# David Tracy's Methodology: Theology in the Present

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# ABSTRACT

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As with all fields of study, theology has been forced to come to terms with the shift into post-modernism, understood here in a general sense as a post-positivist, pluralistic shift to the other. David Tracy is a Roman Catholic theologian who has made a career of developing methodologies that embrace this shift without sacrificing the most integral aspects of theological self-understanding. He has been publishing for more than 30 years and with each new work he introduces new means of achieving a sufficiently post-modern methodology. This thesis summarizes some of the various contributions of David Tracy including some commentary as to how effectively they engage post-modernity. I also explore, briefly, some ways in which Tracy's theological understanding has informed my own.

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# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

*AI =The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*
*BRO = Blessed Rage For Order: The New Pluralism in Theology*
*DWO = Dialogue With the Other: The Inter-Religious Dialogue*
*ONP = On Naming The Present: God, Hermeneutics, and Church*
*PA = Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope*

# Introduction

> We live in an age that cannot name itself. For some, we are still in the age of modernity and the triumph of the bourgeois subject. For others, we are in a time of the leveling of all traditions and await the return of the repressed traditional and communal subject. For yet others, we are in a postmodern moment where the death of the subject is now upon us as the last receding wave of the death of God. (*ONP* 3)

So begins David Tracy's book, *On Naming the Present*. It does seem ridiculous to attempt to name the present. We can easily look into our past and give names to such stages in history as "Renaissance" or "Middle Ages" because we can see these periods in relation to other periods in history. "Renaissance" is a great name for an era of artistic and intellectual renewal. Yet, as we are learning more and more in recent academic discussion, such generalizations are limited. They are relative to their period, relative to our understanding, relative to our sources of informing our understanding. Recent scholarship warns us about positivist notions but we still insist on trying to capture the essence of our current context. We have no real hope of knowing what the future will bring, so we have no idea what our context is in relation to the future. The only frame of reference is our past. For many of us, the modernist era is over. Thus naming the present "post-modern" is adequate as long as it only refers to our relationship with that past. The term is vague, insecure. We define our era in its not being the one before as if to say, "We do not know what we are but we surely know what we are not!" Some might find this vague description exciting, open to new and dramatic possibilities. Others find it useless and already cliché.

Tracy, with courage and rigour, attempts to engage this vague context in all of his work. His major interest is how to do theology in such a context. Above all, he is interested in the methodological questions that face theology today. While he never tries to define post-modernism as such, he does suggest certain realities that seem to inform this age. As we see in the above quote on the major developments of post-modernism, the most obvious contribution is the shift away from the *subject* to the *other*. Descartes' famous reliance on the ego is seen as a defining characteristic of modernity and is spurned by post-modern thinkers. They call for a shift to the other; they claim that knowledge is best found in dialogue and dialectic. But dialectic as understood in the Hegelian thesis/anti-thesis/synthesis model is too simplistic. This positivist notion that with enough scientific and rational thought we can come to know everything is anathema to the post-modernist. There must always be a sense of the limitation of inquiry because there are too many voices with too many claims to truth for any universality to be found. This lack of universality is characterized in another of the post-modern realities, pluralism. There are a plurality of interpretations and a plurality of voices with no one of them being capable of a complete claim to truth. These three realities, shift to the other, post-positivism, and pluralism are the major realities that David Tracy endeavours to contend with in his project of finding an adequately post-modern methodology for theology.

David Tracy is an incredibly important voice in theology today. His capacity for engaging the various voices in hermeneutical theory and philosophical reflection outside of theology is unparalleled in current theological discourse. Everything he writes is

littered with citations providing his readers with a goldmine of bibliographic sources. One common theme running through the reviews of Tracy's work in theological journals is the praise for his breadth of research and seeming unbridled passion for knowledge. But his work is always a struggle to read, as he wastes very little time ensuring his audience is caught up with his own level of understanding. The struggle is always worthwhile. His insights force everyone whether they agree or disagree with his assertions to rethink their own assumptions. His work is far too nuanced to be labelled "liberal" or "conservative". He challenges the liberal and the conservative alike to contend with his critiques of both. Although it is impossible to know what the future of theological scholarship will be, it is certain that Tracy's work will have influenced much of it.

Because of the importance of Tracy's work, I feel it valuable to provide an overview of his writing to the present. The following will be a limited summary of and commentary on his work to the present. This summary will be informed by the overall theme of Tracy's work being dedicated to how theology is to be done in contemporary post-modern context. I will argue that Tracy effectively engages the post-modern problems that theology faces. I will also incorporate some commentary which will evaluate the effectiveness in his conclusions. In other words, I want to provide a nuanced discussion of his work without it becoming an apologetic or simple work of praise. While I feel his work is important, I have some reservations with some of the conclusions he draws. I feel it necessary to add an important note of qualification. David Tracy is still publishing and is by no means finished with his career. There is no suggestion being

made that this work is a summary of a distinguished career come to an end. This project is merely a summary and commentary of his work thus far and could be seen as an introduction to the ongoing and valuable insights of this important theologian.

I have divided this project into three chapters. The first two chapters will be dedicated to the first two major original works of David Tracy: *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* and *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*. The third chapter will be much broader in scope. It will briefly discuss the major developments of Tracy's thought since these two important works. The brunt of the summary will be with these first two volumes because of their substantial content and because they provide a foundation for everything that follows. Moreover, his most recent contributions have yet to be articulated in any extensive work. At some point in the future when Tracy's work has truly come to a final conclusion, no doubt, someone else will be there to provide a complete summary. Until such time, I hope this current project will suffice.

*Blessed Rage for Order* is primarily concerned with the problem of doing fundamental theology in a pluralistic post-modern context. Here Tracy proposes a new methodology for theology which he calls "revisionist." It is a natural beginning for his own work as his previous book explores the contributions of Bernard Lonergan. Lonergan too, had much interest in theological methodology. Tracy's method explores the sources of theological inquiry which are to be analysed through hermeneutical and phenomenological means. He then proposes a metaphysic by which fundamental theology can argue the problem of the existence of God. It is in his metaphysical concern

that Tracy most notably departs from Lonerganian categories by suggesting a process metaphysic as opposed to his mentor's transcendental metaphysic. With this phenomenological metaphysic in place he can then pursue a hermeneutic that interprets the New Testament consistent with this perspective. The primary means of interpretation is through symbolic mediation.

*The Analogical Imagination* is concerned with how systematic theology is to be undertaken in a post-modern context. But before he delves into this methodological question, he puts forward a defence for the public nature of theology. He argues that theology is an academic field that has a voice in the rest of academic thought as well as within the particular religious tradition with which it is associated. Much like *Blessed Rage for Order*, *The Analogical Imagination* is concerned with the sources of theology but the primary focus is with the source of the religious classic. Indeed, Tracy argues that the role of the Christian systematic theologian is to interpret Christian classics. He argues that the prime classic in Christianity is the event of Jesus Christ. But this classic needs to be interpreted within the theologian's context. He puts forward a theory that the current pluralistic context is characterized best through its recognition of "the uncanny." The task of the systematic theologian, then, is to use a properly Christian "analogical imagination" to interpret the Christian classic with particular attention to the current reality of the "uncanny."

The final chapter of this project is concerned with the more recent trends in Tracy's thoughts. Through such works as *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope*; *Dialogue With The Other: The Inter-Religious Dialogue*; *On Naming*

*The Present: God Hermeneutics, and Church*; and his various articles in collected works and journals, we see major changes of both theology and style in his writing. While the hermeneutical task of theology is still emphasized, in all these works new approaches are developed. *Plurality and Ambiguity* puts forward a notion of the hermeneutical task being seen as conversation. This conversation must take into account the pluralistic reality of language and the ambiguous nature of history. In *Dialogue With the Other* Tracy proposes a methodology for inter-religious dialogue that goes beyond mere mutual interest to the risk of being profoundly changed by engaging other religious traditions. His work continues to change all the more dramatically in his proposed means of viewing theology as a study of fragments. Here he casts off all hope of systems for a mystical reflection on the fragmentary nature of all reality. He sees the best means of doing theology in such a fragmentary context as being through the apophatic and apocalyptic traditions in Christianity. And with these profound new developments we are left wanting more.

David Tracy's thought is anything but stagnant. He refuses to stand still in his own systematic developments. He constantly risks new means of engaging theology in the context of post-modernity. This ever-changing tendency can be frustrating for those who struggle through each work only to find a shift in focus. There is a process at work, though. Each new proposal follows from the last. It is an exciting ride if you are willing to work your way through it. That is, of course, only if you are willing to risk having your horizons meet these radical new ones.

I would like to take a moment to outline some of my preunderstandings which

brought me to the point of engaging in this project. I want to give both an idea of who I am in doing this and try to draw out any biases that might be present. I come from an evangelical background which above all emphasizes the truth and authority of the Bible. I have since become an Anglican partly because of my own lack of satisfaction with some of the more extreme variations on this perspective and partly in an embrace of more sacramental worship. In this transition, however, I have found myself caught between two unsatisfactory theological stand points. Heretofore, I had only experienced the two options of liberal protestantism and evangelical conservatism. While I knew I could not return to the latter theological stance, I found the liberal option distasteful, too. I found the so-called quest for the historical Jesus barren of spiritual significance and stuck in a quagmire of intellectual pride. I had no real academic language to express these two concerns with liberal theology. So when I began this project I sought to create a kind of spiritual theology which I felt would hold in check such intellectual arrogance. As I proceeded with my research this problem began to fade to the background because I felt it was too personal and too difficult to demonstrate in an academic forum. I also found that it seemed prideful of myself to think I could come up with some new methodology that could solve all these problems. Furthermore, I found that my understanding of theology was not only limited, it was incorrect.

Now, having been in conversation with David Tracy for some time, I have recalled this initial concern and have come to the realization that his work does, in fact, provide some solutions. I have discovered that what I found distasteful in liberal theology was the tendency toward positivism that Tracy and countless other post-modern

theologians reject. I also found that Tracy's hermeneutical outlook finds a way to maintain intellectual integrity by embracing the contributions of historical-critical methods (like the quest for the historical Jesus) while at the same time emphasizing the profound disclosive nature of Christian texts. Moreover, his more recent work promotes an apophatic understanding that ensures a profound limit to the arrogance of positivist truth claims concerning God. While the major focus of this work is a summary of and commentary on the developments in Tracy's career, I will also conclude with some final points regarding how his work has helped me come to terms with my initial concerns about theology.

# Blessed Rage For Order

It has already been said that Tracy's overall concern is how theology should be done within the "new" context of a post-modern world. Since we are arguably still within this post-modern context, some precision will be necessary. Tracy's thought evolves like any good thinker's. In everything he writes he is trying to engage the current of thought in the context he is in. *Blessed Rage For Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* was published in a period in which modernism seemed to be in its final death throes. At one point Tracy even goes as far as to suggest that the quest for the historical Jesus, a classic example of modernist liberal theology, has "collapsed" (BRO 100). Unfortunately, for many of us this quest is still a major focus of theological attention thirty years after Tracy states this. Tracy does not deny the value of such modernist contributions, rather he merely points out that they have been shown to have limitations. In the example of the quest for the historical Jesus, he points to the fact that it does nothing to answer the questions surrounding the eschatological sayings of Christ. But the statement concerning the "collapse" of the quest demonstrates a kind of naïve idealism that post-modern theology will become the norm and liberal modernist theology will all but disappear. Again, unfortunately for many of us, modernism still permeates the theological world. It is understandable that Tracy felt this way. After all, the neo-orthodox thought of Barth and his colleagues had already been around for some time and liberation theology and feminist theologies had been introduced as well.

Avery Dulles suggests in his critique of *Blessed Rage* that there had yet to evolve a sufficiently and uniquely American Roman Catholic systematic theology. He argues that this work is the first such solid endeavour (this statement amidst a highly critical review). The work is Tracy's first original masterpiece. Here he takes a leap from his Lonergan roots and begins to forge a path of his own. *Blessed Rage* was the first work of what was to be a trilogy, each dedicated to one of the three theological fields: fundamental theology, systematic theology, and practical theology. This particular text is committed to providing an adequate methodology for fundamental theology. Ultimately, Tracy's concern is to provide a workable metaphysic that can answer the concerns brought about by post-modern thought. The purpose of this section is to show how *Blessed Rage For Order* engages this new context within which it occurs. Also in keeping with my overall theme, the progression of Tracy's thought over his career, the following will place this text as the foundation for his future work. Finally, I include some evaluation of how successful his project is in providing an adequate post-modern methodology for fundamental theology.

The basic structure of *Blessed Rage* is as follows: a proposed method for theology, a defense of the meaningfulness of this method, and finally an application of the method. The summary here will follow a similar pattern. Tracy calls the method he proposes "revisionist" theology. The task of the revisionist theologian is to engage the two sources of theology which he identifies as common human experience and Christian texts. Since his concern is primarily methodology, Tracy continues to defend his revisionist theology by applying it. The application is specifically to fundamental

theology which has an audience in the academic world outside of theology. Therefore, he must begin with very basic categories of investigation. First, he demonstrates the meaningfulness of the two sources outlined in the revisionist method by appealing to what he calls the "limit-character" of both common human experience and Christian texts. Second, he argues that since these sources are meaningful, they make truth claims which need an adequate metaphysical verification of truth-status. He feels that the neo-classicist process theism is the best suited mode of reflection. Once an adequate *conceptual* metaphysic is established, Tracy returns once more to *symbol* to conclude his work. This final discussion completes the majority of the project Tracy undertakes in *Blessed Rage*. It should be noted that there is a final chapter concerning praxis that will not be covered here as it is a kind of appendix that is disconnected from this current project concerning the overall work of Tracy. Once an adequate summary has been provided, a discussion will follow concerning the success of Tracy's project and the role it plays in his academic career overall.

## Revisionist Theology

In the second chapter of *Blessed Rage* Tracy evaluates four models of contemporary theological pursuit before stating the model he prefers to utilize. The remainder of the first section of the book is then dedicated to flushing out some major methodological principles of his "revisionist" model. In order to be true to this post-modern shift to the other, Tracy uses models. He refers to Tillich's statement that theologians must not be trapped by trying to say everything or nothing at all (*BRO* 23). The use of models implies a certain degree of modality. In other words, the theologian

who embraces a model is inherently embracing his own limited capacities and is explicitly denoting his own horizon in the process. A model provides a theologian with a methodology and allows her to proceed in a rigorous manner without assuming that she will "say everything". This section will be dedicated to drawing out the methodology of Tracy's revisionist model. The model becomes the foundation for the second part of *Blessed Rage* where he applies his methodology to fundamental theological study.

The four models Tracy evaluates in chapter two are orthodox theology, liberal theology, neo-orthodox theology and radical theology. He uses this ordering as it reflects their places in the historical developments in theology. An orthodox theologian is concerned with expressing "an adequate understanding of the beliefs of his particular church tradition." (*BRO* 24) Modernism and modernist techniques are only relevant insofar as they are upholding the traditions that the orthodox theologian is a part of. Tracy considers the ability to draw out sophisticated systematic understandings of doctrines a strength for this model, while its inability to come to terms with the modernist counter-claims is its greatest weakness. On the other hand, the liberal theological model embraces the tools of modernism. Liberal theology, in fact, is almost defined by its commitment to modernism. Because of this dependency, the liberal theologian is a slave serving two masters: his tradition and the modernist ideal. More often than not, when the two conflict, the modernist ideal wins out. Hence, where modernism fails, so too does liberal theology.

Neo-orthodox theology, Tracy argues, rises out of liberalism. It critiques the idealistic notions toward human progress that modernism embraces. The critique by

these mainly German theologians is deeply rooted in their experiences of the atrocities of war and oppression. The neo-orthodox theologian is focused on the unique gift of faith in the Word of God. It is experiential like the orthodox model but experiential in a way that is more in tune with what Tracy calls "common human experience" than merely that of a particular tradition. He feels that the contributions of neo-orthodoxy are that the distinction between God and humanity is drawn out more effectively, and that there is a retrieval of a christocentricity. Also, the neo-orthodox model brought about not only a "criteria of adequacy" to human experience (science, historical criticism, sociology, etc.) but also a "criteria of appropriateness" to the Christian tradition (*BRO* 29). A better balance is struck between faith and secularity. Tracy suggests that the price of these gains is the unwillingness to have an appropriately critical perspective toward the central fundamental aspects of the Christian tradition. Arising out of both liberal theology and neo-orthodox theology comes the model of radical theology as expressed by the "death of God" theologians. Tracy considers the major strength of these theologians to be their willingness to question alongside secular thinkers the traditional theistic notions of God. However, their weakness then is that their response of the "death of God" calls into question whether they can even be considered *Christian* theologians in any meaningful way.

