foundation. Thiel, borrowing from Ernest Sosa, describes knowledge as a "raft" rather than a "pyramid" (1).

This thought has implications for theological epistemology inasmuch as revelation is the noninferential belief of Christianity – God revealed to humankind in Jesus Christ. For Christians, knowledge of God is believed to rest on this foundation, and from it, the finite beliefs of Christianity are inferred. It is in this area that confessional influences in nonfoundationalism come to the surface. Nonfoundational theologies reflect a strong orientation towards Scripture, as will be demonstrated in the short excerpts from Barth, and in the more detailed description of George Lindbeck's theology. This has long been the tradition of Protestant Reform, the formulations of doctrine that remain firmly entrenched as the foundational belief in the Catholic tradition being less significant in many Protestant traditions. In the current debate, therefore, rejection of the context-free and thus universal implications of doctrine poses no great dilemma for nonfoundationalist theologians. Put differently, there is no place in nonfoundationalism for Tradition, which

together with Scripture is a source of Catholic theology. There is, therefore, in the strict sense, a fundamental conflict between nonfoundationalism and the tenets of Catholic faith.

For theologians who subscribe without reservation to the nonfoundationalist critique, the form/content hermeneutical schema and the ontology which grounds it become irrelevant – and in the Catholic tradition, any resulting theology would be deemed “incommensurable.” Those who subscribe to the form/content schema are presented with two difficulties. The first of these has already been discussed – the absence of metaphysical grounding that will ensure the permanence and universality of revelation. The transcendental theologies of Karl Rahner and Bernard Lonergan mitigate this foundational weakness to some extent. However, they do not replace metaphysics of a universal scope and dimension. The second difficulty presented by the form/content schema, and only alluded to in Chapter 4 lies in the area of hermeneutics itself. The interpretative task of the Catholic theologian requires that the meaning of revelation (or content) be unchanged while interpretation of that meaning is intended to render revelation coherent to contemporary Christians. The question of whether this is entirely achievable is of primary interest to this chapter.

The task of this chapter is threefold. It seeks first to understand nonfoundationalism in the theological context, and to this end will offer a perspective on nonfoundationalist theology. This will include the related thought of Karl Barth as presented by John Thiel, which will be followed by an extensive discussion of George Lindbeck’s “cultural-linguistic” (nonfoundationalist) model of theology as developed in The Nature of Doctrine. The particular interest in Lindbeck to the chapter is his identification of and proposed solution to the form / content problem in the ecumenical context. The second task of the

chapter is to examine the role of hermeneutics in nonfoundationalist theology, and will retain the earlier focus on Lindbeck's work as it relates to the theological and pluralist implications of his "intratextual" approach to Scripture. David Tracy's work in The Analogical Imagination as it relates to the form / content hermeneutical schema is an interesting alternative to nonfoundationalism, and will be discussed in this part of the chapter.

6. 1 Anti-foundationalism and Karl Barth

The term 'foundationalist' is given a certain pejorative connotation in nonfoundationalist circles – in theology as well as philosophy. It may be appropriate, therefore, to identify the specific reasons for this. The thought of Karl Barth – a somewhat unlikely ally of postmodernism – has its parallels in nonfoundationalism. Barth gives us a clear impression of the specific theological concerns in his critique of modern theology. This can be summarised in the observation that for Barth, the defining characteristics of modernism (scientific rationality, secularism and individualism) have inevitably been absorbed by theology with what he perceives as deleterious results.

The theology of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Barth posits, has been a betrayal of the gospel. Its commitment to modernity's expectation of "proper scientific knowledge" and its accommodation to secularism are understood by him as having compromised the integrity of theological interpretation. Theologians have lost "the Word in the words of theology," and have lost, too, a proper sense of the dividing line between God

and sinful “man.”²⁹ (Thiel 47). Religiosity, understood by modern theologians as “a universal condition of human experience, and as a mediating principle capable of justifying Christianity’s intelligibility to modern culture . . . subordinates the Word of God to human words, revelation to experience, finally the infinite to the finite” (48). The focus on the subject as the theological “point of departure” is no more than a theological expression of modernity’s “exaggerated claims to human knowledge and achievement since the rise of individualism in Western culture” (49). Barth describes as “Christian Cartesianism” those attempts to establish an encounter with God’s revelation through “some mediating principle or foundation on which theological knowledge is supposed to rest” (49). He insists that there can be no “foundation, support or justification”³⁰ for theology “in any philosophy, theory or epistemology” (Thiel 50). The acceptance of human knowledge as criterion for divine revelation assumes that the Word of God stands in need of human intellect that it might “be shaped to the ever-shifting lines of relevance.” Revelation has “its reality and truth wholly and in every respect . . . within itself” (50). It would be fair to conclude that Barth, while presaging the term, was nonfoundationalist.

