

# The Plural and Ambiguous Self: The Theological Anthropology of David Tracy

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Boston College

The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

Department of Theology

THE PLURAL AND AMBIGUOUS SELF:  
THE THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY OF DAVID TRACY

A Dissertation

By

STEPHEN OKEY

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***The Plural and Ambiguous Self:  
The Theological Anthropology of David Tracy***

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This dissertation explicates and evaluates the theological anthropology of David Tracy. Through a reading of the whole of Tracy's published theological corpus, it argues that Tracy's work on theological method, hermeneutics, public theology, and otherness rests on an implicit and evolving understanding of the human person. This anthropology is rooted in four key characteristics or "anthropological constants": finitude, relationality, sin, and grace.

The methodological approach of the dissertation is genealogical and hermeneutical. Each of these four constants is taken as an interpretive lens through which the dissertation considers the development of Tracy's thought. This approach will demonstrate first how finitude, relationality, sin, and grace are interwoven in Tracy's work, and second how the development of his core theological loci of method, interpretation, public-ness, pluralism, and otherness are rooted in these four constants.

The text concludes with an evaluation of Tracy's theology anthropology in light of his context as a North American, late 20<sup>th</sup> century, Catholic theologian. Tracy's work provides insight into the interdependence of theological method and anthropology. However, while he attends to the importance of how historical, linguistic, and social context shape human persons, his conceptual approach to context tends to ignore particularity and embodiment. Nevertheless, the four "constants" of Tracy's theological anthropology could fruitfully engage contemporary currents such as ecotheology and disability theology.

This dissertation is the most thorough and sustained foray into the question of David Tracy's theological anthropology to date, and as such provides a significant contribution to the field of 20<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup> century North American Catholic theology.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Completing a project of this size and duration would be impossible without the help of many. To begin with, I'd like to thank my dissertation committee of Mary Ann Hinsdale, Roberto Goizueta, and Frederick Lawrence. Each of them has generously taken time to read drafts, to help me understand Tracy and his conversation partners, and to challenge me during my time at Boston College.

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I'd also like to thank my parents, Michael and Susan Okey, and my brother, John Okey, for being supportive of my desire to return to graduate studies in theology and pursue a career and vocation as a theologian. I'd especially like to thank Paige Cargioli, who has endured my many late nights of work on this text.

Lastly, I'd like to thank David Tracy himself, who on more than one occasion was kind of enough to speak with me about my project and offer ideas and clarifications.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

ABL	Tracy, David. <i>The Achievement of Bernard Lonergan</i> . New York: Herder and Herder, 1970.
AI	Tracy, David. <i>The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism</i> . New York: Crossroad, 1981.
BRO	Tracy, David. <i>Blessed Rage for Order, the New Pluralism in Theology</i> . New York: Seabury Press, 1975.
DWO	Tracy, David. <i>Dialogue with the Other: The Inter-Religious Dialogue</i> . Louvain Theological & Pastoral Monographs 1. Louvain: Peeters Press, 1991.
MT	Lonergan, Bernard J.F. <i>Method in Theology</i> . Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999.
NCFT	Tracy, David. "The Necessity and Character of Fundamental Theology." Lecture, Loyola University of Chicago, 1:27:11. April 8, 2011. <a href="http://webapps.luc.edu/ignation/video-detail.cfm?id=2120034320">http://webapps.luc.edu/ignation/video-detail.cfm?id=2120034320</a> (Part I) and <a href="http://webapps.luc.edu/ignation/video-detail.cfm?id=1206034756">http://webapps.luc.edu/ignation/video-detail.cfm?id=1206034756</a> (Part II)
ONP	Tracy, David. <i>On Naming the Present: Reflections on God, Hermeneutics, and Church</i> . Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1994.
PA	Tracy, David. <i>Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope</i> . San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987.

## INTRODUCTION

David Tracy is widely considered to be one of the most important American Catholic theologians of the twentieth century. During a career spanning six decades, he has made substantial contributions through his work on public theology, hermeneutics, and theological method. Sometimes called “a theologian’s theologian,” his work, as well as his generous spirit, has influenced theologians, philosophers, and other scholars both internationally and across religious traditions.

While his best-known and most cited works have focused on questions of what he would call fundamental theology, Tracy has lamented that his contributions to systematic and doctrinal issues have generally been ignored by his readers and interlocutors.<sup>1</sup> Both his *Blessed Rage for Order* and *Analogical Imagination* feature extensive chapters on Christology; his understanding of public theology includes a subtle and complex ecclesiology; and the Christian teachings on sin and grace have permeated his work from very early on. Yet by and large, these contributions have garnered limited interest in the wider theological community, consequently impoverishing both the understanding of Tracy’s theological project and the wider theological conversation in which he is engaged.

This dissertation serves as a modest contribution and corrective to this oversight. Its founding premise is that Tracy’s theology has a robust, if often implicit, theological

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<sup>1</sup> Todd Breyfogle and Thomas Levergood, “Conversation with David Tracy,” *Cross Currents* 44, no. 3 (Fall 1994): 301-2. In particular, he mentions the lack of interest that readers of *Blessed Rage for Order* and *The Analogical Imagination* have shown in his Christology.

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anthropology supporting it. The particulars of this anthropology are not always made manifest, with many of his explicit references to anthropology and the human person taking the form of offhand comments. Nevertheless, a close examination of his extensive writing on both fundamental and systematic theological topics reveals a profound sense of what it means to be human. In this dissertation, I will undertake such an examination and argue that Tracy's anthropology is based on four anthropological "constants": finitude, relationality, sin, and grace.

This introduction has four goals. First, I will offer a brief biographical sketch of Tracy's life in order to provide the context for the evolution of his theology. Second, I will describe the genealogical method used in this dissertation. This approach takes various concepts and themes and investigates how they develop over the course of his career. It takes account of early influences on Tracy as well as later conversation partners who affect the trajectory of his career. Third, I will consider and critique previous attempts to elucidate Tracy's anthropology, demonstrating the need for a new look at his thought. Fourth, I will explain the idea of "anthropological constants," a term borrowed from Edward Schillebeeckx, and why "constants" provide a useful heuristic for interpreting Tracy. Finally, I will provide an overview of the coming chapters.

## **Biographical Sketch of David Tracy**

David William Tracy was born in Yonkers, NY on January 6<sup>th</sup>, 1939, the middle son of John Charles Tracy, a union organizer, and Eileen Marie Tracy (née Rossell). He

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had an older brother, John Charles Jr., and a younger, Arthur.<sup>2</sup> At the age of 13, he entered the Cathedral College, the minor (or high school) seminary for the Archdiocese of New York.<sup>3</sup> He claims that he felt a very intense vocation to the priesthood, and he hoped to become a parish priest one day.<sup>4</sup> Upon finishing high school, he went on to study at St. Joseph's Seminary (1958-60), colloquially known as Dunwoodie.<sup>5</sup>

In 1960, Tracy was sent to the Gregorian University in Rome to begin his theological studies. While he was there, the Second Vatican Council began in 1962. Although as a young seminarian he had no formal role in the two sessions he was in Rome for, he did attend lectures given by some of the major theologians who had been brought to the Council as *periti* (theological advisors to the bishops). He was ordained to the priesthood in Rome in 1963. He completed his Licentiate in Sacred Theology (STL) in 1964, and then returned to the US to a parish in Stamford, CT. He had long wanted to serve in a parish, and by all accounts he acquitted himself admirably. While he had long hoped for an opportunity to serve in a parish, he discovered while there that he felt called to the life of academic theology. He returned to the Gregorian and studied under Fr.

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<sup>2</sup> He dedicated *Blessed Rage for Order* to his mother and *Plurality and Ambiguity* to his father and older brother *in memoriam*.

<sup>3</sup> Wendy Doniger, Franklin I. Gamwell, and Bernard McGinn. "Tributes to David Tracy." *Criterion* 46, no. 1 (Winter 2008): 7

<sup>4</sup> Breyfogle and Levergood, "Conversation with David Tracy," 305-6

<sup>5</sup> Dunwoodie was widely considered to be one of the best Roman Catholic seminaries in North America. Founded in 1896 when the seminary for the Archdiocese of New York was moved to Yonkers, it was home of the well-regarded *Dunwoodie Review* in the 1960's and 70's. In addition to Tracy, notable alumni include Joseph Komonchak, John P. Meier, and Bernard McGinn. For more on the history of Dunwoodie, see Thomas Shelley, *Dunwoodie: The History of St. Joseph's Seminary, Yonkers, New York* (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1993).

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Bernard Lonergan, SJ. He completed his Doctorate of Sacred Theology (STD) in 1969 with a dissertation on Lonergan's theology to that point.<sup>6</sup>

Tracy's teaching career began at the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC, where he served as an instructor from 1967-1969. In 1968, Pope Paul VI issued the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, a re-affirmation of the traditional Catholic teaching against artificial birth control. Charles Curran, who was then a faculty member at CUA, authored a response arguing that Catholics could in good conscience dissent from the encyclical's teaching without calling into question their Catholic faith.<sup>7</sup> Tracy, along with Bernard McGinn and 19 other members of the CUA faculty, signed onto Curran's response.<sup>8</sup> All were brought to trial by the CUA faculty senate and ultimately fired. The American Civil Liberties Union represented these faculty members in a subsequent lawsuit against the university, and all 22 were reinstated.<sup>9</sup>

During this controversy, Jerald Brauer, then Dean of the Divinity School of the University of Chicago, invited both Tracy and McGinn to lecture and offer a seminar. Even before the lawsuit was settled, Brauer was confident they would get back their jobs at CUA. Yet in the years following the Second Vatican Council, many Catholic students were coming to Chicago, so Brauer looked to expand the Catholic presence on the

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<sup>6</sup> The dissertation, *The Development of the Notion of Theological Methodology in the Works of Bernard J. Lonergan, S.J.*, would later be revised and published as *The Achievement of Bernard Lonergan* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970).

<sup>7</sup> Robert G. Hoyt, ed., *The Birth Control Debate* (Kansas City, MO: National Catholic Reporter, 1968), 179-181.

<sup>8</sup> Beyond CUA, over 600 theologians signed Curran's statement, including Richard McBrien, Bernard Häring, and Roland Murphy. The Pontifical status of CUA made the dissent at that university particularly striking. The negative response to *Humanae Vitae* is widely seen as the first time that lay Catholics widely and publicly dissented from magisterial teaching.

<sup>9</sup> David Gibson, "God-obsessed: David Tracy's Theological Quest," *Commonweal* 137, no. 2 (Jan. 29, 2010): 16

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faculty. In 1969, Tracy and McGinn both joined the faculty at Chicago, where they would remain until their retirements.<sup>10</sup> Tracy's arrival at Chicago "was widely greeted as evidence of the optimistic new ecumenical and intellectual spirit infusing postconciliar Catholicism."<sup>11</sup> As part of this spirit, Tracy became involved with the international journal *Concilium* in the early 1970's, later serving as an editor and regular contributor.<sup>12</sup>

Tracy authored six books and over two hundred articles and reviews during his tenure at the University of Chicago. His first constructive work of theology, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology*, was published in 1975. Intended to be the first book in a trilogy, it attempted to develop a fundamental theology in light of the situation of increased pluralism in theology. *BRO* was greeted with acclaim from the scholarly theological community, but the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, who were concerned about the process theology-inspired notion of God in the book, requested some "clarifications."<sup>13</sup> Tracy responded to the CDF's request, but he never heard back. Following the publication of this text, Tracy was elected president of the Catholic

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<sup>10</sup> McGinn retired in 2003 and Tracy in 2006

<sup>11</sup> Gibson, "God-obsessed," 12

<sup>12</sup> *Concilium* is a journal of Catholic theology that was founded after the Second Vatican Council by Johann-Baptist Metz, Anton van den Boogaard, Paul Brand, Yves Congar, Hans Kung, Karl Rahner, and Edward Schillebeeckx. Its mission is to "reflect on Christian tradition (supported by solid scholarship) in the light of cultural and religious experiences and socio-political developments" ("Our Mission," accessed May 23, 2013, <http://www.concilium.in/aboutus.htm>). It was later joined by the rival journal *Communio*, founded in 1972 by Hans Urs von Balthasar, Louis Bouyer, Walter Kasper, Henri de Lubac, Marc Ouellet, and Joseph Ratzinger. Typically, *Concilium* is considered the more "progressive" journal and *Communio* the more "traditional" one.

In 1994, Orbis published a volume collecting many of Tracy's contributions to *Concilium* under the title *On Naming the Present: Reflections on God, Hermeneutics, and Church* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1994).

<sup>13</sup> Typically, the CDF begins investigations into a theologian's work when there is some concern about the orthodoxy of some text or texts. The theologian in question is usually asked to clarify certain points to clear up any "ambiguities." This process may continue until there is a resolution, but if none is reached the theologian may receive a "notification" that the book is problematic. In some cases, such as Roger Haight, the consequences may extend to the suspension of one's teaching faculties.

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Theological Society of America (1976-1977), and later received that organization's John Courtney Murray Award in 1980.

Tracy followed *Blessed Rage for Order* with the 1981 publication of *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*. This text, which more clearly outlined Tracy's claim for the three theological sub-disciplines of fundamental, systematic, and practical theologies, was intended as the second entry in his trilogy.<sup>14</sup> Widely regarded as his most influential work, in this text he developed several of the concepts with which he would become most closely associated: the method of mutually critical correlation, the public role of theology, theology as a hermeneutic discipline, the classic, and the analogical and dialectical imaginations.

The success of *The Analogical Imagination* was a watershed moment in Tracy's career. In 1982, he was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, which at the time was a rare honor for a theologian. He was the subject of a *New York Times Magazine* cover story in late 1986.<sup>15</sup> The University of Chicago named him a Distinguished Service Professor in 1985, and two years later he was appointed the inaugural Andrew Thomas Greeley and Grace McNichols Greeley Chair in Catholic

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<sup>14</sup> Tracy never completed the proposed third volume on practical theology. He did offer a brief outline of what this work would have looked like in his article "The Foundations of Practical Theology," in *Practical Theology*, ed. Don Browning (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983), 61-82. He followed this article with an examination of practical theology in global context in "Practical Theology in the Situation of Global Pluralism," in *Formation and Reflection: The Promise of Practical Theology*, ed. Lewis S. Mudge and James N. Poling (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 139-154. He later reconsidered his view of practical theology, calling for more emphasis on a "correlational practical theology" in David Tracy, "A Correlational Model of Practical Theology Revisited," in *Religion, Diversity, and Conflict*, ed. Edward Foley, 49-61 (Berlin: Lit, 2011).

<sup>15</sup> Eugene Kennedy. "A Dissenting Voice: Catholic Theologian David Tracy." *New York Times Magazine* 136 (Nov. 9, 1986): 20-28.

## Introduction

Studies.<sup>16</sup> Tracy's prominence has been recognized by the number of honorary degrees he has received, beginning with The University of the South (Sewanee, TN) in 1982 and continuing with his most recent award from Loyola University Chicago in 2011.<sup>17</sup>

During the 1980's, Tracy's theological focus turned increasingly to the idea of conversation as a model for hermeneutics. His 1987 book *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope*, while highlighting the role of the interruptions of pluralism and ambiguity in traditions, affirmed that theology must always be open to the risks of genuine conversation. Tracy's 1988 Dondeyne Lectures, published in 1990 as *Dialogue with the Other: The Inter-Religious Dialogue*, focused on interreligious dialogue between Catholicism and Buddhism, thus signaling his interests beyond strictly Catholic and Christian debates.

Tracy's place among the most influential religious thinkers of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century was settled when he was invited to give the prestigious Gifford Lectures at the University of Edinburgh in 1999-2000.<sup>18</sup> His lectures focused on in how the Christian tradition has tried to name God throughout its history. Tracy originally planned to publish these

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<sup>16</sup> The chair was endowed in 1984 by sociologist Fr. Andrew Greeley in honor of his parents. The endowment for this chair was made possible by Greeley's successful side career as a novelist. Following Tracy's retirement from the Divinity School in 2006, Jean-Luc Marion was appointed to the Greeley Chair in 2010.

<sup>17</sup> Over the next thirty years, numerous institutions followed suit, including Fairfield University (Fairfield, CT), Catholic Theological Union (Chicago, IL), Georgetown University (Washington, D.C.), Williams College (Williamstown, MA), and Wabash College (Crawfordsville, IN).

<sup>18</sup> The Gifford Lectures on natural religion are widely considered one of the highest honors in theology and philosophy. The lectures are given over the course of an academic year at one of four Scottish universities: University of St. Andrews, University of Glasgow, University of Aberdeen, or University of Edinburgh. The lectures are often revised and published, and many of these publications have become major texts in the field (e.g., William James' *Varieties of Religious Experience*, Alfred North Whitehead's *Process and Reality*, Reinhold Niebuhr's *Nature and Destiny of Man*, and Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age*).



lectures in 2003 under the title *This Side of God* as the first part of a new trilogy.<sup>19</sup> While the planned trilogy seems to have been abandoned, he has continued to rework these lectures in the years since his retirement in 2006. Although the publication date has been constantly deferred, scholarly interest in this long-awaited “God Book” has not abated.

## Methodology of the Dissertation

Given this biographical background, it is now important to outline the genealogical method employed in this dissertation in order to analyze Tracy’s theological anthropology.<sup>20</sup> Providing a thorough examination of his thought requires accounting for the broad sweep of his theological career. As with nearly all self-reflective, intelligent, reasonable, and responsible theologians, many of Tracy’s beliefs, claims, and approaches have evolved over the course of his career. Any responsible discussion of Tracy’s theological anthropology must therefore consider these developments and their causes.

There are three aspects to the methodology used in this dissertation. First, the scope will encompass the sweep of Tracy’s career from 1968 to 2011. Beginning with his first publications in the late 1960’s up to and concluding with his most recent essays, in this chapter I will cover each period of Tracy’s thought as represented by the major publications as it relates to the topic under consideration. Although Tracy’s current

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<sup>19</sup> David Tracy, “Form and Fragment: The Recovery of the Hidden and Incomprehensible God,” in *The Concept of God in Global Dialogue*, ed. Werner Jeanrond and Aasulv Lande (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 98

<sup>20</sup> “Genealogical” in this sense refers to the concept of an intellectual genealogy, which considers the early influences on a particular thinker, the development of that person’s thought, and the various factors that lead to change and development. It considers both the continuities and discontinuities in one’s thought. This is a different understanding of “genealogical” from that of Michel Foucault, who sought to oppose the search for origins and the problematic cobbling together of straightforward historical narratives. In this sense, some might prefer the term “genetic” to “genealogical” to describe the method pursued in this text.

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project, writing a volume “on naming God,” is expected to be the culmination of his theological work, this dissertation will confine itself to charting the development of Tracy’s anthropology as a central aspect of his overall theological project.<sup>21</sup>

Second, my approach to understanding Tracy’s anthropology will be genealogical. Based on the hermeneutical presupposition that Tracy seems to consider the later developments in his thought as conveying a more relatively adequate understanding, key concepts and themes in Tracy’s work will be outlined and examined chronologically by noting important terminological changes and by suggesting the reasons for these changes while showing the impact of these conceptual developments on each other. For example, his more widely known articulations are often superseded by later ones,<sup>22</sup> thus any relevant understanding of Tracy’s anthropology must take account of both the enduring themes and concepts in his work and their most up-to-date articulations.

Finally, this approach will also consider Tracy’s conversation partners who have influenced his positions. Those most often cited by Tracy are the theologians and philosophers whose tenure at the University of Chicago overlapped with Tracy’s own.<sup>23</sup> Since his work involves a complex appropriation of the work of other figures, it is important to investigate these sources. Important shifts in his thought often correlate with changes in conversation partners. Tracy insists that theology is essentially an “ongoing

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<sup>21</sup> Because I expect to defend this dissertation prior to the publication of the “God Book,” the scope of this project will be restricted to Tracy’s publications and presentations through 2011.

<sup>22</sup> E.g., in articulating the poles of critical correlation, his shift from “common human experience” to “the contemporary situation.”

<sup>23</sup> E.g., Schubert Ogden (1969-1972), Langdon Gilkey (1963-1989), Paul Ricoeur (1970-1991), and Jean-Luc Marion (1994-2006).

conversation,” so it is inevitable that doing justice to his theological anthropology demands an account of those persons with whom he has been in conversation.

### **Previous Assessments of Tracy’s Theological Anthropology**

The need for a thorough assessment of Tracy’s anthropology stems partly from the limitations of previous attempts to do so. To date, only two scholars have engaged Tracy’s anthropology, and each has done so only to a limited extent. The first was a dissertation from Harvard University by S. Alan Ray.<sup>24</sup> Published in 1987 in the series *Harvard Dissertations in Religion*, Ray devotes three of his eight chapters to developing Tracy’s anthropology in light of a Foucauldian interpretation of the human sciences. The second is a short section in Dwight Hopkins’ *Being Human*, in which he describes Tracy’s anthropology as paradigmatic of the “liberal progressive” model of theological anthropology.<sup>25</sup> While his section on Tracy is brief,<sup>26</sup> it offers a concise and helpful consideration of the role played by context in Tracy’s work. Through a brief analysis of these two texts, I intend to show that a new and more thorough reading of Tracy’s theological career can respond to the limitations represented in these two critiques.

#### *S. Alan Ray*

In his dissertation, S. Alan Ray places Tracy’s work in conversation with that of Gordon Kaufman and Michel Foucault. Ray claims that a central problematic for

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<sup>24</sup> S. Alan Ray, *The Modern Soul: Michel Foucault and the Theological Discourse of Gordon Kaufman and David Tracy* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987). See especially chapters 4-6.

<sup>25</sup> Dwight Hopkins, *Being Human: Race, Culture, and Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005)

<sup>26</sup> Hopkins, *Being Human*, 16-23

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hermeneutical theologians is the growing sense that the “referents of theological discourse” are not actually real; rather, they are “the mirages of *ressentiment*, economic oppression, or frustrated desire.”<sup>27</sup> By “referent” he means, at a minimum, the reality of God, but he suggests that this term should include “the human...and salvation history” as well.<sup>28</sup> This problem is brought to bear primarily by political and liberation theologians; for example, he cites Dorothee Soelle’s statement that “the verification principle of every theological statement is the praxis that it enables for the future.”<sup>29</sup> In Ray’s interpretation, the work performed by hermeneutical theologians does not satisfactorily live up to this test, thus raising the question of the reality of theological referents.

In the case of Tracy, these anthropological assumptions are located primarily in Tracy’s understanding of authenticity and language. Ray describes Tracy’s view of the human person as “a self-transcending entity whose language and experiences provide...access points to depth knowledge of reality.” For this entity, language serves as “an instrument at the disposal of a self-transcending subject.”<sup>30</sup> Ray defines the “authentic self” in Tracy’s anthropology as the person referred to whenever Tracy invokes the transcendental precepts of Lonergan: “any intelligent, reasonable, responsible human being.”<sup>31</sup> This person is connected to Tracy’s understanding of the three publics, making the individual person “the locus of intelligibility” among the variety of public

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<sup>27</sup> Ray, *The Modern Soul*, 8

<sup>28</sup> Ray, *The Modern Soul*, 5

<sup>29</sup> Dorothee Soelle, *Political Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), 77; cited on Ray, *The Modern Soul*, 7

<sup>30</sup> Ray, *The Modern Soul*, 8

<sup>31</sup> Ray, *The Modern Soul*, 93

discourses.<sup>32</sup> Thus according to Ray, the “authentic self” and “genuinely public discourse” are “mutually referring concepts” that serve as “purely regulative idea[s]” in Tracy without reference to concrete historical realities. They are, as Tracy would call them, “ideal” situations that serve as a norm by which to judge reality.

According to Ray, central to Tracy’s “authentic self” interpretation is the claim that the authentic self underlies “the subject’s phenomenal manifestations.”<sup>33</sup> The self is “engaged in a process of intellectual self-liberation” focused on the significance of one’s own existence.<sup>34</sup> This process proceeds through the interpretation of one’s experiences of the two poles of Tracy’s correlational method, common human experience and the Christian fact.<sup>35</sup> Through reflection on the religious dimension of human experience that is expressed in both of these poles, the self attempts to transcend oneself.<sup>36</sup>

There is much to commend in Ray’s work. In particular, his interest in pursuing the anthropological assumptions of the modern human sciences is framed in terms of Foucault’s archaeological and genealogical method.<sup>37</sup> By offering an interpretation of Tracy’s anthropology that is informed by Foucault’s “archaeology of man,” Ray is able to challenge Tracy on the metaphysical assumptions underlying his anthropology.

Nonetheless, there are several key areas where Ray’s assessment of Tracy falls short. First, Ray’s analysis was performed in the early 1980’s, meaning that its

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<sup>32</sup> Ray, *The Modern Soul*, 93

<sup>33</sup> Ray, *The Modern Soul*, 115

<sup>34</sup> Ray, *The Modern Soul*, 123

<sup>35</sup> Ray, *The Modern Soul*, 102-115

<sup>36</sup> Ray, *The Modern Soul*, 199

<sup>37</sup> Ray distinguishes between these two methods in Foucault, with the archaeological method preceding the genealogical. However, Ray’s interest in philosophical anthropology seems to emphasize the “archaeology of man” offered by Foucault, particularly in Foucault’s *Order of Things*. See Ray chapters two and three for more on this.

limitations in scope suggest that a new look at Tracy's work may be justified. For example, Ray's dissertation was published prior to Tracy's *Plurality and Ambiguity*, where Tracy quite clearly rejects the instrumentalist view of language that Ray associates with him. Additionally, while Ray cites *The Analogical Imagination* frequently, he pays little attention to the important distinctions in method between *BRO* and *AI*. While Ray understandably focuses on the pole of common human experience given its obvious anthropological implications, he fails to acknowledge the ways in which Tracy's methodological shift to the pole of the contemporary situation complicates Tracy's use of "limits" in his anthropology.<sup>38</sup>

Secondly, Ray interprets Tracy's view of the human person as overwhelmingly cognitive in nature. Ray locates the category of authenticity, which is important but somewhat underdeveloped in Tracy, in human intelligibility. Ray's focus on the cognitive efforts of the human person to know more, to transcend limitations in knowledge, and to transcend oneself through self-reflection provides a very narrow account of the "authentic self." For Tracy, the self is not only finite cognitively but temporally/historically and culturally. He also regards the self as finite with respect to one's relationship to the divine.

Finally, the anthropological interpretation Ray offers is mainly a *philosophical* one. His fifth chapter, "Revisionist Fundamental Theology and Philosophical Anthropology," highlights this fact. While Ray notes Tracy's concern about distortions

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<sup>38</sup> See Chapter Two, page 10

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in communication and the value of critical theory for responding to them,<sup>39</sup> he does not deal with the role of sin in Tracy's understanding of distortion. Ray believes that the authentic self is seeking to effect its own self-transcendence without recognizing the role of sin in the problematic of self-transcendence nor the role of grace in making it possible. Thus, while Ray offers some account of the self in Tracy's thought, his interpretation fails to take any serious account of Tracy's *theological* anthropology.

## Dwight Hopkins

In his *Being Human: Race, Culture, and Religion*, Dwight Hopkins seeks to develop a theological anthropology from within an African-American context that takes the roles of race and culture seriously. In order to establish the context of his work, his opening chapter offers a series of contemporary models of theological anthropology including paradigmatic figures representative of each model. Tracy serves to illustrate the "progressive liberal" model, which Hopkins identifies as seeking to reformulate the "liberal individual from the European Enlightenment" who is characterized as a "critically thinking human subject."<sup>40</sup> Hopkins argues that Tracy's theological anthropology centers on "conversation, interpretation, and understanding," and that these three areas constitute the primary means through which human persons engage the world.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, according to Hopkins, Tracy sees whatever possibilities exist for human liberation as being effected through these cognitive processes.

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<sup>39</sup> Ray, *The Modern Soul*, 91, 138-141

<sup>40</sup> Hopkins, *Being Human*, 16

<sup>41</sup> Hopkins, *Being Human*, 17

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Hopkins rightly notes that Tracy argues for the turn to “the other” rather than to “the self” as one of the central markers of anthropology in postmodernity. This turn means that the promoters of European Enlightenment views of rationality and discourse now seek to include the marginalized and oppressed others within the conversation. While Tracy argues for pluralism as a *de facto* aspect of the contemporary situation in which these conversations take place, Hopkins judges this approach as privileging European understandings of rationality. Indeed, Hopkins’ central critique of Tracy is that the focus on conversation and interpretation fails to consider that “the Other (of and to whom the progressive liberal has begun to speak) might desire to reconfigure the very scaffolding of the discourse.”<sup>42</sup> Because the “other” has been invited to participate in a conversation where the rules, the topics, and the languages are largely predetermined, any real attempt to engage the other will require more radical reconfigurations. As a result, the other is invited to become an *ersatz* participant in a discourse that has historically oppressed others.<sup>43</sup> Such an approach contrasts sharply with the orientation that Hopkins seeks for his own theological anthropology: “one becomes a human being by gearing all ultimate issues toward compassion for and empowerment of people in structural poverty, working-class folk, and the marginalized.”<sup>44</sup>

Hopkins is right to challenge Tracy on the role of context in his theological anthropology. As will be argued in Chapter Six, Tracy’s employment of context in his description of what it means to be human tends to have a highly conceptual cast. He

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<sup>42</sup> Hopkins, *Being Human*, 20

<sup>43</sup> Hopkins, *Being Human*, 22

<sup>44</sup> Hopkins, *Being Human*, 7



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tends not to deal satisfactorily with the concrete particularities that define specific contexts, focusing instead on how the concept of context impacts and relates to other theological concepts. Tracy's commitment to a liberal progressive understanding of liberation ultimately does tend to overlook the particularities of the concrete situations of praxis that call for liberation. Moreover, it tends to be unsatisfactory in recognizing of the role of the other in one's own liberation.

Nevertheless, I take issue with how Hopkins defines the scope of Tracy's anthropology. Hopkins argues that "conversation, interpretation, and understanding" are the central aspects of Tracy's view of the human. While it is true that these are important and constitutive, they are not exhaustive. Like Ray, Hopkins focuses primarily on the cognitive dimensions of Tracy's anthropology without taking account of the role of human willing, decision-making, or loving. In his interpretation of Tracy, Hopkins offers a relatively truncated self. As will become clear, although Tracy's approach to anthropology often uses conceptually abstract descriptions, it is an over-generalization to claim that he understands the human solely in cognitive terms.

## **Anthropological Constants**

This dissertation's analysis of Tracy's theological anthropology will rely on the heuristic of "anthropological constants." The term "anthropological constant" is drawn from the work of Belgian Dominican theologian Edward Schillebeeckx. Responsible for many significant contributions to the fields of Christology and ecclesiology,

Schillebeeckx was also one of the founders of the international theological journal *Concilium*. It was through this journal that Tracy came to know Schillebeeckx.

In the second volume of his theological trilogy, *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord*,<sup>45</sup> Schillebeeckx describes “anthropological constants” as the “constitutive conditions...which must always be presupposed in any human action.”<sup>46</sup> He views these constants as indicative of “*permanent* human impulses and orientations, values and spheres of value,” yet these constants must always be incarnated in particular places and times. They do not themselves provide norms, but are rather the basis from which norms are developed within a given context. Schillebeeckx identifies seven of these constants:

1. Relationship to human corporeality, nature, and the ecological environment
2. Being a Man Involves Fellow Men
3. The Connection with Social and Institutional Structures
4. The Conditioning of People and Culture by Time and Space
5. Mutual Relationship of Theory and Practice
6. The Religious and “Para-Religious” Consciousness of Man
7. Irreducible Synthesis of These Six Dimensions<sup>47</sup>

Schillebeeckx’s goal here is not to create an essential definition of the human person. He sees such attempts as leading to a “totalitarian conception” of the human person, which will inevitably lead to “totalitarian action” that seeks to manipulate human beings and to deny the humanity of some persons.<sup>48</sup> His argument in favor of using “constants” is that this provides an orientation to thinking about the human that provides “a kind of system of coordinates” rather than a “general substratum.” His selection of these seven constants

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<sup>45</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Seabury Press, 1980).

<sup>46</sup> Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 733

<sup>47</sup> Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 731-743. For a more inclusive translation of these seven constants, see Susan Ross, *Anthropology: Seeking Light and Beauty*, (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), 76-78.

<sup>48</sup> Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 731

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is rooted in their focus on “*personal identity within social culture*.” His hope is that, through looking at these constants in the face of radical human suffering, he will be able to provide context-specific “norms for a better assessment of human worth and thus for human *salvation*.”<sup>49</sup>

## Overview of the Dissertation

The idea of constants provides a useful framework through which to investigate Tracy’s anthropology. By outlining “permanent human impulses and orientations,” they suggest features that are common to all human beings without proposing a static or unchanging view of human nature. In this dissertation, I propose four such constants that can be used to explain the key concepts of Tracy’s theology and to examine their development over time: finitude, relationality, sin, and grace. Tracy did not define these constants; however, the major themes that I have connected to these constants (e.g., the “limit-to” and finitude, conversation and relationality) are recurring concerns of his thought.

In this dissertation, I argue for an interpretation of Tracy’s theology that looks at anthropology through the hermeneutical lens of his method. Chapter One provides an overview of the field of theological anthropology and a genealogical analysis of the development of Tracy’s theological method. This method, and more specifically its distinction between fundamental and systematic theologies, provides a framework for

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<sup>49</sup> Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 734. It is important to note that Schillebeeckx’s reference to “seven *of these* anthropological constants” implies that these seven constants are not exhaustive of what one might consider in theological anthropology (emphasis mine).

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understanding the four focal themes or “constants” of Tracy’s anthropology: finitude, relationality, sin, and grace. These four constants are not intended as an essential blueprint to describe the human person but rather as four “signposts” around which to organize and explicate central themes, ideas, and assertions of Tracy’s thought.

Chapter Two will investigate the constant of finitude, which refers to the human experience of being limited. Human persons encounter limits in a variety of ways, including birth, embodiment, the relative presence or absence of intellectual capabilities, and death. For Tracy, the idea of the limit is formulated primarily in what he calls the “limit-to” and the “limit-of.” Limit-to is a way of talking about a complex of questions, experiences, and situations that bring persons into contact with their limits. These encounters take a variety of forms, including guilt, death, love, and joy. The “limit-to” in turn draws our attention toward the “limit-of,” which Tracy sees as the “ground” or “horizon” of all existence. His understanding of limit develops, however, as Tracy more fully engages questions pertaining to context, ambiguity, and otherness.

Chapter Three considers the constant of relationality. Finitude and relationality are really intertwined concepts, since the recognition of one’s limits suggests the possibility of something that is beyond those limits. Using the metaphor of horizon, this chapter looks at Tracy’s view of the human person as always-already embedded in a complex series of relationships to other persons, to one’s socio-historical context, and to the divine. In particular, the topics of public theology, pluralism, tradition, and conversation in his thought indicate the importance of seeing the human person as a relational being. As I will show, Tracy contrasts his understanding of the relational

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human person with what he calls the autonomous ego of modernity, which views itself as a fully independent and cohesive self. For Tracy, pluralism and ambiguity exist not only in history, language, and social context, but even within oneself. Finally, this chapter looks at the various ways Tracy describes the human person as always-already in relationship with the divine.

Chapter Four examines the idea of sin in Tracy's theology. He advocates for a measured consideration of the relationship between sin and finitude, seeing the two as logically (if not always experientially) distinct. While sin is in a sense a limitation on the human person in terms of one's ability to know or to choose the good fully, it manifests and is exacerbated by one's rejection of finitude. Furthermore, sin infects one's relationships, allowing sin to corrupt the second anthropological constant of relationality. Tracy organizes his view of sin into three distinct but interrelated dimensions: actual personal sin, habitual sin, and inherited sin. The latter dimension, which Tracy frequently describes as "unconscious systemic distortion," represents Tracy's retrieval of the Christian doctrine of original sin.

Chapter Five examines the role of grace in Tracy's thought. It is in grace that Tracy's anthropology largely culminates as he connects the dialectic of sin and grace with the more fundamental polarity of nature and grace. The constants of finitude and relationality serve as keys to Tracy's understanding of nature in the context of his anthropology. These realities are already a part of the gracious gift of God to humanity, but the damage caused by sin can also be healed by God's grace. This encounter with grace is disclosed for Tracy in the divine self-manifestation of Christ, is mediated through

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the church and the tradition, and is encountered in experiences of manifestation, proclamation, and historical action. The encounter is ultimately seen as transformative and liberative, as human persons experience grace as both gift and command.

Chapter Six will provide a preliminary assessment of Tracy's theological anthropology. Because his anthropology is largely implicit, it has not proven particularly influential on other theologians. However, his creative approach to interweaving theological anthropology with his theological method could serve as a useful model for theologians seeking to collaborate with other disciplines. In this respect, I will briefly look at some developments in environmental and disability theologies and suggest these could be fruitful conversation partners for further development in Tracy's anthropology. Despite this strength, this chapter will suggest that Tracy's anthropology deserves more sustained treatment of human corporeality and the doctrine of the *imago Dei*. Finally, while noting that Tracy has strongly emphasized the role of social, historical, and linguistic context in shaping human existence, I will address the criticisms that his abstract and conceptual approach to context tends to underplay the importance of particular contexts, including his own.

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND THEOLOGICAL METHOD**

David Tracy's status as one of the most influential American Catholic theologians of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries is well-established. He has made major contributions to the fields of theological method, hermeneutics, public theology, and interreligious dialogue. While his efforts in these areas are his best known, my intent in this dissertation is to illuminate the theological anthropology that Tracy assumes in the course of these investigations. Despite occasional references to the field of theological anthropology, his understanding of what it means to be human is often implicit or undeveloped. Through an investigation and exposition of significant themes in Tracy's thought, I intend to explicitate his theological anthropology and to assess and to critique it.

In order to do so, however, I must begin by laying out what I mean by theological anthropology. Given his historical and social context, Tracy is profoundly influenced by the so-called "turn to the subject" that began during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the significant events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and what today is commonly called "postmodernity." More proximately, he is influenced by key figures and conversation partners, such as Bernard Lonergan, Karl Rahner, and Paul Ricoeur. Explaining Tracy's anthropology also requires attention to his theological method. Method occupies a

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central position in Tracy's thought. Method often provides the framework for understanding key Christian teachings and their interrelationships in the work of a theologian. In attending to the development of Tracy's theological method and the way in which it structures his thought, I will argue that it provides the key for understanding his anthropology. Only after outlining the broader context of theological anthropology and the particulars of Tracy's theological method can I delve into the main points that underlie his theological anthropology.

This chapter has three goals. First, I will provide a brief survey of the field of theological anthropology, focusing both on the development of the Christian anthropological doctrines of the *imago Dei*, creation, sin, and grace and the implications of the turn to the subject in the Enlightenment. My aim here is to provide a context for contemporary discussions in theological anthropology and how Tracy is situated in them. Second, I will examine Tracy's theological method, looking at how it has developed and how it demarcates the various fields of theology. Finally, I will conclude with a preliminary explanation for how Tracy's theological method is a key to his theological anthropology.

### **The State of Theological Anthropology**

"Theological anthropology" as a foundational area in systematic theology basically emerged during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>1</sup> According to theologian Janet K.

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<sup>1</sup> Regarding the difference between "theological anthropology" and "Christian anthropology," most theologians tend to prefer one term or the other, even though in many cases they are referring to the same thing (e.g., Michael Scanlon describes "Christian anthropology" as "the articulation of the Christian



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Ruffing, “Theological anthropology is an articulation of a vision of human existence within the context of Christian revelation.”<sup>2</sup> This articulation takes into account the relationship human beings share with their Creator, the reality of sin and human fallenness, and the redemption of humans from sin through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.<sup>3</sup> Although revelation and tradition are the primary sources for Christian theological anthropology, it is also in conversation with many other fields, including sociology, psychology, anthropology, and biology.<sup>4</sup> In contrast to these fields, which tend towards empirical approaches that describe “the human condition as it is,”

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understanding of human existence” (Michael Scanlon, “Anthropology, Christian,” in *New Dictionary of Theology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 27) while Janet K. Ruffing describes “theological anthropology” as “an articulation of a vision of human existence within the context of Christian revelation” (Janet K. Ruffing, “Anthropology, Theological,” in *New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993), 47). For some theologians, theological anthropology is a more comprehensive term referring to the faith claims that various religious traditions make about the human while Christian anthropology is a specific example of that from within the Christian tradition (cf. Mary Aquin O’Neill, “The Mystery of Being Human Together,” in *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), 140). For others, Christian anthropology refers to traditional teachings on the *imago Dei*, creation, sin, and grace, while theological anthropology is a broader term that includes theoretical reflection from other fields and perspectives (cf. Mary Ann Hinsdale, “Heeding the Voices: An Historical Overview,” in *In the Embrace of God: Feminist Approaches to Theological Anthropology*, ed. Ann O’Hara Graff (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 22). Pannenberg describes his work as “fundamental-theological anthropology” because it begins with “the phenomena of human existence as investigated by human biology, psychology, cultural anthropology, or sociology and examines the findings of these disciplines with an eye to implications that may be relevant to religion and theology” (Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), 21). In this dissertation I will use the term “theological anthropology,” primarily because it is the term David Tracy uses to describe the field.

<sup>2</sup> Ruffing, “Anthropology, Theological,” 47; Hinsdale, “Heeding the Voices,” 22

<sup>3</sup> David Kelsey, “Human Being,” in *Christian Theology: An Introduction to Its Traditions and Tasks*, eds. Peter Hodgson and Robert King (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 167; Ruffing, “Anthropology, Theological,” 47

<sup>4</sup> Ruffing, “Anthropology, Theological,” 47-8; Michael Scanlon, “Anthropology, Christian,” in *The Modern Catholic Encyclopedia*, eds. Michael Glazier and Monika Hellwig (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004), 33; John MacQuarrie, *In Search of Humanity: A Theological and Philosophical Approach* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 3-6; Michael J. Himes, “The Human Person in Contemporary Theology: From Human Nature to Authentic Subjectivity,” in *Introduction to Christian Ethics: A Reader*, edited by Ronald P. Hamel and Kenneth R. Himes, OFM, 49-62 (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 57; Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, 17-23.

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theological (and philosophical) anthropologies endeavor to “criticize the actual human condition” and to focus on “the realization of human nature as an emerging reality.”<sup>5</sup>

The existence of a distinct field of theological anthropology within systematic theology is a recent development.<sup>6</sup> While Christianity has historically made claims relating to the human person, these claims have usually been made in the context of doctrines. The most important of these are the doctrine of creation in *imago Dei*, human finitude and dependence on God, sin, and grace. A brief exposition of these loci will be helpful to understanding both the shift that took place in the turn to the subject and contemporary approaches to theological anthropology.

The doctrine of the *imago Dei* refers to the Christian understanding of the creation of human beings. In the first creation story in Genesis (Gen. 1:1-2:3), God creates humankind in God’s own “image” and “likeness.”<sup>7</sup> Human beings are distinguished from the rest of creation as having a “unique capacity for communion with God.”<sup>8</sup> Creation in God’s image and likeness grounds human receptivity to divine action and the human capacity to respond to divine action.<sup>9</sup> The *imago Dei* has typically been connected to the spiritual, rather than bodily, character of the human person, especially in some particular faculty of the soul.

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<sup>5</sup> MacQuarrie, *In Search of Humanity*, 3

<sup>6</sup> Ruffing dates this development to coincide roughly with the Second Vatican Council and the expansion of interdisciplinary reflection on human existence (Ruffing, “Anthropology, Theological,” 47), while Kelsey more broadly states that theological anthropology begins to develop “only in the modern period.” (Kelsey, “Human Being,” 167); cf. Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, 11

<sup>7</sup> “Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness....So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.’” Gen. 1:26, 27

<sup>8</sup> Kelsey, “Human Being,” 168

<sup>9</sup> Ruffing, “Anthropology, Theological,” 47

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Nevertheless, Christian theology has understood the human person as being both spiritual and corporeal as seen in the second creation account in Genesis (Gen. 2:4-2:25). Here God creates the first human out of “the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.”<sup>10</sup> The formation of the human from “the dust of the ground” and “the breath of life” speaks to this dual aspect of the human person, grounding the claim that human beings are embodied spirits.<sup>11</sup> Having a material body was not in and of itself seen as negative, at least not initially, since all that God created was “good.” However, this distinction gradually led to a strict dualism of the two, predicated on a hierarchical ranking that denigrated or ignored the body in favor of the soul.<sup>12</sup> The cognitive or rational abilities of the person were seen to be the distinguishing characteristic of the human, thus asserting that these cognitive skills are the real locus of the *imago Dei*.<sup>13</sup>

As creatures, human beings are finite and limited. Finitude is certainly characteristic of the human body, which is bounded and takes up a determinate volume of space. However, it is also characteristic of the human spirit, which, although not tangible, is nonetheless limited in its capacities for knowledge, reason, and love. Finitude is characteristic of the whole person. Because humans are created by God, finitude need not be considered a negative dimension of the human person but a good. Finitude is

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<sup>10</sup> Gen. 2:7

<sup>11</sup> Kelsey, “Human Being,” 170

<sup>12</sup> Kelsey, “Human Being,” 171

<sup>13</sup> Kelly Kavic, “Anthropology,” in *Mapping Modern Theology: A Thematic and Historical Introduction*, eds. Kelly M. Kavic and Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 122

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grounded in the ongoing human relationship of dependence on God, without whom humanity would cease to exist.<sup>14</sup>

In the Christian understanding, the rejection of human finitude is the heart of human sinfulness. Beginning with St. Augustine and codified by the Council of Carthage in 418, the doctrine of original sin claimed that the *imago Dei* in the human person has been so damaged that no one is capable of not sinning. This claim was developed through Christian interpretation of the Fall story in Genesis 3 in which the serpent tempts Eve and, in turn, Adam, to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, which had been forbidden them by God. For their actions, the first couple were cursed and cast out of the garden. According to Augustine, the stain of this original act of disobedience has been passed down biologically through sexual generation or propagation and remains a fact of existence for all people today.<sup>15</sup>

The fall of humans into sin is not, however, the end of the story. Rather, “the central theme of christian anthropology is the reality of grace.” Grace is the love of God that reconciles humanity to God through Jesus Christ. Grace is gratuitous. It is a free gift, given independent of human activity. Grace is also healing since through grace the sinner is forgiven past sins and empowered to live a more holy life. Finally, grace is elevating in the sense that it effects not the elimination or overturning of nature but rather “the perfection and completion of creation.” Michael Scanlon thus describes creation and redemption as intertwined realities, stating that “creation is for redemption; redemption is the fulfillment of creation.” While grace does heal human beings of their sins, grace is

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<sup>14</sup> Scanlon, “Anthropology, Christian” [1991], 29; Kelsey, “Human Being,” 169

<sup>15</sup> Kelsey, “Human Being,” 177; Scanlon, “Anthropology, Christian” [1991], 30

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not only or necessarily even primarily a response to sin. It is fundamentally the love of God expressed through the gifts of creating, sustaining, and redeeming.<sup>16</sup>

Underlying the traditional understanding of the doctrines of *imago Dei*, sin, and grace was an emphasis on a more or less static human nature or substance. Thus, descriptions of the human tended to focus on categories like intellect, knowledge, and nature as broad descriptors of humanity. Scanlon explains that this focus was “cosmocentric,” meaning that any reference to the human person was always within the context of the human’s place within a larger metaphysical framework of the universe. While human nature might be different from the nature of rocks, flowers, and bears, the category of “nature” was seen as an effective to describe the order of reality.<sup>17</sup>

### *The Anthropological Turn*

One of the distinguishing features of the modern era is what is often called the “turn to the subject” or the “anthropological turn.” Beginning in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, this turn represents a shift away from the classical focus on human nature and toward an emphasis on human subjectivity. Subjectivity refers to the human person as “autonomous, historical, and self-constituting.” The key categories for understanding the human thus became freedom, will, and reason. In terms of freedom and will, human persons are seen as autonomous agents, capable of making their own decisions regarding right and wrong. With respect to reason, it becomes the ground both for making moral

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<sup>16</sup> Scanlon, “Anthropology, Christian” [1991], 28-30; Scanlon, “Anthropology, Christian” [2004], 33

<sup>17</sup> Scanlon, “Anthropology, Christian” [1991], 39; Ruffing, “Anthropology, Theological,” 48; Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, 11-12

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determinations and for making claims about the nature of reality. Reason thus displaced “revealed truth” as the highest authority and became the standard by which claims about revelation would be judged as adequate.<sup>18</sup>

The anthropological turn had its first significant development in the second meditation of Descartes, who posited a distinction between the *res extensa* and the *res cogitans*. The former refers to any physical substance or body that can be circumscribed such that no other body can occupy the same space. The latter refers to mental substance, which is the essence of Descartes’ *cogito*. The human person has both *res extensa* (a body) and *res cogitans* (a mind). In Descartes’ project of rigorously doubting all that he knows, he claimed to arrive at the certainty of his mind’s existence (the famed “*cogito ergo sum*”) but remains dubious of bodily existence. The import of Descartes’ dualistic anthropology for the turn to the subject is that it conceived of human beings as “solitary

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<sup>18</sup> Kelsey, “Human Being,” 167; Scanlon, “Anthropology, Christian” [1991], 36-39; Hinsdale, “Heeding the Voices,” 35 n. 1

Scanlon suggests that the roots of this turn might be found in the theology of Martin Luther. Reacting against the dominant Scholastic philosophy and theology of his time, Luther grounded his work in scripture. With respect to his anthropology, this meant that Luther “replaced the scholastic notion of human nature with the biblical notion of personhood.” Central to this move was Luther’s interpretation of the Augustinian claim that justification comes from the free gift of God’s grace. Luther took this to mean that human beings are saved by faith alone, and thus what it means to be human is to be a person “who has found through faith in Christ a new relationship with God, a relationship of trust, confidence, and acceptance” (Scanlon, “Anthropology, Christian” [1991], 35). Tied to Luther’s emphasis on faith was his claim that the works performed by the human person have no salvific merit themselves. This move by Luther does not however mean that his theology is anthropocentric. God alone is the source of grace, God alone saves, and it is through God’s action that the divine-human relationship is reconstituted as one of faith and trust. Nonetheless, the understanding of the human has shifted from a focus on human nature in scholastic terms to human personhood in retrieved scriptural terms. Cf. Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, 12-13. See Martin Luther, “The Freedom of a Christian,” in *Three Treatises*, trans. W.A. Lambert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), 280-89.

thinking things.” This conception would in turn become dominant in other enlightenment figures, including Locke and Hume.<sup>19</sup>

Kant’s first and second Critiques further shaped the Enlightenment view of the human person. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant claimed that the “objectivity” of what we experience in the world is profoundly shaped by the structures of consciousness of the sensing subject. Agreement among persons over what constitutes “objective” reality is actually “intersubjective” and dependent upon the same cognitive processes taking place in other persons. In Kant’s anthropology, the mind of the human subject profoundly shapes one’s perception of reality. This fact dovetails with Kant’s *Critique of Practical Reason* in which he claimed that the human person is a moral agent responsible for following an internalized moral law (the “categorical imperative”) rather than one who subjects oneself to external laws. Rigorous application of reason leads one to the conclusion that the only just law is that which is both completely internalized and completely generalizable. The human person is autonomous both in one’s reason and one’s will.<sup>20</sup>

According to David Kelsey, by the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century beliefs about human subjectivity had coalesced into the claim that “To be a person is to be a center or ‘subject’ of consciousness who is at once a knower of ‘objects,’ a knower of the moral law, and a possible enactor of moral duties. Both as knower and as doer, a subject is

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<sup>19</sup> Rene Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy: A Bilingual Edition*, ed. and trans. George Heffernan (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 98-117; Kapic, “Anthropology,” 124

<sup>20</sup> Kapic, “Anthropology,” 125

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autonomous, historical, and self-constituting.”<sup>21</sup> The shift from a focus on static human nature to autonomous subjectivity had a profound influence on twentieth century theologians and philosophers, especially those who shaped Tracy’s theological anthropology. While Tracy is notable for his diverse conversation partners, three key figures stand out in this area: Karl Rahner, Bernard Lonergan, and Paul Ricoeur.

### *Karl Rahner, SJ*

Karl Rahner (1904-1984), a German Jesuit priest and theologian, was one of the most influential Catholic theologians of the twentieth century. His theology takes the understanding of the human as its starting point and argues that it is impossible “to say something about God theologically without thereby automatically saying something about man and vice versa.” According to Rahner, the anthropological turn in Western philosophy and theology is predicated on the recognition that “the question of the object of such knowledge raises at the same time the question as to the nature of the knowing subject.” All theological claims make implicit assumptions about the human person who makes these claims. Rahner describes this anthropology as “transcendental,” meaning that it involves questioning the conditions of the possibility necessary for the subject to be a knowing and willing subject. He outlines five “determinations” that constitute the “true personhood” of human beings: transcendence, responsibility and freedom, orientation towards mystery, being in history and in the world, and human social nature.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Kelsey, “Human Being,” 178

<sup>22</sup> Rahner, “Theology and Anthropology,” in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 9, trans. Graham Harrison (New York: Seabury Press, 1973), 28-9; Rahner, “Philosophy and Philosophising in Theology,” in



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The core of Rahner's argument for human transcendence is the *Vorgriff*, the human pre-apprehension of infinite being or reality. Infinite reality is the ground of human existence, and it is through the gratuitous freedom of this ground whereby humans receive their existence. Although finite, human beings have an infinite horizon that expands the more and more they question. This questioning is itself grounded in a pre-apprehension of being, a pre-apprehension that is unthematic and ever-present but that is experienced in thematic and specific ways through particular instances of questioning and acting. Thus the human person experiences the self as "transcendent being, as spirit" through pushing beyond one's finitude and encountering the infinite ground of existence. Rahner characterizes this reaching as "openness" or receptivity to the infinite.<sup>23</sup>

Rahner connects this openness to transcendence to the second "determination," responsibility and freedom. Responsibility refers to the fact that the human subject experiences the self as "the subject who is given over to himself" both in terms of one's knowledge and one's action. Freedom refers to the "fundamental characteristic of a personal existent" (i.e., subject) who determines one's orientation towards the divine. Taken together, responsibility and freedom mean that human subjects are responsible for themselves, for their whole selves, and what they choose to do with their lives. In that sense, there is a distinction between one's transcendental freedom, which is this basic

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*Theological Investigations*, vol. 9, trans. Graham Harrison (New York: Seabury Press, 1973), 33; Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), 26

<sup>23</sup> Rahner, *Foundations*, 32-4; Anne Carr, "Starting with the Human," in *World of Grace: An Introduction to the Themes and Foundations of Karl Rahner's Theology*, ed. Leo J. O'Donovan (New York: Seabury Press, 1980), 22

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“power to decide about oneself and to actualize oneself,” and the concrete particular acts of freedom that incarnate one’s transcendental freedom.<sup>24</sup>

While human persons have the responsibility and freedom to decide about this orientation, the most basic orientation of the self is towards God. A human person is always in the presence of an “incomprehensible mystery” that both reveals and conceals itself. One’s experience of this relationship is rooted in the human person’s experience of transcendence, responsibility, and freedom. Since mystery lies beyond the self and recedes from one’s grasp, the self is responsible for determining the character of one’s orientation to mystery and of reflecting thematically on the relationship. Even though there is always some implicit awareness of the orientation to mystery, it is only through “explicitly religious activity and...philosophical reflection” that one has “thematic knowledge” of the divine.<sup>25</sup>

The fourth determination is that human beings live in history and in the world. That one’s earthly life is bounded by time and space is an essential dimension of one’s existence. Human subjects experience themselves in history and the world as these realities “mediate the subject to himself.” Put another way, history and the world constitute the context in which one finds oneself and co-determine the self. They are, in a certain sense, beyond one’s control. However, they do not eliminate one’s freedom but rather make up the situation in which one actualizes one’s freedom. One’s freedom is therefore “historically situated.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Rahner, *Foundations*, 31, 36-38; cf. Carr, “Starting with the Human,” 25

<sup>25</sup> Rahner, *Foundations*, 42, 53, 57

<sup>26</sup> Rahner, *Foundations*, 40-41; Carr, “Starting with the Human,” 27-28

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Finally, Rahner considers the social nature of the human person. He closely connects one's social nature with being in the world and in history and sees one's sociality as descriptive of how one exists in the world and history. The human person exists in relation to other persons and to creation more broadly. The human person also exists in a permanent relationship to God, the transcendent mystery towards which one is fundamentally oriented. Rahner uses the term "creatureliness" to describe the fundamental relationship between human beings and God. Creatureliness is an "ongoing and always actual process...taking place now just as much as at an earlier point of time in his existence." Because the human is in the world, in history, and social, one cannot treat these aspects of the self as contingent predications of the human. Rahner argues quite strongly that these are intrinsic to the mode of human existence.<sup>27</sup>

Through these five determinations, Rahner argues for an anthropology that sees the human person as created by and oriented to transcendental mystery. The human is both responsible and free, meaning that "ultimately he does not do *something*, but does *himself*."<sup>28</sup> One's freedom and one's knowledge of the divine are mediated through a person's historicity, worldliness, sociality, and corporeality. Rahner's theological anthropology provides an understanding of the human that privileges the human relationship with the divine and understands that relationship through the concrete determinations of one's historical existence. As I will illustrate, Rahner's view of the human person, one who is both finite and relational, remains a strong influence on the development of Tracy's theological anthropology.