These models, though having value, could not, in Tracy's mind, fully engage the contemporary situation that he was in when writing this work. Another model had to be used. Tracy puts forward his own method, which he calls "revisionist". The revisionist theologian is

> committed to what seems clearly to be the central task of contemporary Christian theology: the dramatic confrontation, the mutual illuminations and corrections, the possible basic reconciliation between the principal values, cognitive claims, and existential faiths of both a reinterpreted post-modern consciousness and a reinterpreted Christianity. (BRO 32)

Tracy feels his model has struck an appropriate balance between faith and reason. Reason is to be seen as contemporary methodologies coming from such modernist developments as historical criticism, scientific discoveries, and philosophical hermeneutical achievements. Faith is "a revisionist understanding of the beliefs, values, and faith of authentic Christianity." (*BRO* 33) The balance is that the self-referent is a subject committed at once to both faith and reason. The approach to the object-referent or the sources of faith and reason is seen as a "critical reformulation of both the meanings manifested by our common human experience and the meanings manifested by an interpretation of the central motifs of the Christian tradition." (BRO 34) This last point is an important one as he continues into the next chapter with a formal discussion of these two sources of theology.

The discussion of theological sources is split up into five theses. Since this discussion provides a foundation for the rest of the work, it is important to make sure it is adequately covered here. The first thesis is, "*The Two Principle Sources for Theology Are Christian Texts and Common Human Experience and Language.*" (*BRO* 43) When Tracy discusses Christian texts he is referring to more than just writing; he is also referring to the Christian tradition itself in all its expressions. Included are the Bible, classic texts throughout the history of Christianity, liturgies, rituals, etc. The second source, common human experience is much like the "situation" of Tillich or "the contemporary scientific world view" of Bultmann. It is important for Tracy that

interaction with this source is not seen purely as Christianity being relevant to the contemporary situation. It is rather a process of demythologization. There is a perspective shift here. Demythologizing is a process with an inner-theological referent, in contrast to relevance, which has an influence from outside the tradition. In other words, contemporary methodology is allowed to inform and critique tradition rather than tradition being forced to be relevant to the contemporary world.

The second thesis progresses from the first, "*The Theological Task Will Involve a Critical Correlation of the Results of Investigations of the Two Sources of Theology.*" There must be some methodology for bringing the conclusions found in the process of interacting with these two sources together in some meaningful way. Tracy leans heavily on Tillich's methodology for correlating the "situation" (common human experience) and the "message" (Christian texts). However, his concern with Tillich's method is that Tillich uses the "message" to answer the questions brought forth from the "situation". Tracy feels the two must be mutually informative. He suggests that only a method which brings together both the questions and answers of both sources of theology will be adequate.

The next two theses refer to the methodology involved in investigating the two sources. The third thesis is, "*The Principal Method of Investigation of the Source "Common Human Experience and Language" Can Be Described as a Phenomenology of the 'Religious Dimension' Present in Everyday and Scientific Experience and Language.*" (*BRO* 47) Tracy argues that there are existential questions which can only be dealt with in a theological context and that Christian theology is one very good means of

dealing with these questions. The phenomenological method is best suited because it has been demonstrated by many scholars to be effective in describing these questions concerning the final horizon as religious. Phenomenology is an experiential method of study which takes into account not only empirical scientific inquiry and rational *a priori* argumentation, but also human existential experience. Thus it is well suited for theological concerns that may go beyond the empirical sciences and rationalistic philosophies. The other source of theology is dealt with differently, "*The Principal Method of Investigation of the Source 'The Christian Tradition' Can Be Described as an Historical and Hermeneutical Investigation of Classical Christian Texts.*"(BRO 49) Here Tracy acknowledges the contributions that historical critical methods have provided and insists they continue to be used in the hermeneutical process. But the hermeneutical method is not limited to historical criticism, there are linguistic concerns as well. The interpretor is concerned with not just historical facts but also with what kind of meaning there is in the text. More specifically, Tracy is concerned with what kind of mode-of-being-in-the-world is being expressed within a given text.

The final thesis being suggested for the revisionist method of theology is the least commonly accepted, according to Tracy. He states, "*To Determine the Truth-Status of the Results of One's Investigations into the Meaning of Both Common Human Experience and Christian Texts the Theologian Should Employ an Explicitly Transcendental or Metaphysical Mode of Reflection.*" He argues that although metaphysical investigation has become passé, it is still necessary for investigations into the truth-values of religious claims. "The reflective discipline needed to decide upon the cognitive claims of religion

and theism will itself have to be able to account not merely for some particular dimension of experience but for *all experience* as such." (BRO 55) Religious statements are inherently transcendental or metaphysical. With these theses Tracy is setting the stage for the rest of his work.

### *The Limit and the Two Sources of Theology*

Now that the methodology has been proposed, the next step is to apply it. This step requires two stages: a defence of the meaningfulness of the two sources of theology and an evaluation of the truth value found within that meaning. In order to discuss the meaning to be found in both sources, Tracy introduces the metaphor of the "limit". This metaphor becomes very significant in the following chapters and must be tackled before any progress can be made. He uses limit in conjunction with both sources of theology. The common human experiences that are described as limit-experiences and limit-questions are ultimately religious experiences while much of the language of Christian texts can be called limit-language. The limit then becomes one means of correlating the two sources of theology. The first two chapters of part two are dedicated to the two sources and their limit characterizations.

There are three areas in which Tracy feels common human experience encounters limit-situations: science, morality, and everyday life. In the argument for limit-situations in science, there is a great deal borrowed from Bernard Lonergan. Lonergan's concept of self-transcendence is related to Tracy's limit-questions. When questions such as those regarding the overall value of technology come into scientific inquiry, they are considered questions of self-transcendence or limit-questions. As it has become painfully

clear in the last century, scientific progress without self-critical, self-transcendent questions can become frightfully destructive. One need only look at the state of our environment for proof. Lonergan's understanding of self-transcendence works through several levels, but for Tracy the limit-questions only come about in Lonergan's third level where questions like

> Is it worthwhile to ask whether our goals, purposes, and ideals are themselves worthwhile (a limit-to question)? Can we understand and affirm such a demand for worthwhileness without affirming an intelligent, rational, responsible source and ground for them (a limit-of question)? (BRO 98)

This distinction between the limit-to and limit-of is very important. Here we see that the religious realm is encountered when we see the limits *to* our own inquiry and when we wonder what the limits *of* our inquiry might be. Here questions of value come into play, questions of a religious nature. The shift to limit-questions in morality follows quite naturally. Here the questions are like, "Why ought I to keep my promise anyway?"(*BRO* 102) Here again we reach limits; there is a limit-to moral questions and further, a limit-of ethical understanding. So there is a shift to the realm of values, the realm of religion as characterized through limit-questions.

In every day life there occur events that Tracy calls limit-experiences. Here Tracy leans heavily on existentialist philosophy. "All genuine limit-situations refer to those experiences, both positive and negative, wherein we both experience our own human limits (limit-to) as our own as well as recognize, however haltingly, some disclosure of a limit-of our experience."(*BRO* 105) In the positive ecstatic experiences such as "love, joy, the creative act, profound reassurance" (*BRO* 105) we encounter the authentically transcendent. We go beyond the every day experience, and we encounter the religious.

On the negative side, we encounter situations like that of Kierkegaard's *angst*. Here we question our finitude, possibly brought on through sickness, nearness to death, or the death of someone dear to us. At these moments we see our human limits (limit-to) and there is some disclosure as to the limit-of our human experience. The inclusion of these aspects of the limit show that the category of common human experience goes beyond that of scientific inquiry or other academic disciplines. Here we encounter a more existential bent or, more particularly, a phenomenological one.

Tracy wants to be clear that limit does not refer to that which is beyond the limit. He suggests that something like Tillich's "ultimate concern" is still applicable. Limit-situations and limit-questions describe rather the human experiences that might draw us into a reflection upon, or might even draw us toward experiencing in some profound way that "ultimate concern". In a beautiful turn he describes it like this: it is "a dimension which, in my own brief and hazy glimpses, discloses a reality, however named and in whatever manner experienced, which functions as a final, now gracious, now frightening, now trustworthy, now absurd, always uncontrollable limit-of the very meaning of existence itself." (*BRO* 108) It seems as though Tracy gets excited in spite of himself here. His rhetoric really shifts from a mechanical philosophical analytical tendency to a more mystical turn. It is intentional; and it is important to note that Tracy feels even in this early stage of his career that the mystical element of theology must be embraced and redeemed from those who might deride it.

Having dealt with the limit-character aspect of common human experiences, the discussion continues with the limit-character of Christian texts. The first task set forth is

to discuss the limit-character of different language forms of the New Testament: proverbs, proclamatory sayings, and parabolic language. The proverbs of the New Testament tend to show an "intensification" of traditional Hebrew sayings:, "Whoever seeks to gain his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will preserve it" (Lk 17:33; cf. Mk 8:35). This intensification of the ordinary through jarring, paradox, or oddness brings the proverb to the limit of ordinary language use. This unnerving aspect is the limit-character. In reference to proclamatory sayings, Tracy points to eschatological sayings whose "odd" nature challenges our ordinary understanding of space and time. There is often a "here and now" but "not yet" to the kingdom of heaven sayings of the Jesus of the Gospels. This oddness again pushes us to the limit of our ordinary understandings of how the world is. Perhaps the most striking examples of limit-character in New Testament language forms are in the parables. Here the comfortable stories of vineyards and wheat fields are interrupted with odd events such as the master sending his son after the servants have already been killed. Within the historical context of the gospels these would be truly jarring. The familiar becomes wholly unfamiliar. Yet again, the limits of our ordinary understandings are demonstrated in New Testament language.

The product of these language forms is a new mode-of-being-in-the-world which is in opposition to some supernatural understanding. The language of the New Testament shocks us out of the every day with its odd nature and yet it is precisely through our every day understanding that this occurs. The normal is turned on its head to push us to the limits. We do not leave the ordinary but we are thrust to its limits. We become aware of a new mode-of-being-in-the-world, in the world still, but at the limits.

### *From Symbolic Meaning to Metaphysical Truth*

Through the use of the limit Tracy has shown that both sources of theological inquiry are meaningful. The next step is to demonstrate the truth-value of religious language. Common human experience and language and Christian texts as they inform theology are making more than just appeals to meaningfulness, they also claim to be true. To evaluate such claims, further investigation is required. Tracy feels the best step is to evaluate the most primary metaphysical issue in the Christian tradition: the question of the existence of God. Heretofore, the language of Christianity has been predominantly in the realm of symbols and metaphors. While these forms of expression are meaningful, a shift to conceptual language is necessary for a discussion of metaphysical truth value. The criteria with which the truth of theism must be determined "are coherence and adequacy of the 'metaphysical' model (here theism) for all our experience" (BRO 152). His discussion runs through several different metaphysical systems until he concludes that the best possible metaphysical understanding of God is found in the process theology of neoclassical theism or "panentheism" as best developed by Hartshorne (BRO 161). It is most effective, for Tracy, to conceptualize God as one who is affected by the events that occur within time and space.

Through the "turn to the subject" modernist thinkers began to try to explain the existence of God through their own experiences. But the work of process thinkers like Whitehead challenges this perspective by turning it on its head. Here the self becomes object. The self is analyzed as one who experiences: "experience refers to our primary experience of our selves as moving, feeling, sensing, thinking, acting, and deciding"

(*BRO* 173). The categories for metaphysics then shift from "substance" and "being" to "process," "sociality," and "time" (*BRO* 173). This shift in categories is a profound one. Metaphysical analysis has come under a great deal of scrutiny. How do we talk about substance when we cannot see or touch it? How do we talk about the substance of God when we cannot analyze it or even demonstrate its existence? By turning to such categories as "process" we come down to reality. It is true to our common human experience that things change and that time progresses. These are undeniably commonly experienced. But applying such categories to God is another issue altogether, which Tracy proposes is exactly what is needed.

For the orthodox thinker, eliminating categories like "substance" and "being" while replacing them with "process," "sociality," and "time" is a dangerous turn. Christian creeds are founded in these classical metaphysical categories. Tracy argues that the categories of process theology are not only more consistent with a contemporary metaphysical perspective, but also with the God of the Christian scriptures. Classical theism does not adequately explain the scriptural account of God's relationship to humanity. He poses this question: "Is not the God of the Jewish and Christian scriptures a God profoundly involved in humanity's struggle to the point where God not merely affects but is affected by the struggle?" (*BRO* 177). A good question. The most commonly agreed upon metaphor concerning God is "God is love." This description of God is *relational.* A loving God is one that suffers alongside those he loves. To make sense of this primary metaphor in classical theism is either to reduce it to a *mere* metaphor, to suggest that it is a limited anthropomorphism, or to just call it a mystery.

But the process metaphysic can embrace a loving God as perfectly fulfilling its fundamental understanding.

Another problem for the classical theologian is how to deal with the fact that change for the better is one of the few constants in this world. Moreover, change for the better is one of our most consistent societal values throughout history. If, then one who changes for the better is one who is closer to perfection, why is it that the classical theistic understanding of perfection necessarily implies changelessness? Tracy provides a succinct and helpful summary of process theism

> Are we then to affirm with the ordinary understanding of Christian theology that God alone is in no real way affected by others? Or should we say that God is both absolute (as the one whose *existence* depends on no other being) and relative (as the one whose *actuality* is relative to all other beings)? (BRO 179)

Here Tracy provides a valuable clarification by distinguishing between *existence* and *actuality*. The process theologian still maintains in accordance with the creeds the absolute nature of God as one who is creator but not created. On the other hand, she can also maintain in accordance with scripture that God is relative in his behaviour, he is loving. In this sense Tracy might appease the fears of the orthodox without doing violence to his own intellectual conscience. This metaphysical understanding of God has sufficiently fulfilled the requirements for internal coherence and existential meaningfulness.

Having stated quite strongly his case for the process metaphysic, Tracy feels it necessary to admit some problems with it. He cites firstly some internal incoherence between certain thinkers with regard to some of the more technical issues. He also calls into question the interpretations of classical theism. He feels there is a tendency toward

assuming only older classical metaphysical formulations and ignoring the contributions of such neo-scholastics as Rahner, Lonergan, Preller, and Burrell. Another major concern Tracy has with process theologians is their general liberal optimism toward the good of humanity. He feels some account of the reality of sin needs to be provided. Finally, his most critical concern with process theology is its overdependence on conceptual thought. While symbol has given rise to a necessity of conceptual articulation, a return back to symbol is needed. He refers to his earlier discussion of the metaphor, "God is love," as one possible avenue for exploration. This final concern regarding the necessity of symbolic language to express the dipolar God of process thought leads Tracy into his concluding chapter.

### *Christology as Re-presentative Limit-Language*

Thus far Tracy has claimed that his revisionist method's two sources, common human experience and language and Christian texts are not only meaningful but are true reflections of reality as understood through a process metaphysic. The meaning that is derived from the two sources is generally expressed symbolically. These symbols give rise to critical thought as expressed here in the process metaphysic. Tracy returns again to symbol which follows, "Paul Ricoeur's oft-cited dictum 'The symbol gives rise to [critical] thought; yet thought is informed by and returns to symbol'" (*BRO* 208-209). The entire project is being synthesized and concluded in this chapter of the text. The proposal is that some kind of new symbolic system is in order for a new pluralistic age. These symbols are still to be found within the context of the New Testament, but they are to be rediscovered and reappropriated so that they can maintain relevance as the moods

and thoughts of the world shift. Tracy then suggests a christological reappropriation by means of "re-presentative" limit-language. In order to achieve this goal, two facts need to be established: the fact of a need for fiction and the fact of evil. The notion of facts themselves needs to be analyzed as well before finally establishing the new christology.

Human beings need story, symbol, image, myth, and fiction. It is only through these forms that new modes-of-being-in-the-world can be established. Conceptual analysis can only describe what is, it cannot put forward ideas as to what can be. By being fictional, or not actual, these forms draw us out of what we are now to imagining what we might become. Prior to this section, Tracy argues for metaphysical verification of the concepts that arise from symbols. But symbols themselves need verification in their adequacy of existential meaningfulness. How do these symbols effect new modes-of-being-in-the-world? Two means of deciding this question are how they effect change in character and how they effect praxis. It seems clear, for example, that the parables of Jesus still bring change in the way that people see the world. These parables can still affect our character and our values. But they have also, especially in recent years, brought about new theologies of praxis like liberation theology. The Christ of the New Testament is, for practical theologians, the Christ of the marginalized and oppressed. So the symbols, fictions, images, myths, and stories found in the New Testament can still positively effect new modes-of-being-in-the-world.

The fact of evil needs to be understood as fact, but not, according to Tracy, as necessity. There is a subtle but very important distinction being drawn here that is essentially related to the early discussion of the fact of fiction. After all, how can a new

mode-of- being-in-the-world be effected if free will does not exist? So evil must be seen as inevitable but not necessary. Humans do, and will continue to do, evil. But there is always a *possibility* that we will do less or at least not do some evils that we might have done without the powerful grace enacted through Christian symbols. It is important to recall Tracy's earlier affirmation of the contributions of neo-orthodox theologians; specifically that they reminded us of the reality of sin. Tracy's theological stance is not falling into the problem of liberal modernist theologies that ignore too much this reality. He is recognizing the fact of sin, but he is also arguing that the Christian symbols can effect a change in character that can over come the bonds of sin.