6.2 The cultural-linguistic model of theology: George Lindbeck

George Lindbeck is generally acknowledged as an important influence on current nonfoundationalist thinking. His volume, The Nature of Doctrine, was the precursor to the nonfoundationalist writing of the past two decades. As with all nonfoundationalist thought, Lindbeck’s is incompatible with Catholic tradition, which is rendered more obvious in this

²⁹ Karl Barth: “The Epistle to the Romans” (2nd edition 1922).

³⁰ Karl Barth: Church Dogmatics I/I, trans G. Bromily, 2nd edition (Edinburgh T. & T Clark 1986) xiii.

work because the issue of doctrine is confronted directly. Thoroughly familiar with the doctrine-bound Catholic tradition – having been the Lutheran representative at Vatican II, and having engaged extensively in Catholic/Lutheran dialogue – Lindbeck is cognisant of the Catholic perspective. Writing in the ecumenical context, Lindbeck effectively identifies the same difficulty experienced by many Catholic theologians in their attempted adherence to the form/content hermeneutical schema of commensurable pluralism. In the course of his extensive involvement with ecumenical dialogue, Lindbeck recognised that theologians were often in agreement on fundamental issues such as Eucharist without substantial change to the related doctrines. He concluded that “the problem”³¹ did not lie in the “reality” but with “the comprehensibility of this strange combination of constancy and change, unity and diversity” (15). The thrust of Lindbeck’s project – the advocacy of a “cultural-linguistic” model of theology – is the product of his search for adequate concepts by which the possibility of doctrinal reconciliation (plurality of expression) without doctrinal change might be grasped intelligibly (15).

Before describing his own theological approach, Lindbeck outlines three current “theological theories of doctrine and religion.” They are, the cognitively propositional approach (doctrines function as truth claims), the experiential-expressive (doctrines function as non-informative and non-discursive symbols), and the third is a combination of the first two, in which both the cognitively propositional and the experiential-expressive dimensions are religiously significant and valid. He notes that Rahner and Lonergan are the most influential of contemporary proponents of this third approach (16).

³¹ Taking the papal encyclical “*Ecclesia De Eucharistia*” as an example, it would be reasonable to conclude that the “problem” to which Lindbeck refers is that authoritative concern with constancy of doctrine precludes formal doctrinal reconciliation.

Lindbeck's own theory proposes that doctrine in its current function of expressive symbols or truth claims might function instead as "communally authoritative rules of discourse, attitude, and action." He proposes this "cultural-linguistic" model as an approach in which doctrine will function as a "rule" theory (18). Lindbeck is drawing on contemporary anthropological, sociological and philosophical thought which "place emphasis on those aspects of religion that resemble languages and are thus similar to cultures." Cultures in this context are to be understood semiotically "as idioms for the constructing of reality and the living of life" (17-8). The perceived similarity between language and religion thus permits the analogy of grammatical rules to doctrine – the latter being transformed into the "rule theory" of religion. The "rules" need not be altered; rather the circumstances and conditions of their application need only be specified. For example, the doctrine of transubstantiation may in some circumstances be harmonised with other doctrines that appear to contradict it, by specifying their "respective domains, uses and priorities" (18). In other words, for the Catholic tradition the 'rule' of "transubstantiation" would apply, for the Presbyterian a different rule would apply. As doctrines would thus be displaced by "rules" there would be no definitive statements about the nature of God, the intent being to provide for speech about God in certain specific circumstances. In Lindbeck's terms, doctrine is moved from "first-order" rules to "second-order," and any affirmation of ontological reality is eliminated (80). He does not deny the propositional nature of rule, pointing out that "the rules formulated by the linguist . . . express propositional convictions about how language . . . actually work[s]" (80).