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<sup>27</sup> Rahner, *Foundations*, 40, 77

<sup>28</sup> Rahner, *Foundations*, 94

Bernard Lonergan was Tracy's major advisor during his studies at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome during the 1960's. Lonergan's profound influence on the young Tracy can be seen in his dissertation, which investigated the development of Lonergan's thought from approximately 1940 to 1965.<sup>29</sup> While Lonergan made many substantive contributions to such topics as Christology, the Trinity, and Thomas Aquinas, he is perhaps best remembered today for his work on theological method. The connection Lonergan made between the structures of human consciousness and the role of method in theology has left an enduring mark on Tracy's theological anthropology.

Lonergan's theological anthropology relies upon an understanding of four levels of conscious intentionality. The first level is the *empirical*, in which one attends to the data that is presented to the conscious subject. This data comes from the external world through the senses, but it also comes from one's attending to one's own self. The second level is the *intellectual*, in which one interprets the received data, asks questions, and expresses one's basic understanding. Lonergan often described this level as asking the question "what is it" about the data one has received. The third level, the *rational*, moves from the "what is it" question to the "is it true" question by attempting to determine whether one's interpretation of the data is true, accurate, or probable. The rational level makes determinations among a variety of interpretations, using the best available evidence and one's own reason to seek what is true. Finally, there is the *responsible* level, in which one takes the results of one's rational inquiry and deliberates about

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<sup>29</sup> *ABL*. Lonergan himself comments briefly yet positively on this text in *MT* x.

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possible actions, makes a decision, and then acts upon them. While these four levels can be distinguished from one another, they are intimately related. They do not always progress chronologically, in that one might deliberate before fully comprehending the available data. However, at their best, each successive level sublates the previous ones.<sup>30</sup>

For Lonergan, these four levels of conscious intentionality are characteristic of all conscious human persons. They dynamically interact with one another as the subject engages the wider reality in which one is situated. Like Rahner, Lonergan uses the image of the horizon or *Vorgriff* to explain the openness of the human person towards reality. Lonergan characterizes the human capacity for self-transcendence as the unrestricted desire to know and to question. Pursuit of this desire to know expands one's horizon. Finally, he describes "being in love in an unrestricted fashion [as] the proper fulfillment of that capacity."<sup>31</sup> For Lonergan, what we ask questions about reveals what we care about, thus being in love drives the subject towards the ongoing expansion of one's horizon. As such, he worked his four levels of conscious intentionality into what he called the transcendental precepts: "be attentive, be intelligent, be reasonable, be responsible, be in love."<sup>32</sup> Through this wording, Lonergan encourages people to work towards self-transcendence precisely by adhering to these precepts and, in so doing, to become more authentically human.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> MT 9, 17-18, 120; Jeremy Wilkins, "Grace and Growth: Aquinas, Lonergan, and the Problematic of Habitual Grace," *Theological Studies* 72 no. 4 (Dec. 2011): 725

<sup>31</sup> MT 105-6

<sup>32</sup> MT 268. An earlier version omits "be in love" (MT 231), while the version cited by Tracy adds "develop and, if necessary, change" (BRO 96).

<sup>33</sup> L. Matthew Petillo, "The Theological Problem of Grace and Experience: A Lonerganian Perspective," *Theological Studies* 71 no. 3 (Sept 2010): 606; Charles C. Hefling, "About What Might a 'Girard-Lonergan Conversation' Be?" in *Lonergan Workshop* vol. 17, ed. Frederick Lawrence (Missoula, MT: Scholars

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However, Lonergan also notes that sometimes this drive towards self-transcendence fails. He describes moral impotence as a limitation on one's effective freedom, a limitation that is beyond the capacity of the human person to correct. Describing one's moral impotence in terms of evil and sin, Lonergan describes sin as literally unintelligible. According to Charles Hefling, the traditional notion of evil as "privation" takes the form for Lonergan of a negation of intelligence: "intelligibility is just what there is none of to be grasped. There is nothing to be understood. 'Nothing' cannot be understood."<sup>34</sup> The fact of asking questions about evil and sin presumes that there is some intelligibility to be had. This "nothing" that is evil can block or hinder the subject from choosing the good, but there is no intelligible reason for its doing so. For Lonergan, this is the sense in which the "reign of sin" limits human freedom.

### *Paul Ricoeur*

A third influence on Tracy's anthropology is French philosopher Paul Ricoeur. A colleague of Tracy's for roughly twenty years at the University of Chicago Divinity School, Ricoeur's early work was a formative influence on Tracy's understanding of hermeneutics and of human freedom. I draw this conclusion from the fact that first, the majority of Tracy's citations from Ricoeur are from five texts: *The Freedom and Nature*

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Press, 2002), 111; Alison Benders, "Beyond *MySpace*: Grounding Postmodern Identity in Lonergan's Interiority Analysis," in *Lonergan Workshop*, vol. 21 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 2008), 9; John D. Dadosky, "Desire, Bias, and Love: Revisiting Lonergan's Philosophical Anthropology," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 77 no. 3 (Aug. 2012): 246.

<sup>34</sup> Hefling, "About What Might a 'Girard-Lonergan Conversation' Be?" 109

trilogy, *Freud and Philosophy*, and *Interpretation Theory*.<sup>35</sup> These texts, all completed by 1976, are clearly influential on Tracy's *Blessed Rage for Order* and *The Analogical Imagination*. Citations from Ricoeur's later works, such as the *Time and Narrative* trilogy or *Oneself as Another*, are comparatively sparse.<sup>36</sup> Second, Ricoeur's time at the University of Chicago Divinity School began to wind down in the mid-1980's, especially after his 1986 Gifford Lectures and his return to France in 1991. Although they shared an enduring friendship, the decline in regular personal contact and co-teaching may have contributed to a lessening of Ricoeur's immediate influence on Tracy.

The key aspects of Ricoeur's early anthropology are found in the *Freedom and Nature* trilogy. In the first of these texts, Ricoeur focuses on what he calls "*fundamental possibilities*" of the human person. Here he refers to the basic structure of the human will and what it means to perform acts of the will. Drawing then on the phenomenological reductions of Edmund Husserl, Ricoeur describes the first volume of his trilogy as an "eidetic of the voluntary and the involuntary." By "eidetic," he means that bracketing certain issues until later (in this case, the "fault") will enable him to describe more

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<sup>35</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and Involuntary*, trans. Erazim V. Kohak (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1966); Paul Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, trans. Charles A. Kelbley (New York: Fordham University Press, 1986); Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969); Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. Dennis Savage (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970); Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 1976).

<sup>36</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* (3 vols.), trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984, 1985, and 1988.); Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). Though published in 1992, this latter book is based on Ricoeur's Gifford Lectures, delivered at Edinburgh in 1985-86.

In a certain sense this might seem obvious, as Ricoeur's later works are not likely to show up in Tracy's earlier works. However, even though Tracy does cite *Time and Narrative* sometimes in *Plurality and Ambiguity*, his recourse to citing Ricoeur declines after *PA*. I argue that this is because the influence of Ricoeur on Tracy was largely cemented by these earlier texts, and so Ricoeur's later anthropological developments (i.e., "narrative identity") do not really affect Tracy in any notable way.

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accurately the phenomena of human freedom and nature.<sup>37</sup> The voluntary and involuntary can only be understood as being in tension with one another. This is because while the person can make genuine acts of the will (decision, bodily movement, and consent), these acts occur within an embodied self who lives in a world which one cannot control. Indeed, bodily movement and consent speak to this lack of complete control. Ricoeur thus defines consent as “the act of the will which acquiesces to a necessity,” to something that one cannot make otherwise.<sup>38</sup>

What Ricoeur calls the “fault” refers to the alienation or division one finds in oneself. While the basic ability of the will is to decide about values, the fault “changes our fundamental relation to values and opens the true drama of morality which is the drama of the divided man.” Like Lonergan, Ricoeur argues that this fault is absurd and lacking in intelligibility. By bracketing it during his eidetic analysis, he is able to uncover the primordial possibilities of the human person, but this bracketing must always be followed by an *empirical* analysis that looks at the human person as one actually is. Ricoeur removes these brackets in *Fallible Man*, where he argues that the presence of the fault is a necessary result of the freedom and nature of the human person. The fault stems from what Ricoeur calls the “disproportion” within the human person between one’s finitude and *infinitude*. This disproportion means that there is a division within each person, an incomplete synthesis of one’s finitude and infinitude, which creates the

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<sup>37</sup> Ricoeur describes four types of analysis: eidetic, empiric, mythic/symbolic, and poetic. The first three correlate to the three volumes of *Freedom and Nature* respectively. He had projected another volume that would be a poetics of the will, but it never came to fruition.

<sup>38</sup> Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature*, 3-4, 341; Don Ihde, *Hermeneutic Phenomenology: The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1971), 20.



possibility for moral error. The human being is therefore capable by one's very nature of committing moral evil, but human fallibility means *only* possibility, never necessity.<sup>39</sup>

Finally, in the *Symbolism of Evil*, Ricoeur performs a hermeneutical analysis of myths and symbols pertaining to the actual exercise of evil. Focusing on the symbols of defilement, sin, and guilt, he argues that these symbols point indirectly to the concept of the "servile will." Because freedom and servitude are irreconcilable, Ricoeur sees these symbols as the indirect way people attempt to express their experience of being drawn to commit evil even though they know they are not supposed to. These symbols function as ways of making sense of the non-intelligibility of evil. Bringing together the reflective effort of *Fallible Man* with the "confession" of *Symbolism of Evil*, Ricoeur develops one of his best known hermeneutical statements: "The symbol gives rise to thought." These two modes of thinking about fallibility and evil are irresolvable but intimately linked.<sup>40</sup>

The philosophical anthropology of the early Ricoeur focused on the structure of human freedom and its connection to the possibility and the actuality of evil. He ultimately saw this anthropology as insufficient or incomplete, and eventually turned to the concept of narrative in order to focus on "narrative identity" as the key to understanding the human person.<sup>41</sup> His earlier anthropology would exert a huge influence on Tracy's own anthropology.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, 2-4, 21, 25, 142-3

<sup>40</sup> Ricoeur, *Symbolism of Evil*, 151, 348

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, especially 113-168

<sup>42</sup> Michael W. DeLashmuth, "Paul Ricoeur at the Foot of the Cross: Narrative Identity and the Resurrection of the Body," *Modern Theology* 25, no. 4 (Oct. 2009): 591

*Summary*

Tracy's theological anthropology has been profoundly shaped by a long tradition of Christian theological reflection on the human being as well as the more recent forays of Rahner, Lonergan, and Ricoeur. A consideration of this background has served to provide an orientation to Tracy's theological anthropology by raising key issues concerning the human relationship with the divine, human limitations and transcendence, historicity and finitude, the problem of evil and sin, and the encounter with grace. While each of these figures have influenced his thought, the complex way in which Tracy engages with and appropriates their ideas contributes to but does not define his own creative and original approach to anthropology.<sup>43</sup>

Perhaps the most interesting influence is the relationship between method and anthropology that is common to Lonergan and Tracy. The functional specialties of Lonergan's theological method<sup>44</sup> are organized according to the four levels of conscious intentionality. In doing so, Lonergan posits an intimate connection between the structure of human consciousness and the process by which human beings come to ever more cumulative and progressive insights about reality.

Like Lonergan, Tracy also assumes a close relationship between the method that he proposes and his understanding of what it means to be human. Since his theological anthropology is often implicit, it is necessary in this dissertation to explain this connection further. Two preliminary observations regarding the connection between his

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<sup>43</sup> Boyd Blundell, in considering the connection between Tracy and Ricoeur, says that "Tracy is too eclectic and original to be anyone's disciple. See Boyd Blundell, *Paul Ricoeur Between Theology and Philosophy: Detour and Return* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010), 184 n. 43

<sup>44</sup> See Chapter One, page 50

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method and his anthropology are helpful here. First, the development of any theological method relies upon implicit assumptions about the human beings who employ that method. For example, Tracy's focus on the distinct publics towards which theology is oriented assumes that human life is marked by public-ness and, more importantly, by a diversity of public commitments. Second, Tracy's method provides the organizing framework for his forays into all theological questions. His understanding of Christology, the Trinity, ecclesiology, and Scripture are all deeply conditioned by the relationships among his three "sub-disciplines" of theology. Thus, it is reasonable to conjecture that his theological anthropology will also be affected by this framework. The order of the remaining chapters of this dissertation is predicated on the claim that the main themes of Tracy's anthropology, his "anthropological constants" (to borrow Schillebeeckx's phrase), can be intelligibly organized according to the distinction he makes between fundamental and systematic theology. In order to lay the groundwork for this claim, the focus of this chapter will now shift to an examination of Tracy's theological method.

### **Tracy's Theological Method**

Although Tracy's method is not the main focus of this dissertation, considering its development now will be helpful for two reasons. First, theological method is one of the topics on which most theological engagements with David Tracy's work focus. Second, understanding method is necessary for illuminating the relationships among the four anthropological constants to be discussed in Chapters 2-5. Tracy's method not only

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provides a way forward through his theology; it also offers a framework through which to connect the constants that are constitutive of his theological anthropology. Before examining his method, it will be helpful to look briefly at two other topics, public theology and hermeneutics, which are themselves closely connected to his method.

Tracy's articulation of public theology has been influential in certain sectors of theological ethics and political theology, especially in the United States. More recently, his work in this area has been applied to contexts beyond the US by such figures as Gaspar Martinez, Andreas Telser, and Gonzalo Villagran.<sup>45</sup> While Tracy did not create the idea of public theology, his work is widely seen as one of the most robust theoretical articulations for what makes theology public.<sup>46</sup>

With regard to hermeneutics and the understanding of language, Tracy was strongly influenced by Hans-Georg Gadamer and Bernard Lonergan, although it is clear that he goes beyond them.<sup>47</sup> In particular, Tracy appropriated the Gadamerian notion of "play" in discourse in order to explain the risk taken by interlocutors in conversation. The central role of "the classic" in Tracy's process of interpretation is developed in part

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<sup>45</sup> Gaspar Martinez, *Confronting the Mystery of God: Political, Liberation, and Public Theologies* (New York: Continuum, 2001); Andreas S. Telser, *Theologie als öffentlicher Diskurs: Zur Relevanz der Systematischen Theologie David Tracys* (Innsbruck: Tyrolia, 2013); Gonzalo Villagran, "Public Theology in a Foreign Land: A Proposal for Bringing Theology in Public into the Spanish Context" (Ph.D. dissertation, Boston College School of Theology and Ministry, 2012)

<sup>46</sup> For earlier formulations of "public theology," see Martin Marty, "Reinhold Niebuhr: Public Theology and the American Experience," *The Journal of Religion* no. 54 (1974): 332-359; Martin Marty, "Two Kinds of Two Kinds of Civil Religion," in *American Civil Religion*, eds. Russell E. Richey and Donald G. Jones, 139-157 (New York: Harper and Row, 1974). The latter Marty article was a critical response to Robert Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," *Daedalus* 96 no. 1 (Winter 1967): 1-21.

<sup>47</sup> See especially Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Continuum, 2004); *MT* 153-173. For Tracy's understanding of the Gadamerian approach to hermeneutics, see Robert M. Grant and David Tracy, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 153-166.

from Lonergan's description of the classic.<sup>48</sup> More recently, Tracy's work in hermeneutics has been appropriated in the fields of comparative theology and interreligious dialogue, especially in the context of Buddhist-Christian dialogue.<sup>49</sup> As mentioned above, Tracy's use of the metaphor of conversation as the central description of his hermeneutics, first developed in *The Analogical Imagination* and later expanded in *Plurality and Ambiguity*, has served as a basis for investigating religious pluralism in a postmodern context.<sup>50</sup>

Finally, the two main features that stand out in Tracy's theological method are the disciplines into which he sub-divides theology and the role theology plays in the conversation between religion and its context. These two features are formulated somewhat differently at various points in his development, yet most interpreters describe his method as one of "mutually critical correlation," particularly as articulated in *The Analogical Imagination*. The influence of this method can be seen in the work of several

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<sup>48</sup> Cf. MT 161-2; Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 286-291

<sup>49</sup> For hermeneutics in interreligious dialogue, see Catherine Cornille and Christopher Conway, eds., *Interreligious Hermeneutics* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010). For the specifically Buddhist-Christian focus, see David Tracy, *Dialogue with the Other: The Interreligious Dialogue*, Louvain Theological & Pastoral Monographs 1 (Louvain: Peeters Press, 1991). See also "The Christian Understanding of Salvation-Liberation," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 7 (1987): 129-138; "Kenosis, Sunyata, and Trinity: A Dialogue with Masao Abe," in *Emptying God: A Buddhist-Jewish-Christian Conversation*, eds. John Cobb and Christopher Ives (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), 135-154; "Some Aspects of the Buddhist-Christian Dialogue," in *The Christian Understanding of God Today*, ed. James M. Byrne (Dublin: Columba Press, 1993), 145-153. On the relationship between kenosis and sunyata in Buddhist-Christian dialogue, see Karen Bautista Enriquez, "Interrupting the Conversation on Kenosis and Sunyata: Buddhist and Christian Women in Search of the Relational Self" (Ph.D. dissertation, Boston College, 2011).

<sup>50</sup> E.g., Werner G. Jeanrond and Jennifer L. Rike, ed., *Radical Pluralism and Truth: David Tracy and the Hermeneutics of Religion* (New York: Crossroad, 1991); David Ranson, "'Conversation: Our Only Hope': David Tracy's Response to the Presence of Otherness," *Australian eJournal of Theology*, Australian Catholic University, Issue 15 (January 2010).

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other theologians who have utilized it, such as Roger Haight,<sup>51</sup> Chester Gillis,<sup>52</sup> and Gaspar Martinez,<sup>53</sup> as well as those who have critiqued it, such as Avery Dulles,<sup>54</sup> Rebecca Chopp,<sup>55</sup> and Lieven Boeve.<sup>56</sup> Yet in order to understand how Tracy developed his method, it will be helpful to investigate the methods of three figures who influenced him most in this regard: Paul Tillich, H. Richard Niebuhr, and Bernard Lonergan

### *Methodological Precursors*

#### **Paul Tillich**

In his first volume of *Systematic Theology*,<sup>57</sup> Paul Tillich claims that his theology follows a method of correlation in which he “tries to correlate the questions implied in the situation with the answers implied in the message.”<sup>58</sup> By “situation,” he means the cultural context in which the theologian is working, including the variety of artistic, scientific, and political expressions of that culture.<sup>59</sup> The “message” is the central truth or *kerygma* of Christianity. While present in both the Bible and in Christian tradition, the *kerygma* cannot be identified with either. Rather, “kerygmatic theology” attempts to strip away the cultural accretions of Christianity in hopes of reaching the genuine eternal core

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<sup>51</sup> Roger Haight, *Dynamics of Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990); Roger Haight, *Jesus: Symbol of God* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999).

<sup>52</sup> Chester Gillis, *Pluralism: A New Paradigm for Theology*, Louvain Theological & Pastoral Monographs 12 (Louvain: Peeters Press, 1993).

<sup>53</sup> Martinez, *Confronting the Mystery of God*

<sup>54</sup> Avery Dulles, “Method in Fundamental Theology: Reflections on David Tracy’s *Blessed Rage for Order*,” *Theological Studies* 37 no. 2 (June 1976): 304-316.

<sup>55</sup> Rebecca S. Chopp, *Saving Work: Feminist Practices of Theological Education* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 107-8.

<sup>56</sup> Lieven Boeve, *God Interrupts History: Theology in a Time of Upheaval* (New York: Continuum, 2007), 30-49.

<sup>57</sup> Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951).

<sup>58</sup> Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, 8

<sup>59</sup> Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, 4

of the faith, even though this process can never be fully successful.<sup>60</sup> Even if theology were to settle for restating the biblical witness, it would be unable to escape “the conceptual situation of the different biblical writers,” including their languages, their categories, and their worldview.<sup>61</sup> Tillich argues that theology must respond to the questions and concerns of the situation, but this response must be consistent with and under the judgment of the truths of the Christian message.<sup>62</sup>

Tillich’s method of correlation served as an important starting point for Tracy’s method, but one that Tracy came to consider as incomplete. When Tracy described his method of critical correlation in *Blessed Rage for Order*, he initially expressed appreciation for Tillich’s commitment to the two fundamental sources of context and message and Tillich’s hope for “an *Aufhebung* of both liberalism and neo-orthodoxy.”<sup>63</sup> However, Tracy argued that Tillich’s method is not really one of correlation at all, but rather of juxtaposition. It fails to take the situation itself seriously insofar as it understands the answers to the situation’s questions as only coming from the message. Furthermore, it fails to recognize the possibility that the situation itself might offer a response to certain questions implicit within the Christian tradition.<sup>64</sup> For these reasons, Tracy saw Tillich’s method as a valuable starting point, but inadequate on its own.

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<sup>60</sup> Tillich primarily has Rudolph Bultmann’s process of demythologization in mind here.

<sup>61</sup> Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, 7

<sup>62</sup> Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, 8. The titles of the five parts of his *Systematic Theology* refer to the situation-message dialectic: Reason and Revelation, Being and God, Existence and the Christ, Life and the Spirit, and History and the Kingdom of God. While he recognizes that the questions and responses are mutually interdependent, the trajectory of his method of correlation is essentially univocal

<sup>63</sup> BRO 45

<sup>64</sup> BRO 46. It is helpful here to note that Tracy recognizes there are nuanced differences between Tillich’s “situation” and “message” with “common human experience” and “Christian texts” (which is how Tracy described his two poles at the time). While it is unclear whether Tracy would say that the *kerygma* even

## H. Richard Niebuhr

H. Richard Niebuhr represents another significant influence on Tracy's method, especially through his seminal work *Christ and Culture*.<sup>65</sup> For Niebuhr, the problem for Christianity is not its relationship with civilization, but the more fundamental relationship "between the poles of Christ and culture."<sup>66</sup> The attempt to relate these poles depends on how one defines them. While Niebuhr recognizes that there are a variety of ways of understanding Jesus Christ in the Christian tradition, he argues that there is still a "fundamental unity" in that Jesus is a concrete "person with definite teachings, a definite character, and a definite fate."<sup>67</sup> The central insight for Niebuhr is to recall that the power of Jesus to draw us in stems from the double fact that he is "man living to God and God living with men."<sup>68</sup> Niebuhr offers a similarly limited definition of the pole of culture, arguing that one ought to look at the general notion of culture rather than any particular instance. Culture is the "'artificial, secondary environment' which man superimposes on the natural," including language, beliefs, technology, and values.<sup>69</sup>

Christianity is a response to and mediation of the revelation of Christ, but it always is such within some particular culture. Niebuhr famously outlines a typology of five ways of understanding the relationship between Christ and culture: Christ against

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has questions to which the situation could respond (although my suspicion is that he would), the more important point is that access to the kerygma is always mediated through its historical and cultural accretions. This is a point that Tillich himself recognizes, and thus to argue that his method correlates the kerygma or message directly with the situation seems to be problematic for Tillich's method, even on its own terms.

<sup>65</sup> H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001).

<sup>66</sup> Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 11

<sup>67</sup> Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 12

<sup>68</sup> Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 29

<sup>69</sup> Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 32



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culture, Christ of culture, Christ above culture, Christ and culture in paradox, and Christ transforming culture. The first two mark the extremes of this spectrum, between a sectarian rejection of human society and a complete accommodation of Christ's message to whatever culture one finds oneself in. The latter three, however fall somewhere between these extremes. These three use the question of the relationship between Christ and culture to examine further the relationship between God and the individual human person.

Niebuhr's attempts to correlate Christ with culture reveal two important facts that will become characteristic of Tracy's method. First, correlation itself need not be univocal. While Niebuhr's text is contemporaneous with the first volume of Tillich's *Systematic Theology*, his description of a correlational method is somewhat more nuanced. Niebuhr does not claim that theological method ought to correlate answers from Christ to questions from culture, but rather that the mode of relation between these two poles is itself the crucial methodological question.<sup>70</sup> Second, Niebuhr recognizes that none of his five correlations are final or definitive.<sup>71</sup> Christianity consists of an amalgam of traditions rather than a single complete response to the event and person of Jesus

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<sup>70</sup> A helpful nuance to draw out here is that Niebuhr seeks to correlate *Christ* and culture, whereas Tracy seeks to correlate the Christian tradition with a contemporary situation. While the differences between "culture" and "contemporary situation" are arguably cosmetic, the difference between "Christ" and "the Christian tradition" are substantial.

<sup>71</sup> "Yet it must be evident that neither extension nor refinement of study could bring us to the conclusive result that would enable us to say, 'This is the Christian answer.' Reader as well as writer is doubtless tempted to essay such a conclusion; for it will have become as evident to the one as to the other that the types are by no means wholly exclusive of each other, and that there are possibilities of reconciliation at many points among the various positions" (Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 231). Cf. *AI* 376, "The phrase 'mutually critical correlations' functions here to indicate that the responses may take any form in the whole range of classic Christian responses analyzed by H. Richard Niebuhr. The particular form will be dependent upon the particular point at issue."

Christ. This acceptance of pluralism within Christianity and the need to resist totalizing interpretations became central to Tracy's work.

### **Bernard Lonergan**

Lonergan's influence on Tracy is perhaps most clearly located in Tracy's complex appropriation of Lonergan's method.<sup>72</sup> Lonergan claimed that *Method* was concerned not with theology *per se* but with the process of doing theology. He defines a method as "a normative pattern of recurrent and related operations yielding cumulative and progressive results."<sup>73</sup> The operations that theologians perform when doing theology occur on the four levels of conscious intentionality: empirical, intellectual, rational, and responsible.<sup>74</sup> The operations on these levels are performed by a subject who intends some object, and through these operations the subject is at once present to the self and to the object. For Lonergan, the basic pattern of operations on these four levels constitutes a *transcendental* method because it fits his definition and it produces results that "are not confined categorially to some particular field or subject, but regard any result that could be intended by the completely open transcendental notions."<sup>75</sup> This primordial method is not restricted to the field of theological inquiry, but remains open to any field or subject matter that might be investigated by the human mind.

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<sup>72</sup> See *MT*. Tracy's first published book, *The Achievement of Bernard Lonergan*, was written in the mid to late 1960's, during the time that Lonergan was both teaching regular courses and working on *Method in Theology*. Tracy already provides an initial analysis of some of the themes of *MT* in the final three chapters of *ABL*.

<sup>73</sup> *MT* 4

<sup>74</sup> *MT* 9. Yet these levels are not applicable only to theologians. Other specialists perform operations on these four levels in their own fields, and more broadly these are the levels of conscious intentionality performed by any human person who is acting consciously.

<sup>75</sup> *MT* 14

However, Lonergan does go on to apply this transcendental method to theology. He claims that “a theology mediates between a cultural matrix and the significance and role of a religion in that matrix.”<sup>76</sup> He adopts an empirical rather than a classicist understanding of culture, which he defines as “the set of meanings and values that informs a way of life.”<sup>77</sup> In this approach, theology is considered “an ongoing process” conditioned by the continuous changes of the culture in which a given religion exists.

Because theology mediates between culture and religion, Lonergan distinguishes the process of theology into stages that correspond to the four levels of conscious intentionality within transcendental method. These tasks, which he names “functional specialties,” break down into the two vectors of mediating theology and mediated theology. Mediating theology involves research, interpretation, history, and dialectics within the upward trajectory of the four levels of consciousness: experience (establishing the data), understanding (interpreting the data), judgment (pinning down what is going forward historically), and decision (dialectical engagement with conflicting results reducible to difference in horizons). Mediated theology, however, includes the functional specialties foundations, doctrines, systematics, and communications, which reverses the direction of the four-leveled trajectory as it moves from decision (foundations) through judgment (doctrines), understanding (systematics), and experience (communications).<sup>78</sup> Mediating theology is thus indirect discourse that listens to the foregoing tradition, while

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<sup>76</sup> *MT* xi. I think this description of theology corresponds in some ways to the correlational methods of both Tillich and Niebuhr, although it differs from Niebuhr’s as regards the more “religious” pole, and from Tillich’s in terms of the relationship between the culture and the “religious” pole within it.

<sup>77</sup> *MT* xi

<sup>78</sup> *MT* 135

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mediated theology is direct discourse in which the theologian takes a stand in the present with regard to what is true, intelligible, and meaningful in the theological tradition.<sup>79</sup>

Functional specialization has clearly influenced Tracy's way of subdividing the discipline of theology in *The Analogical Imagination*. While there is not a clear one-to-one correspondence between functional specialization and Tracy's theological sub-disciplines, there are obvious parallels between Tracy's fundamental, systematic, and practical theology and Lonergan's doctrines, systematics, and communications. Furthermore, while Lonergan separates indirect and direct discourse into two distinct vectors for theology, Tracy integrates both historical and constructive moments into each of his sub-disciplines. For Tracy, these sub-disciplines determine the primary divisions of theology, while the mediating/mediated distinction is incorporated in a less prominent way. This is less a dramatic divergence from Lonergan's method, but rather a new appropriation resulting from Tracy's emphasis on the distinct audiences for each of his theological sub-disciplines.<sup>80</sup>

### *Method in Blessed Rage for Order*

Although expressed in diverse ways, the methods employed by Tillich, Niebuhr, and Lonergan each require that theology recognize its engagement with both the central religious claims of the Christian tradition and the contexts in which theology is done.

These two poles may be identified in a variety of ways (e.g., question and answer, two

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<sup>79</sup> MT 267

<sup>80</sup> Lonergan, on the other hand, was instead concerned primarily with the issue of integrating history into the Roman Catholic dogmatic and systematic theology that had become ahistorical.

sources, conversation partners), and the relationship between them may take a variety of forms (e.g., continuity, accommodation, conflict, reconciliation). These poles can be distinguished but not rigidly separated, since both the religious tradition and the particular context mutually shape one another.

An analysis of Tracy's method must also take into account both his efforts to correlate the two poles that he has appropriated in an original way from Tillich, Niebuhr, and Lonergan, as well as account for the theological sub-disciplines that he developed. His first attempt to develop his theological method occurred in *Blessed Rage for Order*. As an essay in *fundamental* theology, it is focused on "the basic criteria and methods for theological argument."<sup>81</sup> In *The Analogical Imagination*, Tracy treated the question of theological method more thematically. Together with more pronounced stress on the publics for his theology, Tracy re-articulated his understanding of fundamental theology in *AI* and revised his previous ordering of the sub-disciplines.<sup>82</sup> Since Tracy's method of correlation is intimately bound up with his outline of sub-disciplines, an adequate account of his method must treat both of these features.

### **Critical Correlation in *BRO***

In *Blessed Rage for Order*, Tracy introduced the two poles of his critical correlation by describing the dual commitment of the postmodern theologian.

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<sup>81</sup> *BRO* 15 n. 8

<sup>82</sup> *AI* 84 n. 28 and *AI* 85 n. 31. In each text, Tracy seems to suggest that Part I treats fundamental theology and Part II systematic theology (cf. *BRO* 237).

“Disenchanted with disenchantment,”<sup>83</sup> the theologian faces a pluralistic world in which “he can authentically abandon neither his faith in the modern experiment nor his faith in the God of Jesus Christ.”<sup>84</sup> The great achievement of modern thought, particularly in the fields of history and science, is the emergence of a more rigorous critical thought. Tracy recognized that some see such a critical thrust as a threat to Christian traditions precisely because it substitutes a commitment to critical inquiry for the fundamental commitment to the tradition itself.<sup>85</sup> He argued that because Christian theology is oriented towards *truth*, theologians must commit themselves to a critical posture towards the tradition that can furnish evidence and arguments for its claims.<sup>86</sup> Tracy did not understand “critical” in a strictly negative sense here, but saw it as fidelity to open-ended inquiry. This critical posture is directed not solely at the theological tradition within which the theologian stands but is also related to the meaning and significance of the “secular faith” rooted in the current situation.<sup>87</sup>

This twofold commitment demands what Tracy called the “revisionist” model for theology, which depends upon two sources: Christian traditions and common human experience and language.<sup>88</sup> In describing these sources, Tracy delved not so much into

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<sup>83</sup> Cf. *BRO* 33

<sup>84</sup> *BRO* 4

<sup>85</sup> *BRO* 6

<sup>86</sup> *BRO* 6

<sup>87</sup> *BRO* 8-9

<sup>88</sup> *BRO* 43. Tracy initially identified the former pole with Christian *texts*, which are in fact his primary operative source for understanding the Christian tradition(s). In *BRO* he recognized that a fuller Christian theology must also consider “symbols, rituals, events, witnesses,” and he developed this range of sources more fully when discussing the “classic” in *The Analogical Imagination*. Yet he then postponed this effort, claiming that as of *BRO* his hermeneutical theory, while adaptable to non-textual sources, was not yet nuanced sufficiently in that direction (*BRO* 15 n. 5).

the specific sources themselves as into the best methods for investigating such sources adequately.

The primary approach to the religious pole of the Christian tradition is the “historical and hermeneutical investigation of classical Christian texts.”<sup>89</sup> He advocated using the best of historical-critical scholarship in order to reconstruct the texts that play a significant role within the development of a Christian self-understanding. The hermeneutical investigation then seeks to establish what those reconstructed texts mean for the Christian community. Tracy’s hermeneutical method is highly indebted to Paul Ricoeur’s claim that a text has both “sense” and “referents.” “Sense” denotes the internal structure of the text and the meaning that can be determined through “ordinary methods of semantic and literary-critical inquiries,” while “referents” means the world the text discloses to the reader.<sup>90</sup> This hermeneutical approach marks a departure from romantic hermeneutics, which is concerned with emphatically re-enacting the intentions of the author, emphasizing instead the interpreter’s use of genres, images, metaphors, and symbols to appropriate the new possibilities disclosed by the text.

Tracy illustrated the historical and hermeneutical investigation by appealing to the example of the Christological claim that “Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ.” The primary historical concern is to establish and reconstruct as accurately as possible the “New Testament christological texts,” while the hermeneutical effort is to understand the

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<sup>89</sup> BRO 49. It should be noted that at this point Tracy is not yet using “classical” in the technical sense he developed in *The Analogical Imagination*.

<sup>90</sup> BRO 51; cf. Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 19-22.

“religious significance of the proclamation that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ.”<sup>91</sup> This twofold investigation must engage the historical construction of Christological documents, their historical appropriation by the tradition, and the existential reality they claim as still meaningful today.

The principal method for investigating the situational pole, common human experience, is “a phenomenology of the ‘religious dimension’ present in everyday and scientific experience and language,”<sup>92</sup> assuming that there is such a religious dimension to common human experience. Like Lonergan, Tracy’s view of experience accounts for both the subject’s sensory experience and conscious experience of the self.<sup>93</sup> What gives experience its religious dimension is its “limit character,” that which discloses the radical finitude of human existence and acknowledges that there is something beyond the self. Tracy argues that this sense of “limit” is shared broadly among persons, which grounds his use of the qualifier “common” to describe the pole of human experience.

For Tracy, theological statements also necessarily have an existential dimension. Even though such statements might refer to God or to non-human creation, they refer more basically to the self who is making such statements.<sup>94</sup> These statements also purport to have “universal existential relevance,” so theology must offer an account of how the existential claims of Christianity can have some explanatory power when it comes to common human experience. Tracy argued that the phenomenological approach

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<sup>91</sup> *BRO* 50

<sup>92</sup> *BRO* 47

<sup>93</sup> *BRO* 69

<sup>94</sup> *BRO* 58 n. 18



is well suited to this task precisely because it mediates “the relationship of particular expression...to our immediate lived experience.”<sup>95</sup>

The task of the revisionist theologian is to correlate these two sources. Initially, this means that the Christian tradition must be able to offer a substantive interpretation of common human experience. Throughout history Christian texts have developed a series of categories and narratives that offer a vision of human existence in relationship to the divine, and the theologian’s task is to produce arguments showing the adequacy of these categories and narratives “for all human experience.”<sup>96</sup> If the Christian faith actually does offer a cogent response to the basic questions and concerns of human living, then it is capable of reaching beyond an “inner-theological” conversation in order to engage the secular world.<sup>97</sup>

Were the revisionist model to end the project of correlation here, it would be fully consistent with Tillich’s efforts to respond to the questions of the situation with the answers of the message. But Tracy required a more robust *critical* correlation, and so he proposed a twofold alteration of Tillich’s method. First, Tracy claimed that Tillich’s method fails to take the situation seriously because it operates in only one direction: the questions come from one source and the answers from the other. Instead, he argued that a theologian needs to risk that the past tradition in its own right might raise questions to which contemporary common human experience might have answers, thus making

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<sup>95</sup> BRO 69

<sup>96</sup> BRO 44

<sup>97</sup> BRO 44

correlation a bilateral enterprise.<sup>98</sup> The second alteration was to recognize explicitly that each source might answer its own questions.<sup>99</sup> For Tracy, the “critical” element in correlation means that both sources ought to be subjected to modes of critical inquiry. The questions raised by both poles ought to be articulated, and then presented with possibly relevant responses from both sources. Tracy’s critical correlation thus becomes a more complex and rich engagement with the sources of theology than Tillich’s.

### **Theological Sub-Disciplines in *BRO***

While Tracy primarily regarded the critical correlation of classical Christian texts and common human experience as the method of fundamental theology, he believed that the process of correlation could also be employed in other disciplines of theology. The distinct but related roles of fundamental, systematic, historical, and practical theology remained implicit throughout *Blessed Rage for Order*; however, in the final chapter Tracy explains each sub-discipline in a more detailed manner.

Fundamental theology’s chief task is the development of the criteria used in making theological claims.<sup>100</sup> It performs this task through an ongoing “philosophical reflection” on the meanings of the religious and situational poles. While fundamental theology is performed from within a faith tradition, its questions are not confined by that tradition. Rather, it considers the warrants for making religious claims and the criteria

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<sup>98</sup> As an example, Tracy asked “why do we not find in Tillich a critical investigation of the claims that either Jean Paul Sartre’s or Karl Jaspers’ philosophies of existence provide a better ‘answer’ to the question of human estrangement than the Christian ‘answer’ does?” (*BRO* 46).

<sup>99</sup> *BRO* 46

<sup>100</sup> *BRO* 250 n. 1

used to judge those claims.<sup>101</sup> The basic *religious* questions underlying fundamental theology concern *theistic* and *Christological* levels of meaning as well.<sup>102</sup> Tracy analyzed these three distinct but related areas of meaning (religious, theistic, and Christological) in the context of contemporary pluralism. The second half of *BRO* attempted a variety of revisionist analyses of these sorts of claims.

Systematic theology is closely tied to fundamental theology because it builds on the criteria of fundamental theology when it delves into doctrinal questions of a particular faith tradition. Christian systematic theology inquires into such *loci* as Trinity, soteriology, ecclesiology, and sacraments. Within Tracy's revisionist model, traditional formulations of these *loci* are challenged and reconsidered. They may undergo reinterpretation through a "hermeneutics of restoration" that takes account of our common experience. The theologian must remain open to the possibility that certain formulations may no longer communicate meaning or truth to our common human experience or even to classic Christian self-understanding.<sup>103</sup>

The systematic theologian's commitment to a particular faith tradition is balanced by the public character of systematics. Against the "decline of religion" narrative of some advocates of secularization Tracy insisted that systematic theology can both inform public discourse and participate in the public sphere. *BRO* provided the "initial

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<sup>101</sup> Tracy said his view of fundamental theology is roughly the same as the traditional task of "apologetic" theology. The difference, however, is that apologetics was concerned primarily with arguing for the foundational doctrines of theology – revelation, miracles, divine revealer, creation, faith and reason – while Tracy's fundamental theology focuses on the criteria used to judge these claims in light of common human experience (*BRO* 250 n.1).

<sup>102</sup> *BRO* 237

<sup>103</sup> *BRO* 238-9

spadework” for systematics in establishing criteria for theological conversation and setting forth the grounds for its participation in public discourse.<sup>104</sup> Yet, for Tracy, theological reflection has been much too dominated by fundamental theological concerns: “*The problem of the contemporary systematic theologian, as has often been remarked, is actually to do systematic theology.*”<sup>105</sup>

Historical theology is the third sub-discipline of theology. Tracy distinguished history from historical theology by noting that the primary task of the historian is the reconstruction of texts. Theology depends on historical investigation to determine its sources, whether they be texts, events, symbols, or persons. In short, historians reconstruct the tradition.<sup>106</sup> The critical task of the historical theologian “*qua theologian* is to decipher how and why past Christian meanings were meaningful and true for a particular cultural situation, and how and why such past meanings either are or are not meaningful and true today.”<sup>107</sup> Thus, historical theologians work to make the meanings of texts derived from the tradition available in the present.<sup>108</sup>

Practical theology is the fourth and final sub-discipline of theology discussed in *Blessed Rage for Order*. The central concern of practical theology is *praxis*, understood as “the critical relationship between theory and practice whereby each is dialectically

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<sup>104</sup> BRO 250 n. 1. This incipient notion of public-ness will receive its fullest development in *AI* (cf. Chapter Three, page 136-149)

<sup>105</sup> BRO 238. Tracy would later connect this concern to Karl Rahner’s quip, “But we cannot spend all our time sharpening the knife; at some point we must cut” (David Tracy, “God, Dialogue and Solidarity: A Theologian’s Refrain,” *Christian Century* 107 no. 28 (Oct 10, 1990), 901.

<sup>106</sup> BRO 251 n. 8. Tracy’s description of the historical task here closely parallels Lonergan’s understanding of research in *MT*, especially pages 127 and 149-151

<sup>107</sup> BRO 239-240

<sup>108</sup> BRO 240

influenced and transformed by the other.”<sup>109</sup> For Tracy, practical theology is concerned with the “possibilities of praxis” that are rooted in both the *historia* of the historical theology and the *theoria* of fundamental and systematic theology. While the historical theologian shows how past formulations are meaningful in the present, the practical theologian seeks the potential future meanings in present reconstructions.<sup>110</sup> Tracy’s temporal characterization gives some sense of the role of practical theology: this sub-discipline is primarily concerned not with the future retrievals of history or developments of theory, but with the ongoing enactment of transformative action emerging from the tradition of the faith. Instead of merely reflecting on *historia* and *theoria*, practical theology deploys its central meanings in the social world. Ultimately, practical theology seeks to transform the society and culture in which it is developed.

### *Method in The Analogical Imagination*

Key facets of Tracy’s method in *BRO* remain in his more fully developed method in *AI*. There, the process of doing theology continues to be one of correlation and theological tasks are still divided into sub-disciplines. However, the latter work characterizes both the poles of correlation and the sub-disciplines somewhat differently than did *BRO*. Although Tracy has attributed this adjustment to changing his focus from fundamental to systematic theology, the evidence indicates that this change is more wide-ranging and multi-faceted. In fact, four notable shifts distinguish this method of correlation from the earlier formulation: (1) he re-characterizes the poles for correlation

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<sup>109</sup> *BRO* 243

<sup>110</sup> *BRO* 240

from “common human experience” and “the Christian fact” to “the contemporary situation” and “Christian classics;” (2) he describes his theology as “public” rather than “revisionist;” (3) the sub-discipline of historical theology becomes a moment within the other three sub-disciplines of fundamental, systematic, and practical theology; (4) and he re-orientes each of the sub-disciplines from a temporal understanding to a public one.

### **Mutually Critical Correlation in *AI***

In Tracy’s reformulated method, the role of correlation in the project of theology continues to be central.<sup>111</sup> In *BRO*, “critical” qualified his model of correlation since each pole needed to be suspicious of itself as well as of the other. In *AI*, an additional qualifier is added: “mutually” (or “mutual”) emphasizes even more that the two poles in correlation must respond to and even correct each other.

First, Tracy re-characterized the poles to be correlated in mutually critical correlation. The religious pole is only slightly modified, since in both *BRO* and *AI* Tracy used various formulations of “the Christian tradition.” While the term the “Christian fact” serves as a referent for symbols and texts that are central to Christian self-understanding, Tracy had limited the hermeneutical and historical investigation in *BRO* to texts;<sup>112</sup> when he used the term “classic” there, the meaning tended to be colloquial, not technical.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> *AI* 59: “All theologians agree to the appropriateness, usually the necessity, of appeals to a defended interpretation of a particular religious tradition and a defended interpretation of the contemporary ‘situation’ from which and to which the theologian speaks.”

<sup>112</sup> *BRO* 15 n. 5

<sup>113</sup> *BRO* 49, 59-60 n. 33

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In *AI*, Tracy's use of the "classic" becomes more technical and expansive. Here classics referred to particular expressions bearing an excess and permanence of meaning that arise within a tradition and shape the later development of that tradition. Such expressions may take a variety of forms, including texts, images, symbols, rituals, events, and persons.<sup>114</sup> By their excess of meaning classics require, or even provoke, an interpretation from their interlocutors that can never be definitive. They call forth new questions in new contexts in light of which past responses must be re-evaluated. By their permanence of meaning classics have a "permanent timeliness;" their pertinence remains through changing contexts.<sup>115</sup>

Classics are integrally related to traditions. Produced in a specific place and time by persons shaped by a specific tradition, the classic expression is highly particular.<sup>116</sup> Shaping the classic through particular languages, beliefs, norms of beauty, etc., some tradition is at the heart of each classic, even as classics in turn shape the development of their traditions. The classic formulation reveals central truths, and the particularity of its formulations offer continuing opportunity to challenge, renew, and pass on the tradition. Classics both shape and are shaped by the process of each tradition.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> *AI* 100, 108. Tracy works primarily (but not exclusively) with texts in his theology. For instance, he has at times used the life of St. Francis to illustrate what he means by the classic (*AI* 247 n. 27, 381). Similarly, the close alignment he acknowledges between the plights of religion and art in contemporary society suggests the importance of works of art in his thought.

<sup>115</sup> *AI* 102

<sup>116</sup> This is not to assert that traditions are monolithic; Tracy maintained that traditions are themselves internally plural. However this does not undermine a "family resemblance" view of tradition that allows for the claim that particular traditions shape the classics that originate within them.

<sup>117</sup> Tracy contrasts this view of tradition with what he calls "traditionalism." The latter views tradition as continually repeated prior formulations that require no critical engagement from its adherents. In this sense, tradition is to be conceived as *tradita*, a deposit to be handed on, rather than as *traditio*, the act of handing on.

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The classic is therefore central to the religious pole precisely because the primary activity of the theologian in attending to this pole is the interpretation of the classics of the Christian tradition. While the form of the classic Tracy usually worked with was the text, he claimed that the central Christian classic is the *event* and *person* of Jesus Christ.<sup>118</sup> Understood as the central classic, the event and person of Jesus Christ serves both as the norm for all other Christian classics and as the hermeneutic lens through which Christians understand “God, self, others, society, history, [and] nature.”<sup>119</sup> The focal role of Christology in the development of Tracy’s method in *BRO* continues as Tracy shifted in *AI* from investigating the claim that “Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ” to interpreting the classic of Jesus Christ. This interpretation engages the classical genres of narrative, doctrine, and apocalyptic as they are performed in the New Testament and with the classical contemporary Christological texts developed in the Christian tradition. This process leads finally to Tracy’s explanation of the two classical forms of religious language – the analogical and dialectical imaginations – that structure this text.<sup>120</sup>

The centrality of the classic for the method of correlation also alters the situational pole in Tracy’s mutually critical correlation that *AI* named “the contemporary situation” of the theologian. The theologian has to investigate the ways classical interpretations of the contemporary situation raise “fundamental questions on the meaning of existence.”<sup>121</sup> Tracy’s correlation encounters not merely the classics of the

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<sup>118</sup> *AI* 131

<sup>119</sup> *AI* 233

<sup>120</sup> Cf. Chapter Five, pages 233-37 for Tracy’s interpretation of Christ as the central Christian classic.

<sup>121</sup> *AI* 340-1



situation, but the specifically religious dimension of those classics.<sup>122</sup> According to Tracy, the key facet of the contemporary situation for the postmodern theologian is pluralism and, more importantly, the deep consciousness of that pluralism in culture.<sup>123</sup>

A deeper sensitivity to particularity further distinguishes this pole from its predecessor in *BRO*. There the idea of common human experience appealed to what is universal among all persons, those fundamental religious questions that might occur to anyone. In *AI*, Tracy highlighted the profound role that context plays in the interpretations of individual theologians. A theologian's experience of the event and person of Christ "occurs to the individual theologian in a particular situation,"<sup>124</sup> even though the universal aspect does not disappear completely. What makes some expression or interpretation classic, according to Tracy, is the manner in which its particularity enables rather than hinders the manifestation of truth for any self-reflective person. The heuristic notion of the classic enables Tracy to refocus the more universal trajectory present in common human experience through the particularity of one's particular, contemporary situation.

The underlying issue in Tracy's method of mutually critical correlation is not that the tradition and the situation are a theologian's two sources, but that the theologian is embedded in both a tradition and a situation. Intellectual probity demands that the theologian recognize this and take it into account while doing theology. This is why

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<sup>122</sup> *AI* 61, 326

<sup>123</sup> For example, in distinguishing the present situation from that of Tillich, Tracy argued that there is no longer a single dominant question – not even that elicited by "the profound sense of meaninglessness, absurdity, the radical threat of nonbeing" (*AI* 341). It is precisely in this difference from Tillich's era that Tracy described the contemporary situation as one of "pluralism."

<sup>124</sup> *AI* 344

Tracy claimed that “[e]very theology lives in its own situation,” and so “theologians are no different from other cultural critics who bring their own orientations, questions and possible, probable or certain modes of analysis and response to the situation encompassing all.”<sup>125</sup> However, because the theologian believes that the tradition expresses a truth that is in principle available to all, theology is a fundamentally public discipline. This fact leads to a second major shift in Tracy’s method: the move from a “revisionist” mode of theology to a “public” one.

### **Public Theology**

By employing the idea of the classic in *The Analogical Imagination*, Tracy dropped the term “revisionist” to describe his model of theology. He reformulated the nascent references he had made to public-ness in the footnotes of *Blessed Rage for Order* and began to articulate a deeper understanding of theology as “public” theology. This designation goes beyond his emphasis on the theologian’s dual commitment to critical inquiry and to a particular tradition and stresses more forcibly that theology as a discipline is concerned with questions and realities that are (at least potentially) of concern to anyone.

The focus on publicness continued the revisionist emphasis on common human experience as a source. The common factor of human experience is constituted by the recurrent asking of fundamental religious questions throughout history and across

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<sup>125</sup> AI 339; cf. Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes, Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World* (1965), in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, vol. 1, rev. ed., ed. Austin Flannery, trans. Ronan Lennon and Ambrose McNicholl (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing, 1996), no. 4

cultures. In this sense, the universality of the constellation of questions that are “fundamental religious” epitomizes their public nature. Anyone can ask and respond to these questions; they are not the exclusive privilege of the few. However, in digging deeper, Tracy wanted to ground the publicness of theology in terms of its existence as the *logos* about *theos* whose very reality makes theology public. The theologian’s fundamental faith is in “the all-pervasive reality of the God of love and power disclosed in Jesus Christ.” Thus, any talk about God that is segregated or quarantined into private pens lurches towards a privatistic, even individualistic (and thus eventually idolatrous) understanding of the divine.<sup>126</sup> Not only our questions about the divine, but the universality of the divine itself necessitates that theology be a public discipline.

Publicness is expressed through certain discursive concepts that provide practices and frameworks for doing theology as a public discipline. Publicness demands “criteria, evidence, warrants, disciplinary status,” for making claims that can be defended based on broadly acceptable premises. The development of criteria for public theology means developing standards by which theological claims can be assessed that are not already begged by the theological claims themselves. Tracy developed several such criteria, the most central being (1) adequacy to personal experience, (2) appropriateness to the tradition, and (3) internal coherence. If a theological assertion can be shown to resonate with human experience and a particular tradition while still making sense on its own terms, then that assertion has a strong claim to publicness.

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<sup>126</sup> AI 51

Generally, publicness in theology is always instantiated for Tracy in three specific publics. Theology speaks to the publics of society, academy, and church. While I will attend to the specific characteristics of these three publics later,<sup>127</sup> the central point for an understanding of Tracy's theological method is that these publics represent distinct audiences, each with its own mode of discourse. As a result, the role of faith, the ethical commitments of the theologian, and the understanding of meaning and truth that are operative in each public will vary.<sup>128</sup> The fact that these elements are distinct to each of the three publics does not mean that they are mutually incompatible; rather, the three publics and the modes of theology they engender are integrally related to each other. For Tracy each public features a more or less primary discursive or practical mode. Chief among the tasks which fall to the theologian then is to "explicate the basic plausibility structures of all three publics through the formulation of plausibility arguments and criteria of adequacy."<sup>129</sup>

### **Theological Sub-Disciplines in *AI***

Perhaps the clearest difference in the theological methods proposed by Tracy in *BRO* and in *AI* is the more intentional organization in terms of the sub-disciplines of theology. In *BRO*, Tracy focused on fundamental theology, but the description of its relationships with the other sub-disciplines was given scant treatment. In *AI*, the sub-disciplines form a relatively coherent schema in which the process of mutually critical

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<sup>127</sup> See Chapter Three, pages 136-49

<sup>128</sup> *AI* 56

<sup>129</sup> *AI* 31

correlation occurs within each sub-discipline even though the specific sources, criteria, and audiences for those sub-disciplines differ. Each sub-discipline, therefore, is at its core a hermeneutical exercise in the interpretation of the classics of the tradition and of the contemporary situation. As a result, Tracy's method in *AI* is more robust and comprehensive than that of *BRO*.

The three sub-disciplines in *AI* are fundamental, systematic, and practical theology. Five characteristics orient these sub-disciplines and indicate the important distinctions among them. The first and most important is that each sub-discipline has a primary reference group.<sup>130</sup> Fundamental theology is oriented to the public of the academy, systematic theology to the public of the church, and practical theology to the public of society. The qualifier "primary" is significant here because although each sub-discipline is focused on a particular audience, it is capable of engaging the other two publics. The connection between the sub-disciplines and their respective publics determines the four remaining distinguishing characteristics: the modes of argument, the ethical emphases, the role of the theologian's faith in that mode of theology, and the formulations of "meaning" and "truth."<sup>131</sup> The significance for Tracy's theological method becomes even more evident when he explains their distinguishing characteristics.