Another important distinction that needs to be made is between facts as the actualization of possibility and facts as "ritual, as fictional, as symbolic representations of a real possibility" (*BRO* 215). A good example of facts as representing possibility in Christian terms is in the sacraments. "A Christian sacrament is traditionally believed to be a fact as the re-presentation of a real possibility which God has made present to humanity in Christ Jesus" (*BRO* 215). Another example of this distinction is given through the person of Martin Luther King Jr. On one level he was a real human being who actualized certain possibilities through his own life. But as a symbol he represents a possible mode-of-being-in-the-world. Tracy goes as far as to state that whether Dr. King actualized this possibility (which he does not doubt) is of less cultural importance than the symbol he has become. It seems pretty clear where the argument is leading us. The next step is, of course, to discuss the event of Jesus Christ in light of this representative language of symbol.

This concluding section brings us back to the earlier statements concerning the quest for the historical Jesus. Tracy claims not that the quest is totally useless but rather that it is concerned with lesser issues,

> Whatever the historical occasion of the resurrection-belief so central to the New Testament may be, the basic existential meaning of that belief remains the same: the representative words, deeds, and teachings of this representative figure, this Jesus as the Christ, can in fact be trusted. He is *the* re-presentation, *the* Word, *the* Deed, *the* very Destiny of God himself. The God disclosed in the words, deeds, and destiny of Jesus the Christ is of this new righteousness, this new possibility of self-sacrificing love to those who will hear and abide by The Word spoken in the words, deeds and destiny of Jesus the Christ. In that limit-sense, the witness represented in those words, those deeds and that very destiny is true. (BRO 220)

This quote puts forward Tracy's concluding argument. What is being stated here might well be the most controversial aspect of the entire work. Like the example of Martin Luther King, the historical reality of the life of Jesus is of a lesser importance than the meaning of the narratives concerning Jesus as the Christ. Tracy is careful not to suggest any of the events depicted in the gospels did not happen. Rather, he is merely stating that the *fact* of the re-presentative limit-language of these stories is of higher significance, hermeneutically speaking. The specific example he incorporates is that of the resurrection. The resurrection is not an event that occurred *in vacuo* but rather one that has a context and a meaning. It symbolizes a new mode-of-being-in-the-world that is one of grace and redemption. He claims that whatever the historical reality is that brought about the resurrection-belief is of less import than the meaning it derives.

## ***Conclusion***

I have provided an overview of David Tracy's first major original work. The second task is to evaluate these contributions based on the assertion that his overall

concern is how theology is to be done in a contemporary post-modern, post-liberal, pluralistic world. The book begins with a proposal of a new theological method, namely "revisionist". This method is partly characterized by its difference from other methods. In several reviews of *Blessed Rage* there are concerns as to whether Tracy's method is, in fact, different from the liberal model.[1] After all, he asserts that his model must be informed by rigorous secular academic methods and some of his conclusions would certainly make more orthodox leaning readers uncomfortable. If this criticism is to be accepted, then the revisionist method cannot be adequately described as post-modern or even post-liberal. But the criticism is unfounded. The major concern underlying the discussion of models is in a broad sense the problem of faith and reason. Tracy feels that orthodox theologians are too constrained by their commitment to their own traditions to be truly free to explore the questions that have arisen out of modernist methodologies. But he also argues that the liberal model sways too far to the other end of the pendulum by allowing modernist methodologies to have more authority than faith. The neo-orthodox model does present an attempt at balance between faith and reason but, according to Tracy, it does not allow reason to question some of the more fundamental doctrines of faith. And the radical theological model ends up being too willing to undermine these fundamentals to the extent that it can hardly be called Christian. The revisionist model is an attempt to find that balance between faith and reason. Tracy feels that all belief is fair game to the questions of reason but that faith can and must find a way both to be *informed* by and to *answer* these questions. Otherwise, the final result

1 See for example,Gordon D. Kaufman, Review of *Blessed Rage For Order*, *Religious Studies Review* 2 no. 4 (1976): 10 Jerry A. Irish, Review of *Blessed Rage For Order*, *Theology Today* 34 Apri (1977):122.

will be either a fundamentalist fideism or a doctrineless pantheism. His methodology for achieving this goal is to allow for an equal share of his two sources, common human experience and language and Christian texts, that is mutually informative.

It is on this level that Avery Dulles provides some criticism of *Blessed Rage*. He asks why there is not a provision for "uncommon" human experiences. In other words, why are those individual ecstatic moments or private revelation not considered sources of theology as well? Dulles feels that Tracy does discuss such moments in his section concerning limit-experiences but that he leaves no room to allow these moments to say anything new. Rather, they merely connect us with the common religious experiences of all humanity.[2] This response seems to be a misunderstanding of how Tracy understands the sources of theology. Common human experience and language is considered mainly a secular source of theology whereas Christian texts come out of the tradition itself. Christian texts for Tracy means much more than just scripture. He is also referring to "the Christian fact", which includes symbols, rituals, events, and witnesses (*BRO* 15, n5). With this understanding of the sources, Dulles' point is shown to be unfounded. Moments of special revelation, like in the classic texts of Augustine's *Confessions* or Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*, are included. Any new theological works or classic texts of Christians would become incorporated in the general Christian texts categories. If Dulles is referring to revelation more private than these, he is referring to experiences too specialized to be relevant for common interest and thus of little use to theology.

The discussion of the limit is one of the areas in the work that is most successful

2 Avery Dulles, "Method in Fundamental Theology: Reflections on David Tracy's *Blessed Rage for Order*," *Theological Studies* 37 no. 2 (1976): 303-304.

at engaging theology in post-modern thought. Here Tracy has brought together the current studies in hermeneutics and phenomenology. He leans heavily on such greats as Paul Ricoeur whose thought is still considered relevant today, thirty years later. The limit helps bridge the gap between the problem of faith and reason that has so plagued theology. Both the sciences and religion experience the reality of the limit. Tracy has shown in Lonegarian terms that the sciences have had to begin asking questions that draw them into the religious realm. Moreover, his claim that all people experience moments that cannot be described as anything but religious makes religious experience a phenomenologically valid source of academic concern. They may not point to any particular religious tradition but they force religious questions into legitimate debate. Also the fact of limit-language in the New Testament and other Christian texts demonstrates a meaningfulness that cannot and should not be ignored. This common ground provides room for scientific inquiry to critique religious beliefs while keeping in mind that religious beliefs can well critique scientific inquiry. The fact of this mutually-informative reality brings us back to the methodological point that theology must allow for contemporary secular thought to have a voice while at the same time maintaining a voice of its own. It is a methodology which embraces the insights of post-modernity while not ignoring the tools discovered in modernist scholarship.

The last two arguments of *Blessed Rage* as presented here are that process theology is an adequate metaphysic and that symbolic re-presentations have more existential value than the historicity of the events being represented. It is with these two tightly connected points that I have my own concerns. To demonstrate these concerns I

will need to borrow from existentialist philosophy the concept that "existence precedes essence". There are some similar characteristics here that might shed some light on the subject at hand. Sartre argued that we determine our *essence*, while we receive our *existence*.[3] In this perspective, who we make ourselves to be is of more interest to us than what we are. We cannot bring about our existence but we can effect our essence. Tracy states that God's *existence* depends on no other, while his *actuality* is relative. Whereas a human's existence is dependent on something other than herself, her essence is hers to determine. God exists independently and is also in control of his essence (actuality). At no point is there any mention of the existence of God in Tracy's presentation of process theism. However, for there to be an essence, there must *first* be existence. The question of God being in process or not is irrelevant if there is no God. There is then a metaphysical problem. If we want to talk about a God whose actuality is relative we must first have a God that exists. Tracy states that the process metaphysic is not really concerned with substance or being but rather process and time. However, in dealing with the latter two there is an assumption of being, if not substance. Thus, if we want to discuss the metaphysical through process theism we are still stuck with the problem of being.

This problem trickles down into the return to hermeneutics. What Tracy seems to be proposing in his return to symbol, is that the symbolic re-presentations in the New Testament are valid whether the events depicted occurred or not. It is certainly true that

3 While some might recall this argument was in opposition to traditional Christian beliefs like original sin, it does seem to work well with process theism and Tracy's insistence that sin is inevitable but not necessary. Moreover, much of Tracy's arguments are existentially oriented, so there should be no problem including this existential concern.

fiction can present a particular possible mode-of-being-in-the-world that is valuable and can effect character and praxis. But it is important to keep in mind that once the new possible mode-of-being-in-the-world is disclosed, the narrative or symbol that re-presents it cannot be forgotten. The very process of working through the symbol is what brings about the meaning. Otherwise the meaning would be articulated without the symbol. In a sense then, existence precedes essence here as well. For example, it is impossible to extract the meaning behind Dostoyevsksy's *Brothers Karamozov* without struggling through the entire work. One cannot just read the final chapter and have the same possible mode-of-being-in-the-world disclosed as the reader who followed Alyosha through his interactions with his beloved Zosima or questioned the goodness of God alongside Ivan through the "Grand Inquisitor". Moreover, one who struggles through the entire work and experiences a disclosure cannot then cast aside the book as merely a means to the disclosure. In many respects the book is the disclosure. The existence of the book precedes the essence it discloses. Granted there is no actual existence of the characters and plot, but there is a book and a working through of that book must actually occur (exist) before any essence is disclosed.

However, for some aspects of disclosure *actual* existence of an event must precede essence. Since Tracy uses Martin Luther King as an example, let us return to the the civil rights movement in the United States. One event came to symbolize a possible mode-of-being-in-the-world more than any other individual event, Rosa Parks' refusal to move to the back of the bus. The example of a black woman actualizing a possible mode-of-being-in-the-world became an inspiration to many who felt such a thing could

not be done. Her courage to act gave courage for many to act. While it is true that those who gain courage from this story do not have to witness it happening, the *actual* fact of its happening is what gives courage rather than the *symbolic* fact of its meaning. To find out that Rosa never actually confronted the reality of her marginalized position would diminish whatever symbolic impact it might have. The existence of the event precedes the essence of the event. Another more recent example might suffice as well. Oprah Winfrey discovered in this last month that a memoir she had promoted on her television show was largely fictionalized. The scandal was enormous. The story had inspired many because it concerned a man who overcame his addiction to crack-cocaine. His actualization of a possible mode-of-being-in-the-world, his overcoming his addiction was the inspiration. The idea of such an actualization was not the inspiration. Once the news of its fictional content broke out, people felt cheated. They felt that the hope they had gained from the account was now tainted, or worse, idealistic fantasy. That someone actualizes a possible mode-of-being-in-world demonstrates its very possibility. Without the possibility being actualized, there is less evidence to suggest that it is actually possible.

The same goes for the event of the resurrection. While it is true that historical criticism has made it difficult to be certain of many of the events covered in the New Testament, the denial of many of these events cannot occur without major violence to faith. It seems presumptuous to suggest that the figures of the early church like Peter and Paul would have believed so vehemently in the power of the resurrection as symbol if they had not believed that the resurrection actually occurred. It seems unlikely that the

martyrs would have gone to their deaths as willingly without a belief that the resurrection happened. Indeed, it seems just as unlikely to suggest that people today would find as much meaning at Easter if they knew the events surrounding the paschal event were fictional. The actualization that is the resurrection, the existence of the resurrection, precedes the essence, precedes the power of grace and redemption. Without existence, there is no essence. Furthermore, this kind of reasoning is the luxury of the intellectual elite like David Tracy. This kind of articulation of faith is something that would only suffice for the few who could understand it. Granted, the public of fundamental theology is the academic world; the job of the fundamental theologian, however, is to articulate the common faith in a way that allows it to interact with the academic world. It is not to develop a theology for the intellectual elite completely disconnected from the rest of Christianity.

Tracy's distinction between the events and the meaning disclosed by the re-presentations in the New Testament is still vital. In fact, it would be pointless to discuss the resurrection without it being disclosive of meaning. Without the symbolic meaning that came with the actions of Rosa Parks, her story is reduced merely to a woman being difficult on a bus. The meaning that informed her situation and the meaning that comes out of her actions are still worth distinguishing from the event itself. It is on this level that the plurality of post-modernism is being engaged by Tracy. In other words, there is a plurality of meaning in the re-presentations available in the New Testament if not a plurality of options for the events that disclose them. Different theologies focus on different meanings derived from the same events. Some might find a more existentially

relevant possible mode-of-being-in-the-world in the symbol of the Son of God while others may find it in the Word of God. Such plurality of meaning is where Christian theology can be most influenced by the plurality that is post-modernism. It is exactly this sense of plurality that David Tracy is engaging in his overall project. He is struck by the plurality both within the scriptures themselves and our interpretations of them. For Christian theology to avoid becoming a fundamentalist fideism it must accept this kind of plurality. However, it must also be wary of letting the plurality undermine what makes it Christian theology to avoid becoming a doctrineless pantheism. It will become clear in the next two sections that this perspective towards pluralism informs the majority of David Tracy's work.

# The Analogical Imagination

*The Analogical Imagination* is the second part of David Tracy's proposed trilogy. While *Blessed Rage for Order* was concerned with fundamental theology, this second work deals with systematic theology. Six years separate the publication of these two works. Having introduced his revisionist method and applied it to fundamental theology, his next task was to do the same for systematic theology. Quite soon after completing the first book, Tracy admitted to having some difficulty achieving this second task.[4] Since fundamental theology deals with concerns that exist "prior" to doctrinal statements, it has a different kind of responsibility than systematic theology which is more connected with church tradition. In other words, the question of God is a fundamental theological issue, while the relationship between God and his church is a systematic issue. Therefore, systematic theology has a more restrictive subject matter. While the fundamental theologian uses Christian texts as a source, he has more freedom of interpretation. The systematic theologian, on the other hand, has to answer to church tradition as well as use it as a source. The solution to this problem, according to Tracy, is that the systematic theologian needs an analogical imagination. But this concept is not introduced formally until the final chapter of the work because it depends on everything leading up to it.

As with the first book, the second develops a methodology in a theoretical sense in the first part and then exemplifies it in the second. But even before he could articulate a specific methodology for systematic theology, Tracy had to take a step back from *how*

4 David Tracy, "Theology as Public Discourse," *Christian Century* 92 no. 10 (1975): 283.

theology is to be done to *who* it is to be done for. This is a question he neglects to ask in the first book but realizes it must be answered in the second. One of the primary concerns in establishing a working methodology for theology, he suggests, is that of its public. In order to discuss how a systematic theologian is to go about his work, he must first be aware of who his audience is. The task then in the opening chapters of *Analogical Imagination* is to present the various publics for fundamental, systematic and practical theologies. He suggests that they are the academy, the church, and society. Since the public of systematic theology is the church, it must deal with the "classics" of the church. Hence, Tracy suggests the main job of a systematic theologian is to be constantly reinterpreting these classics. The second part of the book is dedicated to exemplifying these propositions. First, Tracy expands on his discussion of classics by reinterpreting the Christian classics through the event and person of Christ and by establishing a contemporary christology. The next step is to relate this reinterpretation to the current situation through what Tracy calls "the uncanny". Finally, Tracy suggests the most effective way of performing systematic theology with all these concerns in mind is with a properly "analogical imagination." The following will be divided much like the book into sections dealing with the publics of theology, the classic in general, the Christian classic in particular, the situation of the theologian, and the analogical imagination. With the summary in place , an evaluation of the effectiveness of both Tracy's method on its own and in engaging his contemporary context can then be put forward.

### *Publics*

Although the overall task of *The Analogical Imagination* is how systematic theology is to be accomplished in a contemporary pluralistic context, the first few chapters of the text have a broader scope. Tracy is concerned with the publics of not only systematic theology but also fundamental and practical theology. It would be unhelpful to get too bogged down by this general discussion of publics since the overall focus of the book is systematic theology. However, it is necessary to briefly cover these concerns because they lay a foundation for the rest of the work. Hence I will deal with all three publics while paying particular attention to that of systematics.

The three publics of interest for theology are academia, the church, and society. While each of these publics is assigned a corresponding theological field, Tracy does not insist that they are absolute categories. No one theology is singularly and solely concerned with one particular public but there is a sense of primary concern. Practical theology, for example, is primarily concerned with society. Tracy divides society into categories of technoeconomic, polity, and culture. Practical theology then is concerned with such issues as economic imbalance in the global village, the problem of technological development without ethical considerations, foreign policy concerning warfare, or welfare and care of the marginalized. Fundamental theology is primarily concerned with the public of the academy. It plays a kind of apologetic role. Recall that the first application in *Blessed Rage For Order* is to the metaphysical question of the existence of God. Fundamental theology has more of a general religious focus with a public that is not necessarily religious, while systematic theology is primarily concerned

with the public of a particular religious tradition or the church. Academia and society are generally secular but the church is particularly religious. Here the theologian is concerned with both critically analysing her particular church tradition and being committed to the overall health of that tradition. But in keeping with the pluralistic reality of the contemporary situation, Tracy also insists that the public of the church should not be limited to the theologian's own church tradition but to the overall Christian church as well.