Lindbeck notes the apparent reluctance in theological circles to accept the cultural-linguistic model of theology, and proposes that "modernity" has conditioned those

interested in religion “to favor ways of viewing religion that are in general more satisfactory than the alternatives” – one “alternative” being the cultural-linguistic model (20). The “more satisfactory” way is ultimately revealed as the experiential-expressive model, the propositional approach, for the most part, dismissed as the refuge of the insecure or naïve (20-1). The attractiveness of the former, which has its origins in the theology of Friedrich Schleiermacher, lies in its location of religious experience in the “prereflective, experiential depths of the self.” The public features of religion are regarded as “expressive and evocative objectifications (i.e. nondiscursive symbols) of internal experience” (21). Since Kant’s “turn to the subject,” Lindbeck observes, this approach has influenced, perhaps even dominated the humanistic side of Western culture. He concedes that it is not a heritage easily discarded – “even if there is good reason to do so” (21). A further attraction of this model, with its valuing of inner religious experience, lies in the common ground it presents in inter-religious dialogue – the various religions symbolise the same core experience of the Ultimate, and must therefore “respect each other, learn from each other, and reciprocally enrich each other” (23).

By contrast, the cultural-linguistic model would no more deem religion “as having a single generic or universal experiential essence” than it would language. The cultural-linguistic model focuses on religious particularity rather than on “religious universals and their combinations and permutations” (23). Lindbeck notes the theoretical and conceptual difficulties that “work against” the cultural-linguistic model: “Languages and cultures do not make truth claims; [they] are relative to particular times and places, and are difficult to think of as having transcendent rather than this-worldly origins” (23).

Given his non-polemic style, Lindbeck does not explicitly beat out the connections between the experiential-expressive model of theology and his “modernist” conditioning thesis; nevertheless, the implication is clear. He acknowledges that the cultural-linguistic model may hold more appeal for those engaged in religious rather than theological studies, but points out the risk of theology’s isolation, given the ascendancy of that model in academic disciplines such as history, anthropology, sociology, philosophy as well as religion (25).

Lindbeck may well be right in this observation. However, his stance of all or nothing impoverishes theology, which is to be submerged in the grammar of a language that is incapable of expressing the full dimensions of its activity. Theology in one vital respect is different from language – from philosophy, the social sciences and history. They do not make truth claims, but theology must try. Comparison of theology with other disciplines in such a literal context as Lindbeck proposes, can only lead to the conclusion of its “isolation,” which I would suggest is overstated. It has been demonstrated in the last chapter that an apparently irreconcilable rift between theology and philosophy now exists. Regrettable as this is, it must be noted that contemporary philosophy is itself in a state of flux, its character perhaps more readily identified by what it is not, than by what it is. Religion as a discipline is concerned with explicating the meaning of religions, and so, as with the social sciences, the cultural-linguistic model would appear to be well suited to this activity. Co-relational efforts between the social sciences and theology would be inconsistent with Lindbeck’s approach, which would have theology speaking sociology’s language, hence obviating the need for co-relations.

The problems posed by plurality-unity do not arise in Lindbeck's conception of theology; the dilemma of form/content evaporates in a set of rules that are part of the idiom that is culture. This relegating of doctrine to second-order rule poses problems of its own. It will be demonstrated below that in the cultural-linguistic model, theology is developed from Scripture, so that the "rules" are for all theological purposes, little more than a device by which the religious customs and symbols of all denominations are acknowledged, but are of no import in theological development. Christian identity would be unlikely to survive more than a generation or two in such a loose arrangement. It is true that the cultural-linguistic model would situate theology in public discourse. However, the price would be impossibly high. This observation does, of course, imply that some measure of stability is essential to Christian identity, which is a concern that will underlie the remainder of the chapter.