### *Fundamental Theology*

Fundamental theology is the sub-discipline oriented to the public of the academy, which formulates norms for academic disciplines. Based upon an agreed understanding

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<sup>130</sup> *AI* 56

<sup>131</sup> *AI* 56

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of what constitutes criteria, evidence, and good argumentation, all disciplines have previously accepted methods as well as procedures for assessing new approaches. While the internal conversations among the members of these disciplines (“intellectuals”)<sup>132</sup> about norms and methods are central to the academy, the demand that these disciplines are able to make claims about reality broadly construed means that they engage publics beyond their disciplinary boundaries. Disciplines must be able to converse with other disciplines and provide grounds for their criteria, evidence, and methods. Tracy regards such interdisciplinary conversations about the underlying intellectual commitments and assumptions as essential to the academic enterprise.

As oriented primarily to the academic public, fundamental theology determines the disciplinary status, norms, and methods of theology. Tracy describes the mode of argument here as being public in “the most usual meaning” of having to be open to any reasonable person. Interlocutors should neither be privileged nor excluded based on religious commitments (or lack thereof) because the claims made in fundamental theology should appeal to that interlocutor’s experience, intelligence, rationality, and responsibility.<sup>133</sup> What is indispensable is an ethical commitment to the process of

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<sup>132</sup> The terms used here for members of the academy (“intellectual”) and society (“citizen”) are drawn from Tracy, although he does not use them consistently. See Chapter One of *BRO* for “intellectual” and David Tracy, “Freedom, Responsibility, Authority,” in *Empowering Authority: The Charisms of Episcopacy and Primacy in the Church Today*, eds. Gary Chamberlain and Patrick Howell, 34-47 (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1990) for “citizen.” The choice of “believer” for a member of the church is suggested by Tracy’s occasional use of “non-believer,” but “believer” is not itself clearly used. I have decided to use it here in order to parallel the other two terms.

<sup>133</sup> Note here Tracy’s continued indebtedness to the transcendental precepts of Lonergan.

Jürgen Habermas critiques Tracy on his description of fundamental theology as “public.” Habermas argues that if one aims to provide warrants and arguments that are available to all reasonable persons without the explicit faith claims of a particular tradition, then it’s not clear that “theology” is actually adding anything to the conversation. Rather, it seems that fundamental theology would be

critical inquiry and to following where that inquiry leads, even if it challenges one's religious, philosophical, political, and other commitments. The fundamental theologian cannot (and should not) shirk these commitments but should attempt to distance oneself from them. As a result, the question of meaning and truth focuses on the "adequacy or inadequacy of the truth-claims, usually the cognitive claims, of a particular religious tradition" and of the contemporary situation.<sup>134</sup> The question of adequacy is argued not on the basis of the tradition's own criteria but by using the criteria and methods of another discipline. Tracy notes that typically and traditionally the other discipline theology employs has been philosophy, or at least the philosophical aspect of some discipline in the social sciences or humanities.<sup>135</sup> Fundamental theology is therefore the sub-discipline of theology that works out the basic methods of making theological claims and adjudicates the adequacy of particular claims. Because the success of theology on this level depends to some extent on its engagement with other disciplines, it is also the sub-discipline that primarily deals with concepts that are significant for, but not limited to, the task of theology.

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stripping away whatever might actually be "theological" about it. However, Habermas' critique misunderstands Tracy's point here. It is not that the religious tradition can make no claims, but rather that it must demonstrate the grounds by which those claims might be considered reasonable. Fundamental theology tries to show how these claims are reasonable according to accepted standards of argument, not to prove these claims purely on reason alone. It is this distinction that allows Tracy to name what happens in fundamental theology "theology." See Jürgen Habermas, "Transcendence from Within, Transcendence Within This World," in *Habermas, Modernity, and Public Theology*, ed. Don Browning and Francis Schüssler Fiorenza (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 230-233.

<sup>134</sup> *AI* 58, 62

<sup>135</sup> *AI* 62

*Systematic Theology*

Systematic theology is the sub-discipline oriented to the public of the church. Tracy offers two lenses through which to view the church as a public. Sociologically, it is a voluntary association, both communal and institutional in character, that mediates between individuals and the larger society.<sup>136</sup> Theologically, the church is a gift from God and the principal mediator of the human experience of Jesus Christ in the world through word, scripture, and action.<sup>137</sup> The sociological reality of the church serves to witness to, build up, and pass on the theological reality, in accord with its own public criteria, warrants, and methods construed as fidelity to the tradition and the community. Either through the efforts of the individual members (“believers”) or through the moral stature of the institution/community, this public exerts influence on the academy and society.

Systematic theology’s orientation to the public of the church takes seriously the central claims of that particular faith tradition. Its primary purpose is the reinterpretation of a particular faith tradition – especially its founding religious event – in relation to the believing community’s current context. Systematic theology’s arguments are not as public as fundamental theology’s since they are not as outwardly focused,<sup>138</sup> but systematics is concerned with mediating its religious tradition within any new contexts

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<sup>136</sup> *AI* 21

<sup>137</sup> *AI* 50, 236. Elsewhere, Tracy will describe the “tradition” as the primary mediator of this experience (*AI* 237). In so doing, I do not think he is being inconsistent, but rather suggesting the deep interlinking between church and tradition.

<sup>138</sup> This is not to say that they are not fully public, however. For Tracy, publicness is rooted in the idea of the classic in the sense that something is public when it can speak intelligibly to those beyond the particular tradition of its origin. Thus some concrete expression of systematic theology might be public if it “has found the right mode of expression to become public for all intelligent, reasonable and responsible persons” (*AI* 233).



that the church enters, in the belief that the revelation to which it witnesses has an “ever-present disclosive and transformative power.”<sup>139</sup> Thus the systematic theologian needs to be acutely aware of one’s own finitude and historicity as well as that of the tradition in which one works.<sup>140</sup> Operating in traditions and communities that are embedded in history and that change as time passes, systematic theologians must seek to propound their fundamental truths by taking seriously their historical contexts. Their ethical stance primarily involves fidelity to a particular tradition.<sup>141</sup> Instead of a rote reiteration of traditional formulations, what is needed is a “critical and creative fidelity” that grapples with the development of the tradition in light of new circumstances.<sup>142</sup> The theologian’s religious stance should become actively engaged and should express a strong commitment to this tradition which one faithfully reinterprets. In contrast to the fundamental theologian, the personal religious beliefs of the systematic theologian are not only valid sources of argument but necessary ones.<sup>143</sup> Lastly, based on the work of fundamental theology, systematic theology can for the most part *assume* “the truth-bearing character of a particular religious tradition,” and then seek to re-appropriate those claims within the contemporary situation.<sup>144</sup> As a result, Tracy thinks systematic

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<sup>139</sup> *AI* 57

<sup>140</sup> *AI* 100

<sup>141</sup> Here one might recognize a parallel between the relationship Tracy casts between fundamental and systematic theologies with Lonergan’s general and special categories. Matthew Lamb suggests that Tracy’s method of critical correlation constitutes Tracy’s appropriation of Lonergan’s distinction between “general and special foundational theological categories” (Matthew L. Lamb, “David Tracy,” in *A Handbook of Christian Theologians* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1984), 681). The general categories correspond to the human concerns embodied in the contemporary situation while the special categories correspond specifically to Christian tradition. Cf. *MT* 271-281.

<sup>142</sup> *AI* 57

<sup>143</sup> *AI* 67

<sup>144</sup> *AI* 58

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theology is distinctively hermeneutical in character vis-à-vis fundamental and practical theologies, inasmuch as its role is the reinterpretation of a tradition rather than the defense or social application of the tradition.<sup>145</sup>

### *Practical Theology*

Finally, practical theology is the sub-discipline whose public is the wider society. The public of society is comprised of three distinct but related realms: the techno-economic, the political, and the cultural. The first realm has to do with the production and distribution of goods and services in society, chiefly satisfied by the application of instrumental forms of reason. The second realm focuses on issues of justice and power and aims at rightly understanding those social issues using practical reason. The third and final realm, culture, concerns more symbolic questions and expressions, especially the basic existential questions raised by the members of society and the community at large. Tracy locates questions about religion and art within this realm since they are central to the larger symbolic system that animates that culture. These three realms are interconnected, and Tracy thinks that, ideally, symbolic reflection in the cultural realm ought to influence the practical wisdom of the polity, and that both should in turn judge and guide the instrumental reason proper to the techno-economic realm. However, he acknowledges that this is not always the case in contemporary cultures which have achieved tremendous success techno-economically, but have atrophied in the other two

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<sup>145</sup> *AI* 104. It should be reiterated here, however, that as of *AI*, Tracy understood all sub-disciplines of theology to be hermeneutical as each interprets classics of the tradition and of the contemporary situation.

realms.<sup>146</sup> The social public manifests great complexity with respect to how reason is employed, the relations among its diverse values, and the appropriate means by which to pursue those values.

As the sub-discipline oriented to this public, practical theology has to negotiate a complex matrix of rationalities, values, and means under the heading of *praxis*. Tracy understands *praxis* as practice (generally, concrete and programmatic action) informed by and informing theory. In theology, practical theology takes account of the theoretical claims of fundamental and systematic theologies, but more importantly it grounds and transforms this theoretical work.<sup>147</sup> The praxis of practical theology is therefore less a mode of arguing than of responding to specific issues in particular contexts that are deemed religiously significant. It engenders an ethical commitment to be in solidarity with those affected by such issues. This commitment is grounded in the faith tradition of the practical theologian, and so, like the systematic theologian, the religious stance of practical theologians is crucial for the practical theology they develop. While in principle anyone can practice solidarity, the work of practical theologians is specifically rooted in their social location as members of particular faith traditions and communities. Tracy is also aware that the practical theologian might be committed as well to a particular praxis movement.<sup>148</sup> The emphasis on praxis further shapes the understanding of meaning and

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<sup>146</sup> Although not explicit about it, Tracy seemed to suggest that the United States of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries falls into this “technocratic” trap (*AI* 8).

<sup>147</sup> *AI* 57. See also *AI* 69, where Tracy described praxis as “theory’s own originating and self-correcting foundation, since all theory is dependent, minimally, on the authentic praxis of the theorist’s personally appropriated value of intellectual integrity and self-transcending commitment to the imperatives of critical rationality.”

<sup>148</sup> Here he cites Johann Baptist Metz, Jürgen Moltmann, Gustavo Gutierrez, James Cone, Rosemary Radford Ruether, and Juan Luis Segundo as examples of those who are committed to both a faith tradition

truth in practical theology, especially since Tracy describes truth in this context as a “praxis-determined, transformative” notion that acknowledges the priority of involvement over theory. Practical theology explores whether particular situations of systemic distortion<sup>149</sup> require theological analysis and a religious response. The truth claims validated in fundamental theology and re-interpreted in systematic theology are used in practical theology to demonstrate the theological relevance of particular situations.

*AI*’s outline of the three sub-disciplines of theology brings out two significant differences from *BRO*’s approach. First, historical theology is not a sub-discipline of its own but rather a constitutive aspect of fundamental, systematic, and practical theologies. In order for each of these sub-disciplines to be faithful to Christian tradition, they have to

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and a praxis movement (*AI* 57). This suggests that Tracy sees what are commonly called contextual theologies as practical theologies, not fundamental or systematic theologies. In this respect, Tracy is often criticized for not adequately acknowledging the theoretical contributions of political, liberation, and feminist theologies, considering them as playing a prophetic role within the larger, more normative Western theological tradition.

While I think this critique is an important one in that Tracy could certainly do a more adequate job of considering the theoretical contributions of these theologies, I will note two ways in which this critique is not entirely fair. First, Tracy does mention that fundamental and practical theologies intersect for some of these figures, writing that “For many theologians of liberation, for example, it follows that the major problematic of most forms of fundamental theology, the problem of the truth-status of the cognitive claims of both Christianity and modernity, cannot in principle be resolved by better theories” (*AI* 70). Here he draws on the Lonerganian parallel that intellectual, moral, and religious conversion are the foundation of constructive theology (what Lonergan refers to as “mediated” theology in *Method*) in recognizing the correctness of these “praxis” theologians’ effective advocacy for the priority of lived experience to theoretical reflection.

Second, although Tracy could be more consistent about recognizing that his own theology *is* a contextual theology, he does develop a conceptual basis for doing so. Tracy regularly argues that the finitude and historicity of the particular theologian is a determinative aspect of one’s theology. He also, albeit infrequently, notes his own social location as a “white, male, middle class, and academic” person (*DWO* 6). While this does not excuse his insufficiently nuanced references to “political, liberation, and feminist theologies,” he exhibits a far greater awareness of the contextual nature of theology than he is often given credit for.

<sup>149</sup> E.g., sexism, racism, classism, elitism, anti-Semitism, environmental catastrophe, etc (*AI* 58). For more on systemic distortion, see chapter four of this dissertation.

build on the historical development of the tradition and the community's past claims, so that each sub-discipline has both historical and constructive moments in their mutually critical correlations..<sup>150</sup> Tracy claims that in making this shift he neither intended to diminish the importance of historical theology nor to offer a substantive change in his method. While I agree with the former claim, based upon his later description that this move is a "more relatively adequate formulation" that places the historical moment within each sub-discipline, I do see this as a development in his method.<sup>151</sup> In any case, *AI*'s account of the tasks of theology remains his dominant paradigm for the remainder of his theological career thus far and indicates that he found this formulation to be more satisfactory.

Second, the three sub-disciplines of theology are distinguished by their primary reference groups—their publics—rather than the eras to which they principally refer. The publics which are engaged are more significant for the sub-disciplines than the temporal stage of the tradition they happen to deal with. For example, the claim in *BRO* that practical theology was aimed at the future tended to undermine the here-and-now character of the praxis situations to which practical theologians respond. Tracy's modest suggestion that *AI* offered just an "alternative formulation" belies the enduring importance of "publicness" as a theme in his work and confirms his conviction that it

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<sup>150</sup> *AI* 56

<sup>151</sup> *AI* 84-5 n. 28. Matthew Lamb is even more emphatic in his insistence that this reorganization of the theological sub-disciplines in *AI* increases the significance of history in Tracy's theological method; he connects this to Tracy's increased reflections "on the diverse social contexts in which theology is practiced" (Lamb, "David Tracy," 689).

provides a better understanding of the task of theology.<sup>152</sup> The notion of publicness not only better explains the importance of theology in the contemporary world, but it also attests to the universal relevance of both the fundamental questions about existence and the universal reality of God that theology proclaims and seeks to understand.<sup>153</sup>

*Theological Interpretation as Conversation in Plurality and Ambiguity*

The emphasis on the interpretation of classics in the method of mutually critical correlation illustrates the hermeneutical orientation of Tracy's theology. While he emphasized the hermeneutic character of systematic theology because of its role as reinterpreting the tradition in light of new contexts, each of the other sub-disciplines also enacts a complex process of interpreting both the classics from the religious tradition and the classical expressions of the contemporary situation. As each type of theology develops, it is always interpreting these two sources as they interact with one another.

Once Tracy finished his considerations on theological method in *AI*, he became less and less explicit about his understanding of mutually critical correlation or of the three sub-disciplines. While he maintained an essential agreement with this formulation of theological method and continues to reiterate it today,<sup>154</sup> his attention in the late 1980's turned toward more explicitly hermeneutical matters, especially the model of conversation as a way of analyzing the process of interpretation.<sup>155</sup> Although this model

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<sup>152</sup> *AI* 84-5 n. 28

<sup>153</sup> *AI* 52

<sup>154</sup> Most recently during his public lecture at Loyola University of Chicago entitled "The Necessity and Character of Fundamental Theology" (*NCFI*).

<sup>155</sup> Cf. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 356-371

is already prominent already in *AI* (e.g., his outline of the four moments of interpretation), conversation has remained his typical way of speaking about method right up to the present.

In his 1987 text *Plurality and Ambiguity*, Tracy spoke of conversation as a “game” in which the flow of a conversation takes place through un-self-conscious questioning.<sup>156</sup> Wherever conversation partners place themselves at the mercy of the conversation itself, they risk at least some challenge to their usual ways of thinking and living, and possibly even a radical reorientation of the self. Conversation partners might include individuals, communities, and traditions, or texts, paintings, and other distanced expressions. These conversations have the potential to reveal some truth, understood primarily as manifestation or disclosure, in the interaction between partners.

In *PA* the description of conversation is fairly consistent with Tracy’s previous attempts.<sup>157</sup> But where *PA* and later works<sup>158</sup> really advance his position from that articulated in *AI* is in relation to the notion of “interruption.”<sup>159</sup> The realities referred to in the title of this text—plurality and ambiguity—characterize the interlocutors who participate in a conversation. Tracy is fond of claiming that the classics that we interpret are not innocent since they come from traditions that are both plural and ambiguous.

These traditions may have played an emancipatory role historically, but they inevitably

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<sup>156</sup> *PA* 18

<sup>157</sup> See especially *AI* 99-107, 154-167, and 345-352.

<sup>158</sup> See especially David Tracy, “Theology, Critical Social Theory, and the Public Realm,” in *Habermas, Modernity, and Public Theology*, ed. Don Browning and Francis Schüssler Fiorenza (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 19-42; David Tracy, “Western Hermeneutics and Interreligious Dialogue,” in *Interreligious Hermeneutics*, eds. Catherine Cornille and Christopher Conway (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010), 1-43. In the latter text, Tracy recapitulates this Gadamerian understanding of conversation as his fundamental model of hermeneutics.

<sup>159</sup> *PA* 32

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possess oppressive and violent dimensions as well. Plurality and ambiguity affect both the classics produced and the individuals who interpret them. Therefore as much as conversation requires its participants to expose their own vulnerability to critique, it also requires them to be suspicious of their interlocutors. Above all, one is called to be suspicious of oneself and one's own ambiguities.

If conversation is Tracy's basic model for hermeneutics, then his method of mutually critical correlation is a specific way of enacting this model. Broadly speaking, the two poles of correlation are in conversation with one another through the particular theologians who are employing that method. There is a correspondence between Tracy's insistence that in mutually critical correlation the two poles can critique one another and disclose new possibilities and the importance of "truth as manifestation" in conversation.<sup>160</sup> This correspondence arises because plurality and ambiguity enter into the constitution of both the religious pole of the tradition and the situational pole of the contemporary situation. Recognizing this, the process of mutually critical correlation is not always easy or continuous. Rather, it is fraught with argument, disagreement, and suspicion. Nevertheless, for Tracy, conversation remains the fundamental model for theological method.

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<sup>160</sup> PA 28-29. Here Tracy means that in manifestation, there is a dialogical process between "the object's disclosure and concealment and the subject's recognition." In other words, the way in which one appropriates truth as manifestation is through a conversation between the self and whatever it is that discloses that truth.



## **The Relationship between Anthropology and Method**

The importance of using Tracy's method as the lens through which to interpret his anthropological constants becomes clearest in relation to the distinctions he draws between fundamental and systematic theology. For Tracy, fundamental theology does not require that its practitioners exist within or act upon any prior commitments to a particular faith tradition. Rather, its topics and arguments are in principle open to any intelligent, reasonable, responsible person. Even so, fundamental theology's topics, although not primarily or exclusively *theological*, do have theological relevance. This is why I am proposing that the anthropological constants of finitude and relationality fit best into his view of fundamental theology. Both of these constants can be and have been investigated by disciplines other than theology, such as biology, ecology, sociology, and philosophy. Insights from these fields can illuminate theology, opening the possibility of fruitful interaction among them. In Tracy's theology, then, finitude and relationality are anthropological constants within *fundamental* theology.

For systematic theology, on the other hand, the faith commitments of its practitioners are indispensable. While systematic theology draws upon and engages the work of other disciplines, it can only operate genuinely by fidelity to a particular faith tradition and its characteristic pursuit of truth. Even when systematic theology engages other traditions, as Tracy has in Jewish-Christian and Buddhist-Christian dialogue, it does not prescind from the theologian's own faith commitments. Sin and grace, then, are the anthropological constants most proper to systematic theology precisely because Tracy's

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account of them constitutes a faithful and creative retrieval of what the Christian tradition means by them..

Using the framework of Tracy's theological method to organize, explain, and analyze his theological anthropology will be effective for two key reasons. First, his method contains implicit assumptions about the human person who will employ this method. Theology is performed by human beings, and the values that guide doing theology are values relevant to human persons. In developing his method, Tracy both reveals and conceals key aspects of his theological anthropology. By looking first at how he distinguishes the main disciplines of theology, I intended to lay the groundwork for understanding how he understands the person.

Second, Tracy's method is the organizing principle for the broad sweep of his theology. It frames what he has written on Christology, the Trinity, ecclesiology, ethics, and various other fields of theology. It thus would be counterproductive to leave the question of method out of his theological anthropology. Theological method has been the central contribution of his career to the larger field of theology, and it is through his method that all his other contributions are most effectively considered.

Therefore, in the following four chapters, the anthropological constants will be treated according to Tracy's theological sub-disciplines of fundamental and systematic theology. The anthropological constants of finitude and relationality are dealt with according to Tracy's understanding of fundamental theology. These concepts are not limited to any particular religious tradition; rather, they are terms that might be considered by a wide variety of disciplines (philosophy, anthropology, sociology, etc.).

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They are nevertheless relevant for theology, and through interdisciplinary engagement the theological significance of these anthropological constants becomes clearer. Sin and grace, on the other hand, will be approached according to Tracy's understanding of systematic theology. They are specific to and draw their meaning from the Christian tradition.

## CHAPTER TWO

### FINITUDE

This chapter will investigate the anthropological constant of finitude in Tracy's work. Early in his career, Tracy was concerned with providing a transcendental analysis of common human experience that focused on the idea of limits. He began to recognize, however, the ever-greater diversity of human experience, and as he did so he shifted further away from transcendental analysis.<sup>1</sup> While he does not completely drop the idea of limit, he does begin to recognize that there are other markers of what might be considered "religious."

Following again the genealogical method, this chapter proceeds through the various stages of Tracy's career that roughly correspond to a major text, either book or articles, in which each stage culminates.<sup>2</sup> Each stage has several themes that develop, change, or give rise to one another. This chapter will chiefly investigate the various meanings of the concept "limit" in Tracy's thought and the ways in which "limit" implicates his sense of the divine, of pluralism, and of otherness.

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<sup>1</sup> This shift is part of Tracy's theological development from student of Lonergan's to respectful but critical interlocutor of Lonergan's. This is already apparent in David Tracy, "Method as Foundation for Theology: Bernard Lonergan's Option," *The Journal of Religion* 50, no. 3 (July 1970): 292-318; David Tracy, "Lonergan's Foundational Theology: An Interpretation and a Critique," in *Foundations of Theology: Papers from the International Lonergan Conference, 1970*, ed. Philip McShane (Dublin: Gill & MacMillan, 1971), 197-222; and David Tracy, "Foundational Theology as Contemporary Possibility," *The Dunwoodie Review* 12 (1972): 3-20.

<sup>2</sup> In some cases it will include articles published shortly after a particular volume as many of these were written at roughly the same time.

## **Blessed Rage for Order**

### *Transcendental Method in BRO*

In *Blessed Rage for Order*, Tracy outlines five distinct models for contemporary theology: orthodox, liberal, neo-orthodox, radical, and revisionist. In his presentation of these models, Tracy is concerned with the “subject-referent” (i.e., the person who does this form of theology) and “object-referent” (the subject matter the theologian is concerned with) of each.

First, theologians in the orthodox model seek to uphold the “perennial truths of traditional Christianity” against the claims of modernity and postmodernity.<sup>3</sup> Orthodox theology is concerned with promoting a reasoned defense of traditional claims and tends to reject the possibility that other academic fields might have something meaningful to contribute to theology. The subject-referent is the believing member of the church community while the object-referent is an organized understanding or explanation of their beliefs.<sup>4</sup>

Second, liberal theology accepts the claims of the modern period, necessitating that theology account for the truths and ethical demands proposed by the modern secular enterprise.<sup>5</sup> While the liberal theologian still maintains commitment to Christian teaching, the emergence of conflict between the two tends to result in qualifying or even abandoning traditional Christian beliefs. Theology thus adapts itself to modernity without making any serious demands in return. Thus the subject-referent is the

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<sup>3</sup> *BRO* 24

<sup>4</sup> *BRO* 24-5

<sup>5</sup> *BRO* 25

theologian's "own modern consciousness as committed to the basic values of modernity," while the object-referent is the beliefs of a particular community rearticulated in light of the modern project.<sup>6</sup>

Third, the neo-orthodox model is both a development of and a reaction against the liberal model.<sup>7</sup> The neo-orthodox theologian critiques liberal theology first for insufficiently considering the sinfulness of the world and second for inadequately maintaining the justification by faith that comes through Jesus Christ.<sup>8</sup> This account of the human person, as fallen and in need of God's grace, was seen as a more adequate response from the Christian tradition to the contemporary world in which the neo-orthodox theologians lived.<sup>9</sup> By advocating for a dialectical understanding of the relationship between humanity and God, the neo-orthodox model proposes as its subject-referent "the more radical model of the human being of authentic Christian faith" who is focused on the object-referent of God as wholly other.<sup>10</sup>

Fourth, the radical model focuses on the liberation of human beings through an application of the dialectical approach to the Christian tradition itself. Represented most clearly by the "death of God" movement of the 1960's and 70's, this model views the God represented in these other models as alienating "the authentic conscience of the...liberated contemporary human being."<sup>11</sup> It thus proposes a subject-referent who is

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<sup>6</sup> *BRO* 26

<sup>7</sup> E.g. Tracy names Friedrich Schleiermacher as paradigmatic of the liberal model while Karl Barth is his exemplar of the neo-orthodox model.

<sup>8</sup> *BRO* 28

<sup>9</sup> E.g., Barth, Paul Tillich, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Friedrich Gogarten

<sup>10</sup> *BRO* 29-30

<sup>11</sup> *BRO* 31

“committed to post-modern, contemporary, secular intellectual and moral values” and an object-referent of restated Christianity that jettisons God but retains Jesus as a moral exemplar.<sup>12</sup>

Tracy argues that the most adequate among these is fifth model, “revisionist theology,” which is rooted in a mutually critical correlation between the Christian fact and common human experience.<sup>13</sup> This method intends to correlate two sources for theology using three distinct but related approaches. As was stated previously,<sup>14</sup> Tracy claims that the two sources of theology are the Christian fact and common human experience. Analysis of these sources relies on three distinct but interrelated criteria. First, the interpretation of the tradition must be *appropriate* to that tradition, as mediated by both the Christian scriptures – the “fundamental although not exclusive expression” of this tradition – and also by the doctrines, symbols, and rituals derived from these scriptures.<sup>15</sup> Second, the theologian’s interpretation of common human experience must be *adequate*. According to Tracy, this criterion is not only a demand of modern theology, but integral to the “universalist, existential assumptions of the New Testament self-understanding itself.”<sup>16</sup> If the Christian claim is that its beliefs and practices have universal validity, then they have to give an “understanding of authentic human

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<sup>12</sup> BRO 31

<sup>13</sup> Cf. David Tracy, “Task of Fundamental Theology,” *Journal of Religion* 54, no. 1 (January 1974): 14 n. 3; where Tracy argues for “fact” over “tradition” or “kerygma” because he thinks the latter two options imply “that the fundamental theologian need be a believing member of the Christian community.”

<sup>14</sup> Chapter 1, pages 52-7

<sup>15</sup> BRO 44. Cf. AI 309

<sup>16</sup> BRO 44. Tracy is drawing on Bultmann and his sense of the “contemporary scientific world view” in this claim. Cf. Rudolf Bultmann, *Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate*, ed. Hans Werner Bartsch (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961), 1-8.

existence.”<sup>17</sup> Third, any mutually critical correlation of these sources must possess *internal coherence*, so that it must achieve a logically coherent articulation of the experience or ideas in question. Tracy claims that although some symbols, images, myths, metaphors, etc., may resonate with the authentic lived experience of the human person, they may not be susceptible of internal conceptual coherence.<sup>18</sup>

The three approaches Tracy uses in the revisionist model are phenomenological, hermeneutical-historical, and metaphysical-transcendental. The phenomenological method investigates common human experience in order to thematize the existential meaning revealed in the Christian tradition. Tracy argues for the phenomenological method because the historical trajectory from Edmund Husserl to Langdon Gilkey shows that the phenomenological approach is best suited to illuminate the religious dimension of common human experience.<sup>19</sup>

The hermeneutical-historical approach focuses on a reconstruction and interpretation of central Christian texts. Such an approach uses historical-critical methods to investigate and reconstruct these texts and to provide a more relatively adequate rendering of the metaphors, symbols, and ideas to be interpreted by the theologian. Of the two important recent developments in hermeneutics, Tracy notes the recognition that the text under consideration has been *distanciated* from both the author

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<sup>17</sup> BRO 44

<sup>18</sup> BRO 70

<sup>19</sup> BRO 47-48. The specific influence of Gilkey on Tracy’s development of a phenomenological approach is partly a result of their being colleagues at the University of Chicago Divinity School during the years that Tracy was preparing *Blessed Rage for Order*. Cf. the extensive citations of Gilkey’s *Naming the Whirlwind: The Renewal of God-Language* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969) throughout the footnotes of BRO.



and the text's original audience. Thus the interpreter should not be restricted to understanding the text in terms of the author or original audience, but concentrate more on the meaning disclosed by the text itself. Secondly, the interpreter has to determine both the *sense* and the *referent* of the text.<sup>20</sup> The *sense* concerns the internal structure of a text, which governs and frames its meaning, while the *referent* indicates the meaning and possibility disclosed by the text in the world of the interpreter.<sup>21</sup>

Tracy claims that his metaphysical-transcendental approach is the most controversial element of the revisionist method. Both the phenomenological and hermeneutical-historical approaches retrieve the religious and the theistic bases of common human experience and the Christian tradition. Yet this initial stage of correlation, while satisfying the criteria of adequacy and appropriateness, still does not settle the more fundamental issue of the truth of these claims. These claims must instead be assessed on their coherence and their basis in common human experience.<sup>22</sup>

The relevant theological truth claims have a fundamentally religious character that provides an "ultimate or grounding dimension or horizon" for the broader human experience. Therefore the status of the truth claim pertinent here does not have to do with mere correspondence or adequation because while it is one thing to verify or falsify these claims, the further task here is to clarify the necessary conditions of possibility for

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<sup>20</sup> For the distinction between sense and referent, see Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 19-22. The importance of "sense" and "referent" will re-emerge when Tracy distinguishes between the limit-to and limit-of dimensions of experience.

<sup>21</sup> *BRO* 49-52

<sup>22</sup> *BRO* 53-55

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these claims. Tracy insists on going beyond the traditional version of metaphysical analysis to the more contemporary transcendental analysis.<sup>23</sup>

The transcendental analysis of both common human experience and the Christian tradition is grounded in phenomena that have certain *a priori* conditions that must be fulfilled in order to appear. Hence, the phenomenological analysis that describes these experiences remains necessary but not sufficient for Tracy's mutually critical correlation. Fully reflective philosophical analysis of the sources of theology investigates "the conditions for the possibility of the primordial experience of the self."<sup>24</sup> Transcendental analysis validates particular truth claims by demonstrating how specific beliefs either function as fundamental to or comprise the horizon of *all* human experience.<sup>25</sup>

### *Common Human Experience*

The "experience of the self" that Tracy has in mind in *Blessed Rage for Order* is one that is common to all humanity. In the chapter on the criterion of adequacy, Tracy describes the "common sense" understanding of experience, in which one assumes that others share similar experiences on sensory, emotional, and physical levels, so that we experience a sort of resonance in appealing to another's experience. For Tracy this appeal to common experience is imprecise yet still has a certain accuracy.<sup>26</sup>

Here Tracy makes use of his appropriation of the fourfold structure of human consciousness he learned from his mentor, Bernard Lonergan. Scrutiny of one's

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<sup>23</sup> BRO 55-56

<sup>24</sup> BRO 71

<sup>25</sup> BRO 71

<sup>26</sup> BRO 64-66

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conscious operations reveals four levels: empirical (experience, attentiveness), intelligent (understanding), reasonable (judging), and responsible (deliberating, deciding). The level of attention garners the data both of our senses and of conscious operations, which are necessary but not sufficient components for knowing. We not only experience objects in the world through sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch, but we are also able consciously to experience *our experiencing* the world, *understand* our experiencing, understanding, judging, deliberating, and deciding; we *judge* our experiencing, understanding, judging, deliberating, and deciding, and so forth. Human experience is thus not limited to sensory experience. Tracy agrees with Lonergan's opposition to a narrow "empiricist" concept of experience that is taken for granted by many philosophers and social scientists. The appeal to human experience intends something more than "what I can scientifically verify through controlled experiment."<sup>27</sup> Indeed, for Tracy this appeal includes the much more fundamental question "what is meaningful in human life?"

For Tracy, the term "meaningful" indicates "that intrinsic relationship between a mediating symbol, image, metaphor, myth, or concept and the immediate lived experience of the self."<sup>28</sup> In order to be considered meaningful, such an expression must disclose authentic lived experience. Responding to the question of what is meaningful in common human experience requires a "phenomenological-transcendental" approach because this combined method investigates not only the relationship between mediating

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<sup>27</sup> BRO 65

<sup>28</sup> BRO 66

expressions and the relevant immediate experience but also the conditions of possibility of that experience itself.<sup>29</sup>

Based on this analysis, Tracy argues that religious experience is not incommensurable with common human experience. Thus, he typically prefers to speak about the “religious *dimension* of experience” rather than “religious experience.”<sup>30</sup> Put another way, when one asks “how and in what senses is the religious interpretation of our common human experience and language meaningful and true?”<sup>31</sup> one cannot reflect upon religious experience unless one reflects on common human experience. The most important specification of experience as religious experience is what Tracy names the “limit.”<sup>32</sup>

### *Limits and the Religious Dimension of Human Experience*

According to Tracy, the religious dimension of human experience can be described as the “basic faith in the worthwhileness of existence, in the final graciousness of our lives in the midst of absurdity.”<sup>33</sup> This idea of a basic faith or trust, felt but not necessarily based on personally verified facts, helps one to grasp Tracy’s sense of limit. His analysis of the concept of “limit” is largely motivated by his sense that the debate over the meaning of the term “religion” is unproductive. Tracy recognizes that descriptions of the “religious” have recourse either implicitly or explicitly to the limits of

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<sup>29</sup> BRO 69

<sup>30</sup> Emphasis mine

<sup>31</sup> BRO 91

<sup>32</sup> BRO 93

<sup>33</sup> BRO 119

common human experience, thus affirming that there is a “family resemblance” among descriptions or explanation of the religions and religious phenomena.<sup>34</sup>

Tracy draws his understanding of limit from Søren Kierkegaard through the interpretation of Karl Jaspers. Tracy attributes the postmodern concern for becoming an authentic self in the face of radical limits to Kierkegaard and Nietzsche.<sup>35</sup> Kierkegaard provided early existentialist analyses of the bounded-ness of the human person, which pointed to inability of human person’s to exercise total control over one’s fate.<sup>36</sup> The human is free but experiences anxiety in the face of this freedom. Unlike fear, anxiety has no specific object; rather, it is “freedom’s actuality as the possibility of possibility.”<sup>37</sup> At first, humans experience anxiety precisely because they are free. Freedom does not necessitate sin, but it makes it possible, and so human beings become sinners through their exercise of freedom.<sup>38</sup> This brings about a second sense of anxiety, in which the individual feels trapped by one’s sinfulness. Much as Kierkegaard characterizes one’s entry into sinfulness as a “leap,” so too is the individual’s return to God through faith a leap.<sup>39</sup> Thus Kierkegaard’s understanding of anxiety points to the reality of the free human person who experiences radical limitations in the exercise of that freedom.<sup>40</sup>

Kierkegaard’s account of anxiety influenced Jaspers in his development of boundary situations. Jaspers claims that human beings are always in a situation, and the

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<sup>34</sup> BRO 93

<sup>35</sup> BRO 11

<sup>36</sup> BRO 107

<sup>37</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin*, trans. and ed. Reidar Thomte (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 42

<sup>38</sup> Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 22

<sup>39</sup> Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 112 (this is where the term “leap of faith” comes from).

<sup>40</sup> BRO 106-7

only way to change one's situation is by moving into another one. Boundary situations, then, are "like a wall we run into" because while there is something beyond these boundaries, the boundaries themselves do not change.<sup>41</sup> Suffering, guilt, and death are boundary situations that are general – "they *never change*, except in appearance" – but that are encountered in the particular historicity of the concrete situation in which one lives.<sup>42</sup> The self encounters these boundary situations through several "leaps" by which one moves from "mundane existence" to "*real Existenz in boundary situations*."<sup>43</sup> The encounter with boundary situations enables the self to become "aware of being," both in one's immediate situation and ultimately in the "universal boundary situation of all existence."<sup>44</sup> These boundary situations help the self to become aware of one's limits. Only through reflection on one's situation can one come to an awareness of the limits of existence.

Having learned from Kierkegaard and Jaspers, Tracy emphasizes that the experience of the limit indicates the sense that there is something beyond one's finite human experience. Indeed, it is only in the context of reaching the limit of the everyday, mundane engagement with the world that one becomes aware of the limits of human experience. In order to examine more deeply how Tracy develops this idea of limit, we need to make three important distinctions: first, the reinterpretation of Ricoeur's sense-

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<sup>41</sup> Karl Jaspers, *Philosophy, Volume 2*, trans. E.B. Ashton (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 178-9

<sup>42</sup> Jaspers, *Philosophy, Volume 2*, 178, 184

<sup>43</sup> Jaspers, *Philosophy, Volume 2*, 181-2. By "Existenz," Jaspers means the ground or source of the self that is characterized by one's freedom and spontaneity through which one can realize possibilities. Cf. Karl Jaspers, *Reason and Existenz* (New York: Noonday Press, 1955), 60-63.

<sup>44</sup> Jaspers, *Philosophy, Volume 2*, 179, 184

referent distinction; second, the differences among limit concepts in relation to language, experience, situation, and question that follow from this reinterpretation;<sup>45</sup> third, Tracy's fundamental distinction between the "limit-to" and "limit-of."

As was noted above, Tracy's hermeneutical method in theology involves understanding both the sense and referent of an expression. As regards interpreting *religious* expression, Tracy interprets the term *sense* to mean limit-language, and the term *referent* to denote the limit-experience of a given religious text.<sup>46</sup> Tracy uses *sense* to convey that the internal structure of religious expressions consists in some form of limit-language. For instance, Tracy investigates the language forms of the New Testament (proverbs, eschatological statements, parables) in order to find an "authentically Christian limit-language."<sup>47</sup> Such modes of writing and speaking enable the religious expression to disclose an authentically human way of living.

The term *referent* means that the limit-experience disclosed in the particular expression of itself renders this disclosure of possible ways of living. Limit-experience represents what Tracy calls the "final realm of meaningfulness in our lives" that resides in an experience of ultimacy.<sup>48</sup> This experience, which is not reducible to either supernaturalism or moralism, manifests the profound otherness that enables one to realize the limit in one's life, so that in this sense the limit-experience is the *referent* of religious

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<sup>45</sup> This list, though not exhaustive, covers the most important types. Tracy also applies the "limit" in relation to character, concept, and dimension, which are really variations on the four terms listed above. Furthermore, the more crucial distinction for Tracy is between "limit-to" and "limit-of." In a preliminary way, each of the terms applies effectively to the "limit-to," while the "limit-of" provides the ground or horizon of all limit-to. For more on how the concept of the "horizon" factors into this, see the beginning of chapter three below.

<sup>46</sup> *BRO* 78

<sup>47</sup> *BRO* 124

<sup>48</sup> *BRO* 132

expression. Limit-experience discloses newly possible ways to live in a genuinely religious and human way.

If the distinction between sense and referent establishes the basis for distinguishing limit language from limit experience, how does Tracy understand limit-questions and limit-situations? Limit-questions deserve an essentially religious response.<sup>49</sup> Put another way, such questions arise at the limits of particular fields of endeavor as questions shift from “how?” and “what?” to the more penetrating “why?”

Tracy investigates two examples of limit-questions in the fields of science and morality. With respect to science, Tracy uses Lonergan’s analysis of self-transcendence to move beyond the common assertion that religion and science speak in distinct languages and instead seek grounds for a religious dimension of science.<sup>50</sup> For Lonergan, the operator of self-transcendence is the human ability to ask questions. These questions promote the subject from a world of immediacy to a world mediated and constituted by meaning.<sup>51</sup> Tracy applies this insight to the role of questioning and analyzes the scientific process in terms of the levels of intentional consciousness in order to reveal the broader horizons of scientific inquiry. Thus, on the level of questions for understanding, Tracy argues that actual scientific questioning implies the “very possibility of fruitful inquiry,”<sup>52</sup> because were the created universe not in and of itself intelligible, then what would be the value of a scientific investigation of it? If it is intelligible, why is it? What is the origin of that intelligibility? On the level of judgment, the scientist must consider

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<sup>49</sup> *BRO* 94

<sup>50</sup> *BRO* 95-96

<sup>51</sup> Cf. *MT* Chapter Three, especially pages 76-81

<sup>52</sup> *BRO* 98



the grounds of or the evidence that warrants one's scientific and factual judgments. Lonergan describes these judgments as "virtually unconditioned" when hypotheses specifying conditions that must have been fulfilled in order to be verified are grasped to have been actually fulfilled. These virtually unconditioned judgments, however, depend on prior judgments, which themselves depend on prior judgments, and so on.<sup>53</sup> Tracy insists that the scientist needs to question whether there exists some grounding *formally* unconditioned fact (which has no conditions whatsoever) that ultimately *grounds* these judgments.<sup>54</sup> Finally, at the level of deliberation scientists would need to assess the ethical import of their scientific judgments by reflecting on whether the "goals, purposes, and ideals are themselves worthwhile," as well as whether there is a ground or horizon of worthwhile-ness itself.<sup>55</sup>

Tracy closes his analysis of limit-questions in science with two key points about the trajectory outlined here. First, this trajectory is not imposed by a religious mode of thinking. Rather, he argues that these three levels of questioning are integral to the scientific project itself. Indeed, the self-transcending characteristic of questioning directs scientists to ask these sorts of questions about their horizon. Second, Tracy claims that Lonergan's approach is not the only satisfactory one, but rather one possible avenue. Moreover the transcendental approach does not undermine the validity of phenomenological, process, and linguistic modes of analysis.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> For the "virtually unconditioned," see Lonergan, *Insight*, 305-6.

<sup>54</sup> In other words, a "necessary existent."

<sup>55</sup> *BRO* 98

<sup>56</sup> *BRO* 99

The second field that Tracy analyzes with respect to limit-questions is morality. He starts by asking whether there is a clear distinction between religious discourse and moral discourse.<sup>57</sup> Shifting from the Lonerganian account of science, he investigates the possibility of limit-questions in morality by referring to Schubert Ogden's appropriation of Stephen Toulmin. Ogden notes that there are diverse uses of argument among aesthetic, moral, religious, and scientific modes of discourse.<sup>58</sup> From this perspective, moral argument should bring together "our feelings and behavior" for the sake of fulfilling the needs and goals of everyone,<sup>59</sup> but with the recognition that there is "no moral argument for being moral."<sup>60</sup> Indeed, the question of the goal is a limit-question that emerges at the boundaries of moral argumentation.

While Tracy does consider the fields of science and morality in his handling of limit-questions, he concentrates on ordinary, everyday experiences of limit-situations. He defines the limit-situation as one in which "a human being ineluctably finds manifest a certain ultimate limit or horizon to his or her existence."<sup>61</sup> The idea of the limit-situation, which developed out of existentialist philosophy in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries,<sup>62</sup> is divided between those construed negatively (so-called "boundary" situations) and those construed positively ("ecstatic" situations). The boundary set includes experiences of

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<sup>57</sup> BRO 101

<sup>58</sup> Schubert Ogden, *The Reality of God: And Other Essays* (Dallas: SMU Press, 1992), 27-30. Cf. Stephen Toulmin, *The Uses of Argument* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1958); Stephen Toulmin, *An Examination of the Place of Reason in Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

<sup>59</sup> BRO 102

<sup>60</sup> BRO 102; cf. Ogden, *The Reality of God*, 30

<sup>61</sup> BRO 105

<sup>62</sup> See the discussion of Kierkegaard and Jaspers previously on pages 92-3.

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guilt, anxiety, sickness and death, and their power forces people to recognize their own finitude as they confront the stark boundaries of their horizon.<sup>63</sup>

Ecstatic situations also manifest the individual's finitude in "moments of self-transcendence": "When in the grasp of such experiences...we can and do transcend our usual lackluster selves and our usual everyday worlds to touch upon a dimension of experience which cannot be stated adequately in the language of ordinary, everyday experience."<sup>64</sup> Situations of intense joy, authentic love, and even creation can be ecstatic situations that indicate one's finitude.<sup>65</sup> So boundary experiences bluntly force the individual to question the meaningfulness of existence, while ecstatic experiences gesture toward a reality beyond human limitations that may ground an affirmative answer to that question.

The various kinds of limit outlined above – limit-language and limit-experience as the sense and referent of religious experience; the limit-questions of science and morality and the limit-situations of everyday life – are based on Tracy's underlying distinction between *limit-to* and *limit-of*. *Limit-to* refers to human encounters with such limits, while *limit-of* refers to what grounds those limits. Rather than describing the range of human encounters with human limits (such as the differences among limit-experiences, limit-questions, etc.), the limit-to and limit-of distinction regards limits on the one hand and the horizon of these limits on the other.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> BRO 105

<sup>64</sup> BRO 105

<sup>65</sup> By way of a musical analogy, boundary situations seem to be the minor key while ecstatic situations are the major key.

<sup>66</sup> BRO 132-3

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To elaborate more concretely, the limit-to refers to those experiences, situations, questions, and so forth that indicate the bounds of our human condition. In a limit-to experience, such as death, guilt, or joy, the individual encounters the finite character of his/her reality. Similarly, the limit-questions regarding either the worthwhileness of scientific inquiry or the reasons for being moral expose the boundaries of ordinary life. All these limit concepts Tracy names “limit-to” insofar as they run into the finite human condition.

The “limit-of” type indicates or discloses the fundamental reality that grounds all of existence and “functions as a final, now gracious, now frightening, now trustworthy, now absurd, always uncontrollable limit-of the very meaning of existence itself.”<sup>67</sup> The limit-of question wonders about the basis for asserting worthwhileness itself or for grounding any moral inquiry. Interestingly, Tracy understands Lonergan’s concept of the formally unconditioned in terms of the “limit-of.”

Tracy does not venture at this point to refer to the limit-of as “God,” but he leaves open a variety of possible ways of naming and encountering this limit-of reality.<sup>68</sup> Given the centrality of the concept of the limit for distinguishing the religious dimension of experience, for Tracy the religious person’s relationship to the limit-of reality is one of “basic trust” or “confidence.”<sup>69</sup> Basic faith is the reality to which “the religions” bear witness, and Tracy thinks it is the most “authentic mode of being in the world.”<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> *BRO* 108

<sup>68</sup> *BRO* 108

<sup>69</sup> *BRO* 153

<sup>70</sup> *BRO* 134

*Summary*

In *Blessed Rage for Order*, Tracy primarily interprets finitude in terms of limit. It is crucial for his method's correlation between common human experience and the Christian tradition, and it has significant anthropological implications for his theology. This common human experience, while pluralist and broad-ranging, is also universal as regards common structures and conditions of possibility. The encounter with one's limits is the key common human experience Tracy discusses because the limit distinguishes religious experience without separating it from a universal sense of experience. Indeed, Tracy is convinced that all people have limit experiences, and so broadly in this sense there is a religious dimension to all human lives even though some would not name it that way.

Tracy uses the limit character of human experience to describe both human experiences of the limit and the language people use to express limits, the limit situations, and the questions occasioned by or giving rise to their limits. Further, Tracy's articulation of the limit also encompasses the horizon beyond all limits, so that besides something limiting, human limitation indicates a reality beyond the limit-of our experience. Thus the finite human person is inseparable from and related to a reality that is both beyond and fundamental to human existence.

**The Analogical Imagination**

The idea of the limit, so central to Tracy's understanding of finitude in *Blessed Rage for Order*, remains an important concept in *The Analogical Imagination*. But

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Tracy's understanding of limit evolves with respect to its context and its role in his theology. In exploring how his idea of limit and his understanding of finitude is enriched in *The Analogical Imagination*, there are several key developments to consider. First, Tracy reformulates the method of mutually critical correlation by speaking of the contemporary situation instead of the pole of common human experience.<sup>71</sup> Second, this change in the method of correlation enables him to clarify the difference between fundamental and systematic theology, particularly as they involve the reality of the limit. Third, Tracy rearticulates his notion of "limit-of" by placing it in the context of "the whole." Fourth, Tracy's ongoing investigation into pluralism leads to a more fully developed notion of the pluralism internal to the individual. Together these developments deepen Tracy's understanding of finitude in his second constructive book.

### *Methodological Shift I: The Contemporary Situation*

As was noted above, in *Blessed Rage for Order* Tracy's method of correlation explains the interplay between the two poles of the Christian fact and common human experience, the latter of which brings out the anthropological implications of this method. This reciprocal interaction is the basis from which Tracy explores the religious dimension of common human experience, which is marked primarily by its limit character. However, in *The Analogical Imagination*, Tracy substantially re-thinks this pole inasmuch as he clarifies and conceives the mutually critical correlation in terms of the poles of the Christian tradition and the contemporary situation.

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<sup>71</sup> The details of this development are covered in Chapter One, pages 61-5

The contemporary situation expands on what he previously called “common human experience.” His concern with “fundamental questions of the meaning of human existence” remains operative in this pole,<sup>72</sup> and it continues to be a reality that demands interpretation by the theologian.<sup>73</sup> Tracy also describes the interpretive process in the same language he uses in *Blessed Rage for Order*, claiming that the theologian must ask “first, whether the situation is accurately analyzed (usually this proves an extra-theological discussion); second, why this situation is said to be a *religious dimension* and/or import and thereby merits or demands a theological response.”<sup>74</sup> The distinction between an experience or situation and its religious dimension is still part of the structure of Tracy’s thinking.

Of the significant differences between the ideas of contemporary situation and common human experience, the most important has to do with the *situation*, which places the accent on context. In the case of theological method, he is specifically concerned with the context—defined by culture, time, history, and tradition—in which the theologian works.<sup>75</sup> For example, Tracy compares the situation in which he wrote *The Analogical Imagination* with that of Paul Tillich: “our situation poses no one *dominant* question,” so that Tillich’s concerns “may now be viewed as one fundamental *and* permanent question in the present postexistentialist situation.”<sup>76</sup> Tracy in fact wonders if

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<sup>72</sup> *AI* 60

<sup>73</sup> *AI* 59

<sup>74</sup> *AI* 61; emphasis mine

<sup>75</sup> *AI* 59, 339

<sup>76</sup> *AI* 341. Furthermore, in the period between *Blessed Rage for Order* and *The Analogical Imagination*, Tracy probably recognized the increasingly plural and complex nature of the contemporary situation.

the most basic issue in his situation is whether there are any valuable fundamental questions at all – and if so, what might those questions be and for whom.<sup>77</sup>

According to Tracy, the situation is co-determined by a range of different factors, including economic, political, social, technological, and cultural forces. In his own situation, Tracy observes that the theologian's ability to make meaningful claims is undermined by the situation's post-Christian and post-modern character.<sup>78</sup> Other factors include the decline of the Enlightenment myth of progress, the development of nuclear energy and weapons, and the growth of scientific positivism.

The depth and breadth of this array of forces significantly modify Tracy's situational pole in the method of mutually critical correlation. He felt compelled to move beyond Lonergan's understanding of human consciousness and a preoccupation with existentialist concerns about meaning. The concept of the contemporary situation sublates those concerns into the broader context of social location and historicity, both of the human person and of the human race. Tracy's mutually critical correlation has become less existential (i.e. focusing on limit experiences of individuals) and more contextual.

This shift in method further is clearly registered in Tracy's understanding of finitude in theological anthropology because the context of the individual person is constitutive of who that person is. Tracy himself became more aware of how his own socio-economic location as a white, male, middle-class, North American Catholic priest

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<sup>77</sup> *AI* 342

<sup>78</sup> *AI* 342



had influenced his understanding of theology.<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, he now attended more to how the cultural context of language – one of the most fundamental milieus – conditions the ways one experiences, understands, reasons, and deliberates about the world. These and other forms of conditioning set the limited context through which an individual person engages the wider world. Of course these factors, which define the contemporary situation, are also constitutive of human finitude.

*Methodological Shift II: The Limit in Fundamental and Systematic Theology*

After noting how the idea of “the limit” is one of the central categories in *Blessed Rage for Order*, we turn to how the limit category continues to be useful (if less important) in *The Analogical Imagination*. *AI* re-contextualizes the limit in two particular ways: first, as a result of the shift discussed above, the distinction between the “limit-to” and “limit-of” now enters into Tracy’s distinction between fundamental and systematic theology; second, his new focus on “the whole” reframes the “limit-of.”

In the first chapter, I characterized the distinction between fundamental and systematic theology by saying that fundamental theology examines generalizable warrants for truth claims while systematic theology is concerned with the commitment to particular truth claims within a certain theological community.<sup>80</sup> The discourse of fundamental theology, though influenced by specific traditions, employs arguments that

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<sup>79</sup> This particular clarification is arguably only incipient in *The Analogical Imagination* with later texts better developing this point (cf. *DWO* 6). However, the basic thrust here is already evident in *AI* in the way he particularizes the historical context of contemporary theology.

<sup>80</sup> “...the move from fundamental to systematic theology is logically always a move from the abstract, general, universal, necessary features of a ‘religious dimension’ in all reality to the particular, concrete reality of an ‘explicit religion’” (*AI* 162).

should be accessible to all intelligent, reasonable, responsible people even without any prior faith commitment. Arguments in systematic theology do presuppose that the interlocutors share some degree of fidelity to a particular tradition. Therefore, while Tracy argues in *AI* that both discourses have their own classics, systematic theology primarily focuses on *religious* classics that both generate and develop particular traditions.<sup>81</sup>

Tracy explains the relationship between fundamental and systematic theology by recalling the distinction between the limit-to (those experiences or situations that manifest the finite character of human existence) and the limit-of (the horizon that grounds these limit-to experiences). Tracy explains that theologians “can and must move from an analysis of the limit-to experiences proper to fundamental theology and risk an interpretation of the reality of a limit-of disclosure in the explicitly religious classics of our own tradition.”<sup>82</sup> At the level of the limit-to “fundamental questions, needs and desires” arise in which all intelligent, reasonable, and responsible persons can engage without prior faith commitments. At the level of the limit-of individuals make commitments to a particular “religious revelation” that “should resonate to the ‘limit-to’ questions and situations” that they experience.<sup>83</sup> Systematic theology not only responds to these fundamental questions but also transforms them. Systematic theology attempts

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<sup>81</sup> See Chapter One, pages 71-3

<sup>82</sup> *AI* 178

<sup>83</sup> *AI* 196

to interpret and articulate the classic formulations of the limit-of reality and must therefore speak to the questions and issues raised by fundamental theology.<sup>84</sup>

*The Limit-of and the Whole*

In addition to using the limit-to/limit-of distinction in order to differentiate fundamental from systematic theology, Tracy re-thinks the limit-of concept in relation to the “whole.” In a trajectory like that in *Blessed Rage for Order*, Tracy introduces the idea of the “whole” in the course of reiterating his academic hesitancy to define religion. Tracy says this results from wanting to resist the claim that religion is just one of the many possible ways of perceiving the world because he is convinced that, far from being a perspective from which to interpret some part of human experience, it instead “articulates some sense of the whole” and it embraces no less than a total and basic horizon.<sup>85</sup>

In his revision of the limit-of as “the whole,” Tracy enhances his notion of finitude in an important way. First, he is able to maintain that “the limit” is the distinguishing feature of the religious dimension. The limit-of had previously been characterized as the ground or horizon of human limit-experiences. Whenever human persons encountered experiences that revealed their finitude, this sense of the limit was always confronted by the limit-of. By “the whole” as another way of talking about this facet of the limit concept, Tracy again means the basic reality that grounds human

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<sup>84</sup> *AI* 194

<sup>85</sup> *AI* 159

experience, a ground encountered in the most profound and revelatory way in limit experiences and situations.