There are two constants found in all three publics: the interpretation of a religious tradition and the interpretation of the religious dimension of the contemporary situation (AI 59-60). Any theological discipline is inherently religious and therefore is dependent on religious texts and traditions. Tracy suggests that all theologians should provide a "'criteria of appropriateness' whereby their specific interpretations of the tradition may be judged critically by the wider theological community"(AI 59). Most disagreements between theologians and between disciplines within theology occur in the interpretation of religious symbols. For example the practical theologian may consider the important Hebrew Bible symbol of Exodus as the basic means with which to interpret the New Testament while a systematic theologian may be more interested in the New Testament salvific notions of the individual authentic self. All theologians are also concerned with what responses to fundamental questions of meaning their particular religious tradition has to offer. Here the practical theologian might suggest that the Exodus character of the New Testament might speak to social reforms that give freedom to the marginalized. On the other hand, a fundamental theologian will suggest that his religious tradition's theistic

beliefs might be a meaningful response to contemporary experiences of religious moments. So the theologian's task according to these two constants is to interpret religious traditions appropriately and to relate these interpretations to their contemporary situation. While there is a plurality of interpretations, there is a constancy in the role of the theologian. But the focus of this book is specifically how the systematic theologian achieves these aims.

"The systematic theologian's major task is the reinterpretation of the tradition for the present situation. All serious interpretation of the tradition for the situation is called systematic theology" (*AI* 64). There is a sense in which systematic theology is a bridge between fundamental theology and church tradition. Like fundamental theology, systematics must also broach such topics as the existence of God but the focus will be different. The reality of God's existence must then inform and be informed by a church tradition. This synthesis is the job of the systematic theologian. The job is a primarily hermeneutical one. Here faith is assumed, whereas in the fundamental category of theology faith must be justified. Faith, however, must be authentic. The hermeneutical task is then to interpret tradition so as to ensure its authenticity within the contemporary situation. A problem might be seen to arise because of the normative status of systematic theology. Some might mistake the authority of a normative status as authoritarian or dogmatic. But Tracy insists that as long as the systematic theologian is doing her principal task of interpreting, she is not being dogmatic. Such dogmatic forms of authority are ones that do not interpret; they only repeat tradition as an extrinsic dogmatism. Systematic theology, on the other hand, interprets and re-presents tradition.

Intriguingly, Tracy sees a difference between conservative evangelical theology and fundamentalist protestantism as well as a difference between conservative Roman Catholic thought and such radical movements as that of Archbishop Lefevbre (*AI* 99). Often times, more progressive theologians like Tracy might be tempted to unite these variations as equivalent conservative movements. What is being established in this distinction is a truly ecumenical perspective. Here he is allowing for the voices of those who would likely disagree with much of his own stances to inform his notion of systematic theology. The systematic methodology being proposed here is strikingly broad. Having argued for the normative status of systematic theology, Tracy shifts to discussing the normative status of its subject of interpretation, "the classic."

### *Classics and the Hermeneutical Task of the Systematic Theologian*

The thrust of Tracy's analysis of the classic begins very broadly and gradually narrows as the text progresses. The concept of the classic is very important to his methodology. Indeed, more than half of the book is used to express his understanding of how the job of the systematic theologian is to interpret the religious classic. The beginning of the discussion is very broad indeed, "We may start our reflection from a fact of every culture: Classics exist" (*AI* 107). The standard as to what might be considered a classic is by no means a universal one. Tracy's standard is simply, "what we mean in naming certain texts, events, images, rituals, symbols and persons 'classics' is that here we recognize nothing less than the disclosure of a reality we cannot but name truth" (*AI* 108). This standard negates any such claims to subjectivist principles of taste. The classic is not a private disclosure but a public one. When we interpret classics openly we

become caught up in a disclosure event. We transcend our own understanding in a happening; we do not bring ourselves to this moment but are rather brought through the engagement with the classic. Our horizon is broadened by a truth disclosed. When others experience this same event demonstrating its universal appeal, a classic is born. A classic is inherently public because it discloses truth to any who are willing to engage it. Such an understanding of classic cannot be considered mere taste. It is not private but very public. However, since classics are public, their interpretations will also then be pluralistic.

While all classics must be seen as disclosive of truth, that truth is disclosed to many readers from differing places in life, differing cultures, and differing histories. Each horizon that is transcended by engaging a classic is individual. If *Macbeth* was incapable of engaging every different generation that followed its creation it would not be considered a classic. This reality of a plurality of readings demonstrates a major problem in hermeneutical theory. In fact, it is a problem of post-modernism in general. With the rejection of positivist truth claims, what can be called true? Or specifically hermeneutically, with the potential multiplicity of interpretations is any one interpretation valid? Therefore some kind of notion of critical pluralism is required. Tracy hesitates to use the word "explain" in describing the methodology of outlining what new understanding is disclosed by a given classic. If a classic is required to disclose truth, how can a critical analysis express that truth effectively? It is therefore necessary to acknowledge the limited nature of any methodology of interpreting classics. As masters of analysis such as Levi-Strauss, Foucault, and Barthes have shown, there is a value in

trying to explain the understanding and the process in which it is disclosed. Yet all the while a recognition of limitation is needed. Paul Ricoeur's notion of understanding-explanation-understanding informs this need for nuance well. The process begins with understanding "enveloping" the entire interpretation while explanation "develops" the initial understanding and illuminates the final understanding of appropriation (*AI* 118). Interpretation therefore, must be a dialectical process. Tracy states that the emphasis in interpretation theory should be on the *reception* by the reader of the classic text. This perspective is distinguished from those that focus on the artist, structure of the text, or the world disclosed by the text. Here it is the event of disclosure that matters most rather than the more tangible aspects of author, reader, and text. In summary, Tracy's methodology for interpretation emphasizes the response of the interpreter, while keeping in mind the understanding-explanation-understanding dialectic.

Having established his notion of classic and the methodology required to interpret the classic, Tracy returns briefly to the notion of public in systematic theology. He asks, if the public of systematics is a church tradition, is it truly public (*AI* 132)? If the theologian's audience is limited to a particular religious tradition its status as public is greatly diminished. There are two solutions to this problem. The first is a recognition that religious classics which are interpreted by systematic theologians are public in and of themselves. The Bible, for example, could hardly be considered to disclose understanding to only those who are already Christians. Secondly, there is a possibility that a systematic work interpreting classics will obtain a classic status of its own. Consider the *Summa Theologica* of Aquinas or Calvin's *Institutes*, which have been

widely accepted as classics. More recently, the works of Barth and Rahner have become classics outside of their denominational cultural contexts. It is in these senses that systematics can be truly public while having a particular public of the individual theologian's church tradition. If the systematic theologian interprets religious classics specifically, however, some discussion as to the nature of religious classics is in order.

Classics that are considered religious are those classics that articulate meaning from the perspective of a particular religious tradition. The general category of classic is something that discloses truth while not necessarily being limited to a particular tradition. So the theological works of Augustine would be considered religious classics because they disclose truths that are particular to Christianity while Shakespeare's works are not at all limited to religious meaning. But this distinction is an obvious one. Tracy is much more interested in the peculiar nature of interpreting the religious classic. To interpret the religious classics is, fundamentally, to risk. The histories of all religious traditions have had their empowering grace-filled moments and their destructive atrocious moments. To interpret the religious classic is to risk working through such realities (*AI* 156). There is also an intellectual risk because modernity has cast so many doubts upon the notion of religion. Moreover, the discoveries of the diversity within religious traditions and the diversity between them have shown how difficult, if not impossible, it is to define religion in any universal way. But if we take a step back to *Blessed Rage for Order*, we are reminded of the reasonableness of religious belief in a general fundamental sense. We must recall the limit-experiences where Tracy argues that everyone experiences some kind of religious element in their lives. So there is a sort of universal

religious manifestation or revelation through limit-experiences. However, the step from the general sense of religion to the particular religious tradition is a task for the systematic theologian.

In Christian terms, we speak of the actual experience of the "self-manifestation of God in Jesus Christ" as the disclosive moment that produces our faith (*AI* 162). What qualifies the religious classic as classic is the power to disclose truth. Any classic that is disclosive of truth might be considered religious in that it provokes some kind of limit-experience. But what makes a classic specifically religious is that element of particular self-manifestation. The religious classic discloses a truth that consists of a self-manifestation or revelatory character. The systematic theologian is ultimately the risk taker that interprets this particular self-manifestation that is a religious classic. Tracy suggests that fundamental theology involves the analysis of the limit-to experiences while systematic theology involves the analysis the limit-of disclosure present in the religious classic of a particular religious tradition. But to do this the language must shift from limit language to something more particular.

Tracy proposes an important dialectal language for the interpretation of religious classics: manifestation and proclamation (*AI* 203). These two terms not only represent differing characters of disclosure in religious expression as found in religious classics but they also provide a helpful description of a general dichotomy of religious traditions. In other words, those moments of interpretation that bring out a mystical experience, an ineffable moment of intensification would be considered moments of manifestation. On the other hand, when the interpreter is challenged by something entirely clear like a

prophetic convicting word, the moment would be considered one of proclamation. This dichotomy can be found in the various emphases of particular religious traditions. The more sacramental churches like the Orthodox or the Roman Catholic are more inclined toward manifestation while protestant churches which focus on the word are inclined toward proclamation.

A helpful example of this dichotomy is tangibly present in the Anglican churches where there is a clear distinction between the "high" and "low" churches, or between the evangelically leaning and the liberal leaning. Of course, there is no suggestion here that any of these particular traditions focus only on one or the other, but that they are best characterized in these categories. In fact, what Tracy is saying is that both need each other for religion to be truly authentic. Here is another sense of the pluralistic systematic theology that is being proposed. There is a positive claim that these differing traditions need each other, that the manifestation present in the sacraments would empower the proclamation of the word. Moreover, manifestation in sacraments without the proclamation of the word becomes reduced to pure aestheticism. This need can be demonstrated through the charismatic movement in the evangelical churches. There is a desperation in these proclamatory churches for experiencing the immanent nature of God. The need is also seen, in the reverse sense, in the more conservative movements in Catholicism which try to articulate specifically the particulars of the Christian faith.

### *The Christian Classic*

Having established the category of religious classic and having stated that the role of the systematic theologian is to interpret them, Tracy can now begin describing how

this process is to be done. But before taking this step he gives a "methodological preface" (*AI* 233). Because the preceding chapters were focused on the disclosive aspects of interpreting the classics, he feels some assumptions concerning the critical process of interpretation is needed. He simply states that historical-critical, literary-critical, and social-scientific methods need to inform the interpretive process. All three of these methods serve in evaluating the appropriateness and intelligibility of religious classics. They work to develop new interpretations and to correct those traditional interpretations that need it. With these methodological points in place the interpretation may begin. Much like *Blessed Rage for Order* the second part of the book is dedicated to applying the methodology expressed in the first part. Here Tracy elects to focus on the event and person of Jesus Christ. He begins by analysing the New Testament references to Christ and continues to propose a Christology from the results of this work.

In keeping with the theme of plurality found not only in this text but in Tracy's general project, his interpretation of the event and person of Jesus Christ through the New Testament points to the plurality of christological representations found therein. Each gospel, for example, has its own christological focus such as the messianic nature of Jesus in Matthew or the Logos character found in the Johanine account. There is also a clear plurality of interpretations of New Testament accounts by different theologians and different Christian traditions. Tracy points to the fact that Liberal Protestants, charismatics, mainline Catholics and social justice oriented Christians can all find meaning in the same gospel account like Luke-Acts (*AI* 253). This plurality of christological foci and interpretations need not be seen as problematic but rather as

entirely valuable. It is, "a value to enrich each by impelling new journeys into both particularity and ecumenicity... each and all will be transformed together in witnessing to the proclamation and manifestation of the event of Jesus Christ" (*AI* 254). The various accounts in the New Testament and their various interpretations demonstrate the breadth of meaning that is available in the Christ event. The varieties are rarely contradictory but rather complementary; they are what have kept Christianity authentic and relevant throughout its history. It is this very fact of continued re-presentation of the Christ event that keeps the faith alive and meaningful.

But the fact of plurality in both text and interpretation means that some kind of universal criteria of adequacy for interpretation is impossible. So Tracy suggests criteria for "relative adequacy" (*AI* 255). Firstly, the interpreter must risk an authentic conversation with the text. He must be open to the text interpreting him as he interprets the text. Secondly, the preunderstanding in engaging the text must be that the text is in fact a religious classic not a literary one. An interpreter must keep in mind the unique characteristics of religious classics; he must be willing to encounter disclosure of meaning that is of ultimate significance. Having first insisted upon the existential aspects of interpretation, Tracy then shifts to explanatory methods. It is here that he acknowledges the contributions of historical-critical, literary-critical, and social-science methodologies. He suggests that these methods are actually crucial to the two criteria in that they help show "how the world of ultimate meaning disclosed *by* the text is produced with relative adequacy *in* the text" (*AI* 255-56). In other words, critical methods can be used to *explain* how *understanding* is available in the text. Again we return to the

understanding-explanation-understanding dialectic. Tracy feels that while all methods are useful, the best suited for New Testament study is literary criticism.

With this preference in mind he proposes a study of the New Testament accounts of Jesus through four categories of literary genres: apocalyptic and doctrines of Early Catholicism; proclamation as event and content; narratives in the Gospels; and symbols and reflective thought. The first category contains correctives which are expressed in the apocalyptic writings and in the doctrines of the early church (*AI* 265). Apocalyptic writings are corrective in that they are public through their political and historical emphases. They challenge the privileged and remind all of the hope/dread of future redemption/suffering. Apocalyptic language intensifies and negates complacency. The corrective nature of the doctrinal texts of the early church is more obvious. Doctrines were developed to keep the growing church orderly and unified. These two genres of the first category are necessary in the process of interpreting the New Testament understanding of Jesus Christ but they are not sufficient. Also needed is the category of proclamation as event and content. For Tracy kerygma and proclamation are almost interchangeable. He insists that proclamation is first an event, a hearing. What is heard is the content. The response to this hearing is faith. This genre is the primary genre of the New Testament; all others are grounded in it. The word-event of Jesus Christ is the meaning that all others express.

While proclamation is the meaning to which our response is faith, one of the major bearers of this meaning in the New Testament is narrative. This relationship between the two is vital as it helps Tracy articulate the value of plurality in the Gospel

accounts. Each narrative account of Jesus has some kind of purpose, a meaning being put forward that is primary to the story itself. The Gospel of Matthew has a clear agenda of speaking to faithful Jews awaiting the Messiah. The events in this gospel that reflect the life of Moses for example are intentional, they have a proclamatory purpose. The plurality of narrative then is first and foremost a plurality of purpose. Each account has something different to say about this Jesus. There is an interdependence between proclamation and narrative. The narrative is trying to express a proclamation while the particular proclamation is best expressed through the particular narrative.

The final genres Tracy puts forward are symbol and reflective thought. These are articulated best in the Johanine and Pauline theologies. While the first three categories have a distinctly proclamatory tendency, these last two are expressive of both manifestation and proclamation. The proclamations proclaim for the most part the self-manifestation of God in Jesus Christ. The classic symbols of manifestation are cross, resurrection and incarnation. The cross discloses the self-sacrificing love of God, the resurrection discloses redemption and vindication, and the incarnation discloses the reality of "the only God there is as here now, as here always, as here in past, present and future" (*AI* 282). All three are intrinsically related: the sacrifice of the cross is meaningless without the redemption of the resurrection while neither have any meaning without involving the self-manifestation of God that is the incarnation. These symbols then give rise to theology which is both manifestation oriented and proclamatory. In John we see the God of love. His God is mystical and profound but not so much articulated as experienced. God manifests himself in Christ and we experience that love

without restriction. Paul articulates the meaning of these symbols primarily in his theology of grace. The symbols are explained. But it is not "the case that we find in Paul only the reality of proclamation and in John only the reality of manifestation. John's manifestation is grounded in the Word, Paul's proclamation finds its ground and its final releasement in his manifestations of what it means to live 'in Christ'" (*AI* 286). All the genres mentioned here are inter-related and mutually informative. Having put forward these various relevant genres to the Christ event, the discussion can now continue with a means to establishing an appropriately contemporary christology.