6. 3 Hermeneutics: George Lindbeck and intratextuality

Lindbeck describes the cultural-linguistic theological model as "intrasemiotic" or "intratextual." In his presentation of the theological possibilities offered by this model for religious faithfulness, he notes that intratextuality locates religious meaning within the text (or semiotic system), thus meaning is derived through the uses of "a specific language rather than being distinguishable from it" (114). "Faithfulness" here intends fidelity to the text. "Extratextuality," by contrast, locates religious meaning outside the text either through its reference in objective realities (propositional model) or in religious experience (experiential-expressive model). Where extratextuality first establishes the propositional

meaning of 'God' and "re-appropriates its use accordingly," the intratextual approach "examines how the word operates within a religion, and thereby shapes reality and experience" (114). Lindbeck is proposing to change the direction of interpretation:

[T]he cross is not to be viewed as a figurative representation of suffering, nor the messianic kingdom as a symbol for hope in the future; rather suffering should be cruciform and hope for the future messianic . . . it is the text . . . that absorbs the world, rather than the world the text. 118

Intratextuality imbues the world with the presence of the biblical insofar as the "language, concepts and categories of Scripture [are applied] to contemporary realities" (119).

There is much of value in Lindbeck's intratextual / extratextual distinction, for the tendency towards excessive extratextuality is regrettably, all too common. The difficulty I would propose with his approach lies in its exclusively intratextuality, which skews the perception of the social reality. Lindbeck acknowledges that his proposed method is heavily reliant on "literary considerations" (120). Indeed, the interpretative framework for theology, he proposes, is to be derived from the inner workings (or literary structure) of biblical texts (Old and New Testaments). The following is an example of the approach Lindbeck offers: If the gospel might be classified in the genre of "realistic narrative," the interaction of "purpose and circumstance" might then be used to render an "identity description" of an "agent." It is Jesus as agent, then, which is "the literal and theologically controlling meaning of the tale." Nothing else is determinative – his historicity, existential significance, or metaphysical status. The "believer" is told "to be conformed to the Jesus Christ depicted in the narrative" (120). Lindbeck appears to be making two assumptions here. First, that the intrinsic meaning of biblical texts is available to the twenty-first century reader (by which is implied theologians). Second that the reader – free of all pre-

conceptions and cultural conditioning can approach the text ‘innocently.’ I would suggest that neither is likely. There is no indication from Lindbeck that the text can yield as many interpretations as there are ‘innocent’ readers. Nor is there any suggestion that a rather formidable array of skills as well as extensive knowledge would be required to do justice to such a task. Finally, contemporary “literary considerations” alone are hardly adequate preparation for the task that properly belongs with the exegete. It is being concluded here that Lindbeck’s proposal of intratextuality as a theological method is much too tenuous, and lacks adequate reference to the level of sophistication proper to the task

Related to questions of interpretation, there are implications for pluralist culture in Lindbeck’s notion of “intratextuality,” which are of sufficient importance that some form of critical response is warranted. Intratextuality as the text absorbing the world ignores the pluralist reality, and so exclusivism looms large here. While the “rule” Christians are living in the world-absorbing text, how do they relate to the other reality of the text-absorbing world? Indeed, how might they relate to the no-text world, and that world to them? The reality is that Christians live in a pluralist world, and the notion that the scriptural world will serve to interpret the contemporary reality for the “believer” (117) is to understate the complexity of that reality. Science, technology and mass media have made a world that would have been incomprehensible to the authors of Scriptural writings, so that applying biblical language, concepts or categories to contemporary realities is to manipulate the text, and to render such categorisation of the contemporary reality incoherent. The question arises of who, ultimately, designates what context or category to which element of reality. The specific *how* of the world-absorbing text is important to know as this would influence the “believer’s” perception of a particular ‘worldly’ reality. While not unexpected in

postmodernism's nonfoundationalist theology, the issues of relativism and exclusivism such as is implied in Lindbeck's theology is deeply unsettling.

6. 4 A Nonfoundationalist Alternative: Pluralism and David Tracy

Lindbeck has implied that there is no place in public discourse for foundationalist theology. While David Tracy, the foremost public theologian of the (North-American) Catholic tradition may not be considered foundationalist in the sense of Guarino's appropriation of the term, to suggest that he is nonfoundationalist in the Lindbeck tradition would be far from the truth. Even as Tracy dismisses the notion of universal reason as merely instrumental rationality, he can write: "We are gifted, in creation and redemption, in world and church, by a grace that is radical and universal" (30). The nonfoundationalist eschews notions of unity and universality thus such a statement is by no means characteristic of that stance. Tracy's approach recognises particularity in respect of content as well as form, while also insisting on methodology that precludes relativist or exclusivist re-interpretations of the religious "classic."