Second, the concept of “the whole” affords Tracy a more effective way to explain the relationship between culture and religion. In Tracy’s earlier analysis of the three publics, culture is the highest level of the public “society” that, according to Clifford Geertz’s definition of culture, passes on an ethos and a worldview over time that constitutes a population’s “knowledge about and attitudes toward life.”<sup>86</sup> According to Tracy, an ethos is “the tone, character and quality of life—its ‘style,’” and a worldview is “the picture people have of the way things in actuality are.”<sup>87</sup> The religious perspective on the whole unites the ethos and worldview<sup>88</sup> so that one of the most basic religious assertions is to the effect that the way people ought to live and the reality in which they do live are not incompatible or antagonistic but are in fact profoundly interrelated.

Once he shifted to the whole, Tracy started to abandon the terminology, but not the meaning, of “the limit.” Besides improving his conceptual clarity regarding the meaning of the “ground” or “horizon” of human experience, this shift expands his understanding of human finitude in the more contextual dimension of *culture* as one of the factors that conditions human living. The methodological shift from common human

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<sup>86</sup> AI 7; Geertz defines culture as “an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life” (Clifford Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 89).

<sup>87</sup> AI 7

<sup>88</sup> AI 164. Here Tracy is relying on Geertz’ definition of religion: “a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men [ethos] by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence [worldview] and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic” (Geertz, “Religions as a Cultural System,” 90).

experience to the contemporary situation in mutually critical correlation brings with it a greater awareness of how one's cultural location sets the limits of one's existence. If Tracy once stressed that individuals come to grips with a sense of finitude in limit situations such as death or joy, he now dwells on how language, concepts, rituals, and symbols guide our understanding of how those situations now are understood as directed by culture. The ethos and worldview of the culture, united within a religious perspective, are still unique and historically situated for any person's experience. In short, recasting "the limit-of" as "the whole" helped Tracy recognize the role of culture in understanding human finitude.

### *The Internal Pluralism of the Self*

Finally, deeper understanding of one of the dominant themes in Tracy's theology – pluralism – in *The Analogical Imagination* is expressed in the idea of the internal pluralism of the individual. In *Blessed Rage for Order*, Tracy was not unlike many of his interlocutors in emphasizing the plural, social, historical, and intellectual context of theology. He urged a deeper consideration of the pluralism among and within the various religious perspectives and traditions, but his anthropology focused on the "universal and elemental features of human existence" that recur throughout the various religions.<sup>89</sup> *BRO* regarded pluralism as pervasive in the world but only considered the persons who make up this pluralistic world as unitary and rather isolated selves.

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<sup>89</sup> *BRO* 93

In *The Analogical Imagination*, Tracy's idea of internal individual pluralism starts to emerge. He focuses in this regard initially on the three publics of the theologian: the academy, the church, and the wider society.<sup>90</sup> The theologian, as an intellectual who participates in a faith tradition, has a responsibility to engage all three publics discursively. In *AI* Tracy draws attention to the fact that these publics are not merely three external audiences but are also internalized discourses.<sup>91</sup> The academy is internalized in the ethical demand for honest, rational inquiry the church in the faith and truth commitments of the tradition, and the wider society in the expression of authentic social concerns and modes of argument proper to the economic, political, and cultural realms.<sup>92</sup> Each of the publics, both as external audience and as internal commitment, has specific issues regarding meaning and truth to which theologians must respond.<sup>93</sup>

There are two points that follow from Tracy's formulation of internal pluralism. The first is that not only theologians but also other intellectuals have to negotiate internal pluralism. While theologians' work bears explicit meanings pertaining to the church public, like other intellectuals they also speak to multiple publics. A chemist, for

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<sup>90</sup> In addition to the basic description of the publics here and in chapter one, there is a more in depth examination of them in the following chapter.

<sup>91</sup> *AI* 3

<sup>92</sup> *AI* 29

<sup>93</sup> One underdeveloped question in Tracy is the potential for conflict among the theologian's commitments to the three publics. In general, Tracy seems to see the "plausibility structures" of the different publics to be complementary, not conflictual, and thus any sense of conflict seems to be more methodological than substantive. While he hints at the "complexity" of the situation, he does not go into the possibility that, both methodologically and substantively, these commitments might conflict with each other. His understanding of the discourses in which especially the academy and the church participate tends to be idealistic, since it scarcely accounts for obscurantism in either public. For instance, what happens when the academy's commitment to authentic inquiry crashes into the academic demands of "publish or perish"? Is it possible that the academy's requirements to attain legitimacy in a field (e.g., tenure) can hinder thoughtful and sustained investigation?

instance, would need to speak to the academy and the wider society.<sup>94</sup> The demands of both inquiry and social concern would have to animate this chemist's work. The internalization of the requirements of public discourse does not apply only to theologians. Furthermore, even though the church as a public may not have to be engaged by fields outside theology, by no means does this mean that representatives from the other publics should never speak to the church as an authentic public.<sup>95</sup>

The second point Tracy handles with some subtlety. At the heart of his description of the three publics is their status as communities of discourse.<sup>96</sup> Both the academy and the church are *voluntary* communities whose membership and pursuit of intellectual inquiry are freely chosen. While these publics provide audiences for intellectuals, many of the members associated with them may not speak or even identify themselves. This is perhaps most obviously the case in the church, whose members are not only religiously-minded intellectuals but also those "in the pews" who participate in the communal and liturgical life of the church in ways that do not require a public voice.<sup>97</sup> Yet even if people are not engaging in public discourse within the academy or the church, they internalize the commitments and demands of these publics by reason of their voluntary association with these communities.

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<sup>94</sup> AI 21

<sup>95</sup> For example, the recent explosion of literature on science and theology is evidence that among the most widely read authors in this conversation, many have been scientists speaking with varying degrees of success on issues of theology and religion. For example, see Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006); Francis S. Collins, *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief* (New York: Free Press, 2006).

<sup>96</sup> AI 21

<sup>97</sup> In the case of the academy, one could plausibly argue that the academy includes not only students, whose participation in the academic conversation is often limited in various ways, but also professors who are largely disengaged from academic research and publication.

## Chapter Two

On the other hand, the public of society at large is not really a voluntary association. Rather, most individuals belong to society without expressly choosing to do so.<sup>98</sup> Indeed, human finitude entails that elements in the contemporary situation – including the society – are not under the control of the individual person. Society includes both voluntary connections (e.g., political affiliation) and involuntary ones (e.g., family or ethnicity).<sup>99</sup> These multiple associations involve multiple and often conflicting commitments. The individual can be pulled in different directions as a result of this internal pluralism. The resultant attempt to reconcile these differing commitments further demonstrates the finite and limited capacity of the human person. Thus, while Tracy approaches the idea of internal pluralism in the context of the intellectual situation of the theologian, I contend that it applies more broadly as a general feature of finite human experience.

### *Summary*

In many ways, Tracy's *Analogical Imagination* is a re-interpretation of his earlier work. He re-contextualizes and expands upon many of the themes from *Blessed Rage for Order*. Most dramatically, he clarifies and strengthens the methodology of mutually critical correlation by thematizing the contemporary situation and subsuming common human experience into it. Moreover, by adjusting his distinctions among the sub-

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<sup>98</sup> This claim may also be true in many cases for members of the public of the church, who might be initiated as children prior to any decision on their part. While this adds an important nuance to my claim here, one can also imagine that such individuals will eventually make a conscious choice either to continue membership in the church or to leave it. This decision is not however feasible for most individuals with respect to the public of society.

<sup>99</sup> *AI* 21



disciplines of theology (particularly fundamental and systematic theology) he was able to re-work the idea of the limit in a manner more consistent with his methodology.

As I have sought to demonstrate in this section, Tracy thinks out the role of finitude in anthropology more subtly as he takes a more contextual approach to theology. The shift from common human experience to the contemporary situation, using limit-to and limit-of to differentiate fundamental from systematic theology, the explication of the “limit-of” in relation to “the whole,” and the thematization of individual internal pluralism are all indications that Tracy maintains the stress on the limit while also showing how important other aspects of finitude are. Limits to human experience encountered at the extremes (e.g., death, guilt, intense joy) continue to be significant for understanding human finitude. For Tracy, there is an unmistakable sense that there is something beyond human life constraining or even bordering it in these experiences and in the questions people ask about the genuinely mysterious aspects of life.

Tracy gives much greater consideration to social context as he thinks about human finitude in *The Analogical Imagination*. Both the factors that co-determine the human situation and the commitments that affect one’s own experience of internal pluralism demonstrate that social context is a dominant aspect of our experience of finitude. Each individual is born in a particular time and place, grows up within a particular language (or set of languages), and is shaped by particular cultural, political, and economic forces. During a specific arc of history, every person makes specific commitments to various communities within a unique constellation of forces that condition, set boundaries for, and limit their lives. These limiting factors condition but

do not determine people so that a person can learn new languages, form new commitments (or break old ones), or even move to a different place or a new culture. Rather, human finitude means that an individual is shaped by one's historicity, as the sum of contingent particularities that enter somehow into the constitution of one's reality. The person, for Tracy, is finite not only in relation to but also in relation to their social context.

### ***Plurality and Ambiguity***

Tracy follows *The Analogical Imagination* with the shorter *Plurality and Ambiguity*. In this text he examines the topic of conversation in three main moments.<sup>100</sup> First, conversation is a useful model for interpretation since interpretation is most basically a conversation with the text.<sup>101</sup> Second, there are “radical interruptions” to conversation that are discussed under the headings of pluralism and ambiguity.<sup>102</sup> Finally, religion is capable of helping us to resist our vulnerabilities vis-à-vis those interruptions.<sup>103</sup>

A description of what *ideal* conversation would be frames Tracy's argument. Such conversation is a *game* in which the participants in the interaction are not self-conscious about their participation. Those who play the game let both the object and as

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<sup>100</sup> *PA* ix

<sup>101</sup> *PA* 18-19

<sup>102</sup> *PA* 32

<sup>103</sup> *PA* 83-4

well as the rules of the game take over.<sup>104</sup> In conversation, this object or focus is the question or questions that evoke the conversation.<sup>105</sup> By allowing questions to take control, the participants in the conversation open themselves to the possibility of authentic communication undistorted by ego or ideology. Sincerity on the part of the participants, equality among them, and openness to shared understandings of what constitutes a valid and coherent argument are among the marks of such ideal communication.<sup>106</sup>

Nonetheless, such conversation is ideal and something rarely achieved since, in fact, “we never find ourselves in the ideal speech situation.”<sup>107</sup> Both plurality and ambiguity interrupt this ideal. Pluralism as a recurring theme in Tracy’s theology includes pluralism among traditions, within traditions, and within individuals. Now Tracy turns his attention to plurality among and within languages, traditions, and histories.<sup>108</sup> Such plurality is a fact that can lead to conflict. Yet, precisely because pluralism is a fact, it must be engaged, not by genial toleration, but rather by renewed conversation. “Ambiguity” refers to the complicated mix of good and evil present in those languages, traditions, and histories. As an example, Tracy claims that the dominant metanarrative of progress in modernity is no longer compelling because it conceals the

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<sup>104</sup> Tracy has also used the phrase “in the zone” to describe this experience (*NCFT*). Cf. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 102-108; Paul Ricoeur, “Appropriation,” in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, ed. and trans. John B. Thompson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 185-190; Jacques Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978). 289-293.

<sup>105</sup> *PA* 18

<sup>106</sup> *PA* 26. Tracy thinks of argument as a subset of conversation for Tracy, and he deems it most effective when it is a part of a larger conversation (*PA* 23)

<sup>107</sup> *PA* 26

<sup>108</sup> See *PA* 47-65 for Tracy’s full discussion of this

destructive and oppressive events and themes within.<sup>109</sup> Ambiguity requires the recognition that there “is no innocent interpretation, no innocent interpreter, no innocent text.”<sup>110</sup>

In relation to conversation and the interruptions of pluralism and ambiguity, Tracy continues to explore the human experience of finitude. First, in relation to the role of social context elaborated in *AI*, he analyzes the human person as an interpreting and knowing person. Second, he expands upon the language of the limit-of and the whole vis-à-vis the growing engagement with religious pluralism. Finally, his growing attention to otherness affects understanding of internal pluralism.

### *Human as Interpreting and Knowing*

Tracy’s reflections on conversation in *Plurality and Ambiguity* begin with a consideration of the French Revolution. He uses this historical event because the widely divergent interpretations of it add depth to his analysis of the process of interpretation, which he considers one of the most ubiquitous aspects of human living. Drawing again on Lonergan’s transcendental precepts, Tracy claims that whenever “we act, deliberate, judge, understand, or even experience, we are interpreting.”<sup>111</sup> In interpreting, the person engages with some phenomenon that needs to be understood, whether a text, an event, or another person.<sup>112</sup> Tracy describes the phenomenon as having both the stability of some

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<sup>109</sup> *PA* 68

<sup>110</sup> *PA* 78-9

<sup>111</sup> *PA* 9

<sup>112</sup> Tracy is careful to argue that interpretation is not merely the province of some conjectured elite, such as the wealthy or intellectual classes. Rather, he invokes his idea of the “classic,” claiming that all that is

constant or repeatable meaning and the instability of its susceptibility to ongoing and divergent interpretations.<sup>113</sup> Tracy wishes to disabuse the reader of any doctrines of autonomous texts or readers because ambiguities also inhabit those phenomena already so that they require interpretation.

As a human activity, interpreting is marked by finitude. First of all, interpretations, especially those regarding what is meaningful or important, are not final; they can only be more or less adequate given the phenomena available. Achieving an interpretation with relative adequacy<sup>114</sup> is certainly “worth striving for,” but it is never definitive or complete.<sup>115</sup> Moreover, since knowledge is only relatively adequate, human knowing is never absolutely certain. Thus one can, *at best*, only know when there are “no further relevant questions...to know when [one knows] enough.”<sup>116</sup>

Secondly, the finite character of these interpretations derives from the finite character of those doing the interpreting.<sup>117</sup> Even interpretations of those “who have encountered the [infinite] power of Ultimate Reality” are interpretations by “finite and

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necessary when we encounter some phenomenon worth interpreting is a willingness to “risk our present understanding” (103). Moreover, with respect to the “preferential option for the poor,” Tracy understands this to mean not that the interpretations by the poor are the only valid interpretations to be “passively receive[d]” by all others, but that “the oppressed are the ones most likely to hear clearly the full religious and political demands of the prophets,” and thus theirs are the interpretations “the rest of us most need to hear” (103-4).

<sup>113</sup> *PA* 11

<sup>114</sup> The notion of relative adequacy in *Plurality and Ambiguity* is largely an extension of that in *The Analogical Imagination*. Perhaps the only notable difference is that in *AI*, the question of relative adequacy primarily revolves around religious expressions and their greater or lesser ability to explain religious experience and phenomena. This meaning certainly persists in *PA*, but it is more explicitly expanded to include interpretations beyond those of religious expressions (e.g. the French Revolution).

<sup>115</sup> *PA* 39, 44

<sup>116</sup> *PA* 61

<sup>117</sup> *PA* 97

contingent” human beings.<sup>118</sup> Interpretation is not only an act that issues from particular people; it also emerges from particular communities and contexts. These communities and contexts in definite moments in history are “bounded by a particular sex, race, class, and education.”<sup>119</sup> They are limited by the very language used then by these people at this place in conversation and interpretation. Because interpretation and knowledge are rooted in the conversational character of the human person, they are limited by the others with whom the conversation takes place. In the end, human knowledge is “embodied, communal, finite, discursive,”<sup>120</sup> so that interpretation and knowledge are finite precisely because human existence is finite.

Finally, in Tracy’s understanding, interpretation as marked by human finitude must take interruption into account. Perhaps Tracy’s finest description of interruption occurs in his 1984 *Concilium* piece on the Holocaust, where he says that theology must retrieve “the sense of history as interruption, as rupture, break, discontinuity in apocalyptic, the retrieval of liberation over easy announcements of reconciliation, the retrieval of the social systemic expression of sin over individual sins, the retrieval of the concrete praxis of discipleship.”<sup>121</sup> Such interruptive events and histories *disrupt* the easy, often self-valedictory narratives of human history. Interruptions force the theologian to recognize that the contemporary question for theology is not about the non-believer, but the non-person.<sup>122</sup> An interruptive understanding of history depends on

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<sup>118</sup> *PA* 86

<sup>119</sup> *PA* 66

<sup>120</sup> *PA* 27

<sup>121</sup> *ONP* 64

<sup>122</sup> *ONP* 64

previous intellectual gains in the ideas of historical consciousness and historicity,<sup>123</sup> but it pays greater attention to the hitherto often ignored realities embedded in history. For Tracy, only authentic recognition of interruption can uncover the contingent, limited aspects of human history so often concealed by grander narratives that belie the finite character of human living. Facing these interruptions allows the theologian (among others) to see not only the conditioning role played by historico-social contexts in one's interpretations, but also the incongruous, pockmarked, and contradictory elements that constitute our contemporary situation and history.

*The Limit-of, the Whole, and Ultimate Reality*

In the course of Tracy's examination of finitude, which has included ever more factors such as social context, historicity, and language, the role of the "limit-of" or the ground remains important in his thought. In *Plurality and Ambiguity*, his terminology on this theme changes to "Ultimate Reality." Its qualities are familiar: believers have a fundamental *trust* in Ultimate Reality;<sup>124</sup> religions develop out of revelations and manifestations of this Ultimate Reality;<sup>125</sup> and this reality is fundamentally mysterious and beyond human grasp.<sup>126</sup> Although there is less emphasis on the limiting role of Ultimate Reality in human existence, Tracy's new term is in line with his previous attempts to choose language that refers to God while still being sufficiently distinct from

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<sup>123</sup> *ONP* 61-63

<sup>124</sup> *PA* 112

<sup>125</sup> *PA* 84

<sup>126</sup> *PA* 108

blatantly Christian speech about God to be universally accessible.<sup>127</sup> For instance, limit-of, the whole, and Ultimate Reality connote the aspects of mystery, ultimacy, and relatedness characteristic of traditional Christian ways of talking about God, yet his use of them, although open to Trinitarian and (to a lesser extent) Christological discourses about God, does not necessarily entail such beliefs.<sup>128</sup>

Tracy's change to Ultimate Reality seems related to his early engagement with certain strands of Buddhism.<sup>129</sup> If Christians and Buddhists cannot encounter one another's traditions in a context-free manner, this calls for a genuine openness to change in order for that conversation to happen. Tracy warns that "even the most refined concepts of theism can function as fatal evasions of Ultimate Reality."<sup>130</sup> This issue, among other topics in interreligious conversation, can enable traditions to rethink their own understandings, beliefs, and terminology. Absent Tracy's own explicit justification

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<sup>127</sup> PA 75

<sup>128</sup> This claim is somewhat qualified because in *The Analogical Imagination*, Jesus Christ is not only a Christian classic, but the Christian classic *par excellence*. This means that Jesus is the most perfectly adequate manifestation of "the whole" by the power of "the whole." Tracy's construal of Christ as the Christian classic effects a strong conceptual connection between Jesus and "the whole," a connection that is much stronger than any connection between Jesus and either the "limit-of" in *BRO* or "Ultimate Reality" in *PA*. Therefore, Tracy's use of "the whole" in *AI* has implications for Christological discourse.

In *Plurality and Ambiguity*, all the references to Jesus are offhand, usually an example of difficulties in interpretation. In a contemporaneous article, however, Tracy makes a more specific connection between "Ultimate Reality" and Christology. As for the risk of an understanding of Christian salvation too exclusively focused on its existential qualities, Tracy writes "At least this is so unless the distinctively Christian understanding of the nature of Ultimate Reality as the God who Loves as manifested in Jesus Christ is not kept clearly and consistently in view in any discussion of *Christian* salvation" (emphasis author's) (Tracy, "The Christian Understanding of Salvation-Liberation," 131). Tracy's emphasis indicates that the terminology of "Ultimate Reality" is not a specifically or exclusively Christian one, but rather that this term can be "baptized" in the sense of reading it through the lens of Christian convictions about Jesus. Thus the term "Ultimate Reality," though not mutually exclusive with Christological discourse, is also not inherently or necessarily related to it.

<sup>129</sup> PA 94. Tracy's active involvement in interreligious dialogue begins around 1984 (the lectures *DWO* is based on were given in 1988, and he refers to his "four-year experience of Buddhist-Christian dialogue (*DWO* 73)), but it begins to decline in the mid-1990's.

<sup>130</sup> PA 94



for his shift in terms in *PA*, it seems plausible to suppose that he sought more recognizably pluralistic language in order to foster such conversation.<sup>131</sup>

Connected to this change in terminology is the fact that Tracy appeared to regard fundamental trust as also more ambiguous. Previously, Tracy had ascribed “trust” to the basic attitude or disposition of a person towards “the limit-of” and “the whole.” After clarifying the power of interruption, especially in the forms of plurality and ambiguity, he now realizes that this sense of trust “is not immune to either criticism or suspicion.”<sup>132</sup> This critical or suspicious posture is not necessarily directed at the Ultimate Reality itself but rather becomes more nuanced in relation to the historically mediated interpretations of Ultimate Reality by religious traditions. In this text, Tracy refuses to accept that on their face religious traditions are unambiguous and innocent. Thus, he calls for a critical attitude in the face of their ambiguities. If religious traditions can resist lazy pluralism or ignored ambiguities, for Tracy this is due to fundamental trust in Ultimate Reality, which empowers human liberation. Nonetheless, for the first time Tracy also makes a real demand for a critical attitude towards one’s own fundamental trust.

The use of the term “Ultimate Reality” also has two specific repercussions for his understanding of finitude. First, as always for Tracy, finitude means that sees the human

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<sup>131</sup> It seems clear that Tracy’s adoption of the term “Ultimate Reality” occurred under the influence of John Hick, whose Gifford Lectures were given during the time that Tracy was working on *Plurality and Ambiguity* (See David Tracy, “Hermeneutics as Discourse Analysis: Sociality, History, Religion,” *Archivio di Filosofia* 54 (1986): 279 and “Christianity in the Wider Context: Demands and Transformations,” in *Worldviews and Warrants: Plurality and Authority in Theology*, eds. William Schweiker and Per M. Anderson (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1987)8). Indeed, Tracy’s student, Chester Gillis, completed his dissertation on Hick (later published as *A Question of Final Belief: John Hick’s Pluralistic Theory of Salvation* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1989)) in 1986, a work that Tracy cites in *PA* 137n23. Further, see John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 9-11.

<sup>132</sup> *PA* 112

person is finite in relation to the infinite, i.e., Ultimate Reality; now his basic definition of sin in this text is the denial of one's finitude and dependence on Ultimate Reality.<sup>133</sup>

Secondly, the development of Tracy's critical lens required a more thorough analysis of the cultural and contextual aspects of human living. Tracy's use of "the whole" in *AI* depended on Clifford Geertz's definition of culture, which implied that in a religious tradition that emphasizes the whole, both ethos and worldview are indissolubly linked. In *Plurality and Ambiguity*, Tracy is much more prone to challenge such a union, to question whether this is the case, and to call on believers to examine whether their traditions have failed to act in accord with the concrete implications of such a union. The socio-cultural context that places constraints upon human living demands a hermeneutics of suspicion for the sake of a genuine, finite, and contingent human existence. Thus, the shift to the language of Ultimate Reality corresponds to the emergence of a heightened critical perspective of history as interruptive because for Tracy, it is precisely the relationship to and dependence on Ultimate Reality that grounds and sustains the human ability to face and to resist the distortions and ambiguities, not only in religious traditions, but in broader cultural systems as well.

### *Internal Pluralism and Otherness*

In *The Analogical Imagination*, Tracy expanded his understanding of pluralism in three ways: among traditions, within traditions, and within individuals. Individual internal pluralism is a facet of human finitude brought about both by the different publics

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<sup>133</sup> *PA* 74

to which theologians respond and by their various individual commitments. Possessing different attachments and responsibilities inherently risks conflict that may force people to recognize their limitations even when relating with others.

In *Plurality and Ambiguity*, internal pluralism is still an aspect of finitude, but Tracy adds significant nuances to the notion. Beyond the divergent factors pulling an individual in different directions, the specifically modern philosophical claim of a coherent self is called into question. Tracy's critique of the coherent self begins with the development of linguistics and the philosophy of language in the twentieth century, which renders obsolete the once prevalent idea that language is an instrument wielded intentionally by the self. In this view, language is merely secondary in relation to the primary, pre-linguistic phenomena it signifies.<sup>134</sup> Tracy acknowledges that language is prior to the individual who is born into it. One is "talked into talk" by talking, and comes to understand the world through "play" with language.<sup>135</sup> Human experience is mediated through language, and each language is public, shared, and particular. We are, for Tracy, linguistic beings, not beings who can choose or not choose to use language to engage reality. Every encounter is linguistically mediated.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> *PA* 48-9

<sup>135</sup> Cf. Gadamer on the idea of play in language: Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 102-138. For the paraphrase "talked into talk" as it applies to Gadamer, see Fred Lawrence, "Gadamer, the Hermeneutic Revolution, and Theology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*, ed. Robert J. Dostal (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 185.

<sup>136</sup> *PA* 50. Tracy examines other models of language – structuralism (Saussure, Levi-Strauss), differential non-system (Derrida), and discourse (Benveniste) – in order to arrive at a more relatively adequate model (discourse analysis). See *PA* chapter 3 for his account of how language relates to the interruption caused by plurality. For his more thorough examination of discourse analysis, see Tracy, "Hermeneutics as Discourse Analysis," especially pp 261-271. Chapter 4, "Sin," of this dissertation will discuss how his understanding of language relates to sin and systemic distortion.

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Historicity is tied indissolubly to the linguistic character of the human person. Besides being concerned with a person's historical situation as providing one set of boundaries to one's finite existence, Tracy also confronts the radically ambiguous nature of human living based on the fact that histories are not just simple narratives of progress and grace, but rather deeply problematic stories in both positive and negative ways.<sup>137</sup> This means that we not only belong to and participate in histories and in the interruption to those histories.<sup>138</sup> Our personal histories too are riddled with ambiguity.

These two basic interruptions by the plurality of language and by the ambiguity of history underlie Tracy's decisive new concern with the question of otherness in relation to internal pluralism and finitude. "The other" is the partner in conversation, and when a question takes over in conversation, one may recognize the other as other; one may see what real difference, not only as suggestive of possibilities beyond one's experience, but also as harboring similarities to one's own experience.<sup>139</sup> In the measure that conversations are authentic, then partners are opened to possible transformations elicited by the encounter with difference. Indeed, in engaging with others as other makes one aware of alternative external and internal possibilities.

Based on the recognitions to which conversations give rise, Tracy claims that the "most radical otherness is within."<sup>140</sup> This confirms once again his recurrent challenge to the modern autonomous self, inasmuch as the postmodern understanding of the self "is caught between conscious activity and a growing realization of the radical otherness not

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<sup>137</sup> *PA* 68-9

<sup>138</sup> *PA* 67

<sup>139</sup> *PA* 20

<sup>140</sup> *PA* 78

## Chapter Two

only around but within us.”<sup>141</sup> Thus beyond the possibilities that emerge from outside us, Tracy alerts us to the unconscious parts of our selves that are not entirely under our control. As a result, he insists that human knowing is limited to relative adequacy and our self-understanding and self-control are ultimately limited by the lack of “transparency of consciousness to itself.”<sup>142</sup> It follows that interruptions of plurality and ambiguity profoundly affect traditions, texts, and conversations as well as our very selves. And so, Tracy concludes that “at best” the coherence of the self in the postmodern context “will be a rough coherence: interrupted, obscure, often confused, self-conscious of its own language use and, above all, aware of the ambiguities of all histories and traditions.”<sup>143</sup>

### *Summary*

The theme of Tracy’s *Plurality and Ambiguity* is conversation together with the conditions that favor and thwart it. Authentic conversation according to this text depends upon the degree of awareness on the part of those involved concerning their own pluralities and ambiguities, as well as their openness to transformation as the conversation is driven by its questions.<sup>144</sup> Yet these pluralities and ambiguities, as well as those inscribed in the wider histories, traditions, and languages explain why Tracy’s “ideal speech situation” is always actually derailed. As worth striving for the ideal is a

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<sup>141</sup> PA 77

<sup>142</sup> PA 78

<sup>143</sup> PA 83

<sup>144</sup> When an interlocutor is a text, event, symbol – something without agency of its own – the openness to transformation does not strictly apply, but they too are affected by the interruptions of plurality and ambiguity.

standard for judging real conversations; Tracy, however, is convinced that the ideal speech situation always be unattainable.

Whether as ideal or as falling short, Tracy's treatment of conversation adds further depth to his understanding of finitude. Our experience of conversation is finite because its participants are finite, and their interpretations and knowledge are limited and at best relatively adequate. The more self-aware interlocutors are, the more likely they will be to recognize how their socio-historical contexts co-determine their conversations as well as the effects of pluralities and ambiguities upon situations and experiences. Tracy also confronts the potentially negative and even destructive factors that limit human existence. Having brought the masters of suspicion to bear as important correctives in *The Analogical Imagination*, in *Plurality and Ambiguity* he emphasizes even more starkly the relevance of the hermeneutics of suspicion.<sup>145</sup>

Lastly, a further advance in this text is evident in Tracy's distinction between finitude vis-à-vis the rest of creation versus finitude in relation to the infinite. In the first case, finitude is experience in terms of the aspects of one's life that distinguish one individual from others. One's context, which is conditioned by race, gender, class, creed, location, and era, provides a significant constraint on one's existence. Moreover, it is not only those factors beyond one's control (e.g., race, era) that affect the particularities of an individual person but also those factors over which the person exercises some degree of control (e.g., creed, location). The encounter with otherness, within one's self externally,

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<sup>145</sup> The phrase "masters of suspicion" comes from Ricoeur's *Freud and Philosophy*, where he describes Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Sigmund Freud as "[t]hree masters, seemingly mutually exclusive, [who] dominate the school of suspicion" (32).

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discloses limitations and also genuine and real alternative possibilities to the self. For Tracy, there is a basic analogy between the encounter with the other and the encounter with the Other, the Ultimate Reality that grounds all of reality.

### *Dialogue with the Other*

Not long after publishing *Plurality and Ambiguity*, Tracy gave the Dondeyne Lectures at the University of Leuven in Belgium, which were later published as *Dialogue with the Other*.<sup>146</sup> The topic was the relationship between prophetic and mystical forms of religious language, especially as they contribute to Christian dialogues with Judaism and Buddhism. Tracy analyzes prophetic and mystical language by way of referring to the psychoanalytic approaches of Freud and Lacan, the thought of William James, the work on the “ancient other” of Mircea Eliade, and the encounter with the other in Buddhist-Christian dialogue, and then offers a “mystic-prophetic construal of Christian freedom” in light of suffering.<sup>147</sup> Tracy’s synthesis of these different themes flows from the question of what mystical and prophetic traditions within Buddhism and Christianity might teach us about the self or, as the case may be, the “no-self.”

These lectures revisit Tracy’s opposition to the modern understanding of the human person as an autonomous self or ego by way of displacing the modern self by the postmodern other, which involves meeting the growing demand to regard the other as real

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<sup>146</sup> *DWO* xii. The lectures, given in 1988, came shortly after the publication of *Plurality and Ambiguity* in 1987. The ideas presented in them are thus quite consistent with that earlier text. In this chapter, *DWO* primarily serves to provide a slightly different perspective on the role of “the other” in finitude.

<sup>147</sup> *DWO* 118

and not just a projection of oneself.<sup>148</sup> Tracy claims that Christian thought runs the risk of such projection when it engages in dialogue with Judaism and Islam because the similarity of these traditions' beliefs about God tempt members of these faiths to regard the others and no different from themselves. Tracy demands that adherents of these religions be recognized as "remain[ing] profoundly other." As a matter of fact, each of these three faiths has been guilty projecting an "other" when they describe members of non-monotheistic faiths as "pagans." For Tracy, the postmodern understanding of the self has to take the other into account.<sup>149</sup>

The "other" lies at the heart of both prophetic and mystical language. The prophet actually speaks on behalf of the other; and the word the prophet hears "is not his own. It is Other. It disrupts consciousness, actions, deliberations."<sup>150</sup> In the case of the biblical prophet, this other is clearly understood as *Other* – as God – yet God is not the only other the prophet speaks for; the prophet also speaks for the marginalized, the oppressed, and the voiceless, calling all to the "prophetic struggle for justice."<sup>151</sup> It is in this sense that Tracy affirms that the Gospel understands freedom as "responsible agency."<sup>152</sup> Although in a different way, Tracy also describes Freud's rhetoric as prophetic because it enabled the other of the unconscious to speak.<sup>153</sup> On Tracy's interpretation, prophetic language reveals the other of the divine, of those different from oneself, and of one's inner life.

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<sup>148</sup> *DWO* 4

<sup>149</sup> *DWO* 49

<sup>150</sup> *DWO* 17-18

<sup>151</sup> *DWO* 104

<sup>152</sup> *DWO* 117

<sup>153</sup> *DWO* 19-20



The other is also crucial for mystical language. Mystics, too, are “driven by an Other who speaks,” but the mystic aims in some sense to go beyond what the prophet says.<sup>154</sup> According to Tracy, mystics begin by stripping reality down grammatically “to its most basic elements (God, world, soul)” in order to understand the relations among them.<sup>155</sup> The language of the “love-mystics” (as Tracy refers to one group) reveals both “the self’s freedom-in-love and God-as-love-manifesting-Godself in *the sign* Jesus Christ.”<sup>156</sup> Uncovering the fundamental relations among the elements with the help of the grammatical-structuralist approach reveals the role of love (particularly love for the other) in mystical thought.

Yet Tracy also notes that some other forms of mysticism use a second, apophatic approach. Elements of negation problematize both the belief that there is an unrelated other and the sense that there is such a thing as a self at all. This motif resonates with a key aspect of Western Christianity’s contemporary situation, namely the pervasive sense of possessive individualism: “the self-deceptive belief in a unified, coherent, non-relational ego.”<sup>157</sup> However, the orientation of possessive individualism can be resisted by letting go of the notion of the autonomous self, which harmonizes with “the Buddhist analysis of our inevitable clinging to the ego.”<sup>158</sup> Tracy holds this displacement of the self in tension with the radical grammatical approach to mystical thought, so that he can claim that the mystic wants both to free the other to speak for the other’s self and to

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<sup>154</sup> *DWO* 21

<sup>155</sup> *DWO* 24

<sup>156</sup> David Tracy, “Freedom, the Self, and the Other,” in *On Freedom*, ed. Leroy S. Rouner (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 52

<sup>157</sup> *DWO* 74

<sup>158</sup> *DWO* 77

understand “freedom beyond empiricism and rationalism.”<sup>159</sup> Once the self is freed from bondage to possessive individualism, then the apophatic move enables the self to love the other more fully and more responsibly.

For Tracy, the prophetic call to acknowledge and struggle on behalf of the other and the mystical call to love mutually mediate each other.<sup>160</sup> In both cases, the self faces the other as a genuine other, not as a projected other. Indeed, the self achieves real self-understanding only in face of the other. In fact, the encounter with the other in its *otherness* actuates the kind of experience that *Blessed Rage for Order* called a limit-experience. The other reveals differences both as possibility and as an expression of historicity and uniqueness of the self. The self faces the real and particular other, who is at once a real and particular self. The very presence of the other helps one recognize the self’s finitude. Thus Tracy’s *Dialogue with the Other* argues for the necessity of authentic encounter with the other, and in doing so shows how sheer otherness is yet another marker of human finitude.

## Conclusion

Finitude is a central and pervasive theme in Tracy’s theological anthropology. The question of finitude has brought to light several key motifs of his thought. Early in his career, Tracy treated finitude in relation to the infinite or transcendent. His notion of “limit-to” referred to questions, experiences, and situations that highlight the boundaries of human existence, among which Tracy includes guilt, death, and anxiety as well as joy,

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<sup>159</sup> Tracy, “Freedom, the Self, and the Other,” 57

<sup>160</sup> *DWO* 118

love, and reassurance. The “limit-to” indicated without fully disclosing the “limit-of,” which Tracy called the fundamental reality that grounds human existence. He calls the human orientation towards the limit-of “basic trust.” He explained that the “limit-of” is a way of talking about God. Thus, his early work explained human finitude primarily in light of the human relationship with the divine.<sup>161</sup>

This understanding of finitude reappears throughout Tracy’s work, but in *The Analogical Imagination* a second motif emerged where he differentiated finitude with respect to the divine from finitude with respect to one’s socio-historical context. As Tracy’s method gradually clarified the role of the contemporary situation in human experience, he explained that understanding the human person required more serious attention to the particularities of personal existence. One’s unique time, place, ethnicity, gender, class, and so forth condition and to some extent define one’s life. Strictly speaking, these conditioning factors do not determine like a fate, because the individual still has freedom and responsible agency in their regard. Nonetheless, they locate the individual in a context over which one has little control, but which provides boundaries for people’s life and experience.<sup>162</sup> For Tracy, no contextual condition is more central and enduring than language, which cannot be adequately conceived as a tool for

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<sup>161</sup> While the use of limit language steadily decreases over the course of Tracy’s work, it does not disappear completely. For more, see David Tracy, “Theology and the Symbolic Imagination: A Tribute to Andrew Greeley,” in *The Incarnate Imagination: Essays in Honor of Andrew Greeley*, ed. Ingrid H. Shafer (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1988), 242.

<sup>162</sup> Some of these boundaries are malleable – one might move to a different geographic location, immerse oneself in a different culture, or even pursue sex reassignment surgery and therapy. Yet even so, others are not (we are stuck in the time in which we live). More importantly, even those initial boundaries continue to affect us: the historical experience of an individual who grows up in a particular place (say, the southside of Chicago) and someone who moves there in his/her late twenties will still be radically different, as the latter person cannot excise or undo the experience of not-having-been-raised there.

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communication because it is the medium through which all understanding occurs from the time one learns one's native tongue. Learning a second language, even somewhat later in life, begins by translating that language's vocabulary and grammar into one's first language. Any factors that contribute to an individual's specific context mark the finitude of all human existence.<sup>163</sup>

Third, Tracy's engagement with the question of the self in postmodernity reveals a third motif: finitude with respect to the other. The finite human person is not an autonomous, separated individual, but a person who encounters "the other" in three senses. First, there is the divine Other, which essentially reformulates Tracy's first motif of finitude in the context of the question of the other. Second, there is the other of individuals, groups, and cultures who are different from oneself in important ways. In their difference, they disclose authentic possibilities for the self and heighten the awareness of the particularity of the self. Third, there is the internal otherness, namely of one's own unconscious, which prevents the individual from being simply an autonomous, coherent ego.

Each of these three motifs permeates Tracy's thought, with some motifs being more dominant at certain times in his career in accord with the different questions he's responding to at any given time. Yet each also instantiates the human experience of

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<sup>163</sup> It might be helpful at this point to distinguish between finitude and uniqueness. One's context need not be unique in order to be finite. For example, identical twins born to and raised by the same parents will presumably have the same ethnicity, socio-economic background, gender, language, era, and location, among many other factors. The fact that these are shared by two people does not mean they are not finite, but that they still experience similar boundaries.

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boundedness. A human person encounters limits in one's encounter with the divine, within one's context, with others, and also within one's internal life.

Finally, this examination of finitude makes it clear that finitude itself is a fundamentally relational concept in Tracy's theology. The experience of limits may raise such questions as Why are those limits there? What sets or creates those limits? To what are those limits related? Perhaps the most profound experience of human finitude is the human encounter with the divine. But this finitude is grounded precisely in the limit-of, the whole, the Ultimate Reality, which is responsible for human existence. Finitude for Tracy, rather than being ultimately about human autonomy or about how such limits place obstacles between the human and the other (or Other), is about how these limits can only be understood relationally. To comprehend what this means, the question of relationality will be our guide in the next chapter.

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### RELATIONALITY

The previous chapter explored the role of human finitude in David Tracy's theological anthropology. Analysis of his concepts limit, particularity, and historicity demonstrates the importance to him of the finitude of the human person. Yet it also reveals that the concept of finitude does not stand on its own; the fact of human finitude raises the question of how such a limit comes to be. Since Tracy writes about human finitude vis-à-vis the divine, the social context, and the other, it is clear that he sees finitude as essentially relational.

To explore the connection between finitude and relationality, this chapter will examine some of the same material and themes as the previous one but from a different perspective. Here, I focus upon what it means for the human person to be in relation. How does Tracy distinguish human persons' relations to one another from their relationships with God? Furthermore, what central themes in Tracy's work are rooted in the relational character of human life?

The themes pursued in this chapter follow their development and importance in different periods of Tracy's work. The first is horizon, both as indicative of the early influence of Lonergan on Tracy's theology as well as its function as a transitional concept from finitude to relationality. Next, public theology is a topic that Tracy began to tinker with in *BRO* and then developed more fully in *AI*. Then tradition and conversation as

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increasingly prevalent themes become both more dominant and more precise in Tracy's hermeneutical efforts. Finally, this chapter closes by looking at the underlying theme of the human relationship with the divine, which is best clarified in light of the human relationship with the rest of creation. These five themes unfold the profound importance of relationality in Tracy's anthropology.

#### **Horizon as Transitional Concept between Finitude and Relationality**

The notion of "horizon" is apt for understanding the movement from the focus on finitude to that of relationality. Tracy's use of the term stems in part from the influence of Lonergan, especially in the early stages of Tracy's thought. In his extensive study of Lonergan, Tracy defines horizon as "a maximum field of vision from a determinate viewpoint. It possesses both an objective and a subjective pole, each one of which is conditioned by and conditions the other."<sup>1</sup> More simply, one's horizon is the limit of what one can experience and consciously engage. In the case of the human individual, the subjective pole is the embodied consciousness, while the objective pole is the range of phenomena that person encounters. When the term is used more abstractly to refer to the horizon of a discipline like theology rather than to an individual, the subjective pole consists of the methods and procedures in that discipline while the objective field refers to the phenomena, events, and elements on which they operate.<sup>2</sup>

It is important to understand that the structure of horizons is not static. Rather, one's horizon might be constantly in flux, both expanding and contracting; it depends

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<sup>1</sup> *ABL* 14

<sup>2</sup> *ABL* 87

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mostly on how much one asks questions. Tracy says that, for Lonergan, what is beyond my horizon are “questions that are meaningless and insignificant to me.”<sup>3</sup> Significance, however, is determined in large measure by the individual: “One lives authentically insofar as one continues to allow oneself an expanding horizon,” and this drive for ongoing self-transcendence is fundamental to human living.<sup>4</sup>

The notion of horizon helps us to think about the connection between finitude and relationality. First, the language of horizon recognizes that there is a limit or boundary of one’s knowledge, and more fundamentally of one’s caring – of what one loves. Because the boundary is not fixed, but can be transformed even radically, one’s limits are open to change.

Second, within one’s limited horizon, one exists in relationships. One’s horizon includes both the subjective self and the objective world one interacts with. The operations of experiencing, understanding, judging, and deciding take place not in a vacuum but in a world of persons, concepts, and objects. If operations occur with respect to the world, then horizons are formed within a relational context.

Finally, the edges of one’s horizon constitute the liminal space within which a creative dialectic between one’s subjective pole and objective field opens upon all of reality beyond the horizon. The limit of one’s horizon is also a threshold where one encounters what is “other,” so that we can recognize our existence as in relationship to what is beyond us. What Tracy names “limit-to experiences” may compel the individual to reach beyond the limits of one’s horizon, to expand the realm of one’s loving, and to

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<sup>3</sup> *ABL* 10

<sup>4</sup> *BRO* 96



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engage with what is beyond the self. He also speaks of the “limit-of” as the horizon of human existence, which is a horizon that can only be hinted at, touched upon, even glanced at. Tracy refers to this wider horizon as all that may be encountered in limit-to experiences.

### **Public Theology**

#### *What is “Public” about Public Theology*

In *The Analogical Imagination*, Tracy argues that theology is public discourse because of the “fundamental existential questions it asks” and because of the very reality of God.<sup>5</sup> Facets of theological reflection which include arguments, criteria, evidence, and warrants for theological claims demand that they be public, not private. In this way theological claims are open to any member of the public, allowing for conversation about and possible challenges to the elements that constitute any particular discourse. Ultimately, Tracy argues that public discourse “discloses meanings and truths which in principle can transform all human beings in some recognizable personal, social, political, ethical, cultural or religious manner.”<sup>6</sup> This transformative power of public discourse is manifested at the personal, communal, and historical level.

#### *The Two Publics*

While Tracy’s public theology is most amply formulated in *The Analogical Imagination*, its kernel already exists in *Blessed Rage for Order*. The first chapter of

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<sup>5</sup> *AI* xi

<sup>6</sup> *AI* 55

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*BRO* describes the pluralist context of contemporary theology as one in which historic appeals to tradition *as tradition* are insufficient for establishing the cogency of theological claims. Rather, the challenge to theology by scientific modes of argument pushes theology to use more scientific methods and criteria in making claims. The traditional theologian had to be loyal both to the “church-community of which he was a believing member” and “to whatever community of inquiry...[that] aided him to defend and to reinterpret the tradition’s beliefs.”<sup>7</sup> Historically, the central discipline in this latter commitment was philosophy. More recently, however, “philosophical method” has been broadened to mean “ethical commitment to the morality of scientific knowledge.”<sup>8</sup>

Today’s theologian therefore has to be committed to both the “community of religious and moral discourse exemplified but surely not exhausted by his own church tradition” and the “community of inquiry exemplified but surely not exhausted by the contemporary academy.”<sup>9</sup> Tracy’s theological method, specifically his method’s demand for evidence, warrants, and criteria, enables the theologian to render a “service” to both of these communities. Although he did not formulate these demands as central to *public* theology nor develop the two communities in depth, Tracy’s idea of the church and the academy as *public* spaces for theological conversation is clearly incipient in *Blessed Rage for Order*.

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<sup>7</sup> *BRO* 6

<sup>8</sup> *BRO* 7

<sup>9</sup> *BRO* 239

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### *The Three Publics*

The two publics of *Blessed Rage for Order* become three publics in *The Analogical Imagination*. There, Tracy argues that in addition to the academy and the church, the theologian is also responsible to the wider society. He differentiates three parts within society. First is the techno-economic realm, which is comprised of social structures responsible for the allocation of goods and services.<sup>10</sup> Besides broader structures, it includes the technological developments that have enabled modern developed economies to achieve an increasingly efficient process for production and distribution.<sup>11</sup> In the techno-economic realm, an *instrumental* form of reason – the “use of reason to determine rational means for a determined end” – prevails.<sup>12</sup> Instrumental reason is meant for deliberating about the means for attaining society’s goals, not for determining what those goals should be.

The second realm of society is polity, which inquires about the use of power to achieve some understanding of justice. Polity is the public sphere in which members of society are most likely to engage one another in the public discussions about the relevant political issues that Tracy says are necessary “for any humane polity.”<sup>13</sup> In the realm of polity people use practical (or “ethical”) reason in order to converse with one other about

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<sup>10</sup> *AI* 7

<sup>11</sup> It is important at this point to note the generally Western bias of Tracy’s early formulation of the publics. In describing the public of society, Tracy begins by specifically referencing “Euro-American” and “advanced industrial, technological societies with democratic polities and capitalist, socialist or mixed economies” (*AI* 6). This is not to say that Tracy’s thought on public theology is inapplicable outside of a Western context. Cf. Felix Wilfred, *Asian Public Theology: Critical Concerns in Challenging Times* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2010); Edward P. Wimberly, “Unnoticed and Unloved: The Indigenous Storyteller and Public Theology in a Postcolonial Age,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 32 no. 2 (2011).

<sup>12</sup> *AI* 8

<sup>13</sup> *AI* 9

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a shared understanding of justice and the most ethical ways to pursue that justice.

Practical reason is thus quite distinct from instrumental reason.

The third realm of society is culture, which focuses on the symbolic expressions of the society that “express the meaning and values of individual, group and communal existence.”<sup>14</sup> As mentioned previously in Chapter Two, Tracy relies on Geertz’s definition of culture as consisting of both *ethos* and *worldview*.<sup>15</sup> Culture is predominantly a matter of art and religion, the two premiere mediators of symbolic expression in society, and so it is less involved with an explicit form of rationality than with participation in and reflection upon the symbol systems of the culture. By contributing the resources of culture to the ongoing conversation about values, such reflection can have significant repercussions on the practical reason relevant to polity.<sup>16</sup>

For Tracy, the idealized form of interaction among these three realms would be a sort of hierarchy or cascade with culture at the apex and techno-economy at the bottom. The symbolic reflection of culture contributes to practical reason’s determinations of value in polity, and the values determined by polity would then orient the instrumental reason of the techno-economy. Tracy is aware that this ideal structure has at times been undermined. First, the success of instrumental reason in the techno-economic realm leads many to think that instrumental reason should be the dominant form of reason.

Whenever instrumental reason prevails over public discourse about the values of a polity,

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<sup>14</sup> *AI* 7

<sup>15</sup> See Chapter Two, pages 107-8

<sup>16</sup> *AI* 13

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it turns a “technological society” into an “emerging technocracy.”<sup>17</sup> Second, Tracy argues that the spirit of the age fosters a genial ignorance about questions of value. Tracy laments the ongoing malaise of practical reason that “demand[s] professional competence in every major area of our communal lives except value issues.”<sup>18</sup> As regards symbolic reflection in public discourse, a lazy form of secularism has led many to accept ignorance about religion (and, to a lesser extent, art) and its alleged decline into complete privatization.<sup>19</sup> This willful oversight about the need to deliberate about values, combined with the rise of instrumental reason, pushes society down a thoroughly amoral, consumerist path.

The second public is the academy. While Tracy analyzes this public with respect to the place of theology as an academic discipline, he also makes more general comments about it. This public has its own norms for determining what constitutes legitimate criteria, evidence, and argument, setting standards for any discipline which seeks academic status. Tracy notes that because intellectual pursuits fall into different disciplinary understandings, not all disciplines are identical in method and structure. Nonetheless, all such disciplines must still pursue publicness in the sense that their scholarly work should be capable of defending its particular methods and criteria in the broader academy.

Tracy is particularly concerned with the question of the disciplinary status of theology in the academy. Adopting Stephen Toulmin’s distinctions among compact,

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<sup>17</sup> *AI* 8

<sup>18</sup> *AI* 10

<sup>19</sup> *AI* 13

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diffuse, and would-be disciplines,<sup>20</sup> Tracy concedes that theology suffers from both a “lack of a clear sense of disciplinary direction” and “a lack of adequate professional organization for the discussion of new results.”<sup>21</sup> As such its disciplinary status is not “compact” like the natural sciences, but it must be categorized as either “diffuse” or “would-be” (Tracy does not finally come down on either side). He posits the need for an ongoing consideration of the disciplinary status of theology. Theology’s continuing search for both meaning and truth in the interaction between the Christian tradition and the contemporary situation both benefits from and contributes to the academy as a public, as it continues to understand its own disciplinary status more deeply and tries to meet the demand for genuine publicness.

The third public is the church. Sociology and theology provide two distinct but complementary lenses through which to analyze this public. Sociologically, Tracy defines the public of the church as a voluntary association whose communal and institutional aspects mediate between individuals and the larger society.<sup>22</sup> The church’s influence on society is predominantly felt through the activities of its members, although it can occasionally use its “institutional weight” and moral stature more directly.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, as a public, the church has its own criteria, warrants, and evidence, which are related to a profound underlying fidelity and commitment to the church’s tradition.

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. Stephen Toulmin, *Human Understanding Vol. 1: The Collective Use and Evolution of Concepts* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972), 379

<sup>21</sup> *AI* 18. The latter claim is especially telling since Tracy was president of the Catholic Theology Society of America, one of the foremost professional organizations in contemporary Catholic theology.

<sup>22</sup> *AI* 21

<sup>23</sup> *AI* 21. The ability of churches to leverage their moral stature, however, depends heavily on their moral credibility. Within the Catholic Church, the ongoing revelations in the sex abuse scandal have heavily damaged this credibility.

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These need not conflict with similar criteria *et al.* in society or the academy, but rather require that anyone engaged in all three publics to balance and adjudicate these competing factors authentically. According to Tracy, this responsibility falls especially to the theologian, who is a member of all three publics as “citizen,” “intellectual,” and “believer.”<sup>24</sup>

In Tracy’s initial sociological description of the three publics as broad, generally voluntary groups, they encompass a large number of people. Although each public has modes of reasoning and argument appropriate to its own sorts of questions and criteria, there is a large degree of overlap among the three, with society as a public including the academy and church. In a Venn diagram, the large circle of society would engulf the two smaller overlapping circles of the academy and the church. Thus from the perspective of the people who make up the publics, society is surely predominant.

Yet there are two further perspectives on the publics that must also be considered. First, besides understanding the publics primarily in terms of their membership, for Tracy, the publics are communities defined largely by the types of conversations that take place within them. Many conversations and research programs within the academy do not simply fall under the broader concern of promoting the common good sought by instrumental reason, practical reason, and symbolic reflection. For example, *Plurality*

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<sup>24</sup> This is not to say that only the theologian has a responsibility to all three publics. As an example, a devout biologist is also a member of all three publics and as such has a responsibility to engage each one in an authentic manner. However, the biologist will be less likely to speak to the academic practitioners of theology or to formulate a creative and faithful retrieval of the church’s tradition in the contemporary context. (Less likely, but not impossible; cf. Collins, *The Language of God*.

For the explanation of these terms for the members of the three publics, see Chapter One, page 69 n. 132.

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*and Ambiguity* begins with a reflection on what the history of the French Revolution can teach us about the process of interpretation. If certain facets of this conversation might have an effect on the conversations within society, they are not simply reducible to society's concerns. Similarly, the Catholic Church's intra-church debate over the ordination of women both informs and is informed by social debates about justice and gender-equality and conversations about liturgy, scripture, tradition, Catholic demographics, and numerous other relevant aspects. That the conversations of society and the church overlap and influence one another is not in dispute; nonetheless, neither of the two can be reduced to the other. Clearly, the academy and the church as publics are not strictly speaking included within the public of society.

Second, for Tracy the publics should also be considered in theological terms since the church is not only a social institution, but also a gift "participating in the grace of God disclosed in the divine self-manifestation in Jesus Christ."<sup>25</sup> The church is "the primary mediator of...the gift of God in Jesus Christ," thus making it an "an object of faith, of trust in and loyalty to its reality."<sup>26</sup> This description of the church as gift precedes any particular model (institution, mystical communion, herald, sacrament), but Tracy himself favors "sacrament of Christ and eschatological sacrament of the world."<sup>27</sup> The church, then, is not only a sociological reality but also a *theological* one.

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<sup>25</sup> AI 23

<sup>26</sup> AI 50

<sup>27</sup> AI 43 n.90. Cf. Karl Rahner, "Membership of the Church According to the Teaching of Pius XII's Encyclical 'Mystici Corporis Christi'," in *Theological Investigations* vol. 2 (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1963), 1-87; Karl Rahner, "The Church and the Sacraments," in *Inquiries* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1964), 191-257; Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963), 47-89; Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (New York: Image Books, 2002), 55-67



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Furthermore, it is not only the public of the church that is relevant to theology. Tracy's statement that the church is the eschatological sacrament of the *world* indicates "the world" as distinct from the church. In fact, "the world" includes the publics of the society and the academy.<sup>28</sup> Even though the focus of conversations in these publics may not be theological, and even though many – even the majority – of the members of these publics may not be believers, for Tracy the wider society and the academy are "expressions of the theological reality 'world.'"<sup>29</sup>

If sociologically the believer is a member of society (and possibly of the academy), how is this relationship construed theologically? First, Tracy opposes both outright rejection of the world by the members of the church and simple assimilation into the world. The world is both contingent, in that it has been created freely by God, and ambiguous, in that it is both sinful and expressive of God's grace. Yet even in its contingency and ambiguity, the world is "loved by God and by the Christian."<sup>30</sup>

Second, in loving the world yet also recognizing that it is not an ultimate object of loyalty, the Christian, the believer, the member of the church, is "*released* (the violence of the imagery is exact) *from* the world, *for* the world."<sup>31</sup> Tracy claims the believer is released *from* the world because of the dramatic power of God's Word to reveal the

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<sup>28</sup> AI 23. "The world" includes more than the academy and society (e.g., nature), but in thinking about his publics, Tracy sees the academy and society as central to "the world."