Before he can establish his christological formulation, Tracy feels he must establish a criteria of relative adequacy that is faithful to all the literary forms mentioned above. In other words, the interpretor must be presenting her christology in a way that is appropriate to her present community's experience and to the New Testament witnesses. As the discussion of classics has demonstrated, christological formulations vary according to the interpreter, the context within which they are written, and the tradition to which they are speaking. Each new formulation will be geared towards making the Christ event real and meaningful to the audience that engages it. How then is this plurality of possible formulations to be held in check? It must be informed by all the New Testament witnesses as expressed in the forms mentioned previously. But none of these accounts are complete, "The only fully appropriate, fully adequate expression of that event is the event itself- the event of God in Jesus Christ, true word, decisive manifestation" (*AI* 310). The event itself is complete but all representations of it are not. Therefore, any relatively adequate christology will need to lean on all these accounts. It

cannot be done in some simplistic easy pluralism. There must neither be a focus on one account nor a generalization of all. Rather the interpretor must allow for the particularity of each account to intensify some particular aspect of the Christ event (*AI* 309). Often, christologies tend to focus on either resurrection, cross, or incarnation. But in Tracy's formulation all three must be mutually informative of each other. In this regard, a contemporary christology that is expressive of the common experience of its context and faithfully balanced in its interpretation of the New Testament accounts of the Christ event will be relatively adequate.

The various christologies throughout history that have been meaningful and embraced have at their base been new encounters with the Christ event through the Spirit. The spiritual element of these formulations cannot be ignored. Ultimately, they are trying to express something incapable of expression. This reality must always be acknowledged to keep christological formulations in check. They will always only be *relatively* adequate. There are several methods in which relative adequacy can be evaluated. Firstly, a christology must be faithful to the original New Testament witness as achieved through critical methods like historical criticism. Another means of establishing whether it has met the criteria of relative adequacy has to do with the faith response. Does the christological formulation generate an authentic *communal* faith response? So the church becomes a part of the evaluation. The new formulation must be consistent also with tradition or the formulation must adequately critique tradition. There is a dialectic at work here too. Tradition will critique new christological formulations and Christian communities will demonstrate their effectiveness through their faith

response. These new formulations will in turn critique traditional christological formulations through their use of historical-critical, literary-critical, and social scientific methods.

### *The Situation*

Because the contemporary situation is pluralistic it is impossible to articulate one question, one issue that can fully describe the current concern. Tracy suggests any new classic can only hope to deal in partiality with the concern of the situation. Nevertheless, it is the task of the systematic theologian to interpret the religious classic in a way that will be able to engage her cultural context. Those practitioners of the hermeneutics of suspicion (exemplified for Tracy in Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud (*AI* 348-49)) have undermined the arrogance of the modernist Hegelian. But they have also rendered theology all but irrelevant to contemporary academic pursuits. We live in a post-Christian world. These once counter-cultural prophets of the hermeneutics of suspicion have become the cultural norm. None of their work is shocking to our ears. It has become trendy to discard the contributions of religion. Tracy argues that such a perspective is not only limited but disregards some fundamental realities of our situation.

The hermeneutics of suspicion point to the reality of the "uncanny." The positivism they rejected included the religious assumptions of the Christian Western world. Christianity no longer holds the axiomatic position in society that it once did. We are left, then, when experiencing mystery, the supernatural, or the religious with a more general notion of the uncanny. Previously, God would be immediately named as the source of such moments. Now, in a postreligious world, these moments are to be seen as

uncanny. Whereas many Christians mourn the days of Christianity as established and many theologians feel displaced, Tracy argues that the uncanny is a way back into academic forums. Just as the masters of the hermeneutics of suspicion undermined the comfortable, established assumptions of modernism, theologians must remind the thinkers in our contemporary situation that their assumptions are not universal,

> We must keep alive the sense of the uncanny- the postreligious, religious sense of our situation. We must fight against all temptations to canniness- to those bogus affirmations, those principles of domination, those slack feelings which tempt us beyond mere error and even illusion to final distortions of indecency. (AI 362)

In the same sense that positivism developed incomplete systems of thought which refused to consider much of the reality of common human experience, the postreligious world of the academy ignores the reality of the uncanny as a common human experience. It is here where the voice of the systematic theologian is necessary. The systematic theologian must make the religious classic speak into the situation of the uncanny. The primary focus of this task is the Christ event. The fundamental word that describes the event-character of this Christ is "grace." (*AI* 370). The next step is to show how proclamation and manifestation as found in the Christian classics can speak this grace into the uncanny situation. Tracy also suggests that historical action as embraced by theologies of praxis should be included in this process.

There are many roads to manifestation. For some philosophical reflection draws them into the experience of manifestation through the primal wonder concerning ultimate reality. This reflection brings them to that ecstatic moment of mediated grace. Others meet manifestation through limit-experiences like guilt, finitude, or death. Many experience manifestation in the ordinary through the wonder that can be found in the real.

Francis of Assisi is a good example of this kind of perspective. Still others experience manifestation through the extra-ordinary. Here "the paradigmatic is the real," symbolic meaning is derived from everyday experience. There is an intensification of the real. While Tracy does not include it, I would add the experiential worship of the charismatic movement. Here moments of ecstatic joy are experienced that are not at all proclamatory in nature. Some express proclamations within these moments but the moments themselves are pure manifestation. Through these experiences, "the theologians of manifestation recognize and develop theologies designed to articulate their primal sense of the ultimate meaning of the event of manifestation: All is grace" (*AI* 386).

The proclamation trajectory is much simpler in that it is word based. The focus of proclamation is the Word, that is, Christ as Logos, scripture as word of God, and prophetic words of conviction. But it is also the proclamatory nature of Pauline theology which articulates and expresses the ultimate meaning of the Christ event. Paul is unconcerned with the signs and wonders found in the narratives about Jesus but rather in the grace that comes from the event of the crucifixion/resurrection/incarnation. Protestant theologians embrace this task as primary, they deny all idolatry and focus on the meaning re-presented in the Christ event which is above all, grace.

In recent times, however, proclamation and manifestation have not been sufficient. Further reflection into the question of praxis has become necessary. Both manifestation and proclamation can lead to praxis oriented theologies. While the mystic notion of God's presence in all creation might lead a theologian to recognize the value of all creation, the prophetic gift of proclamation convicts the theologian to deny evil and

act toward the greater good.

> Above all, for all political and liberation theologians, the word event of proclamation commands, the gift event of manifestation demands a singular recognition: the recognition of the primacy of praxis, action in and for a church and a global society groaning to be set free form the alienating events and oppressive structures in the contemporary situation (*AI* 390).

These theologies of praxis expose problems in both tradition and situation. They not only embrace the grace experienced and expressed by proclamation and manifestation, they demand our enacting of that grace in the world.

## The Analogical Imagination

Finally, we come to the point where Tracy reveals what he means by *analogical imagination*, his title and solution to the problem of doing systematic theology in a pluralistic context. We return once more to his symbol-understanding-symbol dialectic. The task of the systematic theologian is to interpret the symbols found in Christian classics so that they may find new expression in new contexts. As we saw earlier each theologian will be struck by particular symbols that eventually form a system of symbols which become her systematic theology. Again we need a criteria of relative adequacy for this system of symbols, "The search is always bounded by the theological knowledge of the intrinsic inadequacy of any theology in relationship to the event itself" (*AI* 407). With this modality in mind, Tracy suggests two languages which can be used for doing relatively adequate systematic theology: analogy and dialectic.

Analogy "is a language of ordered relationships articulating similarity-in-difference" (*AI* 408). In other words, analogy is a set of analogues ordered around one focal meaning, a prime analogue. Each analogue is different but achieves similarity

through its relation to the focal meaning. Christian systematic theology will see the event of Jesus Christ as prime analogue. Relative adequacy is demonstrated in the shift from the radical mystery of God's self-manifestation in Jesus Christ to the prime analogue of incarnation. Here we must recognize the limitation of the symbol. It is not exhaustive of the entire meaning of the self-manifestation of God but is relatively adequate. By acknowledging this limitation, the theologian is ensuring a similarity-in-difference. The relations between symbols show similarity but they never achieve absolute equality. Furthermore, this relative adequacy keeps faithful to the uncanny, the affirmation that absolute knowledge is unattainable. The process then, in keeping with the symbol-understanding-symbol process, is to take one prime analogue like incarnation and interpret it through philosophical reflection which attributes various analogues to help explain it. Once an ordered whole is provided, the theologian must return once again to the prime analogue through that ordered whole. This analogical language of theology is used by theologians of the manifestation trajectory.

The same similarity-in-difference criteria of relative adequacy is found in the work of proclamatory theologians through their dialectical language. Dialectical theology is "alive in its concepts with the tensive power of radical negations upon all claims to similarity, continuity, ordered relations" (*AI* 415). While less analogous in nature dialectical language still maintains that need for relative adequacy. These theologians "Let God be God" in maintaining that "only God can speak nondialectically" (*AI* 415). In other words, only God is perfect and can speak adequately without need of the modal sense of relative. The same need for negation is found in theologies of praxis.

Their very nature is one of negation. The need for praxis theologies comes out of the fact that the world is not yet perfect. And so all the theologies whether expressed in analogical language or in dialectical language maintain that recognition of the uncanny. If our situation is one that recognizes the limitations of human systems, theology is well suited for engaging that situation.

Acknowledging that his book is long enough and any attempt at proposing a thorough systematic theology would be unwise, Tracy elects to make some concluding remarks concerning what he has already proposed. He returns to the basic theme of the self-manifestation of Jesus Christ as central to all systematic theology, ultimately disclosing a meaning of grace. The Christ event as interpreted through the trajectory of manifestation will place the emphasis on Christ's self-manifestation. This christological focus is more sacramental, "re-presenting the original grace that is always already given to us by a gracious God, decisively given as gift and demand in Jesus Christ" (*AI* 425). The interpretation of the Christ event in proclamatory theology focuses upon the judging-healing word of address in the parables and Pauline theology (*AI* 425-26). Political and liberation theologies will have a christological focus that is in relation to the "not-yet power in the symbol "cross" united to the historical (prophetic and apocalyptic) proleptic, promissary reality of resurrection and the radical not-yet present in apocalyptic" (*AI* 426). This systematic then embraces the pluralism of meaning within the New Testament and allows for a dialectic in the pluralism of interpretation of the New Testament. It interprets the Christian classic event of Jesus Christ in a way that engages the uncanny situation of a post-modernist pluralist context.

### *Conclusion*

With a "relatively adequate" summary of *The Analogical Imagination* in place, I can now proceed with some concluding statements concerning its efficacy and its role in the overall work of David Tracy. One point that should be made immediately is the stylistic difference between this text and *Blessed Rage*. It is almost twice as long as the previous work but also much more free in expression. The reading is much easier as Tracy allows for more rhetorical flourishes. Another difference is in the technical language. The use of "limit" for example is all but non-existent. This absence is striking since so much of the previous work depends on it. Instead of "common human experience" we find Tracy leans on "the situation" a lot more. This shift in language is characteristic of Tracy's development over his career. We will find in the next chapter how much more apparent this becomes. It is frustrating, though, for the reader who has just become comfortable with the system of the first work and has to learn a whole new set of terminology. Moreover, it really hinders the revisionist methodological development. In fact, there is almost no mention of this term in the second work supposedly dedicated to it. Having said this, the second work is truly a continuation of the first; something that becomes immediately apparent from the beginning.

The first thing Tracy does is take a step backward by discussing the role of theology as public as applied to fundamental, systematic, and practical theology. While the purpose of this work is to outline a methodology for systematic theology, he must add to his revisionist methodology not only the individual audiences of the different disciplines but also an over all question of the role of theology in the contemporary

world. Though assumed, the audience of fundamental theology is not as explicitly referred to in *Blessed Rage* as it is here. The public of fundamental theology being the academy, the public of systematic theology being the church, and the public of political theology being society make perfect sense and deserve no real debate. Tracy is making a broader statement than audience, however; he is affirming that theology has a public role. He is denying the relegation of religion to private concern which would reduce it to an issue of pure taste, as often found in the world of art.[5] His delineation of systematic theology's public as the church helps to build a strong foundation for the entire work. With a public of the church, the characterization of systematic theology as interpreting religious classics works well. He is carefully broad in his understanding of the church as public. He insists throughout the work upon including Protestant and Eastern Orthodox traditions alongside his own Roman Catholic tradition. Furthermore, by classifying the event of Jesus Christ as the primary classic of Christian systematics, Tracy is opening systematic theology to people outside of the Christian tradition. Anyone may enter the conversation.

This last point of the Christ being the ultimate Christian classic has given some cause for concern. Although he does not claim it of himself, Gregory Baum worries that some theologians might find this classification lacking. "Persons are not works of art, not pieces of literature, not paradigmatic actions; persons have consciousness, intentions, and ideas and involve themselves in various activities."[6] This concern ties into previous concerns with Tracy's source of fundamental theology being Christian texts. He tends to

5 John J. Cobb, Review of *The Analogical Imagination, Religious Studies Review* 7 (1981): 281.
6 Gregory Baum, Review of *The Analogical Imagination, Religious Studies Review* 7 (1981): 287.

include non-verbal items in his hermeneutics as well as verbal expressions. I think the classification of Christ as classic could bother some, but within the context of the entire book and his previous writing, it should not be of too much concern. Within this book, the hermeneutical process includes both proclamation and manifestation. Manifestation is more of a non-verbal event for interpretation, of which the self-manifestation of Christ is the prime example. Without attaching that interpretable status of classic, the Christ-event must be an interpretable event. Christ is *merely* a person who has consciousness, intentions, and ideas. As a classic, he is more than just a historical fact, he is *meaningful.* Ultimately, this classification should not be problematic, as Tracy is not suggesting that Christ is only a classic in an artistic or literary sense. Claiming that he is a classic does not imply that he is nothing else. It does not exclude historicity.

In *Blessed Rage* we began to see some mystical elements of Tracy's theology show themselves. With his introduction of the notion of classics, this tendency reveals itself even more. His hermeneutical analysis articulates in a very sophisticated way the kinds of reactions we all have to classic texts. The important point of reference in the hermeneutical process of interpreting a classic is the disclosure more than the reader of the text, the writer of the text, or even the text itself. Something bigger than all three is going on: truth is being disclosed. At the risk of oversimplification (I will freely admit relative adequacy, if not inadequacy here) this disclosive event can be related to the Alexandrian notion of allegorical or spiritual reading of scripture. Tracy refuses to deny the value of historical-critical methods, but he seems to limit their value as only a means to the end of further refining the disclosure of meaning from the text. For the

Alexandrians the littera (or literal reading) is valuable but is also only a means to the end of the allegorical or spiritual reading.

If this comparison to the Alexandria hermeneutic is a reasonable one, then I would like to project some of my own theological concerns onto Tracy's. One of the major problems that arise out of modernist historical-critical methods is their tendency to ignore the spiritual element of scripture. A disconnect develops between theology as intellectual discipline and the average Christian whose interest in scripture is primarily spiritual. Seminarians often learn more about source criticism and authorship of texts than they do about the spiritual significance of the text. This is a post-modern issue. The over emphasis on the value of critical methods while ignoring the meaningfulness of religious experience is a classic modernist problem. Tracy is acknowledging here that the meaning of the text is of more significance than the letter of the text. As in *Blessed Rage*, he is dedicated to defending the contributions that modernist methodologies provide but he realizes that a recognition of spiritual meaning is also necessary.

Another contribution Tracy's hermeneutical method can make is in the area of scriptural authority. Historical-critical methods have rendered the use of scripture as authority difficult. They have shown inconsistencies and even contradictions. But the Bible is still the Christian classic text, without it Christianity falls. A focus on the disclosive aspect of scripture can uphold the authority of scripture without having to rectify minor (for myself at least) problems of historicity. That the Spirit can still be seen to communicate through a flawed text means that it can still hold a spiritual authority. Such an interpretation of Tracy's methodology might seem to contradict my previous

concerns with the question of the actualization of the resurrection. Note that I mentioned that only in *some* cases of symbolic meaning actual existence must precede essence. In other words, events like resurrection, incarnation, and crucifixion must have necessarily occurred for the kind of disclosure they provide. Their disclosive elements are dependent on their actual happening. But some issues of historicity are not necessary for disclosure of symbolic meaning. In other words, the resurrection discloses meaning through the actual event of the resurrection not the more minor details surrounding it. The facts around the discovery of the open tomb do not have the same kind of disclosive meaning as the fact of the resurrection. As another example, *when* the cleansing of the temple occurs in Jesus' ministry is of no consequence to the disclosive meaning of the event of Jesus' actions.