This section will discuss briefly some aspects of Tracy's thought that are associated with his stance on the form/content schema, and which give an indication of the depth of his concern for theological integrity. It must first be explained that Tracy defers to conscience on matters where others might defer to authority – and the issue of authority is not a small one for a very public Catholic theologian. He makes clear his position on this point, "[W]here authority is effectively a matter of obedience to an external norm rather than an acceptance based on a risk and a personal recognition of the authority of a living

religious tradition,” then “authority” degenerates into “authoritarianism” and “dogma” into “dogmatocracy” (99).

As discussed in Chapter 3, Tracy’s writing is nuanced and subtle, yet his elaboration of this point, carefully phrased in the first person alludes to the clearly “authoritarian theologies” such as might be characteristic of the Magisterium. He compares the “human task and hope” of “understanding” as opposed to “certitude,” critical questioning as opposed to uncritical acceptance. In what might be an ironic appropriation of Descartes’ phrase, he writes, again carefully, in the first person “my present horizon is so *clear and distinct* that no effort of interpretation is required for it to be relocated by the classics” (emphasis mine) (103). And Descartes: “[O]ur ideas and notions being real things and coming from God, cannot, in all that is *clear and distinct* in them, be anything but true” (Method 21-2).

As a precursor to establishing Tracy’s thought on the form/content schema, a brief excursus into literary theory would be helpful in recognising the parallels of thought between highly respected literary theorist Terry Eagleton and Tracy. Eagleton (in a non-theological context) critiques the form/content schema (or “reconstructive hermeneutics”) which is the thesis of E. D. Hirsch Jr.³² (used also by Guarino). Hirsch contends that the meaning of a text is always what the author meant by it. There may be a number of different valid interpretations, but they must all “move within the system of typical expectations and probabilities which the author’s meaning permits” (Eagleton 58). While cultural and historical influences may result in different meanings of the work, Hirsch proposes this as ‘significance’ and not ‘meaning.’ Significance may vary all through history, but meaning remains constant (58). The most salient observation of Eagleton’s

critique of Hirsch's approach, although long, is worth reproducing here given its resonance with Tracy:

To secure the meaning of a work for all time, rescuing it from the ravages of history, criticism has to police its potentially anarchic details, hemming them back with the compound of 'typical' meaning. Its stance towards the text is authoritarian and juridical: anything which cannot be herded inside the enclosure of 'probable authorial meaning' is brusquely expelled, and everything remaining within that enclosure is strictly subordinated to this single governing intention. The unalterable meaning of the sacred scripture has been preserved; what one does with it, how one uses it, becomes a merely secondary matter of significance.

Literary Theory (59).

Tracy writes of "the classical," text, "[Its] fate is that only its constant reinterpretation by later, finite, temporal beings . . . can actualize the event of understanding beyond its present fixation in a text" (AI 102). Drawing on Heidegger, Tracy again acknowledges the finite, temporal horizons of the human being within which initial meaning is presented. He insists that one must move beyond these horizons, into "the risk of interpretation of the classics – of the tradition." To stay there, "in the manner of authoritarian theologies of mere repetition and reconstruction, is to hand myself and my tradition over to the dustbin of history" (103).

On the issue of doctrine, Tracy understands "early Catholic" confessional doctrine³² ("the *content* of the *kerygmatic* proclamation" 293 n 56) as a genre, fulfilling a corrective rather than a central role in the New Testament (268). He notes a propensity to either overestimate or underestimate "doctrine," but emphasises its value as a corrective genre "to refine, formulate, clarify, explicate certain central Christian beliefs of the Christian community from the Jesus-*kerygma* through to the doctrines of "early Catholicism" (294 n 57). Dogmatist theologies are for Tracy, ideologies (99). His position

³² Validity in Interpretation (1967). (Eagleton. (Literary Theory: An Introduction).

on form/content, then, is unequivocal. Doctrine is part of “the classic” that represents a corrective to aid the contemporary interpretative activity (99). For Tracy, the Christ event as recounted in the gospels, and as attested to in the *kerygma* is the foundation of knowledge about God. Unlike Lindbeck and others, Tracy hedges against relativism by his doctrinal corrective, and a focus on method as opposed to the descriptive such as Lindbeck employs. He lays out stringent controls on interpretative activity, in which he emphasises the requirement that “criteria of adequacy” retain fidelity to the “whole spectrum of principal forms associated with the “original New Testament responses” to the Christ event (AI 305). He encourages the use of all available tools of literary theory, for interpretation, but cautions that this should not supplant theological understanding of the religious questions (AI 305).