<sup>29</sup> AI 23

<sup>30</sup> AI 48

<sup>31</sup> AI 48. Tracy seems to be drawing on John 15:19 ("If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own. Because you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world—therefore the world hates you"), John 17:6 ("I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world"), and Romans 12:2 ("Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect") in this description of the believer's relationship with "the world."

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radical contingency of the cultures, institutions, and other created facets of the reality of the world. In seeing that the world could be otherwise, and thus that the God who reveals is all that is absolutely necessary, the believer is no longer beholden to any particular interpretation of the world. In being released *for* the world, the freed believer can fulfill the requirement to love the world as God does.

Thus the proper understanding of the relationships among Tracy's three publics depends greatly on perspective. The society, the academy, and the church each have both sociological and theological aspects. When considered in relation to the status of the particular individuals who are members of particular publics, the academy and the church are subsets of the wider society. If considered according to the types of conversations that take place within them, the publics have different but overlapping foci. Finally, when examined theologically, the wider society and the academy are constitutive of the theological reality of the world, a reality for which the church is ultimately a sacrament.

#### *Public Theology and Relationality*

Whether considered as overlapping communities of people, as distinct audiences for particular discourses, or as different sides in the dialectic between the world and the church, Tracy's account of these three publics helps to illuminate his emphasis on the relational character of the human person in three key ways. First, individuals cannot be understood apart from the communities of which they are part. Second, human relationships themselves must be understood both sociologically and theologically. Third, conversation is the touchstone for understanding human relationality.

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Recall that each of the three publics represents a community of discourse and reflection. Each consists of a wide body of members who actively engage one another about issues pertinent to that public. Since each public, beyond being a collection of individuals, is defined by a unifying focus, the very idea of a public implies that these individuals are in relation to one another. Sharing common questions, methods, and criteria, when they disagree they resort to prior shared presuppositions. It follows that the different sub-disciplines of theology are in part defined by the types of relations they have. In fundamental theology, for example, theology engages other disciplines, based on shared concerns over disciplinary status, criteria, method, evidence, etc.

Tracy's three publics, as general patterns of relationships, have been abstracted from particular instances. The church as a public includes the particular churches and faith traditions that directly shape their members. The academy would include the particular institution of which one is a member or even an alumnus/a as well as the diverse academic societies one participates in, the conferences one attends, the audience for which one writes. Similarly, the wider society encompasses both human society in general and one's particular societies (e.g., the United States, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, or the Boston metropolitan area). The public of the society, with its techno-economic, political, and cultural realms, also involves class distinctions and political and artistic affiliations. For example, David Tracy himself is a member of the publics of the society, the academy, and the church through being a citizen of the United States and the city of Chicago, an intellectual as a faculty member *emeritus* of the

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University of Chicago Divinity School, and a believer and priest of the Roman Catholic Church and the Diocese of Bridgeport, CT.

Therefore human relationality in Tracy's theological anthropology involves the way in which one's participation in particular communities shapes who one is. The previous chapter's discussion of Tracy's idea of internal pluralism cited the potential conflict of multiple commitments as an indication of the finite character of human life. Under the aspect of relationality, commitment to overlapping (and at times partially opposed) communities is another indication of how the finite individual necessarily exists within a web of relations, some of which are voluntary (e.g., political and religious affiliation), some involuntary (e.g., one's culture and era), and some are arguably a mix of both (e.g., one's social class and geographical location). Nonetheless, each relationship influences who the finite individual is. Thus, while the sum of communities and demographics helps to comprehend the concrete finite individual, the fact that these various factors contribute to the individual's existence and self-understanding is because the human individual is a relational being.

A second way publics make Tracy's understanding of relationality manifest is related to the distinction between the sociological and theological dimensions of the publics, since relationality is both sociological and theological. Having sketched an essentially sociological view of relationality thus far, the idea must also be understood theologically within Tracy's schema of public theology. His theological analysis of publics engages the dialectic between the church and the world, within which the Christian believer is one who is released from the world for the world. The believer's

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release from the world, far from severing the believers' relationship to the world, re-contextualizes it vis-à-vis their responsible agency in the world. The believer lives in relation to the world as one called to regard it as loved by God, as revelatory of God's work, and so as an object of one's own love. Thus for Tracy, the theological dialectic of church and world underscores believers' relationship to that world as an ambiguous, contingent, yet beloved reality.

This argument raises the important question of where non-believers fit in this arrangement.<sup>32</sup> The implication is that the non-believers' stance vis-à-vis the world is not one of releasement from and for that reality because the non-believers remain a part of the world, and thus would belong to the realities for whose sake the believers are released. In Tracy's theology, believers are not called to proselytize, but to act responsibly and lovingly towards non-believers. Indeed, believers must resist any and all attempts to treat non-believers as non-persons, denied their own agency or integrity. Thus, the heart of the believers' ongoing relationship with the world is genuine openness to "the other" of nonbelievers.

Yet this response is not entirely satisfactory either, since it does not explain how to understand the nonbeliever's relational character theologically. If the only theological

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<sup>32</sup> The "nonbeliever" is a category Tracy does not explicitly reflect on in the context of public theology. Indeed, the only real mentions of the "nonbeliever" in Tracy's theology are usually in reference to his agreement with theologian Gustavo Gutierrez that "'Progressive' theology seeks to answer the questions of the *nonbeliever*; liberation theology confronts the challenge of the *nonperson*" (Gustavo Gutierrez, *The Power of the Poor in History*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983), 92). See Tracy, "God, Dialogue and Solidarity," 902.

In the context of this chapter, nonbeliever is not intended as a judgment, nor should it be read specifically as non-Catholic or non-Christian. Rather, it seems to me that the "nonbeliever" simply means any individual who is part of the public of the wider society but not part of the public of the church (however those publics might be thematized).

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aspect of relationality in public theology occurs within the connection between the world and the church, then that would seem to exclude the non-believers' relations with one another. However, in a more fundamental sense, relationality is theological because the human exists in relation to God. Indeed, as already noted, Tracy claims that any and every person is already a potential hearer of God's revelation. Nor is this possibility limited to those who are members of the church; it also holds true for those who remain members of the world alone. While Tracy does not have recourse to an alleged anonymous Christianity, arguing a more pluralist than inclusivist position, he does nonetheless insist that all humans are in relation to God.

Finally, relationality in Tracy's anthropology is further amplified in his public theology's emphasis on conversation. The reality of conversation demands that one be engaged with another, whether that be with an individual, a public, or even a text. Indeed, that conversation is central in terms of method and of substance to Tracy's theology will be the focus of a later section of this chapter.

### **Tradition**

#### *Anticipatory Elements in BRO*

As a focal concept, tradition is not a major theme in Tracy's earlier work. He does mention it in his initial foray into fundamental theology when he simply asserts that tradition is a fact that the contemporary theologian must critically examine in light of other modes of inquiry. In *Blessed Rage for Order*, the "traditional" understanding of Christianity and its primary cognitive claims are said to exist in a state of ongoing

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challenge. The rise of modern history and science that understand themselves as rejecting (or at least subverting) tradition as a legitimate warrant for believing particular cognitive claims present both a threat and opportunity for theology.<sup>33</sup>

Accordingly, Tracy claims that the growing rigor of these alternative modes of reasoning as well as the fact of the theological discipline's location in the academy force theologians to reconsider their self-understanding. Theologians must effectively balance their commitments to a community of faith with their commitments to a community of inquiry so that "the Christian theologian's basic loyalty to his church tradition can be formulated as his honest resolve to study that tradition critically and thereby aid its self-understanding."<sup>34</sup> This posture leads theologians to pursue a *critical* retrieval of their own tradition.

This critical stance is part of his early correlation model of theology. If tradition is one of the two poles of correlation, theologians have to confront the dominant themes, questions, and symbols of the tradition. In Tracy's revisionist model of theology, this critical stance requires the Christian tradition and the "reinterpreted post-modern consciousness" to question and to respond to one another. However central the cognitive content of the tradition is in *BRO*, Tracy does not reflect on what it means to live within a tradition or on what gives a tradition its authority.

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<sup>33</sup> *BRO* 6. Later on in *The Analogical Imagination*, Tracy will expand these forms of critical inquiry to include "three general methods (historical-critical, literary-critical, social-scientific)" as important correctives for theology as a public enterprise (*AI* 237)

<sup>34</sup> *BRO* 7

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### *Development in AI*

As Tracy's theological method evolves in *The Analogical Imagination*, the Christian tradition remains one of the two poles of his mutually critical correlation, even after the second pole is nuanced from "common human experience" or "re-interpreted post-modern consciousness" to the "contemporary situation" more broadly conceived. Theologians still have to critically correlate the questions and responses between the poles. Since the argument in *AI* is intended to be a *systematic* theology, it interrogates what the term "Christian tradition" means. In particular, Tracy expands his reflection on traditions from their status as sources of cognitive content to include contexts in which communities interact over time.

As dynamic, tradition is conceived in *AI* as a developing historical reality that preserves some core principles, beliefs, or expressions that provide the tradition a sense of unity. The word "tradition" comes from the Latin "tradere," meaning "to hand over,"<sup>35</sup> as when communities hand over traditions to their younger generations over time. Traditions include ritualized action (the sign of the cross during liturgies, throwing one's hat in the air at graduation) as well as beliefs and attitudes (Jesus is the Son of God, the ideal of free speech). These actions and beliefs are considered traditional precisely because they are passed on through the history of a community.

Acknowledging that our contemporary self-understanding is intimately linked with the tradition within which we live, Tracy says that whenever a new understanding or interpretation of some expression or phenomenon emerges, "we constantly mediate,

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. Yves Congar, OP, *Tradition and Traditions: An Historical and Theological Essay*, trans. Michael Naseby and Thomas Rainborough (New York: Macmillan, 1966), 237-270



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translate, from our past understanding to our present one.”<sup>36</sup> The past understanding is not simply repeated verbatim, since the context of the original formulation has changed (different time period, different culture, different language, etc.). In the context of theology, therefore, interpretation provides “a retrieval (including a retrieval through critique and suspicion) and always, therefore, a new application of a *particular* religious tradition’s self-understanding for the current horizon of the community.”<sup>37</sup>

Contemporary interpretations of traditions are always new, yet they also retain the core insights that guide that tradition.

For Tracy, tradition is the milieu in which both the individual and the community exist. One is born into a community and a tradition so they shape one’s initial understanding of self, the world, the other, and God:

As ‘thrown’ into this world—this language, this history, this tradition—my understanding is situated by a past which inevitably involves me in the ‘effective history’ of an ambiguous heritage of funded meanings. My understanding must appropriate these meanings as possibilities for the future which I project.<sup>38</sup>

There is no privileged place outside of tradition or history.<sup>39</sup> Rather, the tradition into which one is born and in which one is raised constitutes in large part one’s horizon. The trajectory of one’s own history may be altered, as in radical conversion or transformation, but such a change never completely severs the self from his or her past. No transformation of one’s horizon can eliminate the history of effects of one’s past horizon.

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<sup>36</sup> *AI* 101

<sup>37</sup> *AI* 131

<sup>38</sup> *AI* 103

<sup>39</sup> *AI* 119

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Therefore any encounter with or interpretation of another tradition depends in part on the tradition from which one comes. Just as there is no objective point of view outside of one's own tradition, one can also not claim a presupposition-less objectivity with respect to any other tradition because one engages this other tradition from within one's own horizon. So, the encounter might change one's horizon, even profoundly, yet the horizon remains operative within the encounter.

Perhaps the most helpful example of Tracy on tradition as dynamic and contextual is his account of the role of language in theology. Language has rules (syntax, grammar) and content (vocabulary, idioms) that develop and evolve while remaining reasonably consistent. Moreover, human beings are immersed in language so that we can only communicate with one another and understand through language. As was noted in the previous chapter, Tracy opposes the instrumentalist notion of language that views it as a tool for comprehension in favor of regarding language as the medium through which comprehension and communication occur:

We find ourselves in Christianity as we find ourselves in the English language: an incredibly dense forest of syntax, grammar, history; a forest which grew not in the manner of the gardens of Versailles—the manner of theory—but in the manner of history itself into ever-changing, ever-stable possibilities of meaningful communication.<sup>40</sup>

This “forest” is language as the dynamic medium through which we understand one another and ourselves.<sup>41</sup>

Tracy's understanding of tradition contrasts with interpretations of “tradition” as rigid, unchanging, or permanent. He distinguishes between *traditio* (the ongoing process

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<sup>40</sup> AI 373

<sup>41</sup> AI 101

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of handing on the tradition) and *tradita* (specific formulations of the tradition).

Whenever theologians, or of anyone within a tradition, are kept from critically interpreting and translating such formulations in new and different contexts, tradition becomes a collection of “‘fundamentals’ to be externally accepted and endlessly repeated.”<sup>42</sup>

According to Tracy, traditions within such a fundamentalist trajectory cease being genuine traditions and become ideologies instead.

In the *Christian* tradition, as a dynamic context through which meaning is mediated through time, the central reality mediated is Jesus Christ. Indeed, that tradition cannot be neglected by theological reflection precisely because “the immediate personal response to the Christ event becomes a communal response as soon as the Christ event is recognized as the event of *Jesus* Christ.” Such recognition only makes sense through the tradition’s mediation of the “original apostolic witness.”<sup>43</sup> The church as the community in which such recognition takes place is understood in this case as both a “gift from God, primary mediator of the church-remembered Jesus Christ” as well as a sinful community that repeatedly fails to live up to the very person it is called to remember.<sup>44</sup> Because the church is both graced and sinful, theology must always retrieve tradition’s sacred symbols, expressions, rituals, and beliefs, while critically identifying and counteracting distortions embedded in that tradition.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> *AI* 99-100. See also *AI* 323: “A respect for tradition grounded in the recognition of its mediation to us of the Christ event and the memory of Jesus, its very formation of our capacity to experience that event, does call for a faith in the church. It does not call for, or even allow, the familiar distortions of that faith into ecclesiolatry and traditionalism.”

<sup>43</sup> *AI* 237

<sup>44</sup> *AI* 321

<sup>45</sup> *AI* 322

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### *Distortions within a Tradition*

The reality of distortions within traditions is a central concern in *Plurality and Ambiguity*. First and foremost, this text continues Tracy's ongoing confrontation with pluralism within traditions, a focus underlined by the titles and subtitles of his major books.<sup>46</sup> Living traditions always feature significant disagreements, competing interpretations, and often multiple irreconcilable strains within them. Tracy argues that pluralism within Christianity is evident already in the New Testament, attested to by the distinct genres of doctrine, apocalyptic, narrative, proclamation-confession, and symbols-images.<sup>47</sup> These genres are employed in diverse ways, such as the apocalypticism of the Gospel of Mark and the early letters of Paul,<sup>48</sup> the more historical narrative focus of the Gospel of Luke,<sup>49</sup> or the symbolic-reflective emphasis of the Gospel of John.<sup>50</sup> The pluralism characteristic of the New Testament continues throughout Christian history, even though the tradition still maintains a family resemblance by consistently focusing on "the Jesus remembered as the Christ by the tradition and its fidelity to the original apostolic witness."<sup>51</sup>

However, in tandem with the question of pluralism, *AI* also highlights Tracy's growing stress on the ambiguity of traditions. As for traditions being both formative of individuals and communities and also passed on by individuals and communities, Tracy

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<sup>46</sup> *BRO*: The New *Pluralism* in Theology; *AI*: Christian Theology and the Culture of *Pluralism*; *Plurality and Ambiguity*: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope.

<sup>47</sup> *AI* 264

<sup>48</sup> *AI* 266

<sup>49</sup> *AI* 278

<sup>50</sup> *AI* 281

<sup>51</sup> *AI* 237

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invokes Gadamer's account of the way traditions generate a "history of effects."<sup>52</sup> At any stage people will contribute to and pass on that history of effects, even though these traditions are never unambiguous or innocent.<sup>53</sup> Traditions always include and transmit problematic or even oppressive modes of thought and action.<sup>54</sup>

Tracy demands that we face and then resist the distortions and ambiguities in traditions. Religious traditions in particular tend to be ambiguous,<sup>55</sup> and so Tracy notes how historically religions have been domesticated by oppressive power structures. At the same time, religious traditions can also provide profound sources of resistance by heightening awareness of the "sin and ignorance" both within themselves and in the wider culture. This empowers religions to "resist all refusals to face the radical plurality and ambiguity of any tradition, including their own."<sup>56</sup> While the ambiguities within a given tradition cannot simply be ignored or willed away through some kind of Pelagian view of moral integrity, they can offer "liberating possibilities to be retrieved, errors to be criticized, [and] unconscious distortions to be unmasked."<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> PA 66

<sup>53</sup> PA 36. See also *DWO* 62: "The recognition of tradition means that every interpreter enters into the act of interpretation bearing the history of the effects, both conscious and preconscious, of the traditions to which we ineluctably belong. As Gadamer insists, we belong to the history of these effects of our traditions—that is, we belong to history and language far more than history or language belong to us." Cf. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 299-306

<sup>54</sup> PA 36-7. See also *DWO* 5-6: "There is no escape from the insight which modernity most feared: there is no innocent tradition (including modernity), no innocent classic (including the scriptures) and no innocent reading (including this one)."

<sup>55</sup> See in particular Tracy's chapter on Mircea Eliade in *DWO* (pp 48-67).

<sup>56</sup> PA 83-4. See also *AI* 100: "...the route to liberation from the negative realities of a tradition is not to declare the existence of an autonomy that is literally unreal but to enter into a disciplined and responsive conversation with the subject matter—the responses and, above all, the fundamental questions—of the tradition."

<sup>57</sup> PA 112. The question of distortion more generally as well as ways in which to respond to distortion will be covered more fully in the following two chapters.

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#### *Traditions as Relational*

Tradition plays an important role in Tracy's understanding of human relationality by connecting persons not only to their contemporaries but also to past members of that tradition, so that members of a tradition are thus related both synchronically and diachronically. Synchronically, each human person is formed within a tradition through his or her relations with both contemporary members and the symbolic resources of that tradition. Traditions are not private enterprises with singular languages,<sup>58</sup> but rather wide-ranging dynamisms that mediate core sets of meanings in time. Indeed, according to Tracy "no one...escapes the reality of tradition," since we are all in fact "radically finite and social selves embedded in this language, this culture, this history."<sup>59</sup> Even if one is repulsed by the distortions or injustices of one's tradition, one must be a hopeful in interpreting and interacting with that tradition in order to reveal and face these ambiguities.

Diachronically, we are also related to those members of our tradition who have gone before us. The individual human person is "thrown" into a particular language, history, and tradition, and is embedded in a past with the "'effective history' of an ambiguous heritage of funded meanings" beyond one's control<sup>60</sup> because it results from previous stages and under the influence of the "equally historical individuals [that] have struggled before us."<sup>61</sup> Moreover, any interpretation of a tradition in the present is affected by "our past experience and the understanding embodied in our linguistic

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<sup>58</sup> *PA* 49

<sup>59</sup> *AI* 119

<sup>60</sup> *AI* 103

<sup>61</sup> *PA* 66

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tradition.”<sup>62</sup> Each individual person is therefore shaped in relation to the present form and membership of the tradition into which he or she is born, along with the multitude of historical persons who belonged and contributed to that tradition.

## Conversation

### *Beginnings in AI*

In *The Analogical Imagination*, Tracy emphasizes the hermeneutical character of the discipline of theology in general and systematic theology in particular. While conversation was not even mentioned in the index to *BRO*, it is both a topic for reflection and a description of the purpose of *AI*, because it is his basic model for hermeneutics. The core of his account is the Platonic model of dialogue, in which “real conversation occurs only when the individual conversation partners move past self-consciousness and self-aggrandizement into joint reflection upon the subject matter of the conversation.”<sup>63</sup> Tracy has compared this experience of genuine conversation to experiences either of really good acting or of being “in the zone” during sports.<sup>64</sup> By giving the self over to the issue at stake in the conversation – usually a question of some sort – the partners in the conversation lose their own self-consciousness and allow the subject matter to take precedence. Through letting the self be engaged by the question, an interlocutor opens the self to the potential occurrence of *understanding*, an event that happens “not as the

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<sup>62</sup> *AI* 101

<sup>63</sup> *AI* 101; cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Dialogue and Dialectic: Eight Hermeneutical Studies on Plato*, trans. P. Christopher Smith (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980)

<sup>64</sup> *NCFT*

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pure result of personal achievement but in the back-and-forth movement of the conversation itself.”<sup>65</sup>

Potential interlocutors in conversation are myriad. As his model for hermeneutics, Tracy understands conversation to be anything from a symposium to a discussion with friends to reading texts, viewing works of art, or reflecting as a solitary thinker on some topic.<sup>66</sup> The relationship between the reader and text is paradigmatic of the interpretive project of genuine conversation, because these “are never static realities but realities-in-process demanding the interaction of genuine conversation to actualize the questions and responses (the subject matter).”<sup>67</sup> For Tracy, some of the best interlocutors in conversation are the classics – texts, persons, rituals, symbols, works of art, and other expressions of human creativity that carry both an excess and a permanence of meaning.

Because Tracy uses conversation as his model for hermeneutics, his description of an interpreter in the process of interpretation is applicable to characterize the interlocutor in conversation. Interpretation has four characteristics or moments. First, the interpreter enters into interpretation already possessing some pre-understanding of the subject at hand, typically comprised of “questions, opinions, responses, expectations, even desires, fears, and hopes.”<sup>68</sup> This pre-understanding is a part of the interpreter’s horizon, shaped largely by the foregoing history of effects in the interpreter’s tradition and cultural context. When he describes the interpreter as “always a social subject...formed by the

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<sup>65</sup> *AI* 101

<sup>66</sup> *AI* 102

<sup>67</sup> *AI* 105

<sup>68</sup> *AI* 118



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community and...responsible to the wider community of inquirers and readers,” Tracy’s brief for the relational character of interpretation is perhaps strongest.<sup>69</sup>

The second interpretive moment is the approach of the interpreter to the classic. Tracy usually considers the classic as a text. Whatever its form, the classic has the power to claim the interpreter’s attention. It may vex, provoke, or even seduce the interpreter into attending to its subject matter. This demand for attention is what Tracy calls “a realized experience,” in which the classic strikes the interpreter as an event, ranging from a subtle resonance to a shocking recognition. The interpreter cannot control the classic since the attempt to manipulate the conversation would corrupt any attempt at authenticity. Rather, the conversation partner must in this case try to be open to the possibly challenging, possibly moving claim of the classic.

In the third moment, Tracy once again characterizes the conversation as a game, which he deems an apt description of “the kind of dynamic actually at work in that experience,” since the object of the game takes precedence over the egos or goals of the players.”<sup>70</sup> Moreover, the game’s dynamics involve the back-and-forth movement among the players pursuing the game’s objective, so that it can truly be said that the players don’t play the game so much as they are played by the game. To be sure, dynamic movement of interpretation is made possible by the interpreter’s openness to being led by the subject matter in question.

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<sup>69</sup> *AI* 118-9

<sup>70</sup> *AI* 120

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Finally, the fourth moment notes that the interpreter also participates in “the larger conversation of the entire community of inquirers.”<sup>71</sup> This highlights the interplay between the interpreters’ understanding of the text and their pre-understanding of the tradition. Moreover, interpreters put into play the impact of others within the tradition on their interpretations, so that the history of effects enables particular classic texts not only to arise within a tradition but also to become partly constitutive of the trajectory of a tradition as others’ interpretations of the same text inform and challenge one’s own.<sup>72</sup>

Central to Tracy’s model of conversation is the openness of the conversation partners, which not only allows the subject of the conversation to take the lead but to risk exposing one’s deepest views to the other in conversation, for this risk marks the only way for the interlocutors to give themselves truly to the dynamics of the conversation.<sup>73</sup>

### *Further Development in PA and DWO*

*Plurality and Ambiguity* and *Dialogue with the Other* further elaborate these basic moments of conversation.<sup>74</sup> Tracy, stressing the connection between interpretation and conversation even more explicit, says “We converse with one another. We can also converse with texts. If we read well, then we are conversing with the text.”<sup>75</sup> He points out that the reader is not passive in receiving the text, but rather questions to understand

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<sup>71</sup> *AI* 120

<sup>72</sup> *AI* 120-121

<sup>73</sup> *AI* 446

<sup>74</sup> Tracy in fact sets out at the beginning of that text with conversation as the theme (ix).

<sup>75</sup> *PA* 19. See also *DWO* 63-4: “For the model of conversation is not imposed upon our experience of interpretation as some new *de jure* method, norm, or rule. Rather the phenomenon of conversation aptly describes anyone’s *de facto* experience of interpreting any classic.”

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the reality disclosed by text. Despite the apparently static role of the text at hand, it can genuinely captivate the reader by opening new possibilities of meaning and value.

The key quality for Tracy is the openness on the part of the interpreter, since in reading or conversing interpreters open themselves to the subject matter of the conversation. They risk entering the “zone.” They also take the risk of openness with the interlocutor by placing their pre-understandings, interpretations, and horizons on the line in conversation; thus the possibility of radical change becomes real when the process of authentic conversation discloses *different* or *other* possibilities. In his illumination of the analogical imagination in interpretation, this recognition of possibilities also involves seeing the “similarity to what we have already experienced or understood” in something other than ourselves.<sup>76</sup> Besides opening us to the subject matter or to the disclosure of new possibilities, the risk of conversation may also initiate an authentic relationship with the other. Real conversation cannot take place with an other projected in one’s own mind; it can only occur with someone or something that is real or different from oneself, that’s able to disclose meaningful possibilities, when the integrity of the other is respected.<sup>77</sup>

In these more recent works, Tracy is increasingly careful to note how limited and imperfect conversation is. His description of the ideal conversation includes such basic tenets as “respect for the sincerity of the other; that all conversation partners are, in principle, equals; saying what one means and meaning what one says; a willingness to

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<sup>76</sup> *PA* 20

<sup>77</sup> *DWO* 4

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weigh all relevant evidence...and abide by the rules of validity [and] coherence.”<sup>78</sup>

While this ideal is never realized in fact, it helps in realizing the limitations and problems in conversation. For Tracy, the interruptive categories of plurality and ambiguity place constraints on the possibility of ideal conversation.

Since plurality and ambiguity challenge the relatively simple and basic understanding of what real conversations are, Tracy wants to contest the idea that conversation is simple and instead acknowledge that language and history, as well as the interpretations of fundamental questions formed within language and history, are inevitably plural, different, and irreducible to one another. Yet the recognition of plurality also helps one to recognize that some forces in cultures and traditions have sought to assert otherwise, to impose uniformity, to reduce the hermeneutical impulse to “more of the same.”<sup>79</sup> Ambiguity, meanwhile, fosters the central insight that all traditions, classics, and indeed all conversations are marred in some way. Each comes with a history, a preunderstanding, that is shaped by countless flawed and sometimes morally problematic decisions and interpretations.<sup>80</sup> There is not only the risk associated with recalling the subtle oppressions and micro-aggressions of this history but also the risk of attempting to control or manipulate the other in conversation. Maintaining permanent unwavering openness and risk vis-à-vis the other is simply impossible.

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<sup>78</sup> *PA* 26-27

<sup>79</sup> *PA* 84

<sup>80</sup> *PA* 36-37; *DWO* 59

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#### *Conversation and Tradition*

Tracy's theology takes conversation as the basic model and metaphor for interpretation, and this then becomes the center of his theological method. In his view, conversation offers the most hopeful way forward in the face of radical plurality and ambiguity, but it does not provide a simplistic or even optimistic mode of handling these interruptions. Insofar as plurality and ambiguity aptly describe any "contemporary situation," they always be accounted for theologically.

Let me underscore the intrinsic link between tradition and conversation. Tradition is, after all, conversation writ large, involving an ever-increasing number of interlocutors through time.<sup>81</sup> For Tracy, Christian tradition is a conversation into which candidates for classic status enter and engage with fellow classics and interpreters.<sup>82</sup> Moreover, traditions are dynamic carriers of meaning that can also be in conversation with one another. Consequently, faith traditions, especially Christianity, can only come to real self-understanding through a genuine recognition of similarity-in-difference through conversation with one another. Indeed, he is a powerful advocate of the position that Christian systematic theology ought to have this conversation with "all the other religions and their classics" at the beginning of its efforts, not at the end.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Tracy's point here is well stated in Jaroslav Pelikan's renowned pithy statement that "Tradition is the living faith of the dead, traditionalism is the dead faith of the living. And, I suppose I should add, it is traditionalism that gives tradition such a bad name" (Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), 65).

<sup>82</sup> *AI* 104

<sup>83</sup> *AI* 449

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### **Human Relations with God**

Previously, I have traced the links among the ideas of the limit-of, the whole, and Ultimate Reality through Tracy's main works in order to show that each of these terms generally refer to the reality Christians call God. In discussing finitude, Tracy uses each of these terms to distinguish the experience of human living from God as the mysterious reality that grounds this human living. It is especially the limit-to, both in positive, reassuring forms (joy, love) and negative, frightening ones (death, guilt, anxiety) that makes the individual aware of the reality beyond the self that is, according to Tracy, the horizon of all existence.

#### *The Limit as Revelatory of Relationship*

The notion of the "limit-to" means those experiences, questions, and situations that push one up against one's limits. This can occur in a variety of ways, ranging from the limits as regards moral and scientific inquiry to those related to personal experiences of anxiety, guilt, love, or joy. These encounters also disclose the "limit-of" these experiences, namely the horizon of one's ordinary existence.

In their own way, ecstatic and the boundary situations also disclose a broader reality. Tracy says experience of authentic love "puts us in touch with a reality whose power we cannot deny."<sup>84</sup> To be authentic, love must be "self-transcending" to push the self to reach beyond the limitations of one's relative horizon and to care for the other. In the boundary experience of anxiety, however, one faces the "often forgotten but never

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<sup>84</sup> BRO 105-106

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totally absent consciousness of our own radical contingency.”<sup>85</sup> Limit-to experiences, questions, and situations bring to collective consciousness the unsettling, sometimes terrifying, sometimes exciting sense that there is something beyond us that grounds, and perhaps even gives meaning to, our finite lives.

The need to articulate this intimation is the primary source of religious language. Since such experiences cannot be put into words adequately, people are driven to metaphorical and symbolic imagery to describe this “final dimension to our lives.”<sup>86</sup> Tracy thus describes religious language as the limit-language that “re-presents” this final dimension in speech. Finally, he claims that the “objective referent of all such language...is that reality which religious human beings mean when they say ‘God.’”<sup>87</sup>

Another way of describing God is the “limit-of” or the final dimension to human experience. God is the ultimate ground and horizon of everyday, ordinary human living.<sup>88</sup> The encounter with the limit-of that is indicated in the experience of the limit-to therefore manifests human finitude and the human relationship with the divine. For the human individual, the religious language for articulating this relationship emphasizes both our sense of a basic trust in the graciousness of God as well as our total commitment to that reality.<sup>89</sup> The divine is what grounds and gives meaning to one’s life, and so it orients human life.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> *BRO* 107

<sup>86</sup> *BRO* 107-8

<sup>87</sup> *BRO* 109

<sup>88</sup> *BRO* 147

<sup>89</sup> *BRO* 122

<sup>90</sup> *BRO* 134

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In *Blessed Rage for Order*, Tracy found the description of the human being as related to God not altogether satisfying. The metaphors of “horizon” and “limit-of” do help, but they leave open the question of what it means for God to be in relationship with human beings. From the human side, this relationship is marked by contingency, dependence, trust, and commitment, qualities whose meaningfulness is not well served by the traditional theistic conceptions of God as impassable and unchanging. Since these conceptions are incapable of doing justice to the relationship between the divine and the human, Tracy turns to process theology’s understanding of God as articulated by Charles Hartshorne and Schubert Ogden.<sup>91</sup>

Tracy begins his engagement with this view by stating the need for metaphysical claims to satisfy two basic criteria: (1) to demonstrate internal coherence; (2) to be consistent with “experience broadly and fairly understood.”<sup>92</sup> For Tracy, the theistic, predominantly Thomist metaphysical depiction of God in the Christian tradition fails on both these accounts, because the metaphysical categories of *substance* and *being* are non-temporal and non-relational.<sup>93</sup> He suggests that that a non-relational God contradicts the witness of scripture, which portrays God as being in an ongoing, expanding covenant with humanity.

Tracy replaces the categories of substance and being with the categories of “process, “sociality,” and “time.” As applied first to the idea of the self, these categories

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<sup>91</sup> For Tracy’s main sources here, see Charles Hartshorne, *Man’s Vision of God and the Logic of Theism* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1941); Ogden, *The Reality of God*; and Charles Hartshorne and William L. Reese, eds., *Philosophers Speak of God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953).

<sup>92</sup> BRO 172

<sup>93</sup> BRO 173



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are inherently relational: “The self as we actually experience that self is an illusion if it is not a process of change and continuity: a process which precisely as process involves both internal relations with all reality and the distinct temporal modes of present, past, and future.”<sup>94</sup> Moreover, since the central human experience of love is relational, “we are authentic selves only in direct proportion to our ability to be affected by and related to other selves.”<sup>95</sup>

The process notion of the self is thus dipolar, with both an abstract and concrete pole. The abstract pole is that “aspect whereby I simply *exist* – I am not affected by others. I simply exist.”<sup>96</sup> The concrete pole, however, refers to the aspect of being in relation to others and to the world; it is profoundly affected by its context. The self has both poles: the unrelated existent one and the relationally existing one.<sup>97</sup>

Tracy then claims that God is the quintessential example of these categories, not the exception. God can also be analogously understood as a dipolar reality. In the abstract pole, God is supremely absolute and does not depend for existence on any other reality. Yet in the concrete pole, God is not only relative, but supremely relative: God is the only reality that is related to everything else that exists. God is thus “both absolute

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<sup>94</sup> *BRO* 173

<sup>95</sup> *BRO* 178

<sup>96</sup> *BRO* 179

<sup>97</sup> The abstract pole in process metaphysics should not be confused with the category of “nature” or “form” in Thomistic metaphysics. In the case of the self, the abstract pole does not refer to human nature, with the concrete self being an individual existent of that form. Rather, the abstract and concrete pole in union with one another form the individual existent. By abstract, Tracy means the qualities of a specific individual that are “relatively unrelated to others.” He refers here to that fact of existing with some defining characteristics, but does not expand on what those mean. In fact, one central weakness to the idea of the abstract pole is that even the mere fact of existence is relational, in that that existence is not only utterly dependent on whatever brought the self into existence (i.e., parents), but also dependent on the reality that grounds human existence (i.e., God). Tracy’s qualifier of “relatively” unrelated seems unsatisfactory in this regard.

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(as the one whose existence depends on no other being) and relative (as the one whose actuality is relative to all other beings).”<sup>98</sup> The dipolar understanding of God thus maintains the perfection language about God, claiming that “in *both* ‘poles’ of his reality God alone is *supremely* perfect.”<sup>99</sup> The traditional description of God’s perfection is thereby expanded to include the ideas of change and process within God.<sup>100</sup>

In defending this process notion of God, Tracy argues that it satisfies the two criteria mentioned above. First, he claims the concept is internally coherent, arguing that God is “eminently social and temporal.” God is immediately in relation to all that is, participating in reality in a way analogous to the self’s connection to his/her body.<sup>101</sup> In addition, God is supremely temporal because “God alone synthesizes in each new moment all the actuality already achieved with all the true possibilities as yet unrealized.”<sup>102</sup> This claim to internal coherence is based on the analogy of the self’s existence as both relational and temporal, and therefore in process. As such, it is not a claim that can be made finally or definitively, but is instead conceived as an argument, not to explain mystery, but to clarify “where the mystery lies.”<sup>103</sup>

With respect to the criterion of adequacy to experience, Tracy believes a process understanding fulfills both the sense of contemporary lived human experience as well as the scriptural witness. The dipolar God is a God understood to be profoundly affected by the human struggle towards the good, whereas for Tracy the more traditional conceptions

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<sup>98</sup> BRO 179

<sup>99</sup> BRO 179

<sup>100</sup> BRO 176

<sup>101</sup> BRO 181

<sup>102</sup> BRO 181

<sup>103</sup> BRO 180

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of God as unchanging and impassable risk describing God as indifferent to human suffering.<sup>104</sup> For Tracy, this is the God of the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, who is persuaded by Abraham's negotiations, who liberates God's people from Egypt, and who frees all from sin through the person and event of Jesus Christ. Thus, Tracy reasons, the understanding of God as profoundly related to human existence is a better interpretation both of our lives and of the attestation of scripture.

The conceptual connections among "horizon," the "limit-of," and the process theology understanding of God in Tracy's *Blessed Rage for Order* bring out the profoundly relational character of the human person. Individuals' encounters with their limits manifest their finitude as well as their connection with what is beyond their limits. The metaphor of the horizon only emphasizes this quality even more. The broad, grounding horizon that discloses the "limit-of" ordinary human experience clarifies the human person's relationship to God, and underscores both the contingency and dependence of the human and God's concern for creation. Tracy claims that "the eminently relative God is the absolute ground of all relationships, ours and the divine."<sup>105</sup> While Tracy will gradually move away from this process theology of God,<sup>106</sup> at this early stage it clearly demonstrates the importance of relationality.

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<sup>104</sup> BRO 177

<sup>105</sup> BRO 182

<sup>106</sup> Tracy recounts this argument in AI 160-161, but he does so mainly as an example of the disagreements surrounding how adequately the limit-of can be stated in religious language.

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#### *The Whole in AI*

In the previous chapter I noted a shift in language in *The Analogical Imagination* from the limit-of to the whole. This shift connects theology more profoundly with culture in Tracy's work. The "ethos" and "worldview" of that religious tradition become indissolubly linked within a religion orientation to the whole as the ground of existence. If the whole is the authentic focus of one's life, then the reality of the whole and the way one should live are interconnected. The whole is thus a reality to which the individual is inevitably oriented, either toward or away from it. When one's orientation is a matter of basic trust in and commitment to the object of faith revealed by the whole, Tracy calls that relationship faith.<sup>107</sup>

The question of the orientation to the whole becomes a key to the larger question of the human relation to the divine. For Tracy, religious classics and theological questions are virtually indispensable for "the most serious questions on the meaning of existence as participating in, yet distanced, sometimes even estranged from, the reality of the whole."<sup>108</sup> How one is oriented indicates where one stands vis-à-vis the wider tension between participation in and alienation from the whole.

The significance of these two poles is brought out by Tracy's distinction between the classical religious expressions of manifestation and of proclamation. As classics, both manifestation and proclamation are marked by the dialectical tension between intensification and distancing. "Intensification" means the "journey into particularity" in which the producer of the classic (the artist, the thinker, the saint) allows the self to be

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<sup>107</sup> *AI* 47

<sup>108</sup> *AI* 155

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open to the “game of the truth of existence.”<sup>109</sup> The result of intensification is some finite expression that aims for the infinite, making its revelatory possibility disproportionate to its producer when it culminates the process of intensification. Tracy calls this distanciation, in order to indicate the point at which the producer of the classic lets go of the expression so that it becomes shareable and public.<sup>110</sup>

Manifestation names what happens when the process of intensification is predominantly a matter of participation and phenomena become saturated with the power of the whole. When that happens, manifestation takes place outside of normal time and space and in the realm of the sacred, even as people participate in, for example, myths and rituals.<sup>111</sup> Then the power of manifestation is disclosed specifically to those who enter into the sacred space. Influenced by the work of Mircea Eliade, Tracy explains that only through such participation can “we impoverished and parochial Western moderns be freed...from ordinary time and space, indeed from history itself.”<sup>112</sup> The classic expressions of manifestation engender participation and, in so doing, put people in contact with the whole.

Proclamation, on the other hand, does not involve participation. Like manifestation, proclamation discloses the power of the whole, but as an address to the self that shatters any easy sense of participation.<sup>113</sup> Here the experience of participation in the whole is dialectically challenged by the feeling of radical difference between the

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<sup>109</sup> *AI* 125-6. Regarding “game,” see Chapter Two, 78

<sup>110</sup> *AI* 126-7

<sup>111</sup> *AI* 205

<sup>112</sup> *AI* 206

<sup>113</sup> *AI* 209

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self and the whole, when the sense of complacency in the adequacy of one's myths, symbols, or rituals is undermined. Proclamation confronts both the community and the self by demanding fidelity "through word and deed in this time and this history to the God who gives that word as enabling command."<sup>114</sup> In this way proclamation reveals the radical estrangement of the self from the whole.<sup>115</sup>

For Tracy these two classic religious expressions are two distinct but basic ways of conceiving the relationship between humans and the divine. While manifestation and proclamation reveal the whole, they are related to different aspects of the divine-human relationship. Manifestation emphasizes the profound connection between humans and God through human participation in the whole through ritual, symbol, and myth, whereas proclamation shows the radical alienation of the human from the divine, especially as regards the finite individual self. Manifestation and proclamation need each other because neither is sufficient on its own to articulate this relationship. Indeed, only in concert with each other can the real ambiguity about the divine-human relationship become clear: "the significance and goodness of history, the estrangement and sin in self and society, the ultimate incomprehensibility of self, society and history, the hope for a really new future, the radical affirmation of world that is released by radical world-negation."<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> *AI* 210

<sup>115</sup> *AI* 211. The religious expressions of manifestation and proclamation will become a central focus of Chapter Five.

<sup>116</sup> *AI* 213

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#### *Transformation to the Other*

Tracy's depiction of the divine-human relationship in *The Analogical Imagination* in terms of the tension between participation and estrangement makes possible the central insight of *Plurality and Ambiguity* and *Dialogue with the Other*. One of the most distinguishing marks of contemporary thought is the "shift from modern self to post-modern other."<sup>117</sup> Indeed, the centrality of conversation and dialogue as a methodological requirement for theology is based on the openness of the self to the other, even to the point of risking radical change. To be sure, "otherness" encompasses not only those persons, cultures, and contexts that are different from oneself, but also the divine Other and one's own otherness.

As we have just seen, the human relationship with the divine Other is marked by the experiences of participation and estrangement. The tension between the two is evident in attempts of religious language to articulate the sense of divine mystery. Divine revelation, for example, is fundamentally a disclosure of God's self, even if it conceals even more than it unveils. Because the divine is ultimately mysterious, religious language can never definitely articulate it. Even the best religious speech ultimately "prove[s] uncontrollable and unmasterable."<sup>118</sup>

Due to the inherent limitations of religious language, Tracy seems to prefer the more apophatic type of religious discourse. Thus, he notes that "Silence may be the most appropriate kind of speech for evoking this necessary sense of the radical mystery—as mystics insist when they say, 'Those who know do not speak; those who speak do not

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<sup>117</sup> *DWO* 4

<sup>118</sup> *PA* 109

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know’.”<sup>119</sup> Religious speech communicates successfully when it evokes and deepens the sense of divine mystery, countering any easy sentimentalism about God while further articulating Otto’s *tremendum* and *fascinans* of religious experience.<sup>120</sup>

Yet, Tracy does not simply advocate silence, but insists that religious classics and experiences must always be interpreted, since they are responses to the basic questions of existence that cannot be thoroughly and definitively answered. Thus the inevitability of human inquiry grounds the ongoing role for religious classics. Moreover, interpretations of these classics need not be performed by the faithful alone since fundamental human questions are not the sole domain of believers or religious elites. Tracy’s argument for the public nature of religious classics implies that *all* people should risk interpreting them. As public discourse, religious classics may

evoke a wide range of responses...from the shock of recognition religiously named faith, as radical trust in, and loyalty to, Ultimate Reality, to some far more tentative religious sense that, without implying belief, can nevertheless envisage some enlightenment and emancipation in the religious classics.<sup>121</sup>

The excess and permanence of meaning extending beyond their traditions of origin proper to religious expressions as classic enables them to elicit such responses from a limitless range of interpreters.

These responses, while not an exhaustive list of possible responses to religious classics,<sup>122</sup> indicate Tracy’s conviction that an encounter with Ultimate Reality can be a

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<sup>119</sup> *PA* 108

<sup>120</sup> Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. John W. Harvey (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 12-40

<sup>121</sup> *PA* 111.

<sup>122</sup> Tracy does not, in this context, seem to envision that spectrum as stretching to the possibilities of profound disagreement or radical rejection as responses to religious classics (or, for that matter, the even



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profoundly transformative experience. In *Plurality and Ambiguity*, Tracy categorizes this transformation as the shift “from self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness.”<sup>123</sup> This shift is a corrective to the modern conception of the autonomous ego that Tracy views as a misunderstanding of human finitude. This shift is made possible for the individual by one’s “relationship with Ultimate Reality,”<sup>124</sup> which emerges in an initial way from one’s experience of asking those limit questions that raise the possibility of a grounding reality.

The responses Tracy notes above suggest that the relationship with the divine disclosed in interpretation of religious classics can be characterized as emancipatory. The move from ego-centrism to theo-centrism is not a minor adjustment of the self but a *release*.<sup>125</sup> The growing realization of one’s relationship with Ultimate Reality has the effect of liberating the individual for responsible agency directed toward “nature, history, others, and even the now transformed self.”<sup>126</sup> The transformation profoundly

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more challenging response of disinterest). In part, this is due to Tracy’s confidence that an expression is only a classic if it has a demonstrated power to reveal universal truths, and thus the likelihood of radical rejection or non-response seems negligible (but still possible). Nonetheless, Tracy has previously recognized the validity of rejecting a classic’s claims (*AI* 116), even going so far in *Plurality and Ambiguity* as to note that coming to an understanding of one’s profound disagreement with such an expression is a valid outcome of conversation (*PA* 93).

<sup>123</sup> *PA* 89

<sup>124</sup> *PA* 90

<sup>125</sup> The use of “theo” in this sentence diverges slightly from Tracy’s intentions in referring to “Ultimate Reality” in *Plurality and Ambiguity*. He makes the important point that this reality is conceived differently in various religions, and these conceptions cannot be meaningfully stripped down to a lowest common denominator concept. Ultimate Reality is not necessarily theo-anything in some of the world religions. Nonetheless, in Tracy’s context as a Catholic theologian (who has himself described Christianity as “Christo-morphic theo-centrism”), the word choice seems appropriate here. Cf. David Tracy, “Augustine’s Christomorphic Theocentrism,” in *Orthodox Readings of Augustine*, eds. George E Demacopoulos and Aristotle Papanikolaou (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2008), 263-289.

It should be noted that in addition to the diversity of conceptions of Ultimate Reality among the world religions, so too are their conceptions of liberation or emancipation. In particular, the way in which liberation might be achieved or received varies in meaningful ways. Yet he seems to see that these liberations depend in large part on one’s relationship to Ultimate Reality construed in some sense as a move away from self-centeredness.

<sup>126</sup> *PA* 90

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exemplifies Tracy's insight into the shift from the self to the other. Shifting one's focus from the self to the divine not only properly orients the human relationship with the divine, but also enables one to enter more fully into right relationship with any other, whether as persons, cultures, or even one's own otherness.

It becomes clear therefore that central to the initial trajectory of Tracy's thinking about the divine-human relationship is the power and necessity of human transformation. This transformation occurs in and through the relationship with the divine and is irreducible to an act of human freedom. Nonetheless the impact of this transformation does depend on the human willingness to be open to it. This transformation becomes the basis for one's relationships to all others. Applying Lonergan's notions of conversion and horizon, Tracy argues for transformation as a re-orientation of the self from the self to the other.

While this trajectory is certainly the dominant one in Tracy's theology throughout the 1970's and 80's, an important and ongoing change of direction begins in the 90's. His theological project until this point was predominantly concerned with methodological concerns, including transcendental, hermeneutical, and phenomenological modes of analysis. In the 90's, however, he shifts to the more doctrinal or substantive question of God, no longer preoccupied with the terms limit-of, whole, and Ultimate Reality, but reconstructing instead what he considers the major traditional ways of *naming* God. This shift, which still awaits its culmination in Tracy's not yet finished "God Book,"

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constitutes a potentially profound shift in how he characterizes the divine-human relationship.<sup>127</sup>

### Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to demonstrate the importance of the category of relationality in Tracy's theological anthropology. Intimately linked to the previous chapter's focus on finitude, finitude and relationality are two poles for understanding the basic nature of the human person. Even though the human person is limited and bounded, these limits are in some sense both defined and transcended by human relationships with the other. Lonergan's concept of the horizon is used by Tracy as an effective way to articulate this dipolar conception of the self.

By examining four important themes in his work – public theology, tradition, conversation, and the divine-human relationship – this chapter has shown that each one depends upon the human capacity for relationship and moves beyond limitations of the autonomous self. Each of these elements, in different ways, indicates that the human person is connected personally, culturally, and historically to a reality that transcends and includes the self.

Finally, Tracy's increasing emphasis on the role of interpretation and hermeneutics highlights his basic assessment of the human person as an inquisitive and interpretive creature. The very possibility of interpretation rests on the ability of the individual to engage with something other, something separate, and something that

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<sup>127</sup> See especially Tracy, "Form and Fragment," 98-114.

### Chapter Three

discloses genuine similarities in its differences. The fact of human relationality is the condition of possibility of interpretation. Tracy construes the human person as an interpreting self:

a self who is a free and responsible individual, who recognizes the intrinsic relations of that event of individuality to a particular tradition and society, to other selves (interpersonal), to the structural realities of society, culture, politics and history; a self whose very selfhood is concretely actual only by the partial determination by, a partial freedom from, these encompassing structures; a self internally related to the reality of the cosmos which encompasses all selves, structures and history; and, above all, a self internally related to the reality of the whole now both disclosed and concealed as like a who—a living, empowering and commanding reality, a judging, healing, loving God.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> *AI* 256

## CHAPTER FOUR

### SIN

The preceding two chapters examined the anthropological constants of finitude and relationality in Tracy's theology. These constants are closely linked to one another, as the encounter with one's finitude in limit situations and one's historicity reveals the ways in which one is related to others, the world, and the divine. Tracy's central themes of public theology, tradition, and conversation illuminate the finite human person as always already connected to the other.

In accord with Tracy's theological method, these two constants belong to the sub-discipline of fundamental theology. While they have deep theological import, the notion that the human person is both finite and relational is not unique to Christianity or to religion in general. Theology can have an authentic conversation about these concepts with other disciplines (such as biology, sociology, and literature), and learn from these other fields at the same time as it offers a different perspective.

For Tracy, the classic Christian symbols of sin and grace are topics in the sub-discipline of systematic theology, which is concerned with creative fidelity to a particular tradition as it interprets its central symbols in light of changing contemporary contexts. Systematic theology can engage publics outside the church to which a theologian happens to belong; but it speaks precisely *from within* that church, presuming that its interlocutors have some commitment to the tradition or at least a willingness to grant its premises for

the sake of conversation. From the start of his career, Tracy believed that the symbols of sin and grace can contribute to the human sciences by offering a more complete account of the human “in his concrete performance.”<sup>1</sup>

This chapter focuses on sin in Tracy’s theological anthropology. He argues that sin is both a rejection of human finitude (meaning that clear distinctions need to be drawn between these two constants) and a corruption of human relationality. Further, he argues that sin is an inevitable fact even if not an intrinsic or necessary aspect of human existence like finitude and relationality. Tracy distinguishes among three distinct but interrelated understandings of sin: personal sins, habitual sins, and inherited sin. Although these three dimensions of sin differ in the degree of consciousness they entail, they still perpetuate and reinforce one another. Inherited sin, described as unconscious systemic distortion, is Tracy’s primary focus in discussing human sinfulness. Insofar as it affects both the individual and the context, sin distorts not only our finitude but also our relationality.

### **The Relationship Between Sin and Finitude**

I will outline two important questions integral to Tracy’s understanding of sin at the outset. The first regards the distinction between finitude and sin. To be sure, the treatment of finitude and sin in separate chapters already indicates an implicit distinction. A consideration of French philosopher Paul Ricoeur’s philosophical anthropology in

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<sup>1</sup> *ABL* 190: “In short, if these are in fact the human elements that must be considered by the empirical, human sciences, then no human science can successfully analyze its object without an appeal to the specific science that handles precisely those elements, viz. theology.”

relation to Tracy's theological anthropology makes the value of such a distinction readily apparent. The key is Ricoeur's opposition to the conflation of the phenomena of finitude and sin in his early trilogy *Freedom and the Will*. In those texts, he investigates the "fundamental possibilities" of the human, specifically what it means for the human person to *will*. These possibilities include the possibility of evil and sin, but Ricoeur opposes any claim that evil is a necessary outcome of human acts of the will. The possibility of evil arises in the "fault," the disproportion between human finitude and *in*finitude (i.e., the ability of one's reason to reach beyond the historically-conditioned character of one's life to understand what is universally true). The possibility of sin therefore depends on the actuality of finitude, but the actuality of sin is a result of one's freely willing to sin.<sup>2</sup>

The second question regards the characterization of the relationship between freedom and sin. Karl Rahner is a notable influence on Tracy, since his treatment of original sin as a social situation in which individuals find themselves is clearly important for Tracy's description of inherited sin.<sup>3</sup> Yet Rahner's understanding of original sin as *analogous* sin and secondary in importance to sin as a free decision to say "no" to God clashes with Tracy's claim that the distortion due to inherited sin is the most basic meaning for sin in the Christian tradition.

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Chapter One, pages 39-40

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Martinez, *Confronting the Mystery of God*, 1-20, 152-215

*The Neo-Orthodox Model of Theology*

The first appearance of the distinction between finitude and sin in Tracy's work occurs during his description of five models for theology in *Blessed Rage for Order*.<sup>4</sup> These five models – orthodox, liberal, neo-orthodox, radical, and revisionist – constitute a rough typology of methodological approaches to theological questions. Tracy situated himself within the revisionist model while writing *BRO*, but for the purposes of this section the relationship between the liberal and neo-orthodox model helps explain the finitude-sin distinction.

The liberal model of Christian theology is deeply committed both to the claims of the Christian tradition and to the modern secular project. According to Tracy, this secular project originates from the far-reaching impact of the methods, claims, and values of modern philosophy, science, and history.<sup>5</sup> Liberal theology both adopts the cognitive claims and commits itself to the ethical stances of secular modernity while simultaneously intending to take the Christian theological tradition seriously. When the secular and Christian projects conflict with each other, sometimes liberal theologians are forced to weaken, modify, or abandon one or the other of these commitments.<sup>6</sup> Yet

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<sup>4</sup> For the description of these various models, see Chapter Two, 84-7.

<sup>5</sup> *BRO* 25

<sup>6</sup> Tracy cites Ludwig Feuerbach as an “extreme” example of this phenomenon (*BRO* 26), but one might also look to the rise of modernist Protestant theology in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries to see how various denominations struggled with the conflict of theological and scientific claims; see William R. Hutchison, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992).



Tracy asserts the main result of this confrontation of differing commitments is to demonstrating the compatibility of Christian and modern “vision and values.”<sup>7</sup>

Typical of the liberal model is the general sense of optimism that pervades much of its theology. Tracy describes this optimism as “evolutionary” in the sense that liberal theology, especially in the decades immediately prior to World War I, asserted that human knowledge, well-being, and even moral stature were continuously progressing: humanity was getting better, even growing up.<sup>8</sup> The anthropology of liberal theology appropriated the Enlightenment construction of an autonomous and rational human person. Despite the finitude of the individual human person, the possibilities attainable by the broader human society’s rational processes were thought to be nearly limitless. Some theologians even went so far as to claim that through human effort, the kingdom of God would be achieved on Earth within their lifetimes.<sup>9</sup>

The neo-orthodox model of theology is largely a response to and critique of the liberal model. The twin claims of the compatibility between Christianity and culture and the optimism about human capabilities was shattered for many by the experience of World War I, leading many theologians to challenge the prevailing liberal worldview. For Tracy, this critique proceeds along two tracks: first, liberal theology offered an inadequate account of actual human existence, and second, it lacked any real commitment

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<sup>7</sup> *BRO* 26. Tracy cites Schleiermacher as the most successful and influential example of such a reconciliation.