There are others who are uncomfortable with Tracy's perspective of historicity. Predictably, these come from protestant reviews of the book.[7] But the fact that these questions arise from protestant sources shows that perhaps the methodology being presented here is not sufficiently ecumenical. Tracy wants to put forward a non-confessional methodology but some of his hermeneutical arguments would be unacceptable to the majority of evangelical Christians and some mainline protestants, not to mention the Vatican and the majority of more conservative Catholics. A work alienating this many diverse groups of Christians can hardly be considered ecumenical. Even a superficial comparison of the amount of content devoted to his notion of manifestation over that of proclamation shows a clear bias. It is indeed wonderful to see

7 See Fisher Humpheys, "The Most Dangerous Conversation," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 10 (1983): 63-73 and John Vissers, "Interpreting the Classic: The Hermeneutical Character of David Tracy's Theology in *The Analogical Imagination*" *Calvin Theological Journal* 25 (1990): 294-206.

a Roman Catholic theologian bringing in the contributions of Barth and others, but his treatment is limited in comparison to his in-depth analyses of the theologies of manifestation.[8] Another complaint that some have voiced is his limited treatment of practical theologies.[9] John J. Cobb in particular feels that Tracy does not fully understand liberation and political theologies if he relegates them to a separate category of practical theology without any contributions to fundamental and systematic theology.[10] Interestingly, in his overall career Tracy's only discussion of these theologies is within his works of fundamental and systematic theology. The third part of his trilogy, which was to be dedicated to practical theology, was never completed. While Cobb may feel liberation and political theology should not be separated to another category, he is too harsh in suggesting that Tracy considers them without a voice in the systematic and fundamental theologies (as mentioned both contain treatments of practical theology).

I would like to return to the notions of manifestation and proclamation by applauding Tracy's insight concerning denominational emphases. Granted, his examples of proclamatory theology are limited yet the assertion that proclamation and manifestation are mutually informative demonstrates a workable methodology for engaging ecumenical discussion within systematic theology. Proclamation depends on the event of manifestation to have meaning while manifestation depends on proclamation to disclose that meaning with more precision. This dialectic shows that the differing emphases of denominational theologies can be mutually informative. Perhaps an

8 Chapter 9 demonstrates this reality well. Also the fact that he calls his methodology an *analogical* imagination shows a preference to the manifestation aspect of his hermeneutic.

9 Cobb, 282.

10 Cobb, 282.

example from a denomination that contains extreme examples of both trajectories would be helpful. Anglican churches have diverse eucharistic theologies, anywhere from memorial last suppers to high masses. Low churches tend to be more proclamatory in nature, where the sermons tend to be of more significance, whereas high churches tend to be more manifestation oriented, with the eucharist being the high point. In both contexts sacraments can become almost meaningless. In the low church the clergy often look uncomfortable in their vestments, as if they just threw them on, and the various rituals they have to perform during the liturgy seem almost forced because in their secondary focus they become empty ritual. On the other hand, high churches go to the other extreme. There are so many little rituals that have to be performed with such accuracy and focus that the meaning behind them becomes forgotten. With a renewed emphasis on the manifestation character of the eucharist it could become more meaningful to low churches. High churches, on the other hand, could use prophetic proclamation questioning the meaningfulness of some of their rituals, and demanding that they be done only if there is meaning in them. This Anglican example is intended only to show how a systematic theology with a proper balance of manifestation and proclamation can have a positive effect on its public, the church. It also serves to demonstrate the voices that denominations can have in the theology of other denominations.

One final aspect of *The Analogical Imagination* needs to be addressed. In using the modal category of "relative adequacy" Tracy is being faithful to both his religious tradition and the situation. In the religious sense, it could be said that Tracy is maintaining a healthy apophatic perspective. He is unwilling to claim full adequacy to

the New Testament, let alone his interpretations of it. We shall see some further developments in his work toward a more mystical apophatic theology. He is also being faithful to his claim of the situation being characterized as "uncanny". He is rejecting the positivism of modernity and claiming that all systematic interpretations will always only be relatively adequate. This insistence is perhaps the most effective engagement with the contemporary situation. It is generally accepted that one of the major critiques put forward by post-modernism is on the positivist assumptions of Hegelian rationalism. Here Tracy is recognizing this failure of modernism, as articulated by the masters of the hermeneutics of suspicion. Cobb again has trouble not so much with what Tracy includes in his characterization of the situation but with what he neglects to include. He asks why the situation is limited to the intellectual aspect of culture and not the more social aspects like the threat of nuclear war (remember this was written in the middle of the Cold War).[11] This critique is related to Cobb's concern with Tracy's treatment of practical theologies. For Tracy, this kind of concern has more to do with the public of practical theology. So such concerns are theological, if not systematically theological. Nevertheless, Cobb's critique is well put. Tracy does tend to be more concerned with intellectual publics in his work than any other.

*The Analogical Imagination* continues Tracy's project of engaging the contemporary context in which he finds himself. The hermeneutical foundations of *Blessed Rage* still inform his second work ensuring some constancy and that he is engaging his contemporary theorists. His additional hermeneutic of proclamation/manifestation provides a powerful means of engaging the pluralist realities

11 Cobb, 282.

both within the New Testament and in its interpretations. He also includes a corrective to the positivist tendencies of modernism through his insistence on only claiming relative adequacy. This work does, however, conclude his trilogy with only two parts and it is his last publication of such substantial size and scope. Tracy's career continues, but in smaller segments.

# Naming God in The Present

From the very beginning of this project I have acknowledged limitation as to its capacity for exhaustively covering David Tracy's career. His work is far too vast and diverse to give it adequate treatment in such a limited forum, but I feel it worthwhile to offer at least as a starting point for a more ambitious project. Having focused primarily on his first two and only major works, I am left with discerning how to cover the rest. The problem now has to do with deciding which texts to discuss as his scope diversifies quite extensively over the twenty or so years since *The Analogical Imagination*. There are some constants, however. The hermeneutical character of theology continues to be a major focus of Tracy's writing, as are the concerns of post-modernism. But there seems to be much less of a succinct overall purpose to his work as seen in the first two works discussed here. This tendency is both frustrating and exciting as we find Tracy's mind engaging various subjects while leaving hopes like mine for systematic reflection dashed. I propose that the methodology of this last section should be thematic. I have claimed that Tracy's thought does develop over time but his major concern of doing theology effectively in the contemporary situation is always present. We have already seen some themes of this kind in his last two works. I am suggesting that these themes do continue into his later work, and are developed further. Whereas the first two chapters of this project have been dedicated to single works, this chapter will be informed by many. Each section will be autonomous, dealing entirely with one subject. I repeat,

there will be no delusion of an exhaustive treatment, but I will take a stab at "relative adequacy."

One major theme we find in Tracy's work is how theology engages its situation primarily through hermeneutical means. Both *Blessed Rage for Order* and *The Analogical Imagination* deal extensively in hermeneutical categories. This focus still drives much of Tracy's later work from *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* to *On Naming the Present: God, Hermeneutics, and the Church.* Thus the first section will show the continuing exploration of the hermeneutical task of theology in Tracy's work. Another theme we find in Tracy's work is the notion of the "other," be it in the sense of publics or in the sense of plurality in theological discourse. A natural progression leads him into inter-religious dialogue as primarily articulated in *Dialogue With The Other: The Inter-Religious Dialogue* but also to a lesser degree in *On Naming the Present.* From these more simple progressions we must continue into some of his more dramatic ones. In his concern for both the reality of plurality and the problem of positivism Tracy finds a new means for exploring theological concerns in his notion of the form of "fragments." This form of fragments leads into his renewed treatment of the apocalyptic and intensified search for relative adequacy in the apophatic. After brief summaries, each of these various themes will be evaluated as to how they relate to the overall concern of this project.

### Hermeneutics

Published in 1987, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* continues Tracy's hermeneutical project through the primary metaphor of *conversation.*

In this work, intelligent inquiry is conversation. He only posits a religious thrust of this conversation in the final chapter. Indeed, his prime analogue is the very non-religious historical event of the French Revolution. He uses this as an example of the impossibility of historical accuracy with regard to epochal moments. Traces of earlier arguments come to play here as we see a recurrence of the problem of historicity versus hermeneutical meaningfulness. The problem he engages in this work is best articulated as, "We belong to history and language; they do not belong to us." (*PA* 29). Truth, in Tracy's understanding, is manifestation. We encounter truth in conversation with partners such as music, film, poetry, art, religious ritual and people. Again we encounter in Tracy the notion of text as more than simply text but as any object of interpretation. Conversation is understood as more than verbal communication; it is dialectic, dialogue, argument. It is a game:

> It is a game where we learn to give in to the movement required by questions worth exploring. The movement in conversation is questioning itself. Neither my present opinions on the question nor the text's original response to the question, but the question itself, must control every conversation... It is not a confrontation. It is not a debate. It is not an exam. It is questioning itself. It is a willingness to follow the question wherever it may go. It is dia-logue. (*PA* 19)

Two problems arise as demonstrated in his example of the French Revolution: a plurality of linguistic articulation of the event, and ambiguity with regard to historical factuality.

All understanding is linguistic, Tracy argues. We not only use language to describe reality we also understand reality through the languages available to us (*PA* 48). The problem of positivism and romanticism is that both sought to use language to thoroughly explain non-linguistic experience. In these modes language is only an instrument. We cannot leave language aside and pick it up on a whim. It is not a mere

instrument; it defines us as we use it to define reality. When we experience we understand our experience linguistically and we articulate that experience to others linguistically. We do not understand the experience outside of language and then use it to explain the experience. So positivism is falsely grounded on the assumption that we are somehow separate from the language we use. If we accept that we are bound by language, we must contend with the problems that come with language.

As demonstrated in the work of Wittgenstein, language is pluralistic, there is no easy universal means of either expressing meaning or interpreting it. In Heidegger we learn that disclosure is always at the same time a concealment, that understanding is always disclosive of truth but also concealing in that it is limited by the limited nature of linguistic expression. Linguistic analysts have also shown that language is a "system of differential relations" (*PA* 53). "Tree" is only understood linguistically as a tree in its difference from all other linguistic terms; it is understood as such through its not being "three" or "she" or "thee". What Tracy is trying to convey is the difference between the linguistic notion of understanding as relational versus the positivist notion of understanding as universal. Meaning is only meaningful in relation to something else. We understand through relational means, which is in opposition to the positivist dependence on nominalist notions of universal meaning. Novels, for example are a collection of words within sentences within paragraphs within chapters within a book. The entire book has meaning through the relational character of the words combined with words to create sentences, paragraphs, and chapters. They show similarity in their relational character but express meaning only in their difference. This similarity in

difference is the plurality of language.

To interpret is to be in history, argues Tracy. Being in history is, "to be born , live, and die bounded by a particular sex, race, class, and education" (*PA* 66). We cannot escape our history. Since we are in history we must reflect upon history. But history is ambiguous. Inasmuch as our classics bring truth and meaning, they too are bound in historical contexts where atrocities occurred. Regardless of all the progress the twentieth century brought, it will always be marred by the horrors of the Holocaust, the Gulag, and Vietnam. The progress of history must always be understood as also containing interruptions of evil. Tracy suggests that one of the major errors of enlightenment historical reflection is the relegation of such interruption as mere error. The post-modern critique refers to these interruptions as systematic distortion. Religious traditions such as Christianity share this critique. The concept of sin is much more than error, it is "more pervasive and fatal" (*PA* 74). "It is named sin from the viewpoint of Ultimate Reality: a perverse denial of one's finitude and a willful rejection of any dependence on Ultimate Reality" (*PA* 74). But religious traditions have also been responsible for atrocities in history as demonstrated by those masters of the hermeneutics of suspicion. Therefore, Tracy argues, we must return to the primary argument: all experience and all understanding is hermeneutical. A proper interpretation of history will keep in mind its ambiguity; it will be a hermeneutic of retrieval and suspicion. We should retrieve those valuable disclosures of truth in our classics but always keep in mind they are bound in historical contexts and informed by systematic distortion.

Tracy argues that since the ego of modernism is "mortally wounded" (*PA* 82)

through this recognition of plurality and ambiguity, one of the major tasks of post-modernity is resistance to traditional universalist notions. "Above all, religions are exercises in resistance," he argues, positing religion as a possible mode of post-modern resistance (*PA* 84). Interpreting them, therefore, challenges what we consider possible but we must interpret them with every hermeneutic of critique, retrieval and suspicion available. This argument is much like the one in *The Analogical Imagination*, as we not only have an insistence on the public nature of the theologian but also on the hermeneutical role that theology plays in the public sphere. But this argument is not limited to Christian theology; Tracy includes a need for a pluralism of religious traditions as well. He argues that we need to engage other religious traditions in their contribution to resistance. Ultimately, Tracy concludes that interpreting the classics means risk but that this risk is worthwhile because it produces resistance to systematic distortion and hope in the continuing progress of intellectual discovery. Furthermore, religious traditions provide a means of resistance in their recognition of systematic distortion through notions like sin, and provide hope in their radical notions of grace.

Tracy's hermeneutical discussion continues in the collection of essays for the theological journal *Concilium*, entitled *On Naming the Present: God Hermeneutics and Church*. There is one essay in particular that shows the development of Tracy's hermeneutics. It provides less of a new development than a new articulation of something already expressed. He returns once again to the problem of plurality in the New Testament and the distinction between event and text. This time however, the language is more approachable and the process begins from creedal formulations. He

suggests a common Christian confession: "We believe *in* Jesus Christ *with* the apostles" (*ONP* 121). The italicized words point to very important distinctions between Christianity and Islam and also between fundamentalism and contemporary Christianity. That we believe in the person of Jesus Christ means that we are not a religion of the book like Islam. We believe in the Jesus Christ as witnessed to in the New Testament but do not believe in the New Testament. In this sense, the inerrancy of scripture is seen as almost a fundamentalist worship of scripture where the confession is not *with* the apostles but *in* the apostles (*ONP* 121). The article continues with the same kind of discussion we have become accustomed to in Tracy's hermeneutic: defending the value of the plurality of accounts in the New Testament while keeping in mind the necessity of critical methods which keep such plurality in check. What is different in this formulation is mainly the initial use of the confession to articulate the difference between event and witness to the event, which forms the foundation of his pluralistic theories. Clearly, with these two examples of Tracy's more recent writings, we see continuity and development in his hermeneutics.

While these examples do show a continuity in Tracy's hermeneutical concern, they also point to new trends that are developing. *Plurality and Ambiguity* is a mercifully shorter work. The scope is much more limited than the previous two books we have covered. Here Tracy proposes a particular mode of hermeneutical understanding and develops an argument over several brief chapters. There is also a loosening of style in these works. *Blessed Rage for Order* is the most tightly argued of Tracy's writing requiring a great deal of attention to each sentence. With these later pieces the arguments

are freer allowing the reader to relax a little more. Having said this, there is no drop in academic rigour. The arguments follow naturally one from the other, but the language is simpler. In the creedal example, we find a much more approachable rhetorical style, while still being classical Tracy. These trends point to an adaptability in Tracy and a renewed insistence in engaging his situation. The brevity of the work means more than a limitation in scope. He has reduced his tendency toward systems of thought. While he has always insisted upon relative adequacy, he still sought to create broad , all-encompassing methodologies. This trend of downsizing his scope will continue to a much more dramatic extent.

### *Inter-religious Dialogue*

There are two interrelated aspects of the post-modern reality that draw Tracy into the question of inter-religious dialogue. In *Plurality and Ambiguity* he is struck by the fact of a plurality of religious traditions. In the context of that discussion the plurality of religion is only a part of the whole whereby religion is for the most part seen as a source of resistance to the interruptions of history and to the arrogance of positivism. The second route to inter-religious dialogue is through the post-modern turn to the other as expressed in *Dialogue With The Other: The Inter-Religious Dialogue.* Here Tracy deals explicitly with religious pluralism as the "real, not projected, other" (*DWO* 4). Heretofore, his work has been open to the otherness of varying Christian traditions but these are others of a more projected kind; differences are more perceived than they are real. Buddhism is a real other. The entire Buddhist metaphysic, for example, is completely different. Dialogue with the other not only opens up new worlds of

understanding of the other, it also sheds new light on the self. Tracy uses the example of Francis of Assisi's passion for the natural world as something a Buddhist perspective might make more sense of. Perhaps the most interesting argument Tracy makes in this book is a development from his earlier work, a shift from the language of "manifestation" and "proclamation" to the "mystical-prophetic." The shift in language allows more broad religious scope and recognizes a more spiritual nature to theological discourse. The hyphen is important as it suggests an inter-relational character to the two trajectories (*DWO* 7). There are three contributions from this short work to Tracy's overall project: the hermeneutics of inter-religious dialogue, an example of a Buddhist-Christian dialogue, and the development of the mystical-prophetic dialectic.

Tracy leans heavily on the ground-breaking work of Mircea Eliade in articulating his hermeneutic of inter-religious dialogue. In interpreting any religious classic we should recall that they are capable of being interpreted in ever renewed ways throughout the complicated histories of a multiplicity of contexts. The Christian Bible has been re-interpreted in every generation to engage anew each context, while maintaining a faithful adherence to the original intentions of the authors. Classics ever demand our attention. Tracy restates his understanding of hermeneutics as conversation, but this time in light of Eliade's religiously diversified hermeneutic, he calls it "a conversation with the radically other" (*DWO* 65). Each religious classic is informed by a manifestation of the sacred. The radical other can be seen as both the diversity of religious expression and the radical otherness of the manifestation of the sacred. This dialogue with the other, then, cannot be a gathering of "souvenirs" but must be, as he has suggested with the Christian classic, a

risk of encounter with ultimate reality. When this risky interpretive process is engaged, there is an encounter with the otherness and sameness in the diverse religious traditions. We can explore the common heritage of our Indo-European roots as discovery of sameness or we can see how strikingly different developments arose from those roots. Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam all derive from that Indo-European heritage. Inter-religious dialogue must not, therefore, be a kind of fad of interest but a real and powerful risk of engaging the other knowing that the self cannot escape unchanged.