While Lindbeck’s theology of “intratextuality” has the text absorbing the world, Tracy understands the text as “allowing us to appropriate,” within our own particular tradition, its “ownmost drive to the fuller reality of Christian life and tradition” (252). The interpretative activity, for Tracy is interactive, and the theologian’s pre-understanding essential to the activity. In other words, he is advocating a combination of intratextuality and extratextuality. The theologian’s pre-understanding must be relatively adequate to the “situation” with which she comes to the text. That is, it must be reflect serious awareness of the responsibility of the “self to all reality” (257). He proposes also a “criteria of relative adequacy” by which the interpreter can be guided in his search for a response from the text that is relatively adequate to her pre-understanding of the situation or religious question. These include: The interactive process between interpreter and text; an approach that allows the religious dimension of the text to take hold; critical freedom is not restrained,

³³ In this category, Tracy includes 2 Peter, and the pastoral epistles.

but the dialectic of freedom and receptivity “demands the highest use of a critical freedom” by the “empowered” self in conversation with God as disclosed in the text (255).

As opposed to a virtually non-existent search for truth in Lindbeck’s theology, Tracy seeks out new ways of affirming the truth of theological claims. Fundamental theology, in co-relationship with another discipline (usually philosophy) seeks adjudication of its truth claims, formulates its arguments in the philosophical tradition, and ensures the concordance of some arguments with public criteria (66). The criteria for judging truth in systematic theology includes the “disclosure possibilities of new meaning and truth” (68). For practical theologies, truth is made evident in personal transformation, although this is also subject to explicit analysis of the “infrastructural and suprastructural realities” that relate to personal authenticity (73).

Tracy defies the artificial labels of ‘postmodern’ or ‘nonfoundationalist’ theologian, and without concern for such categorisations has directed his energies to a new way of doing theology with fidelity and integrity in the contemporary, pluralist reality. He rejects on the one hand dogmatic certitude about and ‘ownership’ of God, and on the other speaks with deep respect of that which is authentic in the tradition. Even more important, he develops a detailed methodology, which is intended to preserve the authenticity of the Christian tradition in the face of pluralism. His approach is far removed from Lindbeck’s “second-order rule” and exclusivist “intratextuality.” It would not overstate the case to suggest that David Tracy offers an authentic response to the postmodern challenge to theology.

Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to demonstrate the challenges posed to theology by the postmodern (nonfoundationalist) critique. To the extent that the enterprise of public theology is affected, the thesis has been concerned primarily with the inherent complexities of the theologian's pluralist realities – social and theological, not least of which are the postmodern influences that at once enrich and threaten theological integrity. Of primary concern, then, has been sociological and theological self-consciousness, as well as a theological integrity that eschews privatism and preserves authenticity while yet embracing pluralism.

From the social perspective, the theory of sociologist Peter Berger was examined with a view to identifying the socialisation process through which social structures, norms and values are internalised. This to demonstrate that in pluralist culture, the theologian internalises a plurality of social locations, which in turn influences her theology. It was proposed that a more discriminating approach to theological pluralism would be achievable through a heightened awareness of internalised plurality, and to this end, the thought of Bernard Lonergan on self-appropriation and horizon shifts was offered as a corrective to Berger's functional and non-critical approach to the social reality. Following the theoretical description of the social, its more specific reality was identified in David Tracy's three "publics," in which the problems of instrumental rationality and the privatisation of religion surfaced as serious challenges to theology. Moving from the complexity of social pluralism, the complexities of theological pluralism was discussed through its history from the Second Vatican Council up to the present. The hermeneutical difficulties associated

with the commensurable pluralism (form/content schema) sanctioned by the Council was explored here and found wanting.