<sup>8</sup> It would be fair to characterize this as a narrow European-North American perspective, especially as these powers attempted to justify their colonial forays as part of their broader efforts to civilize the rest of the world.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *BRO* 213.

to the central role of Jesus Christ in justification and salvation.<sup>10</sup> Some Christians feared that the compatibility between culture and Christianity amounted to accommodation by religious leaders who were, in effect, trivializing the salvific role of Jesus.<sup>11</sup> In contrast to the more isolationist orthodox model, the neo-orthodox model does not abandon the encounter between Christianity and culture. Tracy insists that Christian tradition both challenges and illuminates the cultures it confronts.

The central issue here is the difference between these accounts of human existence. If the liberal model did in some cases engage the fact of “human finitude and possibility,” it still lacked any real recognition of the negative realities of death, guilt, tragedy, and sin.<sup>12</sup> These elements are central to neo-orthodox analysis, particularly among those theologians whom Tracy characterizes as “dialectical.”<sup>13</sup> The dialectical thrust within neo-orthodoxy affirms the radical difference between the Creator and the created, the latter of which includes both the finite character of human existence as well as human sinfulness. Neo-orthodoxy distinguishes between finitude and sin. Sin is not considered a natural or intrinsic part of created humanity, but rather as an ever-present fact of human existence. The liberal model’s lack of stress on sin in the human condition, on the other hand, is not due to the conflation of finitude and sin (as occurs in Heidegger), but rather to its pervasive sense of optimism and progress in human history.

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<sup>10</sup> BRO 28

<sup>11</sup> See H. Richard Niebuhr’s critique of the “Christ of Culture” in *Christ and Culture*, 108-115; cf. Karl Barth, *Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwyn C. Hoskins (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 2-15.

<sup>12</sup> BRO 28

<sup>13</sup> E.g. Barth, Bultmann, Brunner, Gogarten, Niebuhr, and Tillich, primarily. Tracy claims in a footnote the specifically “negative” connotation of “dialectic,” stating that it includes “an incisive account of ‘negations’ in experience and in thought and, ordinarily, an account of the originality of a Christian negation of those negations...” (BRO 38 n. 37)

For Tracy, neo-orthodoxy is a corrective moment not only within liberal theology but also in relation to the insights of process thought. Despite his early appropriation of the process conception of God as di-polar, he wishes to challenge the scant attention paid to anthropology by process thinkers. Tracy claims that process theology's limited "existential impact" is in large part due to the fact that the process understanding of the human person is infected by "residual liberal optimism."<sup>14</sup> So process theology needs the dialectical insights of neo-orthodox theology. Furthermore, Tracy suspects that the abstract nature of process thought neglects symbolic language and restricts its ability to account for the concrete existential situations of actual human beings. Put another way, only an anthropology embedded in the real ambiguities of human life can offer an adequate reflection on contemporary human experience.

The central contribution of the neo-orthodox model is the importance it ascribes to the sin, ambiguity, and tragedy in human experience. Even when construed primarily as a corrective of the larger liberal tradition, neo-orthodoxy motivates a deeper awareness of the role these phenomena play in the actual lives of concrete persons. The neo-orthodox recognition of human sinfulness is in part responsible for Tracy's move away from his flirtation with process theology.

These two strands make evident that very early on in his theology Tracy maintained the distinction between finitude and sin. The fact of human limitation or bounded-ness is neither a result of nor reducible to human sinfulness; nor is sin an inevitable result of finitude. Nevertheless, sin is *also* a limitation or boundary on human

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<sup>14</sup> *BRO* 188

activity, even if it is not intrinsic to human nature. Rather, the various forms of sin are actually a perversion, a corruption, of authentic humanity.<sup>15</sup>

*Rahner and Sin*

Karl Rahner hypothesizes that original sin is fundamentally a social situation into which human beings are born rather than a hereditary stain passed down from parent to child. The insight behind describing original sin as a social situation is that any enactment of human freedom in the world will, due to the relational character of the human person, affect the freedom of others. Human persons are not fully able to separate themselves from this context, whether as regards current decision and actions or in relation to those that occurred in the past. Therefore individual persons enact their freedom in the context prior to and imposed upon them.<sup>16</sup> No one can meaningfully and completely control or determine one's own context, and thus each person's freedom is co-determined by the freedom of others, past and present, whether in righteous or guilty decisions. To recognize that everyone's freedom is co-determined in this way, and thus that each succeeding generation of humanity will experience this context of co-determination, is to realize that Rahner understood this situation to be the universal and enduring reality of original sin.<sup>17</sup> If original sin perpetuates itself by virtue of the fact that all people are born into it and are not able to eliminate it of their own accord, then

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<sup>15</sup> Tracy at one point goes so far to say that the rejection of human finitude is in itself sinful; cf. *PA* 74.

<sup>16</sup> Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 107

<sup>17</sup> Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 109

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original sin does not come from a dualistic, independent principle of evil, but rather from the complex of free decisions of the human community.

To illustrate this point, Rahner provides a mundane but particularly illuminating example in *Foundations of Christian Faith* by reflecting on the act of purchasing bananas:

...when someone buys a banana, he does not reflect upon the fact that its price is tied to many presuppositions. To them belongs, under certain circumstances, the pitiful lot of banana pickers, which in turn is co-determined by social injustice, exploitation, or a centuries-old commercial policy.<sup>18</sup>

Thus banana purchasers become part of and benefit from a situation outside their immediate control, so that even an apparently innocuous decision like picking up the groceries enacts human freedom within a context riddled throughout with moral consequences both for the agents and for those affected by such choices. In short, by acting in the world, the agent participates in the reality of original sin. Indeed, Rahner uses this understanding of original sin precisely to explain how no human action can be completely free of guilt.

In explaining original sin as an analogous sin, Rahner intends to distinguish between the situation marked by sin and personal sin. In Rahner's theology, all human beings are free, and they have this freedom in relationship to God.<sup>19</sup> Thus freedom is both grounded in God and qualifies the personal relationship to God. Rahner then presents the notion of the fundamental option: each person's "yes" or "no" to God. For

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<sup>18</sup> Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 110-111. More contemporary environmental theologies would likely add the impact of shipping bananas thousands of miles to regions that cannot grow them indigenously.

<sup>19</sup> Karl Rahner, "Theology of Freedom," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 6 (Baltimore, MD: Helicon Press, 1969), 180.

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Rahner this is not a matter of any particular choice made in the course of an individual's life, but rather has to do with the person's overall disposition towards God over the course of a lifetime. So sin in the personal sense is this "no." In this enactment of the fundamental option, the human person definitively rejects God's gracious self-communication. Even though such a rejection is also implicitly an acknowledgment of the very ground of that freedom, Rahner maintains that the human person can freely give a "no" to God.<sup>20</sup> Such sin is highly personal because the agent bears the responsibility for this act. Indeed, even though human beings are social and live within a web of relationships to neighbors and to God, this sin entails "the act of that freedom which permits of no deputization."<sup>21</sup>

Original sin is analogous to personal sin. For Rahner there is an analogy between the situation of freedom (original sin) and the individual freedom of the person (sin proper).<sup>22</sup> Rahner focuses on several diverse aspects of this analogy: pre-existence vs. enduring character, the decisions of others vs. one's own decision, and the "dialectical relation between two existentials" (original sin and being redeemed) vs. the "non-dialectical relations of a free decision in Yes or No."<sup>23</sup> Whatever the many differences,

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<sup>20</sup> Rahner, "Theology of Freedom," 182. For a more in-depth look at Rahner's concept of sin as a "no," and especially the problems of describing this "no" as "definitive," see Ron Highfield, "The Freedom to Say 'No'? Karl Rahner's Doctrine of Sin," *Theological Studies* 56 (Sept 1995): 485-505.

<sup>21</sup> Karl Rahner, "The Immaculate Conception," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 1 (Baltimore, MD: Helicon Press, 1961), 208.

<sup>22</sup> Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 111

<sup>23</sup> Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 111

the analogy is based on the fact that while the guilt of personal sin cannot be imputed to another person, such sin does shape the context in which others enact their freedom.<sup>24</sup>

### **The Inevitable Fact of Evil and Sin<sup>25</sup>**

The distinction between finitude and sin leads to the second key part of Tracy's explication of sin and evil, which he regards as a fact. He does not make a rigid distinction between evil and sin, and at times he treats the terms somewhat interchangeably. He suggests that the main difference is that sin is an explicitly Christian rendering of evil. He subtly emphasizes the importance of human freedom in relation to evil and sin and prescinds from questions about natural or non-agentive evil. He also raises the questions of whether the ubiquity of evil in the world warrants the claim that evil is a necessary result of human freedom.

For Tracy, evil is a fact of human experience but not a necessity. Invoking Ricoeur's distinctions in *Freedom and Nature*, Tracy says "That human beings are also fallible, that we can commit error, is a direct consequence of the human reality as constituted by both freedom and nature. But that we in fact commit not merely error but evil cannot be a necessary characteristic of our being."<sup>26</sup> If evil were a necessary result of human freedom, the Christian claim that humans are free and responsible beings would

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<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, the non-imputation of another's guilt is one of Rahner's reasons for rejecting the more "biological" model described above. He denies that original sin has anything to do with the sin of Adam or Eve, as their particular guilt cannot be transmitted to their descendants. It can, and does, impact the situation into which their descendants are born and thus the situation of their freedom. See *Foundations of Christian Faith* 110-11.

<sup>25</sup> Tracy does not so much conflate the two as indistinguishable in themselves as describe sin as the specifically Christian understanding of moral evil (cf. *BRO* 212, 229 n. 51-54); cf. Lonergan, *Insight*, 714-718.

<sup>26</sup> *BRO* 211-2

be false, because sin coerced from the human person nullifies human responsibility.

Furthermore, to claim that evil is necessary contradicts the belief in God's essential goodness. To affirm that in creating human beings God had intended them to turn away from God is to deny the more basic assertion that God created human beings for beatitude. The assertion that evil is necessary contradicts both the freedom of the human person as free to make genuinely moral decisions and the creation of human beings by a good and loving God.

When Tracy calls sin or moral evil an "existential fact," he rejects the metaphysical necessity of human sin. However, Tracy does say that sin is inevitable in the realm of human action—"inevitable" instead of "necessary" precisely because of the sheer statistical probability that each human person will sin. The decision to sin will be made "freely and responsibly," without coercion, yet everyone will eventually make it.<sup>27</sup>

Tracy considers the inevitability of sin to be the central intelligibility in Christian teaching on original sin. On his analysis of the "medieval scholastic discussion" of this topic, it holds that human actions can still be considered free even if consent is not always overt, as happens with habitual action, which, though often unreflective, is still free. It follows that original sin is understood as a "habitual *inclination* to evil."<sup>28</sup> In some particular instances, this inclination can be resisted or avoided, but the human person is unable to maintain the unyielding vigilance that would be necessary to avoid every habitual yet free sinful act. Moreover, such a habit is formed within "a social

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<sup>27</sup> BRO 212. It perhaps goes without saying that Tracy would exempt Christ from making the free decision to sin.

<sup>28</sup> BRO 212, emphasis mine



situation where evil is clearly present,” so that the options available to the person are limited. These twin forces of habitual inclination and social context exacerbate the probability – indeed, the virtual inevitability – of individual sin.

The role of the social situation in the fact of evil demonstrates that evil and sin are not simply the result of individual choices. Agreeing with Reinhold Niebuhr’s *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, Tracy says that human sin occurs “on an individual, societal, and a historical scale.”<sup>29</sup> The deeper recognition of sin inspired in Tracy by the neo-orthodox model includes the claim that sin corrupts social structures, foments the repression of marginalized groups, and infects the histories and traditions of cultures. As Tracy put the matter in *Dialogue with the Other*, “there is no innocent tradition (including modernity), no innocent classic (including the scriptures) and no innocent reading (including this one).”<sup>30</sup> The ambiguity discussed in *Plurality and Ambiguity* implies the many ways in which sin is embedded not just individually but socially. Just as human beings are formed by their relations within traditions,<sup>31</sup> so too formation inculcates the “habitual inclination of sin” in individuals and propagates the sinfulness within those traditions.

### **Tracy’s Three Dimensions of Sin**

On the basis of the fact of sin and the distinction of sin from finitude, Tracy describes three related ways of using the term “sin.” The first and perhaps most obvious

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<sup>29</sup> *BRO* 213

<sup>30</sup> *DWO* 5-6

<sup>31</sup> See the previous chapter

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is concrete personal sin that arises from the free decisions consciously committed by the agent. The second is what Tracy calls habitual sin, which is routinely committed by the agent without explicit reflection. As such, they are tantamount to pre-conscious sins even though the agent remains fully responsible for them. The third is inherited or (more traditionally) original sin. Tracy commonly uses the metaphor of distortion to describe inherited sin, because original sin is at once unconscious and systemic within the self. The unconscious systemic distortion operative in broader cultures and societies is a further undercurrent in Tracy's theological anthropology.

These three ways of using the term "sin" for Tracy are interrelated dimensions of sin but are not reducible to one another. Each dimension reinforces the others and perpetuates the sinful condition in which human beings exist, make decisions, and generally dispose of themselves. Yet among these dimensions, Tracy clearly regards the state of sin that he speaks about primarily through the metaphor of distortion as predominant within Christian reflection. Thus, he differs from Rahner's understanding of sin that emphasized the role of human freedom in actualizing the fundamental religious option with respect to God.

#### *Actual personal sin*

"Actual personal sin" describes those sins that are the individual human agent's conscious and free decisions for evil. Such sins are concrete and particular actions, decisions, or omissions of the human person. Consider, for example, the penitential *Confiteor* prayer used in the Catholic mass, which expresses remorse for sins committed

“in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done and what I have failed to do.”

While the specific motivations for any given sin might be obscure, even in hindsight, any individual sin represents free actualization of the human will performed with an awareness of “missing the mark.”<sup>32</sup>

In presenting this dimension of sin, recall Tracy’s distinction between error and sin. He describes error as a reasonable possible outcome in human endeavors stemming from human fallibility.<sup>33</sup> Tracy adopts Ricoeur’s account of fallibility as a “direct consequence” of the fact that the human person possesses both freedom and nature. Fallibility is the capacity to commit error.<sup>34</sup>

For Tracy, error has a primarily cognitive dimension. Error refers to the fact that human minds misunderstand, make invalid inferences, and fall into faulty logical deductions. While this certainly includes mistakes in remembering made with respect to facts or ideas (e.g. confusing Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address with his Second Inaugural), it also includes actions inspired by cognitive mistakes (e.g. a quarterback throwing interception after misreading the defensive coverage). The human person will not get it right all the time, and this, in a sense, is due to the limitations of human abilities. Further, such errors can be corrected through the application of reason, whether through argument

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<sup>32</sup> The word *ἁμαρτία* (hamartia), which is translated in the letters of Paul as “sin,” comes from the Greek for “to miss the mark.”

<sup>33</sup> It is left somewhat ambiguous as to whether error is a necessary outcome, however.

<sup>34</sup> Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, 133-146

(narrowly construed) or through informal conversation. Rational error can be removed light of a more complete knowledge or understanding.<sup>35</sup>

If errors are those thoughts or actions resulting from mistaken knowledge or understanding, is it then possible to describe personal sins analogously as *moral* errors? Sins of both thoughts and actions can be caused by a mistaken understanding of the right thing to do in a given situation and repented of following their commission. Further, just as regularly repeating the same error can create an error-prone habit (consistent bad grammar leads to habitual bad grammar), so too can repeating the same sins lead to the development of vice. Finally, Tracy's understanding of error and sin is influenced by Ricoeur, and we note that just as the possibility of error is grounded in human finitude, so too is the possibility (but not inevitability) of sin and evil.

Yet this "moral error" analogy also includes substantial dissimilarities. Most importantly, sins are not motivated primarily by false knowledge or misunderstanding. The sinful decision is driven more by a *disordered* sense of the good rather than a mistaken one. Tracy describes the motivation to sin as "the self's eternal struggle to absorb all reality into itself: to force, with both the arrogance of pride and the sloth of self-dispersion, all reality into my needs and my desires or else level it."<sup>36</sup> This is to make the good that is the individual self the highest good, and so to turn the self into an idol. Reality then confirms that idolatry or hinders its fulfillment. In sin the good of the

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<sup>35</sup> Tracy, "The Christian Understanding of Salvation-Liberation," 135-6. In the examples provided, returning to the sources can correct the first while more careful attention to game tape can limit the recurrence of the second.

<sup>36</sup> *AI* 53

self and the good of the world beyond the self, including the ultimate reality of God, become distorted.

There are two further objections to the notion that sin is primarily motivated by cognitive error. First, the degree of culpability for personal sins depends on one's understanding of the moral value of that thought or action. The person would not have the same degree of responsibility for an act committed merely out of ignorance as for an act committed with full comprehension.<sup>37</sup> Secondly, if sin were a cognitive error, then rational reflection or conversation would be sufficient to combat sin. Tracy suggests that we must use "some resources other than the more familiar Western discussion of conscious reason to 'heal' that situation" because such rational approaches are incapable of correcting not only particular sins but the fact of sin in general.<sup>38</sup>

Thus personal sins are moral errors in a rather circumscribed sense, namely free and conscious thoughts and actions that are distorted with respect to the good committed by the individual human agent. Since the good can be conceived of in various ways depending on the circumstances (such as the divine good, the good of others, the good of the self, and the good of creation), there may already be complex negotiations among these goods independently of any distortions. The difficulty of discerning the good can be exacerbated by the potential competition among a range of goods, yet the pursuit of the good is more profoundly challenged, and indeed corrupted, by the disordered self who engages in this pursuit.

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<sup>37</sup> Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (Scotts Valley, CA: NovAntiqua, 2010), I-II, Q. 76, Art. 4, resp

<sup>38</sup> Tracy, "The Christian Understanding of Salvation-Liberation," 136

*Habitual Sin*

Personal sin is not an independent reality for Tracy. Rather, experiences of personal sin are enmeshed with the other two understandings of sin, habitual sin and inherited sin. While Tracy focuses least on habitual sin, it is still crucial to his understanding of human sinfulness.

Habitual sin is a particular kind of habit formation. According to Aristotle's account, habits are states of character brought about through a process of habituation: "a state of character results from the repetition of similar activities."<sup>39</sup> The habit eventually becomes second nature for the individual and requires no real deliberation; given the appropriate circumstances one is simply inclined to behave in a certain manner. Of the two kinds of habits, virtues and vices, virtues are oriented toward good choices and deeds while vices are not, so that "it is as difficult for the vicious person to be good as for the virtuous person to be evil."<sup>40</sup>

For Tracy, habitual sin is a result of vice. Because habits are a "second nature," they issue from the good or evil character of the person with little or no reflection or deliberation. Thus, in contrast to personal sins, habitual sin is said by Tracy to be pre-conscious.<sup>41</sup> The agent participates in a sinful pattern of behavior precisely because prior

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<sup>39</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999), 1103b.21-22

<sup>40</sup> *NCF*; cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1104b1.28-29, 1104b.5-10

<sup>41</sup> Tracy draws on Aquinas here, arguing that "a sin committed through habit" is still sinful because "the free subject wills the habit" (David Tracy, "St. Thomas Aquinas and the Religious Dimension of Experience: The Doctrine of Sin," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 48 (1974): 172.

personal sins have become habitual, as in the case of habitual liars. As regards habitual sin, it is the person's selfish orientation (the *curvatus in se*) that makes it sinful.<sup>42</sup>

Ultimately, these particular ways of behaving and thinking become so engrained in the agent that only with intentional conscious reflection can a habitual sinner resist or prevent habitual evil choice or deed. Habitual sin can be resisted, as Tracy points out in relation to confession and repentance. The pre-conscious aspect of habitual sin does not totally remove the freedom of the agent to resist. Although both are wounded, Tracy thinks that the mind and the will remain free enough to at least cooperate in some way with grace to resist human faults and sins. Thus resistance to habitual sin is possible, but it must rely on the power of God's grace.<sup>43</sup>

### *Inherited or Original Sin*

The first two dimensions of sin in Tracy's thought involve concrete actualizations of human freedom. Personal sins are particular choices in thought and in deed that are sinful, and habitual sin results from the formation of vicious habits that make it increasingly difficult to choose the good freely. "Inherited sin," however, has less to do with the freedom of individuals than with the systemic distortion of the self's mind and will and the social world.

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<sup>42</sup> For a fuller reading of *curvatus in se*, see Matt Jenson, *Gravity of Sin: Augustine, Luther, and Barth on 'Homo incurvatus in se'* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 6-46

<sup>43</sup> For a fuller discussion of the role of grace in Tracy's theological anthropology, please see Chapter 5, "Grace"

### **Systemic Distortion as Personal**

As was previously mentioned, “distortion” is Tracy’s primary metaphor for inherited sin, and it is specifically related to the important difference between sin and error. Error, as was noted above, is generally correctible through the use of one’s reason. But what if one’s reason is itself distorted?<sup>44</sup> According to the theological teaching about inherited sin, every human act of knowing and willing will be tainted to some degree by the inner distortions.. Tracy frequently reinvokes his claim that “there is no innocent tradition (including modernity), no innocent classic (including the scriptures) and no innocent reading (including this one),” which stems from the pervasive fact of distortion and the inability of the human person to discuss, to negotiate, or to reflect one’s way out of it.<sup>45</sup>

Since Tracy uses “distortion” to describe both individual and social aspects of inherited sin, it can be somewhat difficult to pin down its meaning. He is perhaps clearest when discussing its individual aspect:

Sin pervades and de-centers the self’s evasions, whether subtle or brutal. The self keeps turning in upon itself (*curvatus in se*) in an ever-subtler dialectic of self-delusion...It is named radical alienation or systemic distortion from the viewpoint of the self. 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.<sup>46</sup>

Thus distortion refers to this continual inward turning upon itself by the self, as the ego becomes entrapped by itself.<sup>47</sup> Because of this turning in on itself, every aspect of the

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<sup>44</sup> *NCFT*

<sup>45</sup> *DWO* 5-6

<sup>46</sup> *PA* 74

<sup>47</sup> *NCFT*



individual's life becomes tainted or corrupted. This wounded mind and will does not render the individual incapable of either resisting personal or habitual sin to some degree or of cooperating with healing grace, but this vulnerability and distortion cannot be corrected by the individual alone.

According to Tracy, one of the key characteristics of inherited sin as distortion on the individual level is that it operates below the threshold of explicit awareness, so that he calls it *unconscious*. The turn inward, the self-delusion, even the denial of one's finitude are not expressly willed by the individual. The insidiousness of such distortion derives from the subtle way it insinuates itself into the thoughts, the words, the deeds, and the omissions of the individual. Even one's ostensibly moral actions are derailed by the fact of the *curvatus in se*. Thus when Tracy describes sin as inevitable but not necessary, he is expressing the inexorable way in which the distorted self commits personal sins and reinforces habitual sins.

Tracy's use of the term "distortion" to describe inherited sin with respect to individuals is quite consistent with traditional interpretations of original sin, but in a demythologized reinterpretation that rejects the mythical language of "an historical Adam and Eve and their 'fall'" in favor of an existential analysis of the fallen-ness of each person.<sup>48</sup> The damage, corruption, and selfishness ascribed to distortion is intended to be a construal of this central Christian symbol.

A further question concerns the connection between inherited sin and the meaning of distortion as social. The centrality of the social understanding of distortion is clear in

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<sup>48</sup> *DWO* 76-77

Tracy's view of sin. He identifies numerous instances of social systemic distortion, such as ecclesiolatry and traditionalism;<sup>49</sup> elitism;<sup>50</sup> sexism, racism, homophobia, and Eurocentrism,<sup>51</sup> yet he maintains that these phenomena do not exhaust sin as distortion. Invoking Freud and Marx, Tracy refers to "intrapersonal [sic] conflicts" and "structural societal conflicts and contradictions" as sources of systemic distortion in the social world. Instead of analyzing the sources of these conflicts, he points to the important work of feminist, liberation, and political theologies in "the retrieval of the social systemic expression of sin over individual sins."<sup>52</sup> Social systemic distortion seems to be a fact for Tracy, but he does not make immediately clear its connection to inherited sin and individual systemic distortion.

### **Systemic Distortion in History**

In seeking to clarify this relationship, it will be helpful to consider first the locales of social distortion in Tracy's thought and second the responses to this distortion. For Tracy, social distortion occurs in three primary places: history, communication, and religion. As was noted previously,<sup>53</sup> history is constitutive of human relationality in Tracy's anthropology. Human persons are embedded in a history conditioned by the collective action of all who precede them. The self is formed within a historical matrix

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<sup>49</sup> *AI* 323

<sup>50</sup> *PA* 104

<sup>51</sup> David Tracy, "Saving from Evil: Salvation and Evil Today," in *The Fascination of Evil*, eds. David Tracy and Hermann Häring (London: SCM Press, 1998), 112

<sup>52</sup> *AI* 348; *ONP* 64

<sup>53</sup> Chapter 3, pages 149-58

also constituted by cultural and linguistic matrices, so all persons are “inevitably shaped by the history we were born into.”<sup>54</sup>

Every history is ambiguous. In Tracy’s understanding of the term, ambiguity includes visible effects of God’s grace in history (most notably the event and person of Christ) as well as the pervasive and visible effects of human sin. He is an advocate of a sense of ambiguity that contrasts with the more optimistic (or even naïve) belief that history is innocent and that past failures on the part of humanity are sporadic aberrations or isolated incidents. Indeed, not only are there individual and group acts of sin throughout history, but considered more deeply, the history into which we are born and that “inevitably shape[s]” us reinforces and perpetuates the fact of sin itself. Thus Tracy’s emphasis on history as ambiguous is also an assertion that history is distorted.

This raises the question of what distortion in the context of history means. On the individual level, distortion indicates the way in which the capacities of the human person are corrupted. It means that the individual person is continually and too exclusively self-centered. History is “the way it is not because of any natural necessity but only because equally historical individuals have struggled before us.”<sup>55</sup> History is created by persons who are both conscious and responsible and selfish and distorted. Thus the distortion of history itself cannot be separated from the role of individuals involved in it.

Tracy is particularly concerned with the interpretation of history. He resists attempts to read national, social, ethnic, and religious histories as singular trajectories aimed solely towards progress. Such “official stor[ies] of triumph” ignore the

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<sup>54</sup> *PA* 66

<sup>55</sup> *PA* 66

marginalized who either did not participate in the narrative of progress or who were actively trodden upon by the narrators.<sup>56</sup> To concede the truthfulness of such narratives obscures or even ignores those historical events and periods that both call into question the interpretation of progress and still affect the contemporary situation of those caught up in such a history. Tracy instead conceives of history as *interruptive*, having “no single theme and no controlling plot.”<sup>57</sup> Thus, for example, both the contemporary United States and ancient Greece are civilizations that have achieved great honor and success but have also destroyed and enslaved other peoples. The Native American and African American experiences in the United States, from their earliest encounters to the present day, force us to recognize the interruptions in history.

For Tracy, the Holocaust—as the starkest interruption in recent Western history—so shocks the conscience of humanity that we scarcely possess sufficient language to describe it:

The genocide of six million Jews by the Nazis is—is what? *Shocking* seems an altogether inadequate adjective to apply to that enormity...Madness? Aberration? Sin? Or all these, and something more, something demonic and more radically interruptive of our history than we can imagine? The Holocaust is a searing interruption of all the traditions in Western culture. None of us yet know even how to name it properly.<sup>58</sup>

Citing appreciatively Arthur Cohen’s retrieval of Rudolph Otto’s *tremendum*, Tracy hopes that this “unsettling, unexpected phrase” will prove more appropriate than

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<sup>56</sup> *ONP* 64

<sup>57</sup> *PA* 68

<sup>58</sup> *PA* 67

traditional invocations of “radical evil.”<sup>59</sup> The Holocaust as interruption deflates both liberal theological “expressions of enlightenment and emancipation” as well as neo-orthodox “outbursts of paradox, ambiguity, and negation,” and forces theological reflection to take account of “the subscension of individual historicity by the sheer force of the *tremendum* of the Holocaust.”<sup>60</sup>

While it may be difficult to *name* what the Holocaust was and what it represents, there remains a profound need to *face* that reality. Acknowledging Karl Barth’s claim that the “one really central ecumenical question...is our relationship to Judaism,” Tracy contends that Christian theology, if it wishes to take concrete human history seriously, must face head on this most profound interruption within history, in part because of the strains of anti-Semitism that have imbued much of Christian history, and in part because of the active role some Christians played in prosecuting the Holocaust.<sup>61</sup> Tracy is adamant about this demand upon Christian theology to face the Holocaust precisely because it interrupts and so challenges Christian hope that the Holy Spirit continues to work in human history and that our lives have an eschatological purpose.

The concrete experiences of Native and African Americans in the US and of the Jews in the Holocaust are, for Tracy, among the most notable examples of Hegel’s

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<sup>59</sup> David Tracy, foreword to *The Tremendum: A Theological Interpretation of the Holocaust*, by Arthur A. Cohen (New York: Crossroad, 1981), viii; see also David Tracy, “Religious Values after the Holocaust: A Catholic View,” in *Jews and Christians After the Holocaust*, ed. Abraham J. Peck (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 87. With respect to Cohen’s use of Otto, Cohen will go further and qualify *tremendum* as a “subscending” (as opposed to transcending) *tremendum*, indicating the way in which human life is swept under by the profound evil of this event.

<sup>60</sup> Tracy, “Foreword,” ix. Tracy goes so far as to describe the liberal response as “the theological equivalent of a Hallmark card of condolence.”

<sup>61</sup> *ONP* 63-4

“slaughter-bench of history.”<sup>62</sup> They are major confirmations of Tracy’s description of history as an ambiguous configuration of both great honor and tragic violence. Yet how exactly do these examples demonstrate that history is itself distorted? There can be no doubt that within Tracy’s understanding of sin and distortion, such historical interruptions are caused by distorted historical persons. That these events are themselves not discrete moments in time, but rather often extend over long periods and across borders and continents, only further suggests the deep complexity of ambiguous history. Still the complicated texture of historical events, whether distorted or not, provides no more than initial evidence for Tracy’s conception of distortion within history.

Thus, history is distorted in an analogous sense. It differs from individual human distortion as discussed earlier in this chapter. However, like individual distortion, history’s distortions perpetuate and reinforce human sinfulness and foster both social and individual levels of distortion. As a reality into which we are thrown and that shapes us throughout our life, history sets limits on our possibilities and embeds us in a context pervaded by and perpetuating various “isms” that epitomize systemic distortion. While the limits themselves may be merely a testament to human finitude instead of human sinfulness, the sexism, racism, elitism, *et al.*, that Tracy writes about are perduring social sins in history. These phenomena both foster concrete interruptive events, such as the Holocaust and the history of Christian anti-Semitism in Germany, Europe, and beyond, and are fostered by them, such as anti-Semitism under the guise of Holocaust denial. Just as the systemic distortion interiorized by human persons is an enduring fact that

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<sup>62</sup> ONP 63

conditions all human activity, so too systemic distortions in history engender historical interruptions and ambiguities in a self-perpetuating cycle of decline.

The case for thinking of an analogy of distortion in history is buttressed by the issue of recovery and correction of course. According to Tracy, no individuals can heal themselves of distortion by themselves because doing so would involve engaging the already distorted human minds and wills. Nor can the distortions within history simply be healed or corrected through human intervention alone. This does not imply some banal recognition that the past cannot be undone. If one is engulfed in a distorted history, one cannot escape from that history; there is no neutral or objective vantage point from which one can try to correct or reverse the distortions. Even so, the distortions of history must be faced by us.

### **Systemic Distortion in Communication**

Communication is a second locale of social systemic distortion. As was noted previously,<sup>63</sup> conversation is one of the focal themes in Tracy's view of relationality. It not only is the foundational reality in his theological method, but it also embodies the way in which the self in a socio-linguistic context is dependent upon others and on traditions. For Tracy, in the "ideal speech situation," interlocutors fully and consistently demonstrate sincerity, respect, and openness with regard to one another and to the subject matter in question.<sup>64</sup> Yet because this ideal speech situation never occurs in fact, it

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<sup>63</sup> Chapter 3, pages 158-65

<sup>64</sup> *PA* 26-27

functions as a “regulative model” for understanding the *de facto* ambiguities in human communication.<sup>65</sup>

To illustrate these ambiguities, Tracy negotiates the linguistic turn in philosophy, in which he discerns roughly four stages: language (1) as use, (2) as system, (3) as differential non-system, and (4) as discourse.<sup>66</sup> Language as use refers to the understanding of language as purely instrumental, so that language is “secondary, even peripheral, to the real thing.” Language is used to indicate, but it plays no real role in shaping our understanding of the world – an understanding that is implicitly “pre-linguistic.”<sup>67</sup> Despite otherwise substantial disagreements, according to Tracy positivism and romanticism are rooted in the instrumental approach to language. Positivism holds that a scientific understanding of reality points to “a realm of pure data and facts” while “art, morality, religion, metaphysics, and common sense” yield no more than feeling-laden interpretation.<sup>68</sup> Romanticism, on the other hand, “uses language to express or represent some deep, nonlinguistic truth inside the self,” most notably the individual’s *genius*.<sup>69</sup> The former links language as use with an external reality and the latter links it to an internal one, and yet both regard the respective realities as independent of the language used to express them.

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<sup>65</sup> PA 26

<sup>66</sup> PA 61; cf. Tracy, “Hermeneutics as Discourse Analysis,” 262-271

<sup>67</sup> PA 47-49

<sup>68</sup> PA 47. Cf. AI 12

<sup>69</sup> PA 49. Friedrich Schleiermacher, whose hermeneutics are paradigmatic of romantic hermeneutics, describes *genius* as the identity of the *classical* (“what is most productive and least repetitious”) and the *original* (“what is most individual and the least common”); Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics and Criticism: And Other Writings*, ed. Andrew Bowie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 13.



With the work of Ferdinand de Saussure, the understanding of language as system breaks from the instrumental view. Saussure studied language as “a system of differentially related signs.”<sup>70</sup> The linguistic system is based on the fact that linguistic signs differ from one another, and that the relationships among the differences constitute the meaning of language synchronically isolated from its concrete usage. Tracy offers the example of “tree,” a word which is meaningful precisely because it is different from other signs both visually and aurally.<sup>71</sup> The meaning of this sign is based on its relationships of difference, but that meaning is also abstracted from the use of this sign in a given language in concrete situations by actual persons.<sup>72</sup> The linguistic system as diachronic is not totally separated from its use, but rather the understanding of that system in Saussure’s linguistic prescind from such use.

The development of linguistics after Saussure follows several trajectories, but for Tracy the most significant figure is Jacques Derrida.<sup>73</sup> His assessment of the relationships of difference that give signs meaning in the linguistic system raises the further question of whether that system “can adequately account for its own ineradicably differential nature.”<sup>74</sup> According to Derrida’s interpretation, Saussure both assumed a

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<sup>70</sup> PA 53

<sup>71</sup> PA 53. Tracy offers “free” and “three” as similar but different graphemes and “she,” “be,” and “thee” as similar but different sounds. He does not venture further to dramatically different visually or aurally different signs, such as “acorn,” “leaf,” or “wood,” even though within the system of language in which the word “tree” becomes a meaningful sign these ostensible different terms are much more closely related through difference.

<sup>72</sup> PA 54

<sup>73</sup> PA 54-5. Tracy names structuralism, formalism, and semiotics as the “three major alternatives in post-Saussurean hermeneutics,” but he largely declines to attend to the differences among them (or, more intricately, the differences between structuralists and post-structuralists. The latter category includes Derrida, to whom we turn here, and Benveniste and Ricoeur, to whom we will turn next).

<sup>74</sup> PA 56

unity between the sign and the thing that it signified but asserted that the unity was arbitrary although based on the differences among signs. If the meaning of a sign is determined by the web of differences, then the meaning of any one sign can never be fully present due to the absence of the other signs that give it this meaning.<sup>75</sup> The idea of presence, however, rests on a fundamental assumption of “a nonlinguistic pure self-presence of consciousness,” a thing in itself that is not shaped by the interplay of differentiated signs.<sup>76</sup> For Derrida, however, the self is not fully present to the self, but rather is always already enmeshed in this differential non-system of signs that endlessly defers full presence. Put another way, one can only understand the meaning of the self through language, but meaning in language can never be fully realized.

Following his explanation of these three views, Tracy adopts a discourse model of language derived primarily from the work of Emile Benveniste and Paul Ricoeur; this model integrates the basic tenets of the three ways of conceiving language just discussed. In discourse, language functions as use when it is used by persons to communicate; in Ricoeur’s famous rendition: when “someone says something to someone about something.”<sup>77</sup> Yet to have any actual use, or in order for the “somethings” that the “someones” say to issue in meaning, language must also be understood as “a system of differentiated signs.”<sup>78</sup> Still more (and agreeing with Derrida), if signifiers have their meaning determined by this *absent* system of signs, then meaning cannot be fully present.

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<sup>75</sup> PA 56-7

<sup>76</sup> PA 57

<sup>77</sup> Paul Ricoeur, “The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation,” in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, ed. and trans. John B. Thompson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 138; cf. Tracy, “Hermeneutics as Discourse Analysis,” 268

<sup>78</sup> PA 53

But meaning is never fully absent either. It is “crystallized into significant discourse” through texts.<sup>79</sup>

On the discourse model of language, language is both historical and social; it exists prior to the individual self. We are born into and raised in a discourse that shapes us and our interactions with each other. Whatever particular language (or languages) we learn first conditions our understanding of reality since language is in fact a key condition of the possibility for achieving any sort of understanding.<sup>80</sup> Tracy underlines the shared, public character of language: “We do not invent our own private languages and then find a way to translate our communications to others.”<sup>81</sup> Language is an intersubjective reality that depends on the participants who construct meaning within the differentiated system of signs.<sup>82</sup>

Tracing this history of the linguistic turn in philosophy enables Tracy to analyze distortion in communication, specifically how language as discourse discloses both the plurality and the ambiguity present in human communication.<sup>83</sup> Communication is enacted by persons who are not only finite and contingent, but also flawed. While our finitude prevents our knowledge from ever being complete and our interpretations from being definitive, our flaws yield distorted communication when we say what we do not mean, we deceive others, and we use words to inflict harm. Such personal, conscious sins occur within a context of discourse already marked by ideology, bigotry, and

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<sup>79</sup> Including, Tracy notes, the texts of the deconstructionists. Cf. Tracy, “Hermeneutics as Discourse Analysis,” 269.

<sup>80</sup> *PA* 66

<sup>81</sup> *PA* 49

<sup>82</sup> For more on intersubjectivity, see *MT* 57-61.

<sup>83</sup> *PA* 65

violence. Our discourse takes place in distorted contexts: “unconscious systemic distortions...inevitably pervade all discourse.” Just as we live within distorted histories, so we communicate through distorted languages.

### **Systemic Distortion in Religion**

Religion is a third social reality marked by unconscious systemic distortion. Tracy’s approaches towards a heuristic but incomplete description of “religion”—in which religion is conceived as the human attempt to articulate some understanding of the whole of reality motivated by the encounter with the limits of human experience—opens the possibility of recognizing how distortion might feature within religion.<sup>84</sup> As an all-encompassing view, religion runs the risk of becoming a totality that prevents the genuine in-breaking of something new.<sup>85</sup> Does religion really account for the wide range of human experience, including error, distortion, and sin? Lastly, does religion also recognize that it is both a historical and linguistic phenomenon, and as such its particular history and discourse will suffer from distortion as well?

Tracy’s discussion of systemic distortion in religion focuses on the varieties of distortion within the Christian tradition. Beyond being a conduit of propositions, the Christian tradition includes rituals, symbols, beliefs, attitudes, and structures that have developed in response to the encounter with the person and event of Jesus Christ.<sup>86</sup> As a

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<sup>84</sup> On Tracy’s understanding of religion, see Chapter Two, pages 91-2

<sup>85</sup> David Tracy, “African American Thought: The Discovery of Fragments,” in *Black Faith and Public Talk: Critical Essays on James H. Cone’s Black Theology and Black Power*, ed. Dwight N. Hopkins (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 31

<sup>86</sup> *AI* 322

theological and social reality, the church is the “primary mediator” of Christ to those involved in its social institutions, interpersonal communities, and shared meanings.<sup>87</sup>

Despite their purpose in mediating Christ to humanity, Tracy insists that both the church and the tradition suffer from distortion. The church as the community that carries on and embodies this tradition is ambiguous precisely because it is also a “sinful church” that regularly betrays the very reality it seeks to mediate.<sup>88</sup>

This betrayal can take several forms, such as the Christian church’s two common distortions, “ecclesiolatry and traditionalism.”<sup>89</sup> In ecclesiolatry, the church as institution (including whatever structures pertain to that church) displaces the communal response to Christ as primary in one’s faith; in traditionalism, the historically and linguistically conditioned formulations of the past are handed on uncritically, elevating these formulations, at the price of the realities they signify, to objects of faith. Tracy refers to the distortions of racism, sexism, and anti-Semitism that imbue not only the classics of the tradition but “their history of effects upon all interpretations.”<sup>90</sup> Thus while “every theology worthy of the history of the classic self-understandings of Christianity” will attend to the classic symbols of sin, grace, church, revelation, Christ, God, and so forth, the classic texts, images, rituals, and lives that derive their meaning from these symbols can be marked by these (and other) forms of distortion.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> *AI* 50, 22

<sup>88</sup> *AI* 321

<sup>89</sup> *AI* 323

<sup>90</sup> *PA* 104

<sup>91</sup> *AI* 373. As an example, the Catholic liturgy for Good Friday prior to the mid-1950’s included a prayer for the Jews, referring to them with the Latin word *perfidiiis*. While this term is more accurately translated as “unbelieving,” it was often translated with the English cognate *perfidious*, meaning “treacherous.” As a result, a ritual with the ostensible goal of praying for the salvation of others became marked by currents of

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Among this array of distortions, Tracy underscores the perhaps even more subtle and pervasive one: elitism. In theology, elitism usually involves privileging particular sources for theological reflection and particular persons for the interpretation of those sources—an issue that arises for Tracy as he reflects on his own use of *classics*. The very term “classic” already carries an undercurrent of cultural and socioeconomic class, but in general the focus on classics concentrates on “extremities and intensifications” in contrast with “the ordinary practices, beliefs, and everyday rituals of all religious persons.”<sup>92</sup> As for the basic perspective of the theological elite, “All who wish to enter the discussion should leave the margins and come to the centers to receive the proper credentials. They must earn property rights if they are to fashion proper readings of the religious classics.”<sup>93</sup> In an essay on evil, distortion, and sin, Tracy highlights how elitism effects this distortion in religious discourse, advocating

for theologians to face not just the fascination with evil so prominent among contemporary cultural elites but to consult and learn from the real experts in evil: the suffering, poor and oppressed as they have left their reflection in their narratives, songs, actions and rituals.<sup>94</sup>

These marginalized persons not only give voice to their experiences of suffering but can also offer profound reflections on other symbols of the Christian tradition. They must therefore be taken seriously as both sources and interpreters of religious discourse. While Tracy seems hesitant on the point, he wonders whether religious discourse focused

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distrust and disrespect for the Jewish community. In 1960, Pope John XXIII had *perfidis* dropped from the prayer, and following the Second Vatican Council the prayer was entirely rewritten (Michael Phayer, *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust: 1930-1965* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000), 209).

<sup>92</sup> *PA* 97

<sup>93</sup> *PA* 104

<sup>94</sup> Tracy, “Saving from Evil,” 107

exclusively on interpretations of classics and performed mostly by the highly educated members of the tradition ever effectively reaches the lived experience of the vast majority who participate in the tradition.

Ecclesiolatry, anti-Semitism, and elitism are by no means a comprehensive list of the distortions that may be present in Christianity specifically or any other religious tradition. Even if all the forms of distortion were to be named, this would not exhaust for him the depths of sin as a fundamental religious classic. His investigation of these forms of distortion, however, suggests myriad ways in which unconscious and systemic issues pervade religious traditions and communities. Community members formed in their particular traditions become susceptible both to acting out of such unconscious systemic distortions and to perpetuating these distortions by passing on their tradition.

### **Distortion and Inherited Sin**

For Tracy, the classic Christian symbol of the Fall remains an effective one—not as a literally true story about the actions of the first couple but as a mythic account of the way in which the human condition is damaged, tainted, and distorted. Tracy uses “systemic distortion” to highlight the *curvatus in se* of the sinful person. This twisting in on the self is largely unconscious and thus not the result of an explicit choice by the self. Tracy applies this term primarily to the individual human person, as the locus of understanding, freedom, and responsibility are in the self. Derivatively, however, Tracy explains social systemic distortion as analogous to individual systemic distortion precisely because of the role played by contingency in propagating human sinfulness.

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Tracy's claim that systemic distortion functions both individually and socially implies that sin affects human persons in both their finitude and their relationality. Using the term "inherited sin" to name this reality already entails its relational character.

Unconscious systemic distortions are received by the self, and they grow, develop, even fester in that self. The distortions in the self will manifest themselves more fully later in life as the self grows in maturity. Selves raised in distorted contexts become tainted by these distortions and contribute to the ongoing extension of these distortions in society. As in the previous chapter we saw the mutual entanglement of finitude and relationality, so too are the individual and social levels of inherited sin.

Finally, when Tracy qualifies sin on this level as unconscious, he means that inherited sin is not about any particular act or a habit formed by a series of acts, but a state in which one finds oneself; it is an aspect of being human that, though not a necessary part of human nature, is nonetheless inevitable. In addition, the systemic distortion is unconscious, but not unknowable. Tracy's assessment of the role of distortion in individuals and so in history, communication, and religion is concerned with unmasking these distortions and, whenever possible, resisting them.

#### *Relations Among the Three Dimensions*

Tracy understands the different dimensions of the idea of sin as personal, habitual, and inherited. While each is distinct from the other, they cannot ultimately be separated from one another. The routinization of personal sins engenders habitual sins; surrender to these two types of sin sustains the turning in upon oneself proper to inherited sin.



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Alternatively, the systemic distortions in self and society lure individuals toward making sinful decisions and developing vicious habits. That these three dimensions of sin mutually implicate one another is central for Tracy.

What holds these three dimensions of sin together is the relationship between consciousness and freedom. As one moves from personal sins through habitual sins to inherited sin, the degree of awareness that the individual self has of one's actions becomes more diffuse. Although personal sin arises from conscious and considered decision, Tracy claims that precisely because habitual sin emerges from a *habit* it typically occurs without full reflection. Inherited sin, on the other hand, is less a matter of the particular decisions made than of the interior disposition of the self and its effect upon subsequent self-comportment. The degree of human agency in each of these dimensions correlates the degree to which consciousness is heightened. Personal sin can be resisted in any given instance, and sinful habits can also be altered. Inherited sin, however, is unavoidable and cannot be overcome by human effort alone. Rather, all the individual can do is seek to become more open to cooperating with God's grace. In fact, Tracy holds that in all three kinds of distortion, true healing is only possible through grace.<sup>95</sup>

#### Conclusion

This chapter has delineated Tracy's understanding of sin and its role in his theological anthropology. His analysis of personal, habitual, and inherited sin enables

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<sup>95</sup> *NCFT*

#### Chapter Four

Tracy to explore deeply the various ways sin affects human life. At the most basic level, the individual person has a distorted sense of self by rejecting its own finitude and recoiling in self-importance. The context of the self's existence is also distorted by the historically contingent choices of past and present individuals. The centrality of the relational character of human living for Tracy's understanding of tradition and conversation emerges again in his view of systemic distortion, by which they too become derailed. While history, communication, and religion are analogously distorted, they condition individual lives so drastically that human activity alone cannot correct them.

As the most fundamental kind of human sinfulness, inherited sin contributes to and is reinforced by the self's personal and habitual sins. These three dimensions of sin mutually implicate one another as they sustain the inevitable yet unnecessary condition of sin. The self has some ability to reverse or recover from its own sinfulness, whether through unmasking the self's or society's distortions or through resisting temptations to occasional personal and habitual sins. Yet, since sin does not leave the human reason and will uncorrupted, so that both are damaged but not destroyed, such resistance will always be partial, incomplete, and ultimately submissive to one's self-distortions. Ultimately, only grace can be the sufficient antidote to human sinfulness in all its forms.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### GRACE

Tracy's most clear and concise treatment of grace appears in *The Analogical Imagination*. There he defined Christian responses to the contemporary situation as responses

to the event of Jesus Christ as that event is mediated through the tradition in the situation. Those mediations are expressed in three paradigmatic forms: manifestation, proclamation and historical action. The primary response of any Christian systematic theologian remains a response in the present to the event and person of Jesus Christ. Whenever that event is experienced in the present situation through some personal sense of the uncanny, the event-character itself moves to the forefront of Christian theological attention. The primary Christian word designed to emphasize that event-character is the word 'grace.' Grace—the grace of Jesus Christ—is mediated through the ecclesial and cultural traditions and through the situation in the three principal forms of manifestation, proclamation and historical action.<sup>1</sup>

In contrast to the work of his mentor, Bernard Lonergan, Tracy largely prescinds from the highly technical discourse about grace undertaken by many Catholic theologians, particularly those within the Thomistic tradition.<sup>2</sup> Rather, his efforts to explicate the importance of grace in Christian theology focus on the ways in which God's grace is mediated to the human person and the impact that grace has on human living. Thus in analyzing Tracy's understanding of grace, I will first examine his understanding of the

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<sup>1</sup> *AI* 371

<sup>2</sup> For example, Tracy's work largely sidesteps the distinction between operative and cooperative grace. This does not seem to be due to any disagreement with such a distinction, but rather his prudential judgment that this conversation is not the most relevant to the more methodological, hermeneutical, and linguistic concerns of his theological research. For Tracy's examination of Lonergan's work on grace, see *ABL* chapter two. For Lonergan's work on grace, see Bernard J.F. Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom: Operative Grace in the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas*, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan vol. 1, eds. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).

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relationship between sin and grace. Tracy often uses his views on sin as an opportunity to pivot to discussing grace, in which the connection between sin and grace is revealed to be based on a more fundamental relationship between nature and grace. The primordially of the nature-grace relationship lies at the heart of the divine-human relationship while the dialectic of sin and grace is derivative.

Following my consideration of the complex of relationships among nature, grace, and sin, I next turn to Tracy's work on "the uncanny" in order to show how it illumines his understanding of grace. In *The Analogical Imagination*, Tracy emphasizes the uncanny and its relationship to the role of the religious dimension of human experience, which serves as a primary characteristic of his account of grace. Third, I consider his Christology, where Tracy argues that the self-manifestation of God in Jesus Christ becomes crucial for explaining grace in human life and what humans are called to become. By showing the relevance of the contemporary sense of the uncanny for the Christological tradition, I investigate how Tracy sees grace as mediated to human beings and the effects it has on them. In conclusion, I present Tracy's understanding of the connection between grace and freedom and the ways in which freedom thematically unites Tracy's four anthropological constants.

### **Nature-Grace and Sin-Grace**

As one of the central symbols of Christian theology, Tracy understands grace as belonging to the grammar of systematic theology. For him, grace functions as part of one

of two pairs of symbols: nature-grace and grace-sin.<sup>3</sup> Tracy analyzes grace-sin as a dialectic of opposites and nature-grace as a polarity. By polarity, Tracy means that nature and grace exist in a tension such that they are not in opposition but rather complement each other. He agrees with Aquinas' famous dictum that "grace does not destroy nature but perfects it"<sup>4</sup> so that grace presupposes nature. Nature is thus open to grace in a non-oppositional way.

In contrast, the dialectic of sin and grace is one of opposites. As I argued in the previous chapter, Tracy's discussions of sin deal predominantly with inherited sin (unconscious systemic distortion). Because this distortion is not just error, human beings are incapable of correcting it on their own. Sin can only be healed by grace. As Tracy says repeatedly, one's understanding of sin depends on one's understanding of grace (for cognitional, not ontological reasons).<sup>5</sup>

This dependence must be qualified in three ways. First, nowhere does Tracy suggest that the reality of sin depends on the reality of grace or vice-versa; it is only our *understanding* of sin that depends on our *understanding* of grace. Second, each time Tracy speaks of the relationship between sin and grace, his point is that sin can only be understood (inasmuch as it can be at all) in light of the understanding of grace. Thus, he argues that the polarity of nature and grace is a more fundamental Christian teaching than the dialectic of sin and grace and the intelligibility of grace is integrally related to one's

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<sup>3</sup> *AI* 373

<sup>4</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, Q. 1, Art. 8, ad. 2: "Cum enim gratia non tollat naturam, sed perficiat."

<sup>5</sup> "The Christian understanding of sin is understood *as* sin only in the light of grace" (*AI* 53); "We can understand what a Christian means by sin...only by grasping what a Christian means by grace" (*PA* 75-5); "one may have as radical an understanding of evil and sin as necessary as long as one's understanding of grace and salvation are equally radical" (Tracy, "Saving from Evil," 107).

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understanding of nature, not of sin, because sin is a distortion of nature. Through sin, “the self alienates itself as well from nature, history, others, and, in the end, from itself.”<sup>6</sup>

Sin is the antithesis of nature.

Third, Tracy emphasizes that grace is not just a response to sin. He describes grace in terms of realized eschatology, the “always-already, not-yet.” This means that human beings already experience grace and that grace is still to come.<sup>7</sup> At stake here is the fact that reality is fundamentally gracious because of the “Pure Unbounded Love disclosed to us in God’s revelation of who God is and who we are commanded and empowered to be in Christ Jesus.”<sup>8</sup> This statement is based on the belief that God is love and is immanent in reality.<sup>9</sup> Thus the human person can have faith in the graciousness of a reality that “can be trusted in spite of it all.”<sup>10</sup> The gracious character of reality is asserted in spite of the fact of systemic distortion. Grace is fundamentally God’s love for creation. The healing aspect of grace is a result of this more basic reality, and so is relatively less important.

It is not that the sin-grace dialectic is not important both for theology and theological anthropology. For Tracy this dialectic functions as a Christian hermeneutic of suspicion or even an early theological analogue of “critical theory.”<sup>11</sup> While the

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<sup>6</sup> *PA* 74

<sup>7</sup> See especially *AI* 430-449 for the “always-already, not-yet” character of grace. The “not-yet” aspect of grace will be examined more fully in the section on Christ below.

<sup>8</sup> *ONP* 101

<sup>9</sup> Cf. David Tracy, “God Is Love: The Central Christian Metaphor,” *Living Pulpit* 1, no. 3 (July-September 1992): 10-11; *AI* 432

<sup>10</sup> *AI* 320

<sup>11</sup> *NCFT*

theologian ought always to approach the other<sup>12</sup> with a hermeneutic of trust, at least initially, something may arise during that encounter that causes the theologian to suspect that distortions of some sort may be involved. This suspicion may lead an interlocutor to call upon any of a number of critical theories, which “are designed...to test such suspicions, to try to spot them, and, if possible, to heal them as much as possible.”<sup>13</sup> The dialectic of sin and grace parallels the insights of critical theory precisely because it functions as a way to unmask the unconscious systemic distortions that plague individuals and communities and to seek ways to heal them.