The first step Tracy takes in his own Buddhist-Christian dialogue is to see what elements of post-modern Christian theology might be most related to Buddhist beliefs. He finds this a rather fruitless task. Buddhism is truly radically other and cannot easily be correlated with Christian beliefs. This chasm is best shown through the notion of self in the two traditions. The western world has become far too individualistic (*DWO* 74). While some critiques of this phenomenon have been put forward, no where is there as profound a notion as that of the Buddhist "no-self" (*DWO* 75). Tracy suggests that this notion can be an important contribution of Buddhism to Christianity. In a culture so self-obsessed, in a faith that is so concerned with personal existential meaning we find a response that suggests we see our self as no-self. Liberation theology, for example, is concerned not with the nonbeliever but with the societal situations that marginalize people to the point of becoming non-persons (*DWO* 76). There is a detachment from that individualistic drive of personal salvation to the general problem of marginalization. Christian thought can have a contribution to Buddhism too, particularly in its struggle to

formulate an ethical understanding in a tradition that denies the self and denies the world. There is, in Buddhism, a compassion for all things but there is no real notion of justice. The Christian understanding of justice might inform a Buddhist worldly ethic (*DWO* 81). Tracy finds one important connection to Buddhism in the earlier apophatic Christian writings, in particular those of Meister Eckhart. But dialogue could not be easily based upon Eckhart's thought since his apophatic tendencies are so radical as to be potentially untenable with fundamental Christian beliefs. We will always have the reality of trinitarian belief, the reality of a God who exists, whereas Buddhism is often understood less as a religion as such and more as a world-view or a philosophy.

As this example of Buddhist-Christian dialogue demonstrates, the most consistent source of common ground in inter-religious dialogue is in the mystical realms of various religious traditions. Sufism, Kabbalah, Zen Buddhism, and Christian mysticism all seem to seek that *unio mystico*, that moment of encounter with ultimate reality. It is more difficult, however, to find such common ground in the prophetic traditions. It is in the proclamatory statements of various faiths that claims to universal veracity come about. Tracy suggests that the prophetic nature of practical theologies can bridge the gaps; when the focus is less on individual salvation and more on the redemptive act of freeing and caring for marginalized people (*DWO* 119). The shift in perspective from denouncing the sin of the individual to systemic distortion in the interruptions of history takes the focus away from the differences of religion that demand individual adherence and focuses in on the common demand present in all religious traditions for virtuous living. Moreover, a common goal or purpose is more effective in drawing disparate groups together than the

mere desire for unity. One means of drawing the focus toward the prophetic in this sense is through the practical theological emphasis on the apocalyptic. Apocalypse is theology that rises out of interruptions like the persecutions of Christians in the early days of the church, the holocaust, or (to use my own example) the Chinese government's persecutions of Tibetan Buddhism, Falun Gong, and even Christianity. Apocalypse reminds us that God is judging this kind of systemic distortion as evil. It also provides hope that God can redeem it as well.

There are several trends that are developing in Tracy's thought that need to be pointed out. The first shift is, obviously, toward a religious pluralism rather than a ecumenical pluralism. Secondly, there is a movement from the dialectic of proclamation and manifestation to that of the prophetic-mystical. As we saw in the last section, Tracy's language is becoming simpler, almost more religious than philosophical. Tracy explicitly states that part of the purpose of this shift to the dialectic of the prophetic-mystical is to incorporate a more spiritual perspective. While there are some mystical elements in Tracy's earlier work, he is becoming much more free with this kind of language. Whereas before there is a sense that he is trying to express spiritual things with academic language, here he seems less bothered by incorporating those two worlds. Another important note is his continued use of the apocalyptic. We will find that in future writing this theme becomes a major focus. It is important to note all these shifts because these discussions of hermeneutics and inter-religious dialogue are setting the stage for a much more dramatic change in Tracy's style and theology.

### *Fragments*

The last decade has seen a major change in Tracy's thought. He has not fully abandoned his earlier writings but his new work is barely recognizable from the earlier work. He has been quick to respond to questions about these progressions by distancing himself from systematic language concerning God. He now prefers language that keeps in mind the "impossible" nature of God.[12] In this shift Tracy fully embodies my argument that he is interested in how theology is to be done in a post-modern context. One of the main critiques of modernism by post-modern thinkers is with regard to positivism and attempts to systematize thought. While his earlier writings are clearly critical of modernist assumptions, he still tries to utilize some aspects of modernist methodologies with modal qualifiers. Recall his insistence upon "relative adequacy" in *The Analogical Imagination.* In this sense he was certainly avoiding positivist language but seemed to be holding on to a hope of providing a systematic approach to understanding God. Now he insists on the use of "fragments" which deny any connection to totality. The use of fragments is not unheard of in academia, in fact, it is common in post-modern hermeneutics. Tracy, however, is suggesting a particularly theological form of fragment. Both literature and philosophy have used fragments as a means of answering the positivist claims of modernity. It would be helpful to take a look at these two areas before dealing with Tracy's own theological theory of fragments.

Fragments are first mentioned by name by the German Romantics Schlegel and Novalis. In literary circles we find fragments disclosing "'sparks' of the divine,"[13]

12 Lois Malcolm, "The Impossible God: An Interview With David Tracy", *Christian Century* 119 no. 4 (2002): 24.

13 David Tracy, "Form and Fragment: The Recovery of the Hidden Incomprehensible God," (Center of

articulated in various ways by the likes of Joyce, Woolf, and Eliot. Eliot in particular strikes Tracy as an important employer of fragment, "the poetry should be read, and better heard, as non-totalizing but oddly moving and partly harmonizing fragments of music."[14] He argues that *Four Quartets* have a very Buddhist tone to them in the central image of "the impersonal still point."[15] Eliot's fragmentary approach denies attempts to neatly figure out the divine but insists on holding God as completely other, as totally unknowable yet mysteriously capable of being experienced. In philosophy we find the use of fragmentation exemplified in the writing of Kierkegaard who used all kinds of genres to engage the divine like diary, music, dialogues, edifying discourses, and narratives. He refused to accept the systems of totality as presented in particular by Hegel. He also experimented with pseudonyms like Johannes Climacus and Don Juan. For Kierkegaard, all intellectual discourse must be qualified as a thought experiment rather than any arrogant claims to sufficiency.

For the more theologically oriented form of fragments, Tracy suggests that Barth and Hans Urs Von Balthasar are good examples of seminal developments. Modernity brought about a separation between reason and passion, theory and practice, and form and content. While the first two have been sufficiently reunited in many post-modern critiques of modernism, the separation of form and content is first reunited theologically in these two German masters. They recognized that form is not a mere aesthetic means to the end of expressing content but that the two go hand in hand. Barth uses the form of

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Theological Inquiry, 1999), http://www.ctinquiry.org/publications/reflections_volume_3/tracy.htm (accessed March 9, 2006).

14 David Tracy, "Fragments: The Spiritual Situation of Our Times," *God, The Gift, and Postmodernism*, eds. John D. Caputo and Michael Scanlon (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1999), 175.

15 Tracy, "Fragments: The Spiritual Situation of Our Times," 175.

fragment in expressing the content of such early work as his commentary on Romans. He seems to move away from this practice in later work. Balthasar's great trilogy, according to Tracy, is deeply affected by Eastern Christianity in its exploration of all kinds of literary forms. Indeed, it is in the Eastern Christian liturgical traditions that Tracy feels fragment is best expressed. Ultimately, neither Barth nor Balthasar are particularly helpful in their developments of the form of fragment. Barth seems to leave aside any methodological concern for fragments in his later work, while Balthasar seems to have a generally critical attitude toward fragments. It is more in their drawing together the modernist division of form and content that Tracy feels they are most helpful.[16]

It is important for Tracy to contrast his fragmentary theory with the more common forms of post-modern fragments. Post-modern notions of fragment lean toward excess, transgression, and disruption. They react against self-satisfied modernist attitudes by destroying them and picking up the pieces as fragments to be embraced individually in their particularity rather than in their connection to the systemic whole. Mystical fragments of meaning are included in this mess but really only as general religious feelings rather than in any kind of developed theological sense. Tracy posits a perspective of fragments as specifically theological and spiritual. There is some connection to his earlier notions of plurality in this new formulation. He reminds us of the variety of narratives and perspectives in the New Testament while pushing for an even stronger emphasis on the individuality of these plural accounts and perspectives. He insists that we take Mark's gospel as a single account, not as a part of a narrative system with the other gospels. This gospel must stand alone as a fragment of meaning which has

16 Tracy, "Form and Fragment."

apocalyptic overtones and cannot be easily correlated with the Luke/Acts historical narratives. [17]

In a dialogue with Jacques Derrida, Tracy encounters some critique of his form of fragments. As is his wont, Derrida tries to undermine the theory by showing its relationship with modern totality systems. He argues that fragments do not escape totality because they are fragments of a totality and will always have the taint of totality.[18] Their original telos was oriented toward system, therefore, the fragments will always have that originating purpose informing them. Tracy agrees that the oft-used post-modern fragment is indeed subject to that critique. However, his theory is a Christian one more than it is post-modern. For Tracy, fragments are not fragments of a totality, but fragments are to be seen eschatologically. Fragments are the now aspect of the now-then nature of eschatology. The present realities of the coming kingdom, the coming Christ, and the future messiah are fragments of that future fulfilment. In this sense, fragments are not a part of a totality, they are a spiritual hint of future glory. God is not a totality, God "must remain un-nameable, but certain aspects of which can be seen in the fragments."[19] For Tracy, fragments are a part of a movement towards the apocalyptic and apophatic.

This shift from plurality to fragments is a development not a complete u-turn in his overall thinking. Indeed, it is a dramatic shift, but the prefigurations of it can be seen from the very beginning of his work. Whereas his understanding of plurality was tied

17 Tracy, "Fragment: The Spiritual Situation of Our Time," 178

18 Jacques Derrida, "Derrida's Response to David Tracy," *God, The Gift, and Postmodernism*, eds. John D. Caputo and Michael Scanlon (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1999), 182.

19 Tracy "Fragment: The Spiritual Situation of Our Time," 183.

into his over all methodological system, the shift to fragment is a shift to a more organic perspective. Here fragments are the reality and they must be accepted as such and left as such. They are not to be correlated to create elaborate systems of thought but must be left as individual disclosures of meaning. To be sure, these fragments may have inter-related tendencies but these must not be forced into a facile systematic. To be sure, the Luke/Acts account leans on the Markan narrative, necessitating certain correlations but they must be left at that. Mark's account has an entirely different disclosure of meaning than does Luke. The use of fragment is helpful in a post-modern situation because it refuses to aim toward system while enabling a means of talking about religious meaning that respects the diversity of understanding and the total incomprehensibility of God. Tracy's writing is saturated with this new proposal of fragments in his most recent work. His dedication to this metaphor can almost be named total. There is a kind of zeal here which might be too much. He uses this hermeneutical formulation to critique systems of totality, but his commitment to it is so strong that it becomes a kind of system in and of itself. It seems that Tracy gets excited by new concepts and new formulations every few years, causing me to wonder how long this excitement will last. Since the book he promised concerning fragments has yet to be published[20], it seems entirely possible that he has already moved on.

### *The Apophatic and the Apocalyptic*

Tracy's interest in apophatic and apocalyptic aspects of theology has roots in his earlier work. From the beginning, Tracy's theology never claims universal appeal and is

20 See Tracy, "Form and Fragment," where in 1999 he says he has completed the work.

articulated specifically as such through his use of "relative adequacy." There is an apophatic tendency in this refusal of positivist truth claims. In his more recent developments into inter-religious dialogue his mystical side becomes all the more articulated. A combination of mystical theology and insistence on relative truth claims leads quite naturally into apophatic theology. The apocalyptic nature of theology is present in Tracy's work from the very beginning. In *Blessed Rage* he finds fault with the quest for the historical Jesus through its inability to adequately come to terms with the apocalyptic sayings of Christ. In *The Analogical Imagination* we find an emphasis on the literary genre of apocalypse as a proclamatory corrective to an over emphasis of the trajectory of manifestation (later changed to mystical). However, much like the shift from plurality to fragment, there is an intensification of Tracy's earlier notions to a strong focus on these two forms.

In recent times theologians have concentrated on the more approachable notion of eschatology as opposed to the more difficult literary genre of apocalypse. Apocalypse is a dramatic, often scary genre and is difficult to interpret with its vague descriptions of unsettling future events. It is much easier to think in terms of eschatology, a more generalized dialectic between the past, present and future sense of God's involvement in history. Apocalypse speaks of events that are to occur in graphic yet intellectually preposterous detail. So from as early a time as Augustine's *City of God* theologians have been deliteralizing apocalyptic aspects of the New Testament. This process of deliteralizing is a fragmentary one that must occur lest we are left with a "totalizing and deadly"[21] genre to contend with in these post-positivist, post-Christian times. But

21 Tracy, "Form and Fragment."

apocalypse is fundamental to the New Testament from the first gospel (chronologically) of Mark to the final book of Revelation. Some of the final words of the Christian Bible are, "Come, Lord Jesus!" So it is a genre that cannot be ignored and should not be underestimated; but it is also one that must not be naively interpreted too literally.

The apocalypic must be deliteralized so that it might, "fragment any triumphalism, any sense that history is a pure continuity ending in us the victors."[22] Tracy suggests that Martin Luther in his wrestling with the apocalyptic, gave us a properly apocalyptic name for God -the "hidden God." In Luther, God's revelation is in hiddenness, *sub contrariis*, life through death, wisdom through folly, strength through weakness. "The hidden God is *deus crucifixus*."[23] This understanding of the hidden God is useful today in a theological situation that must always keep in mind the praxis foci of marginalization and oppression. The deliteralized reading of the apocalyptic invokes the theme of the hidden God of the marginalized early Christians. This is the God questioned in the "Where is God when..." of suffering and oppressed peoples. Tracy suggests that there is also a second sense of the hidden God in Luther. This is the God who is "beyond the world."[24] This God is a frightening God that stirs up images of chaos, abyss, and even horror. There is a natural progression, then, from this idea of the hidden God to Tracy's other fragmentary development, the apophatic.

Whereas the apocalyptic focuses on evil and time (history and non-closure of history), the apophatic is focused on two other constants of the human condition, thought and language. It fragments any attempt at totality either intellectually or linguistically.

22 Tracy, "Form and Fragment."
23 Tracy, "Form and Fragment."
24 Tracy, "Form and Fragment."

In order to inform this discussion Tracy reaches back once again to an earlier thinker in Christianity, namely Dionysius the Areopagite. For Dionysius, the only valid namings for God are those that are revealed, specifically those found in the Bible. Although grounded in neo-Platonism, Dionysius cannot be denied his Christianity, argues Tracy. The primary name for God used by the mystical writer is "the Good" which is not only a Platonic category, it is also a fundamentally biblical one. But even this name is limited in the mind of Dionysius. Ultimately, God cannot be named and must be finally understood only as incomprehensible. In other words, even Biblical cataphatic namings are ultimately inadequate when dealing with this great incomprehensible God. While we can and do experience a mystical connection with God, our language will always be insufficient in describing that experience nor can we truly grasp the experience intellectually. We are left with fragments which are only stutters in comparison to the radical otherness of the incomprehensible God.

This last development in Tracy's thought, the embrace of the incomprehensibility of God is the most striking contrast to one of his earliest proposals, process theism. While Tracy will argue that he still feels that the best metaphysical means of discussing the nature of God is panentheism, he is no longer really interested in it. He insists that God cannot be understood and articulated in theistic language, that "isms", theism, pantheism, atheism, panentheism are no longer adequate for naming God.[25] This progression is consistent with my argument that Tracy effectively engages his post-modern context in constantly seeking a contemporary methodology for theology. Again,

25 Scott Holland, "This Side of God: A Conversation With David Tracy," *Cross Currents* 52 no. 1 (2002): 55.

he has intensified his refusal of positivist truth claims by denying the validity of linguistic naming of God. This shift is easily recognizable as a development in his thought rather than complete change. The language has changed but the original impetus remains the same. At the same time, there has always been a fascination with the apocalyptic in Tracy's work. All his work shows some consideration for the importance of this fragmentary form. Now, however, it has become a central element, its role has been intensified.