Before engaging in a discussion of nonfoundationalist theology, the thesis undertook an exploration into the philosophical background to which postmodern thought essentially responds. The focus was primarily on Descartes, who gave us the foundations of knowledge, and on Rorty who deconstructs that notion, arguing knowledge to be contextual, achieved in conversations. As a general statement, there is much anti-foundationalist invective in postmodern writing (Rorty being an example). This is unfortunate in the sense that it tends to obscure a wider and important perspective. The underlying concern of much postmodern thought is that the valuing of the individual over community has damaged Western society, perhaps irretrievably. The postmodern critique, then, is directed in part towards a recovery of community – a position with which theology would be in accord.

The theologies profiled in the work of George Lindbeck and David Tracy have one common element – knowledge of God is to be found in ongoing re-interpretation of Scripture. However, the interpretative approach of each theologian is very different. Lindbeck observes the narrative description process as most nonfoundationalists do, while Tracy is prudent and highly sensitive to the risk of relativism, ensuring that “criteria of adequacy” is met, and that doctrine, in its early form, serves as an interpretative corrective.

George Lindbeck is arguably one of the most frequently cited nonfoundationalist theologians in the literature of this field. His sound background in ecumenicism would not lead one to expect a theology marked by relativism and exclusivism. The nature of nonfoundationalism, however, lends itself to these results. Where all forms of unity and

universalism are eschewed, there is an inevitable turning inward, which is contrary to the spirit of Christianity. Carried to its logical conclusion, Lindbeck's theology would lead to a fragmented and marginalised Christianity. Further, the theologian who is apparently not engaged in the search for truth leaves much to question. Given Lindbeck's status as the one who forged the way for other nonfoundationalists (thus attributing to him a level of competence above his peers) the theological option that he presents would not be a satisfactory alternative to the current doctrinal theology.

David Tracy has taken pains to protect theology against relativism and marginalisation, while conceding plurality in interpretation of content. As a public theologian and staunch advocate of pluralism these would be concerns that one would expect him to take very seriously. The Heidegger influences in Tracy's stance can be detected in his rejection of the notion of formulated dogma, abstracted from the "classic" to define God and Christianity for all history. Rather, doctrine in its scriptural and very early forms stands as a corrective (but not a central truth) for the ongoing activity of re-interpretation. Tracy's approach provides for checks and balances in respect of criteria for justification of truth claims, and relative criteria of adequacy for approaching textual interpretation, thus addressing problems of relativism, exclusivism, and theological integrity.

Tracy's vigilance notwithstanding, a certain reluctance to leave behind the familiar dogmatic pronouncements on the nature of God is, I would suggest, as likely to find its source in Berger's sociological analysis as in the pronouncements of dogmatic theology. That is, objective religious realities are no less likely to be transformed into subjective reality than any element of the social reality, so that letting go the ancient doctrine of

revelation, which has defined Christian self-identity for fifteen hundred years can be likened to shedding part of one's personal identity. Yet, while one might feel gratitude for the tenacity and firmness of purpose that yielded the formulations of Nicea and Chalcedon, thus establishing a Christian identity that survived over centuries, the notion of a permanent, formulaic interpretation of revelation as the foundation for Christian faith is increasingly untenable.

This is not to suggest the absence of theological foundations, and indeed, a final, clarifying word must be rendered in respect of the term(s) '(non)foundationalism.' Theology, by definition, implies foundations for belief. Christian understanding of God has its foundations in Scripture; thus, to appropriate the pejorative philosophical term of 'foundationalism' to theology is to misuse the term. Its reference in Guarino's text (and implied in Thiel's) is to the formulation of the doctrine of revelation, and not to its content. That God is revealed through Jesus Christ is the noninferential Christian belief. How the content of revelation is to be interpreted in the contemporary context is the question and the challenge that the "nonfoundationalist" critique presents. It is not a challenge for the faint of heart; yet, it demands a response from theologians of the twenty-first century if a vibrant, living faith tradition is to be restored. Only then, when questions of identity and difference, unity and plurality are honestly addressed in Christian theology can they be fruitfully explored in public discourse.

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