For the purposes of this dissertation, the most pressing question about grace concerns the integration of nature, grace, and sin into theological anthropology. Tracy says that “the relationship between nature and grace is the basic foundation of all theological anthropology.”<sup>14</sup> A full understanding of what it means to be human requires recognizing the graced character of the human person, who experiences this graciousness not as contradictory to human nature but as integral to that nature. Typical theological anthropologies approach the question of human nature using categories such as creaturehood, embodiment/corporeality, sociality, historicity, and freedom. Chapters

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<sup>12</sup> Here Tracy pointedly remarks that this includes not only the “friendly” other (family, nation, church), but *any* other.

<sup>13</sup> *NCFE*; cf. *AI* 363: “Conflict is our actuality. Conversation is our hope. Where that actuality is systematically distorted, conversation must yield for the moment to the techniques of liberation and suspicion classically expressed in Freud, Marx, Nietzsche and Heidegger.”

<sup>14</sup> *NCFE*. Just before making this claim, Tracy made the even more provocative claim that “In all three forms of theology, the basic model for understanding, the correlation (the interpretation of the tradition, the interpretation of the situation, the use of different forms of reason and different understandings of faith) is in fact, I think, the relationship of nature and grace.” This comment suggests that grace is to the tradition as nature is to the situation. Unfortunately, Tracy does not carry this insight through or expand on the possible nuances of this (for example, it seems unlikely he would go so far as to say that “the tradition does not destroy the situation but perfects it”).

Two and Three have stressed finitude and relationality as the two basic aspects of Tracy's understanding of human nature.<sup>15</sup> After this emphasis, Chapter Four turned to his theology of sin in which the notion of unconscious systemic distortion showed that sin involves both a rejection of authentic finitude and a corruption of relationality. The present chapter explains the relationship of grace to nature and to sin in light of the forms of mediation through which human beings experience grace and in light of the effect of grace on the human person.

### **The Uncanny and Grace**

Appreciation of Tracy's understanding of grace requires an investigation of his description of "the uncanny." Tracy insists that only by considering "the many expressions of what can be named the emergence of the uncanny" can one's understanding of grace offer something to a Christian view of the human person.<sup>16</sup> The phrase "emergence of the uncanny" as pertaining to the contemporary situation implies both that the uncanny is not a permanent or transcultural fact of all situations and that it is something distinct, perhaps even jarring, about the situation that exists now. In fact, for Tracy, the emergence of the uncanny is a key descriptor for the "*religious* sense of our

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<sup>15</sup> In particular, the categories of sociality, historicity, and freedom are clearly implicated in the chapters on finitude and relationality. Significantly, embodiment/corporeality is not developed in either of those chapters due to the overall lack of focus on this topic in Tracy's thought. This lacuna in his work will be one of the central points of critique of Tracy's theology in the following chapter.

<sup>16</sup> David Tracy, "Grace and the Search for the Human: The Sense of the Uncanny," in *Catholic Theological Society of America Proceedings* 34 (1979): 64. Tracy seems to draw the term "uncanny" from Freud's seminal 1919 essay "The Uncanny," where Freud describes the uncanny (*das Unheimlich*) as "that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar" (Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," in *The Uncanny*, trans. David McLintock (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 124). While Tracy's interpretation of the uncanny differs from Freud's, it shares the same sense that something with which one is familiar and accustomed has become anxiety-inducing.



situation.”<sup>17</sup> Thus, Tracy uses it to connect the religious character of the situation with the doctrine of grace by way of offering a meaningful reflection on the human condition.

*Fundamental Trust in BRO*

Tracy does not use the term “uncanny” in *Blessed Rage for Order* when considering the religious dimension of a given situation; however, he does develop this basic problematic in terms of “limit” language. The notion of “limit” lies at the heart of Tracy’s theology of finitude and of relationality. Limit-experiences and situations indicate the radical contingency of human existence. Yet the same limit-experience may lead human persons to “find ourselves radically out-of-our-everyday-selves as ecstatic, as gifted, even as ‘graced.’”<sup>18</sup> The human experience of finitude and contingency can lead people to experience their relationship with the ground of that contingency, or the reality that gives both existence and its meaning to them. In *BRO*, Tracy describes this grounding reality as the “limit-of.”

Tracy calls this relationship with grounding reality a “basic faith in the worthwhileness of existence.”<sup>19</sup> By basic faith, he means the belief that life has meaning and value, even in the face of sheer absurdity or apparent rejection of any meaning or value, and that this is a feature of common human experience.<sup>20</sup> According to Tracy, the contingent character of human lives means that life must be understood as gracious or gifted. Such a recognition leads to the further acknowledgment that basic faith

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<sup>17</sup> Tracy, “Grace and the Search for the Human,” 75

<sup>18</sup> *BRO* 107

<sup>19</sup> *BRO* 119

<sup>20</sup> *BRO* 119

necessarily presumes a lack of human control over our own individual situations as well as existence broadly speaking. Indeed, basic faith is grounded in the “limit-of” reality that we encounter when we press up against our limit-experiences and situations.<sup>21</sup>

### *Uncanny in AI*

Tracy introduces the term “uncanny” in *The Analogical Imagination* in his description of the situation in which contemporary systematic theology is done. He describes this situation as postmodern, pluralist, and predominantly Western.<sup>22</sup> Perhaps what is most striking is that, for him (unlike Tillich), the contemporary situation “poses no one *dominant* question” but rather faces “the conflictual pluralism...on what worthwhile fundamental questions are now to be asked.”<sup>23</sup> This is a tribute to the success of the masters of suspicion and to critical theorists, whose unmasking of the myths and claims of modernity and the Enlightenment have deflated any belief in an “absolute standpoint.”<sup>24</sup> As Tracy says elsewhere, there are no innocent traditions or cultures. In a postmodern age, “all are now under suspicion.”<sup>25</sup> Unmasking the distortions in the contemporary situation has not only challenged the dominance of any one explanatory narrative but it has also opened up the greater diversity of concerns and questions that mark the situation.

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<sup>21</sup> *BRO* 187

<sup>22</sup> These three qualifiers are not meant as normative, but rather as a realistic description of Tracy’s context in the late 1970’s and early 1980’s.

<sup>23</sup> *AI* 341, 342

<sup>24</sup> *AI* 346

<sup>25</sup> *AI* 347

These critical efforts to unmask the ambiguities and distortions in the contemporary situation have also disclosed the sense of the uncanny as one of its key characteristics. Tracy offers a thick description of the various ways the uncanny is encountered in order to emphasize the inherent pluralism of the experience: namely, encounters on the part of scientific humanists, conservatives, deconstructionists, the oppressed, the marginalized, and even ordinary, everyday persons.<sup>26</sup> While these experiences may be diverse and even conflicting, Tracy focuses on the recurring theme of negation and release that marks all of them. The sense of the uncanny arises from encountering a negation in the present situation, whether that be a situation of oppression, alienation, domination, exile, totalization, or even hopelessness. Such negations in turn give rise to hope for release from these negative realities.<sup>27</sup> Thus, perhaps Tracy's most succinct description of the uncanny names it "the postreligious, religious sense of our situation."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> *AI* 358-362

<sup>27</sup> The list is by no means exhaustive

<sup>28</sup> *AI* 362. Tracy's writings are not altogether clear about whether the uncanny is a feature specific to the contemporary Western situation in which he works (which his invocation of scientific humanists and postmodern deconstructionists seems to suggest) or if it's a more general and permanent *possibility* of all (or most) situations (which his general invocations of the extraordinariness of the ordinary suggests). Tracy does not describe the uncanny as totally new, so that it would remain a possibility in any historical situation. Still, because he discusses the "emergence" of the uncanny, it seems to be characteristic of the situation occurring now instead of the recent past. The fact that he sees it as characteristic of the present postmodern situation would seem to exclude its also being a facet of past situations. Cf. *AI* 357: "As the secular traditions set loose by the postmodern classics show us, the experience of the uncanny awaits us everywhere in the situation."

A second problematic in Tracy's description of the uncanny becomes evident in the subtle differences between chapter 8 of the *Analogical Imagination* and his article "Grace and the Search for the Human." The latter often asserts the negativity or even sinfulness of the uncanny, i.e. "we may have as radical a doctrine of the negative, of the uncanny, of sin itself as we wish and need as long as our doctrine of grace is equally radical" (Tracy, "Grace and the Search for the Human," 65). Here, negativity and the uncanny are tied together in apparent opposition to grace and hope (65). It is unclear what sense of "negativity" he intends (e.g., "negative" as in bad or "negation" as in unmasking). This article goes on to pit the uncanny as a good reality in comparison to "canniness," meaning "bogus affirmations, those

An important aspect of the uncanny is that something is *given* to us no matter what the cause behind this sense of the uncanny is, because the “presence of the uncanny” refers to something beyond our control, something that comes to us both as “gift and command.”<sup>29</sup> That which is given is completely other from ourselves. In both of the two poles of situation and tradition, the emergence of the uncanny discloses the “religious dimension.” Thus, what Tracy means by “the power of the uncanny” in *The Analogical Imagination* refers to his earlier formulation of “the whole,” which is the generalized articulation of the divine in *AI*. The disclosure of the whole in our situation and in our tradition is a revelation of the divine, which in the Christian tradition is regarded as sheer gratuity.<sup>30</sup> This experience disrupts and constitutes our interpretations of our situation and tradition.

For Tracy the sense of the uncanny we experience in our contemporary situation amounts to a further development of what he previously described in *BRO* as “basic faith” in the graciousness of existence. His later description of the uncanny draws on the gratuity of our own existence, yet it has developed from the basic faith in the worthwhileness of existence to a more ambiguous recognition of the negative facets of

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principles of domination, those slack feelings which tempt us beyond mere error and even illusion to the final distortions of sheer indecency” (76).

Adding to the lack of clarity regarding these two texts is the tremendous overlap between the two, including many sections that are quoted verbatim or with only minor changes. The article version suggests that it is a later adaptation (a “sketch”) of the chapter (65 n. 3), but its citation has an early publication date for *AI*. This suggests that submission of the article to the CTSA Proceedings for 1979 occurred prior to the actual completion of the text of *AI*. *AI*’s presentation of “uncanny” is more consistent in portraying the uncanny as involving a certain form of bondage, alienation, or oppression, and the related hope for release or liberation from that negativity. As such, the uncanny is neither negative nor sinful itself, but rather includes the recognition of negative and sinful realities in one’s life. Given that the two works are produced at roughly the same time and that *AI* has proved to be the more enduring and influential of the two, preference will be given to *AI*’s formulations when these two texts differ.

<sup>29</sup> *AI* 374. Later Tracy will describe it as “gift and threat” (*PA* 75).

<sup>30</sup> *AI* 374

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our reality from which we hope for release. There is what Tracy might call a “rough coherence” between basic faith and uncanny hopefulness, even though in *AI* the latter more effectively acknowledges the negativities within which hope is experienced. The significant continuity between the two is Tracy’s profound sense of graciousness as the ground for this basic faith or hope. We experience grace through our personal recognition of the uncanny in our situation.<sup>31</sup>

### *Uncanny in PA*

The use of the term “uncanny” tends to disappear from Tracy’s work in the mid-1980’s, but the underlying idea he wants to convey with that term remains pertinent to his theology. In *Plurality and Ambiguity*, he describes grace as “a power erupting in one’s life as a gift revealing that Ultimate Reality can be trusted as the God who is Pure, Unbounded Love.”<sup>32</sup> Although not stated explicitly in *PA*, the language here of “erupting in one’s life” shares a rough coherence with the personal sense of the uncanny in *AI*. Tracy’s claim that grace is experienced as both the gift of transformation and the threat that unmask the various ways in which humans reject or hide from Ultimate Reality. “Gift and threat” develops and intensifies the earlier “gift and command” formulation in *AI*.<sup>33</sup> In both formulations one’s experience of grace in the contemporary situation is

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<sup>31</sup> *AI* 371

<sup>32</sup> *PA* 75. As was noted in Chapters Two and Three, Tracy uses different terms to refer to the divine in *BRO*, *AI*, and *PA*. Nonetheless, the idea of basic faith or fundamental trust rooted in this divine reality remains a fixture of each.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. *AI* 235, 248, 269, 330, 371, and 434

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characterized by both disclosure of some form of bondage or distortion and the concomitant possibility of release from that bondage that is experienced as hope.

Tracy's "basic faith" is continued in *PA*. But this attitude is slightly recast as "fundamental trust," a disposition nourished by one's particular faith tradition. Just as religious traditions can be helpful to one's self-reflective interpretation of the uncanny, so too religion can help an individual to "resist the ego's compulsive refusal to face the always already power of the Ultimate reality that bears down upon us."<sup>34</sup> Tracy continues to emphasize human beings' dependence on the gracious quality of this ultimate reality for their existence. However, *PA* further tempers his optimism about this basic faith, since he explicitly says that fundamental trust "is not immune to either criticism or suspicion."<sup>35</sup> It is an ambiguous aspect of human existence, potentially in need of the sort of disclosure and releasement that the sense of the uncanny is able to bring about.

## Jesus Christ

### *Christ as Representation in BRO*

In Tracy's "revisionist" approach to fundamental theology a Christological interpretation of common human experience is not the first step. Rather, he claims that one ought to begin with a general religious interpretation of human experience, followed by a theistic interpretation of that religious interpretation. Only then does he face the

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<sup>34</sup> *PA* 84

<sup>35</sup> *PA* 112

issue of a Christological interpretation of the theistic and religious views.<sup>36</sup> In *BRO*, Tracy explains how each of these layers functions within his fundamental theology. His emphasis here is on the criteria—especially the language—used to interpret common human experience.

Tracy approaches the initial religious question by focusing on the “limit-of” reality that discloses the overall horizon of existence, since for Tracy the idea of “limit” distinguishes the religious dimension of existence from other dimensions. This “limit” quality reveals the religious dimension as the “ultimate ground to or horizon of all other activities.”<sup>37</sup> The language used to describe this dimension of common human experience “re-presents that basic confidence and trust in existence” that Tracy had already designated as a sense of the gracious ground of existence.<sup>38</sup>

The next step is to determine whether a theistic interpretation of the religious dimension of common human experience is “an adequate re-presentation of those basic beliefs.”<sup>39</sup> For Tracy, there is no intrinsic requirement for a religious interpretation to become a theistic one. However, he questions whether one can have fundamental trust in the graciousness of reality without faith being placed in *something*. For him, a theistic interpretation describes this something as the “single metaphysical referent to our most basic faith or trust,” that which is commonly denoted “God.”<sup>40</sup> Like religious language, theistic language is re-presentative of fundamental trust, because it provides an adequate

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<sup>36</sup> *BRO* 91

<sup>37</sup> *BRO* 108

<sup>38</sup> *BRO* 134. “Religious language” is here what Tracy would later call “the uncanny” in *AI*.

<sup>39</sup> *BRO* 154

<sup>40</sup> *BRO* 156

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interpretation of the human experience of basic faith in the gracious character of existence.<sup>41</sup> Tracy does not find the particular interpretation of the metaphysical term of “classical Christian theism” a compelling one, since at this point in his theological development he regards a process account of God to be a more relatively adequate one.<sup>42</sup>

The third step inquires into the interpretation of the religious dimension of human experience, entering more fully into the particularities of a specific tradition. Of course any religious tradition begins “with some moment or occasion of special religious insight” to be interpreted by those who experience it with “limit language representative of that insight and that experience.”<sup>43</sup> Anticipating his later ideas about “the classic,” Tracy describes this event as both universal in its potential disclosure of meaning and particular with regard to its own history.<sup>44</sup>

Tracy’s focal example of this third step is the Christological interpretation of religious experience that takes the life of Jesus of Nazareth as this grounding event, in the sense that through his words, actions, and life, Jesus lived “the representational reality present in the office of Messiah.”<sup>45</sup> By “representational reality,” Tracy means that in Jesus, fulfillment of what it means to be the Christ not only epitomizes but makes present again (“re-presents”) the life human beings are called to have in relationship to God.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> *BRO* 154

<sup>42</sup> See *BRO* Chapter 8 for more on the process understanding of God as a more relatively adequate model for a theistic interpretation of the religious dimension of common human experience and of the Christian fact.

<sup>43</sup> *BRO* 205

<sup>44</sup> *BRO* 206

<sup>45</sup> *BRO* 216

<sup>46</sup> *BRO* 218



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Through his teaching, his ministry, his life, and his death, Jesus as the Christ<sup>47</sup> lives a “a certain limit-mode-of-being-in-the-world,” a profound intensification of the possibilities of human living. In this life at the limit, Jesus as the Christ re-presents “the righteous, loving, gracious God.”<sup>48</sup> “God” then is what Christians intend when they articulate an objective referent for basic faith:

For Christians, christological language suffices because it fulfills certain factual understandings of human and divine reality: the fact that our lives are, in reality, meaningful; that we really do live in the presence of a loving God; that the final word about our lives is gracious and the final power is love.<sup>49</sup>

According to Tracy, Christological language summarizes and sublates both the religious and theistic interpretations of the religious dimension of common human experience.

Jesus as the Christ is both the universal and historically particular re-presentation of the gracious God who is the ground of human existence.<sup>50</sup>

### *Christ as Divine Self-Manifestation in AI*

In *Blessed Rage for Order*, Tracy’s religious, theistic, and Christological interpretations of experience indicated the interconnection between basic faith in the graciousness of existence and the reality of Jesus as the Christ as the re-presentation of the gracious God attested to in Christianity. In the *Analogical Imagination*, his theology

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<sup>47</sup> This is one of several ways Tracy commonly refers to Jesus in *BRO*. Others include “Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ,” “Jesus the Christ,” and the more widely used “Jesus Christ.” The other variations are designed to underline a distinction (not separation) between the historical person of Jesus of Nazareth and the office of the Messiah as the anointed one of God.

<sup>48</sup> *BRO* 221

<sup>49</sup> *BRO* 223

<sup>50</sup> *BRO* 237

of grace brings together more clearly basic faith and Christology in terms of the uncanny and the classic in order to articulate the distinct forms of the mediation of grace.

As presented in Chapter One,<sup>51</sup> the classic for Tracy is an expression arising from within a tradition with an excess and permanence of meaning. While classics are particular in origin and form, in principle they can reveal truth to any self-reflective person open to engagement with them. Although classics arise within and shape those traditions, their disclosive possibilities are not confined to those traditions. The form of the classic Tracy works with the most is the text, but the category of the classic also includes images, symbols, rituals, events, and even persons.

Tracy applies the category of classic to Jesus Christ, understanding him as both event and person. In fact, Jesus Christ is the focal Christian classic: “At the center of Christianity stands not a timeless truth, nor a principle, nor even a cause, but an event and a person—Jesus of Nazareth experienced and confessed as the Christ.”<sup>52</sup> While classic texts, particularly the canon of Scripture, witness to this event and person, these in turn are themselves “normatively judge[d] and inform[ed]” by the event and person of Jesus Christ.<sup>53</sup> The normative status of Scripture is not intrinsic to the text, but it is derived from the reality to which it witnesses. Tracy carefully distinguishes Christianity from other “religions of the book” precisely because in Christianity the book is secondary to the event and person to which it attests.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Chapter One, pages 62-4

<sup>52</sup> *AI* 317

<sup>53</sup> *AI* 233

<sup>54</sup> *AI* 249. Tracy seems to overlook the fact that the other two main religions of the book, Judaism and Islam, also believe in a transcendent God to whom their central texts give witness. However, at least in

Although Christ is both event and person, Tracy emphasizes the event-character of Jesus as interpreted by Christian theology. Event and person remain necessarily connected by the simple fact that there would be no event of Jesus as the Christ without the historical person of Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>55</sup> This is because the primary experience we have of Jesus now is the event of Jesus Christ as mediated through various Christian traditions and churches.<sup>56</sup> The mediation of the Christ event occurs in Christian communities through word, sacrament, and action.<sup>57</sup> These forms of mediation attest to the present experience of the event mediating the historical person of Jesus in telling the story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection through the normative texts of Scripture.<sup>58</sup>

The "event" of Jesus Christ discloses God. Within the community that mediates this Christ event through word, sacrament, and action, the event of Christ is experienced precisely "as an event *from God* and by God's power."<sup>59</sup> As a classic, this event provokes a response from its potential interpreters, and demands of them recognition and engagement. For Tracy the event of Christ is both gift and command, both graciousness and the demand to live in light of that graciousness.<sup>60</sup> Tracy says this is the "gift and

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Islam, the Quran is viewed as the Word of God essentially, not derivatively as Christianity views the Bible. In fact, some have noted that while Christianity typically refers to Jesus Christ as the "Word of God," Islam primarily uses "Word of God" to describe the Quran. Cf. The Midwest Dialogue of Catholics and Muslims, *Revelation: Catholic & Muslim Perspectives* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2006), 4.

<sup>55</sup> *AI* 234

<sup>56</sup> *AI* 408

<sup>57</sup> *AI* 254

<sup>58</sup> Tracy makes a helpful distinction between the knowledge of the contemporary Christian about the event and person of Jesus, noting that "What Christians know historically about the 'Jesus of history' they know, like everyone else, through the ever-shifting results of historical criticism. That Christians believe in the actual Jesus as the Christ comes to them from some present experience of the Christ event: an experience mediated by the whole community of the Christian church" (*AI* 428).

<sup>59</sup> *AI* 234

<sup>60</sup> *AI* 235

command of *agape*” disclosed in the event of Christ, and it is the vocation of all Christians.<sup>61</sup> The life of Jesus of Nazareth is lived as radical love through profound faith in God, and is disclosed in the “event” of Jesus Christ as a new possibility for human persons.<sup>62</sup>

For Tracy, the Christian belief in Christ affirms that the Christ event is not only disclosive of God, but is in fact the decisive self-manifestation of God in Christ. The language of manifestation (and more specifically self-manifestation) refers to the revelatory or disclosive character of the event. “Manifestation” means that it shows the reality to which it attests. Thus, in *The Analogical Imagination* “manifestation” effectively reformulates the terms “re-presentation” and “re-presentative” Tracy used in *Blessed Rage for Order* in order to describe the connection between Jesus Christ and God.<sup>63</sup> The Scriptures, as well as the mediation of this event through the tradition and community, attest to the claim that in the event of Christ’s incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection, God reveals God’s self.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, this self-manifestation has the proleptic quality of an “event of the decisively true word and manifestation that already happened, that happens now, always happens, that will happen in Jesus Christ, the event

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<sup>61</sup> *AI* 434 (cf. *AI* 326)

<sup>62</sup> *AI* 330-1

<sup>63</sup> Neither of these terms is exclusively in either text. In a few isolated incidents, Tracy uses “self-manifestation” in *BRO* to describe how Jesus re-presents God (*BRO* 205), and at least once in *AI* he uses the terms together to refer to the same idea (*AI* 216). Nonetheless, the language of re-presentation is dominant in *BRO*, while the language of manifestation is dominant in *AI* and leads into the three central mediations of grace in manifestation, proclamation, and historical action.

<sup>64</sup> *AI* 250

of God.”<sup>65</sup> The Christ event is already/not-yet, shown in the past and present life of the tradition and hoped for in a future to come.

Because Christ is the self-manifestation of God, the Christ event for Tracy is the fullest disclosure of the reality of grace. The centrality of Christ in the larger Christian tradition attests to the fundamental trust in a gracious God. Such a disclosure of grace unmask the ambiguities experienced in the uncanniness of the situation. It unveils the possibilities for liberation from these ambiguities and empowers us to live agapically.<sup>66</sup> For Tracy, the fundamental disclosure that occurs in the self-manifestation of God in the event of Christ is precisely the reality of grace, understood proleptically.<sup>67</sup> Grace is an always-already present reality that heals and liberates, but also a not-yet reality that will only be fulfilled eschatologically. Moreover, grace reveals not only that human beings are loved and called to be loving, but that the entire world is the beloved of God. In other words, both humanity and the world coexist in grace.<sup>68</sup> Grace is experienced as both gift and command, driving and enabling the human person to live the life of love disclosed as possible for everyone by the life of the person Jesus of Nazareth. Thus, with the realization that he or she is graced, “the Christian should be released to the self-transcendence of genuine other-regard by a willing self-exposure to and in the contemporary situation.”<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> *AI* 309

<sup>66</sup> *AI* 430, 438

<sup>67</sup> *AI* 430

<sup>68</sup> *AI* 438

<sup>69</sup> *AI* 446

## Forms of Mediation

For Tracy, the reality disclosed by the event of Jesus Christ is grace, meaning the love of God that enables and commands us to love. This event, rooted in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, must be also mediated historically through the community gathered around this central reality and through the traditions that have been passed down in this community. Thus, grace is mediated through the contemporary situation in which we find ourselves, and it is disclosed in the sense of the uncanny in of our situation.

A distinction needs to be drawn at this juncture between two valences of “mediation” in Tracy’s understanding of the mediation of grace: context and form. First, the community, the tradition, and the contemporary situation are all contexts or locales through which grace is mediated. We encounter the event of Jesus Christ *here* and *now*. Second, while the event is mediated through these contexts, the mediation takes place in three particular forms: proclamation, manifestation, and historical action. In some places, Tracy will refer to these three forms with the more traditionally Christian vocabulary of “word, sacrament, and action.”<sup>70</sup> These two valences of mediation, context and form, are intertwined in Tracy’s understanding that the event of Jesus Christ is mediated through the tradition, the community, and the situation in these three paradigmatic forms of manifestation, proclamation, and historical action. In what follows, the focus will be on the forms and how they have developed in his thought.

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<sup>70</sup> *AI* 234. Tracy first draws the analogy between manifestation/proclamation and sacrament/word in *AI* 203.

### **Manifestation**

While Tracy works with all three forms of mediation, his main focus is on manifestation. This is evident in his description of Jesus Christ as the “self-manifestation” of God. Manifestation has to do with understanding truth as disclosure. Tracy contrasts this idea with truth understood as adequation or as verification.<sup>71</sup> Truth as manifestation means that one ought to let “whatever shows itself to be in its showing and hiddenness.”<sup>72</sup> Manifestation therefore indicates a reality that, in its appearance, both discloses something that is true but also keeps some aspects of its reality concealed. Disclosure is never full disclosure; uncovering carries with it some hiddenness.

Tracy’s understanding of manifestation is influenced by the work of Paul Ricoeur. Ricoeur describes five key traits of manifestation.<sup>73</sup> First, the experience of the sacred in manifestation is the *numinous* in Rudolf Otto’s sense of the *fascinans et tremendum*, where manifestation is attractive, awesome, and overwhelming.<sup>74</sup> Second, the sacred manifests itself in some form (what Mircea Eliade calls “hierophany”) that is not initially or primarily a *verbal* form. Third, manifestation is more than a symbolic representation of the sacred; it also requires ritualized behavior that consecrates the world in which this manifestation takes place. Fourth, the symbolism in manifestation is a “bound symbolism,” meaning that those elements of nature and reality through which the sacred

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<sup>71</sup> Cf. Chapter Two, pages 88-9

<sup>72</sup> *AI* 195

<sup>73</sup> Paul Ricoeur, “Manifestation and Proclamation,” in *Figuring the Sacred*, ed. Mark I. Wallace, trans. David Pellauer (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995). 49-55.

<sup>74</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 25-40.

manifests itself can only become symbols when they become transparent. Put another way, the symbol that mediates the sacred does so most effectively when there is an “immediate liaison between the appearance [of the symbol] and its meaning.”<sup>75</sup> The fifth and final trait functions as a summary of the previous four traits: our ability to say anything about the sacred depends on the possibility of the created world to symbolize the sacred in a way that is other than the created world. Ricoeur emphasizes the pre-verbal character of manifestation as resting on the “law of correspondences,” so that our linguistic articulations about sacred reality depend on some correspondence between the world we can see and the transcendent reality we believe is revealed through it. Manifestation means a disclosure of the sacred mediated by the created order. For Ricoeur,<sup>76</sup> manifestation, although it might be verbal or linguistic, is chiefly symbolic and precedes and grounds later verbal articulations of what is revealed.<sup>77</sup>

On the basis of Ricoeur’s law of correspondences and his description of the transparency of the symbol to the symbolized, Tracy adds that a central feature of manifestation is that one experiences it as gift, so that like grace itself, it is never something one initiates or controls, but rather it comes to oneself from beyond oneself. The sacred reality encountered in manifestation gives itself in the experience.<sup>78</sup> Such experiences can thus be meaningfully described as *self*-manifestations. With Eliade, Tracy describes manifestation as a “purely given” that separates the sacred and profane

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<sup>75</sup> Ricoeur, “Manifestation and Proclamation,” 54

<sup>76</sup> And also Eliade

<sup>77</sup> Cf. *AI* 205

<sup>78</sup> *AI* 206



realms.<sup>79</sup> Such manifestation of the sacred occurs in the profane character of one's everyday life, but it alters one's experience of these realms.<sup>80</sup>

The manifestation of the sacred calls us to participate in the sacred realm. What is participation? Recall the two decisive moments in the production of the classic: intensification, by which the classic expresses in radically particular ways the meanings and values of some person or community; and distancing, which liberates the expression from the control of its producer and renders it shareable beyond its particular origins. According to Tracy, this is a dialectical process that sometimes enables either a "sense of radical participation," which he calls manifestation, or a "sense of radical nonparticipation," which he names proclamation.<sup>81</sup> Manifestation happens in relation to those classic expressions that provoke a sense of participation in the sacred that is disclosed in them. Participation in this sense is never a matter of complete or total transparency, but rather discloses the mysterious quality of the sacred – or in Tracy's language, of "the whole" – which is manifested. In short, we encounter the whole with a sense of *fascinans et tremendum*.<sup>82</sup> Manifestation brings about a sense of the accessibility of mystery, so that we can say something about it, or point to something real about the whole, and so articulate some claims, however inadequate they may be.

In Tracy's account, manifestation mediates the encounter with the sacred in three primary ways. The first, and perhaps the most familiar to philosophers and theologians:

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<sup>79</sup> AI 206. Cf. Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (San Diego: Harvest Book, 1987), 11

<sup>80</sup> AI 207

<sup>81</sup> AI 203

<sup>82</sup> AI 176

philosophical reflection on the experience of wonder. The use of reason to think about these experiences is important for this way of mediation, especially because the sorts of eruptive events in nature and history described in scripture seem no longer seem to happen. Yet reasoned reflection on this original witness may mediate some recovery of the “fundamental trust” in gracious reality to which these original claims testified.<sup>83</sup> The second way of mediation is through our ordinary experience, which can be a vehicle for the disclosure of the sacred precisely in its concrete everyday-ness. Tracy wonders about the potential attractiveness of this kind of manifestation because in such contemporary situations as the uncanny experience of homelessness, the ordinary can provide a real sense of belonging to and participating in families, communities, traditions, and so forth.<sup>84</sup> Finally, there are the extraordinary experiences, in which human persons encounter their sheer finitude and face the sort of limit questions treated in *BRO*. These experiences are perhaps not so much the eruptions referred to earlier instead of the “paradigmatic” and “privileged” experiences that occur in special “places, times, events, rituals, images, [and] persons” who reveal the truth of the whole to us.<sup>85</sup> This series repeats the litany of the typical forms of expression that might attain classic status. After all, isn’t the classic essentially an extraordinary expression that manifests truth in this way?

These three ways of experiencing manifestation each communicate the sense of giftedness and wonder characteristic of manifestation. Through manifestation as one

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<sup>83</sup> *AI* 379

<sup>84</sup> *AI* 380

<sup>85</sup> *AI* 383

major form of the mediation of grace, “some pervasive yes at the heart of the universe” – the ground of fundamental trust in the graciousness of existence – is disclosed.<sup>86</sup> This manifestation of grace liberates because it frees us to trust in the meaningfulness of existence and to love in an agapic, self-donating way.<sup>87</sup> Ultimately, in the manifestation of Jesus Christ, which for Christian theology is the primary analogue for all other events of manifestation, the disclosure of grace reveals the radical ubiquity of God’s love, which inspires “theologians of manifestation” to proclaim that “All is grace.”<sup>88</sup>

### **Proclamation**

The second paradigmatic form of the mediation of grace is proclamation. Proclamation is similar to manifestation inasmuch as both are experienced as decisive events, but proclamation because it is a “word of address,” which confronts the individual who receives it. The word confrontation is intentional, because this word of address shocks, disconcerts, provokes, and judges the person who receives it.<sup>89</sup> In receiving proclamation, the “hearers of the word” are challenged to recognize not only their freedom but also their dependence and their sinfulness. In the reception of proclamation, hearers are forced to face themselves.

The main term for characterizing proclamation is “kerygmatic.” The *kerygma* refers originally to preaching or announcing good news; namely, the New Testament

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<sup>86</sup> *AI* 386

<sup>87</sup> *AI* 432

<sup>88</sup> *AI* 386. Tracy cites Friedrich Schleiermacher, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Karl Rahner, Langdon Gilkey, and John Cobb as examples of “theologians of manifestation.”

<sup>89</sup> *AI* 269

message about Jesus. Tracy makes a rough distinction between “Jesus-kerygma” and “Christ-kerygma.” The former refers to the earliest layers of apostolic witness that can be reconstructed from the New Testament, so that there is some overlap between the “Jesus-kerygma” and the “historical Jesus” that some modern thinkers have sought to uncover, but the role of *apostolic* witness in the kerygma creates a crucial if subtle distinction between them.<sup>90</sup> The “Christ-kerygma,” however, refers to the witness to the Christ event as the disclosure of God, especially as it is described in the work of “John, Paul, and early Catholicism.”<sup>91</sup> In this sense, Tracy’s use of “Christ-kerygma” refers to the primary witness to the Christian classical *event* of Jesus Christ.<sup>92</sup> According to Tracy, it is precisely this “Christ-kerygma” that is both the ground and the norm for Christian theology.<sup>93</sup>

As kerygma, proclamation is then the act of preaching. Yet this act always implies content because preaching witnesses to the decisiveness of some fundamental

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<sup>90</sup> *AI* 245 n.24. The distinctions Tracy is trying to make here are not entirely clear. He places Paul’s letters in the “Christ-kerygma” category, but scholars generally agree that the letters of Paul are the earliest texts still extant from the community centered on Jesus. “Jesus-kerygma” seems to be based on a historical-critical reconstruction of earlier sources used in Paul and the Gospels (i.e., hymns or liturgical descriptions, the episode of Jesus’ cleansing the Temple), but this does not seem to be any sort of developed or substantiated claim. This Jesus-kerygma then differs from the quest for the historical Jesus in that its aim in reconstructing earlier layers of New Testament texts is to discover earlier theological witnesses to the Christ event. It does not seem to be an attempt to reconstruct the historical figure or his socio-historical context. Tracy goes on in the referenced footnote to cite the confusion of “Jesus-kerygma” and “historical Jesus” as a problematic aspect in the Christologies of Boff, Sobrino, and Küng. Whatever may actually be the case here, one ought to resist the apparent analogy between “Jesus-kerygma” and “Christ-kerygma” with the relationship between the person of Jesus of Nazareth and the event of Jesus Christ. Ultimately, resolution of the apparent ambiguities and inconsistencies in Tracy’s terminology for this issue is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

<sup>91</sup> *AI* 270

<sup>92</sup> What is perhaps less clear is whether the references to “Christ-kerygma” refer more restrictedly to the event of Jesus Christ as it was experienced by these early communities, or whether there can still be “Christ-kerygma” today.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. *AI* 245 n. 23

event, person, or meaning.<sup>94</sup> In New Testament proclamation, this content is the belief that the person Jesus of Nazareth, “who preached, lived, ministered, was crucified and raised by God,” is the same person as the risen Christ who is experienced in the present as “the decisive disclosure of who God is and who we are.”<sup>95</sup> This basic belief unifies what in fact are rather diverse “kerygmata” in the New Testament.<sup>96</sup> The relationship, then, between preaching and the content of that preaching is integral to Tracy’s notion of proclamation. Proclamation includes both.

In this vein Tracy names proclamation as one of the classic genres of the New Testament. Certainly, in its *confessional* function, proclamation is a primary genre in the New Testament.<sup>97</sup> As such, he thinks proclamation is a relatively more adequate source for understanding the event and person of Jesus than what Tracy calls the “corrective genres” of apocalyptic and doctrine.<sup>98</sup> Proclamation in the New Testament is both the primary source for preaching about the event and person of Jesus and the fundamental norm for judging later proclamation. Tracy says scripture is “proclamation” only in a derivative sense, because prior to the witness of scripture is the event to which scripture

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<sup>94</sup> *AI* 269. Here Tracy states that kerygma “is a language of response and witness to a founding event recognized and confessed as the decisive event of the self-disclosure of God.”

<sup>95</sup> *AI* 272

<sup>96</sup> E.g., Tracy often contrasts the theologies of Paul and John as examples of this diversity. Cf. *AI* 281-287, 431.

<sup>97</sup> The others are narrative/gospel and symbol/reflective thought. Cf. *AI* 275-287. While this part of the dissertation focuses on proclamation to the relative exclusion of these other genres, this is due to the scope of the question regarding the complex of manifestation-proclamation-action as mediations of grace rather than the genre distinctions among proclamation-narrative-symbol. Tracy is clear that, as a genre, proclamation depends on these other genres (as well as apocalyptic and doctrine) precisely because “without them proclamation is ever in danger of becoming either merely abstract content or violent and authoritarian act of address” (*AI* 274). My goal in this section, however, is to investigate how the description of proclamation as a genre can illuminate our understanding of proclamation as a form of mediation of grace.

<sup>98</sup> *AI* 239, 268. Tracy is clear here that these are not unimportant or unenlightening genres, but simply that their effectiveness depends upon the three primary genres of proclamation, narrative, and symbol.

witnesses. Taking seriously the Word of God theologians of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Tracy states that proclamation “exists primarily as word-event from God,” namely, the Word made flesh in both the person and event of Jesus Christ.<sup>99</sup>

In this insight Tracy is especially under the influence of the neo-orthodox Protestant theologians of the early and mid-twentieth century, specifically Barth, Brunner, Gogarten, Bultmann, and Tillich. Each was a theologian whose professional careers were profoundly marked by the complex and ambiguous relationship that liberal German Protestantism had with its larger culture during the period from before the beginning of WWI until the end of WWII. Despite the many later disagreements among these figures, they were largely in accord on rehabilitating proclamation as a central category for understanding God’s revelation in the Word of God.<sup>100</sup> Their central concern, according to Tracy, was that the only salvation possible for human beings comes through divine address. This address is experienced as an event that is directed to all persons and that reveals both the “true godforsakenness” of all addressees and their “possible liberation” from that state.<sup>101</sup> Our salvation is dependent on this disclosure.

The character of proclamation as address underlies one of Tracy’s distinctions between proclamation and manifestation. Whereas manifestation is characterized by participation in the sacred reality that is manifested, proclamation does not enable a sense of participation in the reality that addresses us. Playing on the hermeneutical term “distanciation,” i.e. the process through which an expression is “distanced” from its

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<sup>99</sup> *AI* 273. By “Word of God theologian,” Tracy primarily has in mind Karl Barth, Rudolf Bultmann, Emil Brunner, Friedrich Gogarten, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Paul Tillich (*AI* 389, 415).

<sup>100</sup> *AI* 389

<sup>101</sup> *AI* 386

original producer, Tracy notes that in receiving the word of address from God, the self becomes distantiated from prior senses of participation.<sup>102</sup> Proclamation is “shattering, disclosive, [and] eschatological;” it reveals the distance between the divine and the self. Thus, in contrast to manifestation’s sense of participation in mystery, proclamation discloses the radical otherness and incomprehensibility of that mystery.<sup>103</sup>

Here again Tracy evokes Ricoeur’s distinction between manifestation and proclamation, once again based on the contrast between the logic of correspondences (manifestation) and the logic of limit-expressions (proclamation).<sup>104</sup> The logic of limit-expressions resists classification in accord with the five criteria of manifestation, which intimate the connection between the created cosmos and sacred reality. Ricoeur characterizes proclamation’s eruptive speech as both historical and ethical, and it challenges the manifestation of the sacred in nature because “a theology of history could not accommodate a cosmic theology.”<sup>105</sup> The limit-expressions of proclamation “bring about the rupturing of ordinary speech” through intensification.<sup>106</sup> Ricoeur says that limit-expressions intend to orient the hearer toward limit-experiences. For him, the paradigmatic limit-experience in Christian theology is the Kingdom of God. Instead of making the Kingdom of God manifest in our universe, proclamation points us to the “something more” that is experienced not only as crisis, but also as culmination.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> AI 210

<sup>103</sup> AI 212

<sup>104</sup> Ricoeur, “Manifestation and Proclamation,” 57. He also uses the distinction between seeing and hearing as a metaphor for the differences between these phenomena.

<sup>105</sup> Ricoeur, “Manifestation and Proclamation,” 56

<sup>106</sup> Ricoeur, “Manifestation and Proclamation,” 60

<sup>107</sup> Ricoeur, “Manifestation and Proclamation,” 60-61. For more on this sense of crisis, see Friedrich Gogarten, “Zwischen den Zeiten,” *Christliche Welt* 34, no. 24: 374-378.

In Ricoeur's account of the relationship between manifestation and proclamation, these two phenomena need and imply the presence of the other. Nevertheless, he tends to give some priority to proclamation, as in the statement, "the numinous is just the underlying canvas from which the word detaches itself."<sup>108</sup> Tracy regards the fundamental difference between Ricoeur and himself as based on the contrast between Ricoeur's Reformed Protestant interpretation and Tracy's Catholic reading.<sup>109</sup> Tracy subtly prioritizes manifestation as the "enveloping presupposition" of proclamation.<sup>110</sup> Tracy agrees with Ricoeur that there is some ultimate unity between word and sacrament parallel to proclamation and manifestation, but Tracy insists that the pre-verbal character of manifestation is the basis for the transformative possibilities proper to proclamation.

Such subtle disagreements over the relative importance of manifestation and proclamation, according to Tracy, suggest the more fundamental unity between them, because isolated from the other, manifestation and proclamation would devolve into caricatures of themselves. Thus, absent the kerygmatic word of address, "sacrament becomes magic, aesthetics, or even mechanics," and absent the symbolism of manifestation, proclamation becomes the "righteous rigorism of duty and obligation" and loses its capacity to move "our hearts and imagination."<sup>111</sup> Yet in the final analysis, these two phenomena are most fundamentally united in the reality of Jesus Christ. The event

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<sup>108</sup> Ricoeur, "Manifestation and Proclamation," 56. Cf. also "The sacrament, we could say, is the mutation of sacred ritual into the kerygmatic realm" (Ricoeur, "Manifestation and Proclamation," 67).

<sup>109</sup> *AI* 221-223 n. 26

<sup>110</sup> *AI* 215

<sup>111</sup> *AI* 217. Tracy is perhaps nowhere clearer on this than in his description of the theologies of Paul and John in the New Testament, in which he reads Paul as fundamentally a theology of proclamation while John is one of manifestation (*AI* 282-287).



and person of Jesus Christ is the self-manifestation of God, but as the Word made flesh this manifestation is also the primordial proclamation of God. This unity of proclamation and manifestation is perhaps most explicit in the Gospel of John.

### **Historical Action**

Of the three paradigmatic forms that mediate grace, Tracy pays the most attention to manifestation and proclamation. This seems to be due to Tracy's focus on classic texts of the Christian tradition, especially the books of the New Testament, as examples of manifestation and proclamation themselves and as witnesses to the proclamation and manifestation of the event of Jesus Christ. Yet these texts are also witnesses to the *actions* of Jesus and his disciples. In the contemporary situation, Tracy no longer regards manifestation and proclamation as adequate for Christian theology; so many theologians move away from these forms "into the realms of action and history, of performative personal, social and political praxis."<sup>112</sup> These theologians do not so much detach themselves from manifestation and proclamation, but rather take them as starting points. Using the metaphors of seeing (manifestation) and hearing (proclamation) the word, Tracy says that theologians who have turned to historical or prophetic action feel called to be "doers of the word in history."<sup>113</sup>

For Tracy, the key to historical action as a form of the mediation of grace is his notion of 'praxis.' The first use of this term occurs in *Blessed Rage for Order*, where he

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<sup>112</sup> *AI* 390. The theologians Tracy has in mind here are Johann Baptist Metz, Gustavo Gutierrez, Jürgen Moltmann, Dorothy Soelle, Carl Braaten, Rosemary Radford Ruether, and James Cone.

<sup>113</sup> *AI* 390

primarily associated it with the version of practical theology he then advocated, namely the future-oriented practical theology whose goal was “the rigorous investigation of the possibilities of *praxis*” rooted in the *historia* and *theoria* developed by historical, fundamental, and systematic theologies.<sup>114</sup> Praxis was more than practice; it meant “the critical relationship between theory and practice whereby each is dialectically influenced and transformed by the other.”<sup>115</sup> Praxis is irreducible to any particular social program precisely because it engages the theoretical work that is so often relegated to the provenance of fundamental or systematic theologies. In *BRO*, Tracy regards Metz, Moltmann, Segundo, Gutierrez, and Soelle as exemplary praxis theologians who have reformulated a neo-orthodox model of theology based on “Hegelian-Marxist praxis” instead of “the Kierkegaardian-Heideggerian sense of the individual.”<sup>116</sup> Tracy situates these theologians within the sub-discipline of practical theology working on the model of neo-orthodoxy. He avoids suggesting that they do not make meaningful or substantive contributions to conversations about theory, but he is primarily interested in the social and practical concerns these theologians have about the injustices and problems of their socio-historical situation.

In *The Analogical Imagination*, praxis remains linked to the sub-discipline of practical theology while he subtly reframes the task of practical theology. The future orientation of praxis continues in a perhaps attenuated manner, but it is oriented towards the public of society. Because Tracy describes practical theology as being particularly

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<sup>114</sup> *BRO* 240

<sup>115</sup> *BRO* 243

<sup>116</sup> *BRO* 243

concerned with “some particular social, political, cultural or pastoral movement or problematic which is argued or assumed to possess major religious import,” praxis in *AI* is focused on a specific issue rather than being concerned with a generalized notion of social engagement.<sup>117</sup> Since all theologians are situated in a specific context, in some sense all are already shaped and motivated in their work by a “situation of praxis.”

On the one hand, Tracy argues that all theology is built on lived praxis. Any theoretical work depends “on the authentic praxis of the theorist’s personally appropriated value of intellectual integrity and self-transcending commitment to the imperatives of critical rationality.”<sup>118</sup> On the other hand, praxis sublates theory; it is more than some mechanistic application of theory to practice. In light of the authentic personal commitments one makes, praxis integrates theory into itself.<sup>119</sup> In theology, this is reflected in the fact that praxis-focused theologies include and build upon the theoretical work of non-praxis theologians. To acknowledge that praxis-theologies make significant contributions to the overall field of theology means also realizing that these contributions usually depend on the praxis-theologian engaging the theoretical work of someone else within the praxis-theologian’s “situation of praxis.” The situation of praxis of individual theologians becomes a constitutive base for whatever theoretical work they undertake. This theoretical (i.e., fundamental and systematic) theology in turn provides a basis for practical theology.

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<sup>117</sup> *AI* 57

<sup>118</sup> *AI* 69

<sup>119</sup> *AI* 73

This attention to the mutual mediation of praxis and theory is most evident in his depiction of political and liberation theologies in *AI*. He understands the praxis orientation of these theologies to mean that the transformative model of truth is its primary model, so that the adequacy of any claim to truth (orthodoxy) is the measure in which it leads to right action (orthopraxis). Truth ought to be transformative in the life of the person speaking it, and so if this fails to be the case its claims are called into question.<sup>120</sup> Tracy does not eliminate the importance of truth as disclosure, but he provides a criterion by which to judge truthfulness in a balanced manner. He regards this emphasis as a corrective to the privatization in religion that resist the significant contributions theology might make to the public of society. Precisely because of the failure to live according to the transformative criterion of truth, any theology which lacks this criterion is potentially “fatal...to the proclamation and manifestation of the event of Jesus Christ.”<sup>121</sup>

It remains that Tracy’s position on the relationship between praxis theology and its claims to truth is that he tends to limit the political and liberation theologies to the field of practical theology. In so doing, he tends to undervalue the theoretical insights and gifts these approaches bring to light from the perspective of their concrete situations of praxis. For example, when Tracy claims that such theologies “represent above all a classic event in search of a classic text,” he nevertheless states as well that the “search for the classic disclosed through and by these theologies...will not end in any text...[but an]

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<sup>120</sup> *AI* 71. Tracy does go on to claim that this criterion of truth ought to be applied in all forms of theology, but he does so in the context of affirming that the claims of truth in these other theologies are sublated in the work of praxis-theologies (*AI* 73).

<sup>121</sup> *AI* 393

event of a liberating praxis.”<sup>122</sup> Despite finding the texts by Gutierrez, Metz, Segundo, *et al.* exemplary, Tracy does not regard them as classics in the genre of liberation and political theologies.

Tracy uses praxis to ground his claim that historical action is a form of the mediation of grace. The classic event that praxis-theologies pursue is a “kairotic event disclosing and transforming all.” Clearly he maintains the primacy of the future-orientation of praxis from *BRO*.<sup>123</sup> The struggle for liberation is both an ever-present demand in our contemporary situation and an eschatological hope for the coming Kingdom of God that will set all people free. This eschatological hope ought to ground the historical action demanded now.<sup>124</sup> Even though contemporary efforts cannot complete the work that needs to be done to free ourselves and others from the systemic distortions, it is important to acknowledge that they are performed in hope of some current improvement and some proleptic fulfillment. Historical action mediates grace precisely in the possibilities for liberation not only disclosed by such action but transformative of those who are undertake it. Here the encounter with grace as both gift and command frees and enables us to pursue justice and liberation in our world.

For Tracy, the three paradigmatic forms of mediation of grace (manifestation, proclamation, and action) mutually mediate one another through the whole life of the Christian tradition. We encounter grace in our daily lives in each of these forms, where sometimes one type occurs with greater emphasis than another. Yet because all three

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<sup>122</sup> *AI* 397-8

<sup>123</sup> *AI* 398

<sup>124</sup> *AI* 434

## Chapter Five

witness to the same core reality of the self-manifestation of God in the event and person of Jesus Christ, they cannot be decisively separated. Using Christological symbolism, Tracy explains that each of these mediations emphasizes a different aspect of the mission of Christ. Manifestation emphasizes the incarnation by highlighting the “immanence” of God in reality. Proclamation emphasizes the judging-healing address of Jesus in his ministry and the crucifixion as the focal judgment on humanity. Historical action emphasizes the resurrection as the eschatological promise of redemption brought about by crucified Jesus.<sup>125</sup> These three mediations depend on the incarnation-crucifixion-resurrection, symbols of any genuine Christology. To summarize, “The scope of the entire Christian symbol system, like the reality of the event of Jesus Christ which decisively elicits and empowers the whole system, is the always-already, not-yet reality of grace as manifestation, proclamation and prophetic action.”<sup>126</sup>

### *Shift in Dialogue with the Other*

As the preeminent means through which we encounter the grace disclosed in the event and person of Jesus Christ, manifestation, proclamation, and historical action lie at the heart of Tracy’s explanation of grace in *The Analogical Imagination*. These three forms of mediation are so intimately intertwined with one another that no one can adequately capture the Christian understanding of reality without the others.

Thus it comes as a surprise in *Dialogue with the Other* that Tracy shifts his focus from manifestation, proclamation, and action to the dialectic of the mystical and

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<sup>125</sup> *AI* 425-6

<sup>126</sup> *AI* 448

prophetic. This involves two aspects. First, while insisting that manifestation and proclamation are still the dialectic “at the heart of Christianity,” he feels compelled to acknowledge that the “pervasive religious dialectic of manifestation and proclamation is best construed theologically as mystical-prophetic.”<sup>127</sup> This acknowledgment coincides with Tracy’s increased involvement in interreligious dialogue following the publication of *AI*.<sup>128</sup> In *DWO*, Tracy moves away from emphasizing the role of manifestation and proclamation in the mediation of grace and explores the rhetorical strategies of mystics and prophets, since he regards the mystical and the prophetic as modes of discourse regarding disclosure of the divine Other. Some fundamental consistency remains between these two dialectics because they all aim at the disclosure of the gracious reality that grounds existence.

The second shift is that this new dialectic of mystics and prophets subsumes the distinct role of historical action in *AI*. In *DWO*, Tracy portrays his previous work as an attempt to “rethink the traditional Christian theological dialectic of sacrament and word,”

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<sup>127</sup> *DWO* 7. It remains an open question whether there is an opposition here between “religious” and “theologically.” His concentric levels of religious, theistic, and Christological as a way of describing dimensions of experience in *BRO* might be instructive here, although it would take a further hermeneutical nuance to claim that the sense of “theologically” here is congruent with the use of “theistic” in *BRO*.

<sup>128</sup> Tracy’s work in interreligious dialogue has focused on Jewish-Christian and Buddhist-Christian conversations. On the former, his main interlocutors are Arthur Cohen and Tikva Frymer-Kensky (one of his colleagues at the Divinity School). His publications in this dialogue are “The Dialogue of Jews and Christians: A Necessary Hope,” *Chicago Theological Seminary Register* 76, no. 1 (Winter 1986): 20-28; “God as Trinitarian: A Christian Response to Peter Ochs,” in *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, eds. Tikva Frymer-Kensky, David Nowak, Peter Ochs, David Sandmel, and Michael A. Signerl, 77-84 (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000).

In Buddhist-Christian dialogue, his main interlocutor is Masao Abe, although he makes frequent reference to the Kyoto School of Japanese thought on religion and philosophy. His engagement with Buddhist-Christian dialogue also seems to be influenced by efforts in this dialogue by process theologian John Cobb and Divinity School colleague Langdon Gilkey. For Tracy’s publications in this dialogue beyond the text of *DWO*, see “The Christian Understanding of Salvation-Liberation;” “Kenosis, Sunyata, and Trinity;” and “Some Aspects of the Buddhist-Christian Dialogue.”

but he seems to omit the constitutive role he assigned to action in this symbolic complex.<sup>129</sup> This apparent demotion of action is also expressed when he states that manifestation-proclamation is a dialectic. It seems that the missing third member is now thought to be better construed in terms of the dialectic of the mystical-prophetic. It is not that there is no place for action in Tracy's new schematization, but only that in *DWO* he displaces its distinct role in the mediation of grace into the terms of a dialectic.

### **The Mystical**

In the move to the dialectic of mystical-prophetic, the mystical assumes the role previously played by manifestation. Tracy does not completely drop the term "manifestation," particularly in *DWO*'s chapter on Mircea Eliade. Here Tracy claims that truth in religion is primarily that of manifestation, not of correspondence or adequation, or even of praxis. Tracy resumes his account of the classic as the expression through which such manifestation takes place, and again he highlights the influence of Eliade on his own development of the classic.<sup>130</sup> These religious expressions make manifest the Other, whether as "Being, the cosmos, [or] the sacred that both reveals and withdraws itself in all the religions."<sup>131</sup> Manifestation both reveals and conceals the reality that is disclosed in any given expression.

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<sup>129</sup> *DWO* 6

<sup>130</sup> *DWO* 57

<sup>131</sup> *DWO* 59



If the form of truth as manifestation is mainly activated in religion, then Tracy uses a hermeneutic approach to engage the question of mysticism.<sup>132</sup> Hermeneutics means not so much a theory of interpretation as the actual practice of interpreting these disclosures. Mysticism, Tracy argues, is characterized by a series of common traits. The first is what he calls “basic grammar,” by which the mystic seeks to break reality down into basic components in order to understand the relationships among them.<sup>133</sup> In the Christian mystics, these key components are God, the world, and the soul, which are the hermeneutical keys through which the mystic interprets scripture. This is characteristic of each of the Western mystical traditions Tracy identifies, especially as seen in the “love-mystics”<sup>134</sup> and the apophatic mystics.<sup>135</sup> This structural trait is essentially apophatic precisely because it strips away the accidental layers of reality in order to understand the relationships at the heart of reality.