To be sure, this fragmentary approach negates any hope for systematic thought, but there is a sense in which Tracy leaves me wanting more. Apocalyptic and apophatic fragmentary forms are powerful and productive ways to approach theology, but they seem too negative. Indeed, part of their purpose is to destroy totalizing systems, an inherently negative undertaking. But where is the love? Where is the God of Love that so pervades Tracy's earlier work? The ultimate purpose of the analogical imagination in systematic theology is to disclose the grace of the Christian God. In *Plurality and Ambiguity* religion plays the role of resistance to totality systems, easily relegating sin to mere error. But religion also provides an answer to the pervasive nature of sin with the redeeming notion of grace. While he incorporates Dionysius' God that is the Good in his apophatic theology, Tracy leaves us with more of an emphasis on the incomprehensibility of God than the value of the scriptural cataphatic names for God. His apocalyptic approach is appropriately negative but where is the hope of eschatology? Do we abandon the positive notions of eschatology and cataphatic names for God altogether? I doubt Tracy is suggesting such a negative attitude since he promotes Eastern Orthodoxy as

providing a good balance between a need for apophatic while affirming the Trinity. But *his* emphasis in these later works is always on these negative fragments. Theology is inappropriate when it is systematically totalizing, but it is useless without the empowering fragments of grace and love.

I think it appropriate to leave the summary of Tracy's work here with only a brief overview of his latest developments because he has done the same. There is only a collection of short articles concerning these last questions of fragment, the apocalyptic, and the apophatic. He has yet to publish the promised work, *This Side of God*, which was to illuminate in depth these new developments. Perhaps he has abandoned it altogether for something entirely new. We shall have to wait and see.

# Conclusion

Over the last three chapters it has been my aim to demonstrate how David Tracy effectively engages his post-modern context through his continual concern with theological methodology. His work has grown and developed over several decades but manages to maintain relevance with each new project. Although the most recent positions he holds differ dramatically from his earliest ones, they are all related. Each new development follows from the last, bringing to his work the value of consistency coupled with the necessity of adaptability. His first book, *The Achievement of Bernard Lonergan*, was published when he was only 31 years old and the second, *Blessed Rage for Order*, when he was 36. These works threw him onto the theological scene at a young age as a thinker to be reckoned with. He answered these works with several more and has continued to command respect through a period of time when theologians have had to grapple with the intense critiques of post-modernism. Tracy not only accepted these critiques as valid, he successfully answered them with each work he published. His work embraced the shift to the other by proposing methodologies that rejected positivism and provided a deeply nuanced treatment of the problem of pluralism.

I began this project with *Blessed Rage for Order*, where Tracy introduces his revisionist methodology. He questions the usefulness of modernist theories which rely too heavily on methodologies that cannot respect the role of faith in academic inquiry. Nor is he satisfied with those that base themselves solely on dogmatic beliefs preventing

adequate responses to the valuable criticisms of modernist inquiry. He suggests that an appropriate use of the two sources, common human experience and Christian texts, will give theology a balanced approach that can both engage in academic discourse and maintain faithful adherence to Christian tradition. Tracy argues that one aspect of common human experience is the "limit." Phenomenologically speaking, we encounter God at the limits. We encounter God in limit experiences and we can affirm God as one who engages with the world. God is seen in panentheistic terms or as a God of process, affected by the world because his primary quality is love. A God who truly loves the world must be capable of being affected by the world. This understanding of God is consistent with our common human experience of the process nature of our world in evolutionary theory and in basic human nature. The limit is also found in Christian texts. Hermeneutically, we encounter limit language in the various genres of the New Testament where Jesus challenges the limits of our understanding and presents a new possible mode-of-being-in-the-world. The arguments put forward in this work are informed by the academic positions of his time. Tracy makes use of contemporary thinkers like Ricoeur, Gadamer, and Hartshorne and engages the philosophical concerns of his period through his discussions of phenomenology and hermeneutical theory. While his work in this volume might be considered still too modernist in its methodologies, it is certainly a beginning. It is a far cry from the positivist claims of classical theism and respects the pluralistic nature of New Testament texts.

The hermeneutical nature of Tracy's work continues in *The Analogical Imagination* where he suggests the role of the systematic theologian is to interpret

Christian classics. Here he demands again a balance of historical-critical, literary-critical, and social-scientific methods of interpretation with the existential meaningfulness of the Christian classic. But he also engages the pluralistic reality of the Christian tradition found in both its scriptures and their interpretation. He suggests that there are trajectories of both manifestation and proclamation present in the various genres of the Christian New Testament. This plurality of meaning is not a critical blow to the authority of the scriptures but rather an important means of engaging the current pluralist situation. With an appropriate understanding of the dialectic at work between manifestation and proclamation, the systematic theologian will interpret the scriptures anew in a way that is authentic and relevant to her situation. In the context of this work, the situation is primarily understood as coming to terms with the "uncanny," the reality of non-totalized systems of thought. A pluralistic analogical imagination in interpreting the New Testament can effectively interact with the various concerns that arise in a pluralistic world. In this work Tracy addresses some fundamental concerns of his period. The first argument for the public nature of theology addresses those who would relegate theology to the private sphere, being meaningful only to individuals as a kind of private matter of taste like art or music. Tracy's notion of classic suggests that Christian classics are disclosive of truth and should therefore not be considered a matter of taste. His hermeneutical method for interpreting the New Testament as pluralistic itself and open to pluralistic interpretations embraces and engages the pluralistic reality of the times.

With the introduction of *Plurality and Ambiguity*, *Dialogue With the Other*, and *On Naming the Present* we see a dramatic shift to the other that is demanded in the

pluralistic reality of post-modernism. Tracy is willing not only to see the importance of the other of various Christian traditions, he recognizes the valuable contribution of the radical other of non-Christian religions. Understanding is fundamentally hermeneutical, and it is a conversation that various religious traditions must take part in. The conversational nature of understanding denies any facile positivist interpretation of language or history. Religion is at its best when it is resisting the kind of positivist notions like that of sin as mere error. In *Dialogue With the Other* Tracy delves deeper into the otherness of religious pluralism. He suggests that only those willing to risk encounter with this radical other are genuinely engaging in inter-religious dialogue. It cannot be only a fad of interest. In continuation with all his other work, this process is a hermeneutical one. There must be consideration of both the mystical commonalities of all religious traditions and the apocalyptic trajectory of the prophetic. Inter-religious dialogue with this kind of approach is a means of engaging the reality of religious pluralism without ignoring the significant and differing contributions of the various traditions. There is a significant turn to the other here as Tracy truly embraces the value of inter-religious dialogue, which has become another aspect of theological inquiry that cannot nor should not be ignored.

In embracing the post-modern turn to fragments and interpreting them with a more rigorous theological filter, Tracy puts forward his most dramatic form of methodological reflection. Here there is a firm rejection of positivism. This brand of fragmentary use is, in fact, more authentically non-positivist than the secular ones. In a theological context, fragments derive not from the smashing of a systematic whole but

from the radical otherness of the unknowable God. They are eschatological in the sense that they are particular temporal experiences or "sparks" of the eternally divine. God is not a system, hence fragments that disclose meaning of this divine being are not fragments of system. They are hints of something greater, something beyond our finite capacity for understanding. The two fragmentary forms that stand out in Tracy's new understanding are the apocalyptic and the apophatic. The apophatic is truly non-positivist in its refusal to accept any names for God as completely adequate. God is ultimately too radically other to be named anything but incomprehensible. The apocalyptic form fragments any hope of a salvation history that culminates in our own situation. Rather, it demands recognition for the marginalized and the abused. It cries out to the hidden God that cannot be found in these interruptive situations of systemic evil. Our present situation is one that denies all systems of totality, particularly those actual systems of government and economics that force human beings into the margins of society. No theology is truly meaningful anymore unless it can speak to these concerns of praxis.

All these examples of Tracy's writing show his incredible capacity for authentically engaging his situation by struggling with the question of how theology is to effectively turn to the other and be both sufficiently post-positivist and adequately pluralistic. Each new work puts forward a new means of accomplishing this goal. Each shift follows from the last. In this continual process, David Tracy is entirely successful. He shows that he can adapt and maintain a logical progression. However, there is one tendency that might cause a good deal of frustration in those trying to follow him on this

journey. It seems as though Tracy gets hung up on a new trope with each new work. Consider the use of the limit, common human experience, and revisionist theology in *Blessed Rage for Order*. Or consider public, proclamation/manifestation, the uncanny, and the classic in *The Analogical Imagination.* Then there is conversation in *Plurality and Ambiguity* and a transition to mystical-prophetic in *Dialogue With The Other*. Finally, he leaves us with fragment, the apophatic and apocalyptic. In each progression of his thought he all but leaves behind these tropes that so informed the work before it. To be sure, there is thematic constancy in his general concern for the hermeneutical character of theology. But what do we do with all the expressions he has worked so hard to convince us are the new best means of doing theology? We now have an arsenal of "Tracyisms," but it seems that even he has found them to be no longer capable of packing a punch. Are we to relegate these terms as items of interest in some museum of the history of Tracy's thought? Do we now leave behind all we learned in his early work and rely only on the new? This tendency in Tracy's work leaves the reader hesitant to embrace any new tropes because it seems like only a matter of time before they too are cast aside for some new Tracyism.

This criticism of the Tracy's tendency toward constantly reinventing his language naturally stems from my attempts to systematize his thought. Each work stands alone quite well. It is really only when you try to compare them to each other that such a problem arises. It could be argued, then, that the problem is not so much with Tracy as with those trying to systematize his work. The reality is that language is always imprecise. I suspect that Tracy's language evolves as he attempts to grow more precise

with his arguments. Another issue that might inform this tendency is the unstable nature of post-modern thought itself. *Blessed Rage For Order* came in the early days of post-modern theological developments. The problem of post-modernism has by no means been settled since. So Tracy has been forced to adapt alongside the rapidly adapting post-modernist theological understanding. Thus we cannot be too critical of Tracy for this constant sense of change.

I cannot help but wonder what is next. Is this book *This Side of God* ever to be published? Or has he already given up on his fascination with fragment and moved on to something new? Will there ever be a point where his readers can say, "This is the true David Tracy!"? In many respects I feel cheated that I worked so hard to engage his understanding of the limit or any of his other terms, only to find he has very little interest for them now. I suppose we could see all these tropes eschatologically, as fragments that disclose some meaning but are by no means sufficient in capturing the essence of the incomprehensible. We could embrace the value that each work has to offer without leaning on any particular one as the solution to the methodological problem of doing theology in a post-modern world. Many of these tropes are still disclosive and can continue to be helpful. But it is important to view them in the context of Tracy's entire project. Viewing the concept of the limit as fragment can redeem the more systematic elements of the book it derives from. Keeping in mind the radical plurality of inter-religious dialogue can inform the more perceived plurality of ecumenical diversity. Finally, an apophatic perspective will always maintain a humility in any christological formulation or metaphysical theism.

As I have been careful to mention, David Tracy continues to publish and continues to engage his situation. This project is by no means sufficient either in its treatment of past work or in being able to gage the overall impact of current work. Further research will, no doubt, be necessary into both. While much has been said about the first two works I have covered, his more recent writing is still too new to evaluate its impact on theological study. It would be truly valuable if at some point in the more distant future a more detailed treatment were given of Tracy's entire project. I am confident that the effects of Tracy's theology will be felt for decades to come thus demanding this kind of project.

# Epilogue

As I mentioned in the beginning, my research into Tracy's work has borne some unexpected fruit. My first intentions in initiating this project stemmed from concerns that had been growing in me about the very purpose of theological study. I began with the classic definition of theology as "faith seeking understanding" and felt as though in many ways theology had become better characterized as "understanding with or without faith." Part of this concern derived from my own background, which put a strong emphasis on the authority of scripture. I was feeling as though historical critical methods were taking over biblical hermeneutics to the extent that faith was no longer relevant. It seemed to me that intellectual pride was interfering with a faith that I saw as requiring a more submissive and more worshipful attitude. So I set out to propose a methodology that would be intentionally spiritual so as to keep pride in check and ensure that faith was the foundation of intellectual pursuit in theology. But both through my research and in my dialogue with others I found that I was mistaken. My experience had been too limited. What I found objectionable were more modernist modes of theology, I had yet to discover the changes brought about through post-modern criticisms. I ended up settling, as it were, on studying David Tracy. Having worked through his theological contributions, I have found that he had similar concerns as myself, but was much better at articulating these concerns in a properly academic theological way. He, too, was concerned with methodology but he was much more capable than I was at saying what I

wanted to say.

Tracy criticizes modernist methodologies as being too focused on the understanding aspect of theological study. What I was reacting to were these modernist tendencies that Tracy also rejected. His insistence in *Blessed Rage for Order* for a properly correlated treatment of the sources of theology answered this concern for the most part. While some of his conclusions such as his emphasis on the disclosure of symbols over and above the actualized event of the symbol gave me cause for concern, his methodology remains sound. Both sources of his revisionist theology take into account the reality of faith. Whether it be the limit situations of common human experience or the limit language of the New Testament, faith is given a voice. But both of these sources are to be open to the critiques of the academic situation be they historical critical methods of interpretation or social-scientific discoveries. With this form of methodology there is a healthy balance of faith and reason. In fact, this dialectical approach is a useful qualifier to the notion of "faith seeking understanding". It would prevent a more linear understanding of the classic definition of theology. Faith needs to be informed by understanding, but understanding also needs to be open to the reality of faith. Perhaps that symbol-understanding-symbol dialectic of Ricoeur expresses the answer to my problem best. We begin with the symbol, and we attempt to understand it through conceptual language, but ultimately, we must return once more to symbol.

Tracy also shows that a post-modern rejection of positivism brings about a form of intellectual humility in theological study. From his insistence on relative adequacy in *The Analogical Imagination*, he is asserting that no theological interpretation of the

Christian classic will ever be sufficient. In fact, he argues that the fundamentalist view of scripture as inerrant is another form of positivism which needs to be addressed. With the event of Jesus Christ as the central Christian classic, as opposed to the New Testament itself, he recognizes that any linguistic account of the event will always be a limited interpretation. The event is always the primary moment of God's self-revelation. Tracy takes this anti-positivist call for humility a step further with his shift to the apophatic. In this sense, human understanding will always be rendered insufficient when encountered with the incomprehensibility of God. No linguistic representation of God nor any mystical encounter will ever give us any more than a fragmentary disclosure. God will always remain as totally other.

My greatest concern, however, was a sense that theological studies tended to lack a spiritual aspect in its methodology. I was quite inspired by a quote from Evagrios of Pontus, "If you are a theologian you will pray truly and if you pray truly you are a theologian."[26] Part of my concern was to develop a methodology that incorporates prayer. Tracy's methodologies do include spiritual realities but do not often make explicit calls for prayer. In one article he does say, "The devastating separation of spirituality and theology in theological education must be undone."[27] Here he recalls his concern for the separation of theory and practice.[28] But the reunion called for in this article is really only abstract. It does not include any articulation of practical ways in which this might occur. Tracy is ever concerned with plurality and thus cannot suggest a

26 Evagrios of Pontus, "On Prayer," in *The Philokalia* Vol. 1, eds. G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, Kallistos Ware (London: Faber and Faber, 1979).

27 David Tracy, "Traditions of Spiritual Practice and the Practice of Theology," *Theology Today* 55 no.2 (1998): 240.

28 Recall in his discussion of fragments, Tracy pointed to the modernist separation of theory and practice, feeling and thought, and form and content.

particular practice of prayer without championing one particular form of religious practice. There can be no standard methodology of spirituality in our pluralistic context. To be sure, certain seminaries can demand particular forms of spiritual practice from their students but a sufficiently pluralistic academic theology must be sensitive to the reality of religious pluralism or even ecumenical pluralism. It cannot be limited to any such particularity. The individual theologian must then be left to decide what discipline of prayer she will embrace.

Nonetheless, Tracy's other methodological concerns such as the disclosure of meaning in scripture, his notion of the limit, the trajectories of manifestation and proclamation (prophetic-mystical), and the form of fragments can be understood spiritually. Limit experiences and language might not always be limited to events and texts attached to particular confessions of faith, but they are religious. Being religious, they can be interpreted as spiritual. Manifestation is seen in Tracy's work as the self-manifestation of God primarily through the event of Jesus Christ. Proclamation is a representation of these manifestations. The event then is spiritual be it the actual incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ or the sacramental and mystical experience of the faithful. Even fragments are spiritual when they are understood as "sparks" of the divine. They are means of mediating experience of the hidden God. While the methodological concerns may not demand any particular form of spiritual practice, they all take into account movements of the Spirit.

The scope of my project certainly did shift, from proposing a new methodology to exploring the methodology of another. However, I found that just as those concerns of a

need for humility and spirituality in theology initiated my journey, they also found some solutions in the final destination. My concerns were broad and less academically minded. I did not have the vocabulary to deal with these problems in a scholarly way. David Tracy has articulated both the concerns and their potential solutions far better than I could have. What I could only express in broad simplistic terms he engaged with precision and intellectual grace. He has helped restore (my) faith in theology.

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