Yet for the apophatic mystics, this structural trait makes way for a further process of negation, in which the mystic sees these at first distinct components as dissolving into one another, undermining the structure of the first move.<sup>136</sup> Tracy seems to read this second apophatic step as clearing space for the Other to speak, insofar as the apophatic mystics will then often finally “adopt a prophetic rhetoric and proclaim the word of the Other.”<sup>137</sup> The mystics’ coming to grips with the structure of reality in “its radically de-

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<sup>132</sup> *DWO* 43

<sup>133</sup> *DWO* 24

<sup>134</sup> E.g., Bernard of Clairvaux, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, John the Evangelist

<sup>135</sup> E.g., Meister Eckhart, Pseudo Dionysius. In the chapter cited here, Tracy actually reads Jacques Lacan as an apophatic mystic in relation to Tracy’s reading of Sigmund Freud as a prophet.

<sup>136</sup> *DWO* 25

<sup>137</sup> *DWO* 26

structuring actuality” enables them to disclose the truths the Other wishes to disclose. In effect, the mystic wishes to unsay whatever the prophet has said as well as to say more than the prophet did.<sup>138</sup>

### **Prophetic**

As Tracy begins to talk about manifestation in terms of the mystical, so too did he speak about proclamation in terms of the prophetic. The prophet discloses the Other through speech, but the prophet is effectively an instrument in this process. Prophetic speech is direct speech from the Other that takes shape in the words of the prophet. The prophetic words are deliberately jarring, “disrupt[ing] consciousness, actions, deliberations” both in those who hear the prophets and in the prophets themselves.<sup>139</sup> These words disturb not only because they come from the Other through the prophet, but because they strike the receivers in their own selves. It is precisely this sense of prophetic rhetoric as disturbing word of address where Tracy finds the link to his previous depictions of proclamation. There is still the possibility of healing by this word of address, although Tracy now speaks of it more as “continuous convalescence” than as once-and-for-all healing.<sup>140</sup> Yet, even with this caution, Tracy is adamant that the role of the prophet is not to deliver consolation but challenge and judgment. Despite this challenge, prophetic rhetoric can also be persuasive, enabling the hearer of the prophet to recognize the truth in the words of the Other in the life of the recipients.

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<sup>138</sup> *DWO* 22

<sup>139</sup> *DWO* 17-8

<sup>140</sup> *DWO* 18

In *Dialogue with the Other*, the emphasis previously given to manifestation is now placed on mysticism. In this text, Tracy wants to retrieve the prophetic element of the Christian tradition for the contemporary age by subtly accentuating the prophetic dimension of the three Abrahamic religions through strategic placement of his study of prophecy in the text. Thus, the discussion of prophetic rhetoric comes before mystical rhetoric partly because of investigating whether or not Lacan (the mystic) interprets Freud (the prophet) adequately. This has the general effect of proposing mystical rhetoric as basically a response to prophetic rhetoric. Even as the prophetic and mystical are dialectically related to one another, monotheistic traditions ascribe a certain priority to the prophetic.

Towards the end of the text, Tracy calls for a return to prophetic approaches to the Christian tradition. His work with both Jewish-Christian and Buddhist-Christian dialogues led him to recognize meaningful parallels in the understanding of mystics and prophets among these traditions. He is persuaded of the need to de-emphasize “the ‘no-self’ of Buddhism and the ‘death of the subject’ of post-modern thought.”<sup>141</sup> Tracy becomes convinced that contemporary Christian theology needs to retrieve the image of the prophet as the responsible human agent who works to correct present injustices.

### **Action**

In *DWO*, the role of historical action as it appears in *AI* is effectively included under the purview of the prophetic. Prophetic rhetoric emphasizes “the notion of

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<sup>141</sup> *DWO* 104

freedom as responsible agency,” to which all are called and empowered by the Other who speaks through the prophet.<sup>142</sup> He is insistent on the Christian understanding of freedom in the struggle for justice, which stresses the responsibility of human persons and grounds their freedom in the freedom of Jesus Christ, so that the ethical demand for human action is balanced against the rejection of modernity’s putative freedom of the autonomous ego. As a Christian theologian, Tracy holds that our freedom cannot be understood apart from the Other’s gift of that freedom accompanied by the command to use that freedom well. The prophet typically calls upon agents particularly to work with and for the marginalized and oppressed; and so Tracy connects the prophetic to liberation, political, and feminist theologies which require theology to take account of “the concrete histories of suffering and oppression” that are so often ignored by “mainstream” theologies.<sup>143</sup>

Besides the prophetic involvement in action, the mystic, and particularly the love-mystic, is strongly engaged in the life of action to which people are called. For Tracy, the mystical reading of the Gospel of John illuminates the self-manifestation of God in Jesus as “a meditative self empowered and commanded to love.”<sup>144</sup> The mystic’s responsible agency, however, is characteristically motivated by love, which is disclosed most profoundly in the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ. Without such a love, the work of the responsible agent risks becoming sanctimonious and self-righteous.

Therefore, both the prophet and the mystic disclose a call to responsible agency. Tracy leaves the difference between the two roles seriously underdeveloped. The clearest

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<sup>142</sup> *DWO* 117

<sup>143</sup> *DWO* 119

<sup>144</sup> *DWO* 117

distinction he brings to bear is that between the political/justice orientation of the prophet and the mystic's insistence on genuine love as the source of this pursuit. Perhaps the weakness of this distinction is largely attributable to a statement early in the text of *DWO* that what really interests him in the mystical-prophetic is the "hyphen" between them.<sup>145</sup> His point of course is that the mystical and prophetic need each other because it is only with this balance of love and justice that a complete understanding of Christian freedom is possible. This freedom is a *call* to freedom, received as both gift and command through the grace of God.<sup>146</sup>

The mystical-prophetic dialectic, with its attendant demand for the responsible agency of the human person, integrates the role of manifestation, proclamation, and historical action play in the mediation of grace according to Tracy's earlier theology. Here, the self-manifestation of God in Jesus Christ is decisive precisely because in Jesus we learn both who God is and who we are supposed to be. Jesus is fully human, not only in the sense that nothing human is lacking in Jesus, but that Jesus represents what we are to become in order to be fully human ourselves. In the event and person of Jesus Christ, then, we see grace not only as the command to be like Jesus – to love, to pursue justice, to serve the marginalized and oppressed – and as the gift of enabling us to be like Jesus. Through the mystical-prophetic, and the significance of that hyphen, we are challenged and empowered to genuinely graced discipleship.

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<sup>145</sup> *DWO* 6

<sup>146</sup> *DWO* 112

## **Salvation, Liberation, and Transformation**

The preceding section looked at the ways, according to Tracy, human persons encounter grace in their lived experience. The triad of mediations described as manifestation, proclamation, and historical action on the one hand and the dialectic of the mystical and the prophetic that leads to a retrieval of responsible selfhood on the other comprise the complex sets of symbols which Tracy employs to describe the encounter with grace; they are all rooted in God's revelation of God's self in the event and person of Jesus Christ, who is the unifying and decisive disclosure of God's grace in creation.

In recalling the earlier discussion of the nature-grace polarity and the sin-grace dialectic, it is important to point out that while Tracy contends that the former is more fundamental to theological anthropology, the latter is often his primary focus in discussing grace. The corrupting character of sin in relation to both finitude (as in the rejection of human finitude) and relationality (as in the systemic distortions that plague and condition our relations with one another, with creation, and with God) causes sin to be an ever-present problem for authentic human living. As I argued in Chapter Four, Tracy's primary metaphor for sin is distortion, more explicitly unconscious systemic distortion. This emphasizes a social interpretation of inherited sin as a way of accounting for the overall context of human living rather than only the corruption of individual persons.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Cf. *DWO* 119-20, where he writes that the mystical-prophetic view retrieves "the social systemic expression of sin over individual sins" as well as the "concrete praxis of discipleship in and for the oppressed."

## Chapter Five

In the case of grace, Tracy's primary metaphor for the effects of grace in our lives is salvation. For Tracy, salvation is an experience of "releasement" from a situation of evil.<sup>148</sup> The breadth of this description suggests that salvation includes not only some final and definitive deliverance of humankind from sin but also all the smaller "salvific" experiences of daily life. For instance, someone who has been marginalized by one's community because of the social stigmas associated with homelessness or mental illness might experience releasement from this situation of evil if the community rejects the stigma and restores that person to community. Whatever the situation might be – guilt, anxiety, bondage – the persons released from it interpret that releasement as salvific.<sup>149</sup> Their understanding of what they have undergone is that of being freed from the evil situation.

In addition, the person is not only free from the situation but is freed *to* something as well. For Tracy, the Christian view of freedom rests on the claim that sinful human freedom is grounded in Christ, and so positively, the salvific experience of grace also frees one to love. This does not mean that one now has an option to love that one may choose to ignore; rather, one is tasked, commanded, and fundamentally enabled to love. The releasement from sin is therefore also a releasement to love. Tracy's frequent references to grace as gift and command, gift and task, even gift and threat, all point to the twofold aspect of salvation.

For Tracy, the empowerment to love is the clearest effect of grace in our lives. Tracy treats manifestation, proclamation, and historical actions as the paradigmatic ways

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<sup>148</sup> Tracy, "Saving from Evil," 107

<sup>149</sup> Tracy, "Saving from Evil," 108

in which grace is mediated to us, but he depicts love as “the concrete experiential form of grace.”<sup>150</sup> All mediations of grace are examples of God’s love for us, which we are in turn gifted and commanded to share with others. Grace experienced as love “displaces ‘our hearts of stone with hearts of flesh’” and releases us from the constant turning inward upon oneself proper to the *curvatus in se*, the unconscious systemic distortion that pervades our own individual corruptions. This opens us up to love each other and the Other that is God. Tracy says this heals both our authentic *eros* for the divine and transforms it by divine *agape*.<sup>151</sup> Our desire for God and for the other becomes one with the desire to serve God and the other.<sup>152</sup>

The empowerment to love carries with it the command to work for the liberation of others. Liberation is another term Tracy often invokes in speaking about grace, and it is related to the attempts to correct concrete social evils. He acknowledges the situations of oppression and marginalization that liberation theologians have so effectively brought to the forefront of theological reflection, and he agrees that we are called to work to remedy the systemic and other causes that lead to and sustain these situations. Yet he often warns that the Christian view of salvation and liberation cannot be reduced to or limited to the attempts to heal these particular wounds: “Christian salvation is not exhausted by any program of political liberation, to be sure, but Christian salvation, rightly understood, cannot be divorced from the struggle for total human liberation—

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<sup>150</sup> ONP 100

<sup>151</sup> ONP 103

<sup>152</sup> Cf. Karl Rahner, “Reflections on the Unity of the Love of Neighbor and the Love of God,” in *Theological Investigations vol. 6* (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1969), 231-249



individual, social, political, and religious.”<sup>153</sup> Such efforts may be salvific, and individuals caught in such situations may experience release. Yet, the breadth of Tracy’s view of salvation excludes such experiences from fully comprehending the whole meaning of salvation.

The work of social and political liberation demands the efforts of individuals who have experienced these encounters with grace. Tracy typically reserves the term “transformation” to name the experience of grace through which the individual person is re-oriented from self-centeredness and towards other- (or Other-) centeredness.<sup>154</sup> He sees the call for transformation especially in the commandment to love one’s neighbor as oneself, which he describes as “a command to a life at the limits.”<sup>155</sup> This use of limit language explicates those situations where one comes into contact with the gracious ground of existence by showing a life of genuine neighbor-love is a privileged way of experiencing the divine. Yet Tracy claims that this command is not solely “command,” but that it is connected to the ability of the individual to respond: “the Christian is ennobled, empowered, gifted, graced to hear and fulfill that command.”<sup>156</sup>

Such a transformation in oneself does not originate with the self but rather with the divine reality, as the free gift from God, without our deserving or demanding, and it comes to us through our experience of the event of Jesus Christ.<sup>157</sup> Moreover, this

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<sup>153</sup> *PA* 104; cf. Tracy, “Saving from Evil,” 113: “Yet again, Christian salvation, as grounded in God as origin and goal of all human actions, cannot be achieved through the sole use of some new emancipatory method or struggle, but at the same time must be committed to and involved in that struggle.”

<sup>154</sup> *PA* 89-90

<sup>155</sup> *ONP* 98

<sup>156</sup> *ONP* 98

<sup>157</sup> Tracy, “Saving from Evil,” 109; cf. *PA* 89-90

initiative actualizes the revelatory power evident in manifestation, proclamation, and historical action. For Tracy, if theological anthropology accounts for the pervasiveness of sin in human existence, it does not do so at the expense of hope in the saving power of grace. Despite the fundamental ambiguity that plagues all human activity, Tracy believes in “the ultimate triumph of grace in the human spirit and history.”<sup>158</sup> Rooted in the divine initiative of love for us, grace finally not only perfects nature but heals all the distortions of sin that plague our nature.

## Freedom

The significance of transformation and liberation in Tracy’s understanding of grace culminates in the role of freedom in his theological anthropology. This is true for three reasons. First, freedom is the aspect of Tracy’s theology where the influence of Lonergan, Ricoeur, and Rahner is most evident. Second, freedom is really the locus where Tracy’s four anthropological constants intersect. Finitude, relationality, sin, and grace are all implicated in his view of freedom. Third, freedom is his most apt way of describing what the human person is called to become.

Early in Tracy’s career, the influence of Lonergan’s understanding of freedom was quite clear. In *The Achievement of Bernard Lonergan*, Tracy describes Lonergan’s view of freedom as “the actuation of one’s rational self-consciousness” that “emerges from ordered horizon of intelligence, reason and decision.”<sup>159</sup> Freedom in this sense is focused on the freedom in the life of the individual as a personal capacity. As the

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<sup>158</sup> *ONP* 98

<sup>159</sup> *ABL* 168

distinguishing characteristic of Lonergan's "fourth level," freedom includes the possibility that one might not necessarily follow up on the results of the "insights, judgments, and decisions already achieved" through one's decision-making process. Thus there is a difference between one's "hypothetical effective freedom," meaning what one might actually do given the fulfillment of all necessary conditions for enacting that freedom (e.g., sufficient time for reflection, the absence of external constraints), and one's "proximate effective freedom," meaning what one actually does in a given instance.<sup>160</sup> Tracy describes this difference as "man's moral impotence," in distinction from human sinfulness. Sinfulness, in this Lonerganian understanding of freedom, refers to the "recognition of the need for liberation from man's inability to sustain his development," to continue in self-transcendence and in the enactment of one's effective freedom.<sup>161</sup> For Tracy, the import of this Lonerganian understanding of freedom is that human beings are in fact free, that freedom is the actualization of one's insight, judgments, and decisions, and that this freedom is constrained both by external factors beyond one's control and by the "reign of sin" in one's life.

While Tracy's goal in *ABL* was to exposit Lonergan's theology, Lonergan's sense of freedom definitely shaped Tracy's early work on freedom, self-transcendence, and liberation. For example, in *Blessed Rage for Order*, Tracy considers self-transcendence in the context of the limit-questions of science.<sup>162</sup> He argued that those who pursue "some ideal of what is truly good" rather than their own self-interest are participating in

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<sup>160</sup> *ABL* 168

<sup>161</sup> *ABL* 177

<sup>162</sup> *BRO* 96-100

“real, moral, existential, and communal self-transcendence.”<sup>163</sup> He characterizes authentic human living as pursuing Lonergan’s transcendental imperatives<sup>164</sup> and being open to a continued process of self-transcendence.

Tracy appropriates the idea of self-transcendence largely through the language of “disclosing genuine possibilities” for the human person. In *BRO*, this phrasing is situated in the context of the need for narratives and symbols beyond “conceptual analysis” in understanding human existence.<sup>165</sup> Through narrative and symbol, the human person can encounter potentially transformative understandings of how one is called to be human.<sup>166</sup> This is most fundamentally true in the case of Jesus Christ; attending to the narratives of Jesus’ life in the Gospels can disclose to the human person “real human possibilities for genuine relationship to God.”<sup>167</sup> Encounters with these new possibilities for human existence can challenge the person towards continued self-transcendence.

In addition to Lonergan, the influence of Paul Ricoeur is also clearly present in Tracy’s early formulation of freedom. Drawing on Ricoeur’s work in the *Freedom and Nature* trilogy, Tracy relates freedom to the possibility of sin. While recognizing that fallibility, meaning the *possibility* of erring, is part of the freedom and nature of being human, he argues against the necessity of committing error. Since fallibility refers to the possibility of error, it then follows for both Ricoeur and Tracy that it is possible (but not

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<sup>163</sup> *BRO* 97

<sup>164</sup> *BRO* 96. The transcendental imperatives are “be attentive, be intelligent, be reasonable, be responsible, develop, and, if necessary, change.”

<sup>165</sup> *BRO* 205-211

<sup>166</sup> *BRO* 208

<sup>167</sup> *BRO* 218

necessary) for human beings to commit evil and sin.<sup>168</sup> Human freedom on its own explains neither the fact of evil nor its inevitability, but freedom is one of the conditions of possibility for sin in the world.

While the influence of Lonergan and Ricoeur is still quite strong in *BRO*, this text also marks the beginning of the central role of “liberation” in Tracy’s understanding of freedom. In the index of *BRO*, under the heading for “freedom” it simply says “See Liberation.”<sup>169</sup> His evaluation of theologies of praxis at this time highlights their rejection of individualism and their advocacy for a more contemporary, social model for humanity.<sup>170</sup> It is through theologians like Gutierrez, Metz, and Soelle that “one witnesses, above all, a retrieval of the Jewish and Christian eschatological symbols as symbols of societal, political, and religious liberation.”<sup>171</sup> By rooting his understanding of freedom in his understanding of liberation, Tracy intimately links the two and orients freedom towards not only one’s personal releasement from bondage but toward the emancipation of human beings more broadly. Looking back on the rampant development of political, liberation, and feminist theologies in the 1970’s and 80’s, Tracy later claims that the “insistence on political, economic, and cultural freedom in these theologies has considerably revised any residual purely ‘private’ or individualistic understandings of the self and its freedom.”<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> *BRO* 211-2

<sup>169</sup> *BRO* 265

<sup>170</sup> *BRO* 243-4

<sup>171</sup> *BRO* 243

<sup>172</sup> Tracy, “Freedom, the Self, and the Other,” 47. Cf. *DWO* 111.

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In *The Analogical Imagination*, Tracy sustains the connection between freedom and liberation by casting freedom in terms of love. Opposing “sentimentalized notions of love” to the visceral reality of those people are called to love, Tracy claims that “love as a freedom for the other” includes all the difficult ways of loving that Jesus called for: love of outcasts, love of enemies, love of one’s persecutors.<sup>173</sup> The freedom that Christians have then is expressed as “loyalty” to “the oppressed, the alienated, and the marginalized.”<sup>174</sup> Tracy conceives of freedom as the commitment to loving those whom God loves, thus tying freedom to human responsibility.

In describing freedom as “a gift to the self-transcending self,” Tracy connects freedom to his sense of grace being received as both gift and command.<sup>175</sup> The command element relates to the human person as responsible for these others whom one is called to love. The self “is a free and responsible individual” who bears “responsibility as a self to all reality.”<sup>176</sup> Responsibility is construed here as a relational concept, meaning that the responsibility of the self is always situated in the context of the self’s interconnections with other persons, structures, the wider cosmos, and God.<sup>177</sup> Freedom therefore cannot be conceived in terms of individual autonomy because freedom is relational and intimately connected to one’s love for reality broadly construed.

While his references to freedom in *Plurality and Ambiguity* are brief, here again Tracy maintains the relational focus of freedom. He challenges the modern conception of

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<sup>173</sup> *AI* 330

<sup>174</sup> *AI* 392

<sup>175</sup> *AI* 433

<sup>176</sup> *AI* 256, 257

<sup>177</sup> *AI* 256

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the autonomous ego and contrasts it with an “authentic freedom” that is “related to nature, history, others, and even now the transformed self.”<sup>178</sup> Human beings are still called to self-transcendence, which is described in *PA* as turning “from self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness.”<sup>179</sup> Through their focus on Ultimate Reality, religions disclose authentic possibilities to the human person in the sense that they can enable one to resist selfishness, canniness, or the desire for mastery of others.<sup>180</sup> The very meaning of being a human person is tied to this call to be a relational self that loves others as genuine others.

Tracy’s understanding of human freedom ultimately crystallizes in the terminology of the Christian as a “responsible agent.”<sup>181</sup> The language of responsible agency ties together the command that the Christian be responsible to the wider reality of which one is a part as well as the conviction that the human person has “sufficient freedom” in order to be capable of responsibility.<sup>182</sup> The Christian as responsible agent becomes one of three “crucial facts” in the intra-Christian debates about the human person:

[F]irst, there is meaning to the word *freedom* for the Christian insofar as that word refers to some notion of personal agency and some sense of personal responsibility; second, the ground of that freedom, as Paul insisted, is, for the Christian, Jesus Christ; and third, the center of that freedom is the kind of agent disclosed by the narratives on the singular agency of this Jesus as the Christ.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> *PA* 90

<sup>179</sup> *PA* 89

<sup>180</sup> *PA* 84, 107

<sup>181</sup> Tracy, “Freedom, the Self, and the Other,” 47; *DWO* 117; *ONP* 54

<sup>182</sup> Tracy, “Freedom, the Self, and the Other,” 50

<sup>183</sup> Tracy, “Freedom, the Self, and the Other,” 51. Cf. *DWO* 115

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Christian freedom therefore means that the human person has the possibility of being responsible, that this freedom is a gracious gift rooted in the event and person of Jesus Christ, and that the genuinely new possibilities for authentic existence disclosed by the event and person of Jesus Christ exemplify the lives that human beings are called and enabled to live. The Christian's experience of transformation or liberation due to the encounter with Christ's grace shows the self both how one ought to live and that one is empowered to live that way.<sup>184</sup> The dual nature of grace as gift and threat thus becomes the basis for Tracy's language of "responsible agency."

Freedom is, finally, the theme through which Tracy's four anthropological constants are most clearly connected. As finite beings, humans do not have limitless capacities for enacting their responsible agency. Rather, the "fragile, finite, gifted, free self" is subject to a wide range of "orientating and disorienting...liberating and distorting" factors and constraints that shape and limit the exercise of one's freedom. Freedom is relational precisely because responsible agency includes one's responsibility to all of reality, to other persons, and to "the God of history."<sup>185</sup> A free self is fundamentally a relational self:

a self who is a free and responsible individual, who recognizes the intrinsic relations of that event of individuality to a particular tradition and society, to other selves (interpersonal), to the structural realities of society, culture, politics and history; a self whose very selfhood is concretely actual only by the partial determination by, a partial freedom from, these encompassing structures; a self internally related to the reality of the cosmos which encompasses all selves, structures and history; and, above all, a self internally related to the reality of the

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<sup>184</sup> Tracy, "Freedom, the Self, and the Other," 48

<sup>185</sup> *ONP* 54



whole now both disclosed and concealed as like a who—a living, empowering and commanding reality, a judging, healing, loving God.<sup>186</sup>

In terms of sinfulness, Tracy argues that personal sins and habitual sins are both results of human freedom. While not necessary choices, human sinfulness more broadly (represented in Tracy's thought by inherited sin and unconscious systemic distortion) means that human beings will inevitably choose sin. And while inherited sin is not itself a conscious free choice by the individual or community, the way in which it shapes one's choices means that human sinfulness is a constraining factor on one's exercise of freedom. Finally, grace not only heals the human person of the sinfulness that wrongly limits one's freedom, but it is more basically the source of human freedom itself. Jesus Christ is the ground of human freedom, and so it is through the grace of Christ that the human person is gifted and commanded to live a life of responsible agency.

## Conclusion

This chapter has sought to explain the role of grace in Tracy's anthropology. Among Tracy's few explicit statements about anthropology is his insistence that an understanding of the relationship between nature and grace is fundamental to a Catholic theological anthropology. Even so, most of his elaborations of grace regard the dialectic of sin and grace. Through my examination of Tracy's theology of grace, it remains clear that both dynamics play important roles in his work. Grace is a divine initiative that Christians claim is disclosed in Jesus Christ. Through his classic terms of "event" and

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<sup>186</sup> *AI* 256

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“person,” Tracy delineates this disclosure by distinguishing, not separating, the historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth and the Christian community’s experience of this person as the self-manifestation of God in the past, present, and future.

Now, two millennia removed from the original encounter with this person, we still experience grace through what Tracy in his early work called the paradigmatic mediations of manifestation, proclamation, and historical action. In his later work, Tracy sought to improve his thematization of these mediations, opting for the dialectic of the mystical and prophetic. Yet, in either exposition he intends to communicate the profound experience of grace as both gift and command. Indeed, it is the language of gift and command (and his variations on the theme) that perhaps epitomizes Tracy’s understanding of grace. The healing and judging experience of grace in its various mediations is never just a release from sin and distortion, but an empowerment to become what God intended human beings to be. Grace is what empowers human freedom and enables the self to be a free agent, responsible to the self, the neighbor, the world, and God. As finite and relational creatures, human beings are called to love and to serve one another and God. They are called, in effect, to be human in the way Christ was human. Grace does not just heal people of sin; it perfects and enables them to love the way human beings are intended to.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **TRACY’S ANTHROPOLOGY: TOWARD A PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT**

The goal of this dissertation has been to elucidate the theological anthropology of David Tracy through a close reading of his extensive body of work. His references to theological anthropology have typically been offhand and infrequent, yet his descriptions of limits, interpretation, tradition, method, distortion, grace, freedom, and several other key concepts have demonstrated that a complex and implicit understanding of the human underpins his theology. A close reading of his use of these concepts yields a more developed understanding of his theological anthropology.

Since Tracy’s anthropology is more implicit than explicit, this dissertation has proposed four “anthropological constants” as a heuristic for investigating his theological anthropology. As noted in the Introduction, these constants are my own framework for analyzing Tracy; they were not originally articulated by him. Nevertheless, taking a cue from Schillebeeckx’s work in *Christ*, which advocated for “anthropological constants” (permanent features of human existence even though their concrete particulars depend on the particular context in which they are instantiated), I proposed the constants of finitude, relationality, sin, and grace as a framework for analyzing Tracy’s anthropology. The scope of this investigation focused on his published writings from 1968 through 2011. While his terminology and even certain basic ideas would change, the regularity with

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which these four constants recur in his writings suggested they could be useful hermeneutical keys for elucidating his anthropology.

The previous chapters have offered genealogical interpretations of method, finitude, relationality, sin, and grace in Tracy's theology. They have looked at the way his thought has developed and at those who have been his key theological and philosophical influences. In particular, I have argued that Tracy's distinction between the methods of fundamental and systematic theologies could prove helpful in understanding how the four anthropological constants are related to one another.

This concluding chapter offers a critical assessment of Tracy's anthropology. This assessment will proceed in three parts. First, it will discuss the contributions that Tracy's anthropology makes to contemporary discussions in theological anthropology and to the field of theology more generally. Second, it will offer a critique of Tracy's anthropology. Here the focus will be on important omissions in his anthropology and on his use of context as constitutive of human existence. The third part looks at some challenges for theological anthropology that might provide a fruitful and productive conversation for further development of his theological anthropology.

### **Tracy's Contributions**

Assessing Tracy's contributions to the field of theological anthropology requires some qualification of what is meant by "contribution." Because his working anthropology has been implicit, Tracy's anthropology has not been particularly influential. Examinations of Tracy's anthropology are few, and those that do exist are

problematic.<sup>1</sup> Because much of Tracy's work has been devoted to method, hermeneutics, and public theology, not many theologians have explicitly engaged his anthropology.

Moreover, Tracy is clearly drawing on a very diverse range of interlocutors. His work on method, hermeneutics, and public theology appropriates and synthesizes the work of many figures, but it also affords him the opportunity to make a creative and original impact on theology. The lack of attention to his anthropology has overlooked the ways in which it too is a well-woven synthesis of the work of several major figures that offers productive insights for theological anthropology.

Given this situation, what might one conclude about what his anthropology and what might be beneficial for other theologians to appropriate? In this light, Tracy makes two key contributions: (1) his developmental and conversational approach to anthropology and (2) the interrelationship between his theological method and anthropology, which yields the insight that theological method assumes an anthropology and that an implicit anthropology is best examined through an analysis of theological method.

The developmental and conversational approach to anthropology refers to how Tracy's theological project is best understood as an *ongoing* project rather than a static achievement. As his thought has developed, he has demonstrated an openness to changing previous formulations in favor of newer or more compelling ones.<sup>2</sup> Because he views theology as a continuing conversation, he is open to reformulating his own work

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<sup>1</sup> See 11-16 of the introduction for the issues with the work of S. Alan Ray and Dwight Hopkins.

<sup>2</sup> E.g., "common human experience" becoming "the contemporary situation," "the whole" becoming "Ultimate Reality."

and to changing his mind when warranted. Thus the ideas of development and conversation are intertwined, since it is through the process of conversation that his thought develops.

This does not mean that Tracy is unwilling to take stands or vacillates in his theology. He upholds the ethical values that he outlines in his discussion of the three publics and the three sub-disciplines of theology. Throughout his work, he maintains a commitment to open and honest critical inquiry, pursuing truth even when it challenges his previous stances. He remains committed to creative fidelity with his faith community of Roman Catholicism, even when fidelity might occasionally manifest itself as “loyal dissent.” Finally, he continues to encourage involvement in situations of praxis in the form of his support for so-called “contextual” theologies (e.g., feminist, liberation, and political theologies). Through these basic commitments Tracy maintains his open and conversational approach to theology.

The four anthropological constants in Tracy’s anthropology point to concerns that persist throughout his career. While their concrete formulations, the topics through which he presents them, and the conversation partners he engages change, each of the four constants has a continuous presence in some fashion throughout his theological corpus. This developmental and conversational approach is driven largely by Tracy’s participation in wider circles of discourse. While Rahner, Lonergan, and Ricoeur clearly have been significant influences, Tracy’s work has been marked by many other conversation partners, such as Ogden, Hartshorne, and Tillich.

Lastly, by pursuing a conversational approach that retains key principles and ideas without rigidly enforcing particular formulations, Tracy has been able to present a more dynamic understanding of the human person. He has described nature-grace as the fundamental polarity at stake in theological anthropology and has largely avoided talking about human nature as a category. As presented in Chapter Five, Tracy's treatment of nature is constituted by the constants of finitude and relationality. He does not focus on a particular understanding of "nature," nor does he regard nature as static and unchanging. Like Schillebeeckx, Tracy resists a "totalitarian conception" of the human person that ignores the various ways context co-determines one's existence. By means of the anthropological constants of finitude and relationality, Tracy's anthropology can be seen as an ongoing conversation with key features of human existence without viewing these features as rigid. These characteristics of humans are incarnated in different times and places. Tracy's understanding of what it means to be human attends to the importance of differing contexts while still advocating for enduring characteristics of human existence.

Tracy's second major contribution consists in the close relationship between his theological method and his anthropology. As has been shown, he draws on the previous efforts of Lonergan to base the eight functional specialties of his general empirical method on the four levels of conscious intentionality. While Lonergan explicitly grounded his method on his anthropology, Tracy does so only implicitly. Relating method to anthropology yields helpful insights about the project of relating fundamental and systematic sub-disciplines of theology.

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The connection Tracy draws between method and anthropology is structured differently from Lonergan's approach. Tracy does not articulate an anthropology and then unfold a method based on it. Rather, he makes a claim about the types of commitments theologians hold and articulates a method built on them. One discovers Tracy's anthropological assumptions by looking at how his theological method develops. The most notable example is his description of the pole of "common human experience" in the context of explaining his method of critical correlation in *BRO*. His articulation of the "limit-to" and "limit-of" in human experience provides the earliest formulations of his understanding of finitude and relationality. A second example occurs in his discussion of conversation as the model for hermeneutics, in which he proposes an understanding of human persons as engaged in conversation with the other. Although these conversations are at times marked by distortions, they offer genuinely new possibilities for the development of the self. Thus, Tracy's method is a major source of his anthropology. At the same time, since his method is articulated without an *explicit* anthropology, he assigns a certain priority of method over anthropology.

Since most of Tracy's work has been in fundamental, rather than systematic, theology, his work expends tremendous energy on the appropriate warrants, evidence, criteria, and modes of argument in theology. Thus, outlining a theological method fits well within the sub-discipline of fundamental theology. However, because it concerns a particular faith tradition's reinterpretation of what it means to be human in light of that tradition's contemporary context, theological anthropology is usually a locus in systematic theology.



However, as the treatment of Tracy's four anthropological constants in this dissertation has indicated, theological anthropology is not only a systematic endeavor. Fundamental theology's focus on how arguments are made is inseparable from its interest in interdisciplinary approaches to what it means to be human. This question is not the exclusive concern of theology; it is a field of academic inquiry in which disciplines as diverse as biology, sociology, economics, and theology can ask and answer questions about a particular phenomenon held in common. A robust theological anthropology must take account of the insights of other disciplines in addition to the interpretations of one's religious tradition. As this dissertation has shown, finitude and relationality are "fundamental" constants because they are more compatible to interdisciplinary approaches to what it means to be human. While Tracy draws primarily on the discipline of philosophy in his work, he also engages psychology, art, and sociology. His focus on relationships with the "other" draws heavily on liberation theologians.<sup>3</sup> Through their work he engages postcolonial and subaltern studies as well. Tracy plainly engages fields beyond theology in his understanding of human existence, and so it is clear that he does not consider theological anthropology to be only a "systematic" endeavor.

### **Critiques of Tracy's Anthropology**

Despite the valuable aspects of Tracy's theological anthropology, there are three particular areas that deserve more focused treatment in a robust theological anthropology: (1) his lack of engagement with traditional teaching on the *imago Dei*, (2) the limited

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<sup>3</sup> Especially Gustavo Gutierrez; see Chapter Five, 268-9.

references to human corporeality, and (3) the abstract way in which he uses “context” and “situation.”

As Chapter One explained, the *imago Dei* is the Christian claim that human beings are created in the image and likeness of God.<sup>4</sup> This doctrine has traditionally been central to Christian interpretations of what it means to be human. It describes the human as *created*, and it describes that creation as being intimately related to God in such a way that humans are distinct from the rest of creation.<sup>5</sup> The *imago* is therefore key to understanding the divine-human relationship. Moreover, the status of the *imago* in relation to original sin was one of the contested issues between Catholic and Protestant theologians during and after the Reformation. Thus it seems that attention to the *imago* would be a key feature in one’s theological anthropology.

However, references to the *imago Dei* are rare in Tracy’s work. The only explicit mention of it occurs toward the end of *Plurality and Ambiguity*. There Tracy claims that hope arises from one’s belief in a gracious Ultimate Reality. Anyone who acts on that hope “acts in a manner faintly suggestive of the reality and power of that God in whose image human beings were formed to resist, to think, and to act.”<sup>6</sup> Of the three verbs Tracy attaches to the *imago Dei* here, the latter two, “to think” and “to act,” are suggestive of traditional interpretations of the *imago Dei*, referring primarily to human

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<sup>4</sup> Chapter One, pages 25-28

<sup>5</sup> The question of human distinctiveness from the rest of creation has been challenged by some ecological approaches to anthropology. See Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993); Leonardo Boff, *Ecology and Liberation: A New Paradigm*, trans. John Cumming (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995); Denis Edwards, *Jesus the Wisdom of God: An Ecological Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995).

<sup>6</sup> *PA* 114

rationality and freedom. The use of “to resist” is more in keeping with Tracy’s call to resist canniness, inauthenticity, oppression, and sin. Thus, Tracy locates the human capacity to fight evil in humans having been created in the image and likeness of God.

Another instance, although less explicit, is Tracy’s use of the *imago Dei* to describe Jesus as “the decisive manifestation both of who God is and who human beings are empowered and commanded to become.”<sup>7</sup> Here he focuses on the *vocation* of human beings rather than their *creation*. Jesus represents who human beings are called to become. Because Jesus is both divine and human, calling for humans to be more like Jesus means calling for them to be more like God: loving, free, gracious, authentic, and concerned for the other. Here Tracy subtly links the vocation of the human person with being like God, but he does not significantly connect it with the doctrine of the *imago Dei*.

A more robust anthropology on Tracy’s part would include a larger role for the *imago Dei*. Tracy does have a strong sense of the divine-human relationship, but he characterizes it primarily in terms of human dependence on the gracious ground of existence (whether that is termed the “limit-of,” “the whole,” or “Ultimate Reality”). The dependence of the human on this ground implies God as Creator, but that is perhaps a somewhat tenuous leap. Indeed Tracy largely overlooks the theological locus of creation.

A second issue concerns the limited role for corporeality and embodiment in Tracy’s anthropology. Typically, his description of the human being focuses on the cognitive functions of the human person, such as interpreting, conversing, reasoning, and

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<sup>7</sup> *DWO* 112

deciding. The role the body plays in interpretation or conversation is not specified, and is in need for further development. Although the constants of finitude and relationality are manifested in Tracy's theology in terms of experiences that enable people to recognize that they are distinct from but connected to others, the "experiences" he considers tend to emphasize awareness, the exchange of ideas, the disclosure of possibilities, or the sense of dependence on the gracious ground of existence.<sup>8</sup> Neither the physical limitations of the human body nor the mediation of one's experiences through the body receive sufficient attention.<sup>9</sup>

Tracy also tends to omit the body in considering the constants of sin and grace. The three dimensions of sin are distinguished primarily by the degree of human consciousness (conscious, preconscious, and unconscious), but there is no apparent reference to the role of the body in sin. This might stem from Tracy's rejection of a biological transmission model for inherited sin or his strong focus on unconscious systemic distortion, but either way it avoids specifying whether the body is relevant to sin. With grace, neither in its relationship to sin or to nature is the relevance of the body mentioned.

The only exception to this omission occurs in a brief reference to the character of human knowing. Describing the relationship between reasoning and knowing, he states that "we humans must reason discursively, inquire communally, converse and argue with

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<sup>8</sup> E.g., self-consciousness (54-5), of being limited by guilt and death (Chapter Two), of conversation with the other (Chapter Three). Tracy does explicitly mention "sensory experience" (54), but mainly to suggest that this is not the whole of experience.

<sup>9</sup> Tracy misses a clear opportunity to involve the body in this way during his rejection of the Cartesian *cogito*: "For the concrete self is always mediated by the ideas, actions, works, images, texts, institutions and monuments that objectify our experience" (*AI* 199).

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ourselves and one another. Human knowledge could be other than it is. But this is the way it is: embodied, communal, finite, discursive.”<sup>10</sup> However, his reference to embodiment here is only made in passing; it is not developed. The communal, finite, and discursive character of knowledge, particularly framed as conversation, serves as the focus of *PA*. The “embodied” aspect of knowledge would benefit from similar development.

A place where one might have expected the body to play a larger role is in Tracy’s Christology. In considering the incarnation, he talks about the founding narrative of Christianity and the three interrelated symbols of incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection. Each of these symbols has traditionally been highly corporeal: the Word *becomes flesh*; Jesus experiences the pain of mortification, crucifixion, and death *in his body*; the resurrected Jesus is encountered in a glorified body in a series of resurrection accounts. Yet Tracy’s investigation of this narrative only considers what these symbols mean in terms of manifestation and proclamation, the meditative-contemplative mode of thought that the narrative calls for, and the reality of the event of Jesus Christ that human beings experience now in their contemporary situations. Even when Tracy considers the question of the “historical Jesus,” he only considers the kerygma of Jesus, not his embodiment.<sup>11</sup>

This lacuna in Tracy’s anthropology is problematic for several reasons. First, the question of the relationship between soul and body has been the subject of longstanding debate in Christian anthropology. That Tracy ignores this question, a central aspect of

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<sup>10</sup> *PA* 27

<sup>11</sup> *AI* 239

theological anthropology, is puzzling. Second, all the cognitive aspects of the human that he does consider are implicitly corporeal. No one interprets, knows, or encounters classics without using their brain. Currently, there is a burgeoning theological engagement with neuroscience, which is investigating questions about the brain, belief, and the soul, that a robust contemporary theological anthropology ought to consider.<sup>12</sup> Third, certain classics, such as rituals, often feature a variety of postures, gestures, and motions that engage all aspects of the human person. Thus, when Tracy says that the “appeal of any religious classic is a nonviolent appeal to our minds, hearts and imaginations, and through them to our will,” it would be important to add “to our bodies” to this list.<sup>13</sup> Since much of the work being done in theological anthropology today takes seriously the role of human corporeality,<sup>14</sup> Tracy’s call for theology to be in conversation with the situation would be greatly strengthened by taking account of this work.

A third critique of Tracy concerns the abstract way in which “context” functions in Tracy’s theology. His methodological shift from common human experience to the contemporary situation marked an increased focus on the particularity of context for concrete human persons. Clearly, Tracy is acutely aware of the role context plays in shaping the experience of individual persons. People are formed by a variety of factors:

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<sup>12</sup> Robert John Russell, Nancey C. Murphy, Theo C. Meyering, Michael A. Arbib, eds., *Neuroscience and the Person: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999); Warren S. Brown and Nancey C. Murphy, eds., *Whatever Happened to the Soul? Scientific and Theological Portraits of Human Nature* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998)

<sup>13</sup> *AI* 177

<sup>14</sup> *Inter alia*, M. Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010); Marc Cortez, *Embodied Souls, Ensouled Bodies: An Exercise in Christian Anthropology and Its Significance for the Mind/Body Debate* (New York: T&T Clark, 2008); Molly C. Haslam, *A Constructive Theology of Intellectual Disability: Human Being as Mutuality and Response* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012).

the time and location into which they are born, the language they first learn to speak, the traditions in which they are raised, and their gender, race, and ethnicity.<sup>15</sup> Everyone has a concrete, particular context that is constitutive of their identity.

Tracy is correct in emphasizing “context” in his theological anthropology, but his treatment is almost entirely conceptual. He rarely pays attention to the particulars of his own context and rarely explores the significance of context for other theologians. Only once does he attend to his own context as “white, male, middle class, and academic,” admitting this social location shapes his process of doing theology.<sup>16</sup> He even acknowledges that the critiques of these other theologians are ones he needs to hear. Yet he quickly moves to summarize what is held in common by these various “others,” calling it the “hermeneutical practice” of the “mystical-prophetic.” While the effort to categorize these perspectives makes sense from a systematic point of view, the diversity of ways of doing theology that are “different, even conflictually other” from Tracy’s are much more complex than he acknowledges. Second, by describing these other ways of doing theology as “mystical-prophetic,” he distinguishes their way of doing theology from his own. However, he has also claimed that the manifestation-proclamation dialectic in *AI* is “best construed theologically as mystical-prophetic,” meaning that this is not actually a way in which his theology differs from these others, thus creating confusion about what exactly he means by the phrase “mystical-prophetic.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> In this last grouping, Tracy does note features that are intimately tied to human bodies, but without delving into the impact of such bodily features (or of bodiliness more generally). Cf. *PA* 66

<sup>16</sup> *DWO* 6

<sup>17</sup> The term “mystical-prophetic” is Tracy’s appropriation of the “mystical-political” dimension of theology as articulated by Gustavo Gutierrez (David Tracy, “The Christian Option for the Poor,” in *The Option for*

Indeed, Tracy's engagement with what are often called "contextual," theologies tends to treat them collectively, rather than engage with them individually, on their own terms. Thus, though he frequently mentions "liberation, political, and feminist" theologies as important sources to consider, he rarely engages the particularities of these types of theologies.<sup>18</sup> Grouping all these theologies together also suggests that he does not regard their individual perspective as terribly significant since they seem to come to the same mystical-prophetic conclusions. In sum, it appears that context is important conceptually for Tracy, but predominantly in an abstract way.

The relatively greater emphasis he puts on fundamental and systematic theologies over practical theology also exacerbates this emphasis: at one point he intended for *BRO* and *AI* to be the first two volumes of a trilogy focusing on the three sub-disciplines, with a volume on practical theology to follow at a later date. However the trajectory his work followed did not ultimately include this, with a couple articles somewhat filling the gap. Yet the heart of Tracy's practical theology is his understanding of *praxis*, meaning practice that informs and is informed by theory. His engagement with praxis tends to focus on the practice side of it, stating that practical theology is often caught up with concrete situations of praxis and particular social concerns. Indeed, its orientation towards the public of society and its three interrelated realms emphasizes this role. He

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*the Poor in Christian Theology*, ed. Daniel G. Groody (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 120). Cf. Claude Geffré and Gustavo Gutierrez, eds., *The Mystical and Political Dimension of the Christian Faith* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1974).

<sup>18</sup> Tracy is clearly engaged with some particular figures (e.g., Gustavo Gutierrez, Johann Baptist Metz, Sallie McFague, and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza), but the way he refers to these different types of theology often suggests that he sees these theologies as more closely aligned with one another than they really are.



has gone so far as to claim that the classics of *praxis* theologies will not be *texts* but *events*.<sup>19</sup> Were Tracy more focused on practical theology, it seems conceivable that he might take particular contexts more seriously because of how practical theology is bound up with particular “situations of praxis.” Nonetheless, the fact is that even fundamental and systematic theologies are bound up with particular situations as well, and so theologians ought to attend to their contexts more clearly.

### **Trajectories for Further Development**

Beyond these issues with Tracy’s anthropology, I think there are several further avenues of exploration for his anthropology. Two in particular are significant currents in contemporary theological anthropology: (1) the broadening of an anthropocentric understanding of what it means to be a human creature to a more relational, interdependent understanding as emphasized by ecological approaches and (2) the ongoing research into disability theology that challenges a capacities-oriented understanding of the human person. Tracy does not consider these two currents, but due to their relatively recent rise he cannot be faulted for that. Nevertheless, I consider these issues to be fruitful conversation partners for Tracy’s anthropology because I think his work could make helpful contributions to them.

The challenge environmental theology or “eco-theology” raises for theological anthropology is how to understand human beings in relation to the rest of created reality. Anthropology often focuses on what makes humans distinct from the rest of creation to

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<sup>19</sup> *AI* 398

the detriment of what connects humans to creation. In this way, the *imago Dei*, coupled with a narrow interpretation of Genesis 1:26-28,<sup>20</sup> inculcates a sense of separation between the human and creation. However, not only are humans closely related to other animals, but they are also dependent on their broader ecosystems for survival.

The issues raised by environmental theology and new developments in cosmology are important for further development in Tracy's anthropology. His interest in context as constitutive of the self and the anthropological constant of relationality could be broadened to include the ecosystem. It would also be a way in which his conceptual use of context could be sharpened to include particulars, because the specific environmental issues, concerns, and possibilities that shape one's situation vary depending on one's location. Living in a region suffering from deforestation might raise different questions from a coastal area plagued by recurrent flooding. More broadly, the ways in which one's culture or state engage the environment may vary based on political or economic power: wealthier countries often import food from far flung places while poorer countries engage in cash crop agriculture that impoverish both the land and the people in order to trade with wealthier countries. Accounting for these sorts of differences between ecosystems would contribute to a more robust contemporary anthropology.

Furthermore, attending to the environment could be productive for one's understanding of sin. Tracy applies the term "distortion" to talk about sin in

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<sup>20</sup> "Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.' So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.'"

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communication, history, religion and the self; he could build on this approach and relate it to the environment as well. Shifting and conflicting priorities, economic imbalances, and short-sighted, self-oriented thinking have all contributed to an environment that is out of balance and with which human beings have a troubled relationship. “Sin” could also be enlarged to include the human-environment relationship and could inculcate more proactive reflection on human responsibility for and stewardship of our diverse ecosystems.

A second current in contemporary theological anthropology has been the rise of disability theology. Spurred largely by Nancy Eiesland’s seminal *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability*,<sup>21</sup> disability theology has developed into a profound challenge to the many theological anthropologies that operate on assumptions about how *capacities* define human existence. Early work in this field focused on physical disabilities, but increasingly theologians have also addressed intellectual disabilities.<sup>22</sup> Most recently, Molly Haslam has called for a rejection of “capacity-based anthropology,” considering instead that “we find our humanity in relationships of mutual responsiveness.”<sup>23</sup> This shift grounds a theological anthropology that considers even those with profound intellectual disabilities<sup>24</sup> to be fully human, not defectively human.

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<sup>21</sup> Nancy L. Eiesland, *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability* (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1994)

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Sharon V. Betcher, *Spirit and the Politics of Disablement* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007); Thomas E. Reynolds, *Vulnerable Communion: A Theology of Disability and Hospitality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2008); Hans S. Reinders, *Receiving the Gift of Friendship: Profound Disability, Theological Anthropology, and Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008)

<sup>23</sup> Haslam, *A Constructive Theology of Intellectual Disability*, 9

<sup>24</sup> E.g. micro-encephalitis and severe Down Syndrome.

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The challenge of disability anthropology is that it highlights the problems with traditional discourse on the human person as a reasoning agent. Several characteristics typically assumed of the human, such as symbolic reasoning, awareness of self-identity, and personal agency, may not be possible in those with profound disabilities. While these conditions vary in type and severity, in each case they affect particular human beings. Thus it requires some rethinking of what it means to be human if theology is to include them adequately in its understanding of what it means to be human.

Disability theology presents both opportunities and challenges for Tracy's anthropology. First, the biggest challenge is that Tracy places freedom as responsible agency at the heart of his anthropology. Freedom is implicated in each of his anthropological constants. To construe freedom in terms of agency assumes the individual has the capacity to actualize that agency. Because individuals with profound intellectual disabilities may be lacking in this capacity, Tracy's anthropology may be unwittingly excluding such persons.

Secondly, the four constants outlined here are often illuminated through capacity-based assumptions. Conversation presumes the ability of humans to use their reason, engage in communication with one another, and understand what the other is saying. Tradition presumes the passing on of beliefs, values, and practices to succeeding generations capable of understanding and performing them. Reflection on limit-experiences and situations presumes that one has a developed sense of the self and the ability to reflect on what these experiences mean for that self. Tracy's anthropology is bound up with assumptions about what the human is capable of doing, and these

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capacities in turn disclose permanent characteristics of human existence that may be incarnated in diverse ways depending on one's context. Tracy's anthropology to date is predicated on seeing the human in terms of capacities that reveal these characteristics. Because so many disability theologies argue against seeing the human in terms of capacities, this may present a difficulty when engaging Tracy's thought.

At the same time, disability theologies would be a fruitful area for Tracy's further consideration. First, although the anthropological constants considered in this dissertation are disclosed through the examination of capacities, they do not necessarily need to be conceived of in this way. Rather, disability theology might present a new way of understanding finitude, relationality, sin, and grace. Central to Haslam's argument is reconceiving of relationality in terms of mutual responsiveness, meaning that there are ways that those with profound intellectual disabilities do respond to others, even if that response is not necessarily a conscious or intentional response. Mutual responsiveness highlights that there must be "a partner who responds to us and to whom one responds," which helps to move relationality beyond a capacity to respond to the need for others.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, the experience of finitude need not be precisely the same in all persons; those with profound intellectual disabilities are limited in ways that others may not be, but all humans can be characterized by the fact that they are limited. Moreover, all humans are finite in relation to the infinite God who has created them. Finitude in this sense is not dependent on any capacity of the person but on the dependence of all on God. Grace also need not presume that one's reception of grace be an active ability in terms of something

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<sup>25</sup> Haslam, *A Constructive Theology of Intellectual Disability*, 53

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the human does; grace as a free gift from God presumes that in some way God has created or enabled the human to receive that grace. Again, this rests more heavily on the relationship humans share with God than with some particular capacity the human exercises.

The major caveat for Tracy's anthropology would be how to relate sin in ways that take disability theology seriously. Sin typically presumes that the individual is responsible in some sense and thus able to enact one's agency. If someone does not possess agency as is normally conceived, it becomes difficult to consider them sinful, at least in the dimensions of personal or habitual sin. It may be more meaningful to think of how they might be affected by inherited sin, given the way that it infects relationships with other persons and with one's situation. However, if persons are incapable of conceiving what sin is or of acting independently in such a way as to sin themselves, I'm not sure how to relate the constant of sin to those with profound intellectual disabilities.<sup>26</sup>

Lastly, engaging with disability theology might be a way for Tracy to consider human corporeality more seriously. Eiesland's text comes out of her own experiences of physical disabilities and the ways in which she was marginalized as a result. She challenges religious persons to make proactive efforts to include disabled persons into the community beyond installing wheelchair ramps or handicapped bathroom stalls. While these basics are necessary, disabled persons also need to be recognized as full members

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<sup>26</sup> Eiesland's treatment of sin focuses on the problematic conflation of sin and disability (Eiesland, *The Disabled God*, 70-75). Reynolds, on the other hand, focuses on God's solidarity with human beings in our "weakness and brokenness" and how God redeems us from sin. Within his thought, then, disability is seen as both tragic—it is involuntary and can cause suffering—and redemptive—God affirms human disability in the incarnation of Christ (Reynolds, *Vulnerable Communion*, 197, 210).

of the community. Moreover those with intellectual disabilities, especially profound ones, often have physical aspects of their disabilities that require physical therapy or assistance.<sup>27</sup> Because of the needs of disabled persons, disability theology does not relegate human corporeality to a background assumption. By engaging with this field, Tracy's anthropology would be better able to think about the role of the body in human existence.

### Summary

Most theologians have regarded David Tracy's major theological contributions to be in the area of theological method, public theology, or hermeneutics. His theological anthropology, however, has received scant attention. Nevertheless, his assumptions about what it means to be human are a significant, if implicit, factor in shaping his work, especially his theological method.

This dissertation has offered several interrelated arguments. First, it has argued that a genealogical approach is the best way to interpret Tracy's theology. Doing so takes account of the important developments and shifts in his thought as well as the key conversation partners who often contribute to these changes. A genealogical reading of Tracy also avoids the risk of restricting the ongoing conversation that comprises his work to one narrow period of time or one particular text. The challenge of this reading is that it can make it difficult to make any fixed judgments about what Tracy thinks on particular topics. However, as I have demonstrated, there are certain ideas, concepts, and

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<sup>27</sup> Haslam attributes her interest in the field to her experience as a physical therapist (Haslam, *A Constructive Theology of Intellectual Disability*, 10).

formulations that remain relatively stable, and there are common themes and concerns that consistently permeate his thought. A genealogical approach enables a fuller understanding of these underlying consistencies in his thought.

Second, this dissertation has employed the heuristic of “anthropological constants” as a means to frame Tracy’s anthropology. Drawing on Schillebeeckx’s approach, the dissertation argues that finitude, relationality, sin, and grace present the key characteristics of what it means to be human in Tracy’s thought. These constants recur over and over in Tracy’s corpus, suggesting that they are permanent concerns in his thought. The ways in which these constants appear in Tracy’s thought are diverse and complex, but this dissertation has attempted to show they are indeed operative in his work.

Third, the dissertation has argued that distinctions between fundamental and systematic theology in Tracy’s work provide the structure for understanding these four constants. Finitude and relationality, while not necessarily religious in any clear way, do have theological significance. They are constants which present a locus for the interdisciplinary engagement that allows for the theological process of mutually critical correlation with fields such as sociology, biology, and philosophy. Various fields understand finitude and relationality differently, and so entering into conversation with them can ultimately be fruitful for theology. Sin and grace, however, have long been significant symbols in Christian theology for understanding the actual state of human existence and the relationship between God and humans. Consideration of them outside of the Christian faith tradition would diffuse their symbolic meaning. They are thus



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systematic constants in the sense that they make sense within the symbol system of a particular faith.

Finally, building on these three arguments, this dissertation has claimed that Tracy's anthropology offers assets, liabilities, and ways forward. His conversational approach to examining what it means to be human and his consistent recourse to method offer an intriguing approach to theological anthropology. At the same time, his lack of emphasis on the *imago Dei*, the human body, and the concrete realities of context and social location leave significant lacuna. Two examples from recent contemporary approaches to anthropology, ecological and disability theologies, offer further avenues of exploration for Tracy. More specifically, they offer new conversation partners that may contribute to new developments and insights for Tracy.

It is important to recognize that this text focuses heavily on expositing Tracy's anthropology because he has not done this himself. His sense of what it means to be human is often implicit and assumed. Although the anthropological constants of finitude, relationality, sin, and grace were not articulated by Tracy, they have been useful in making explicit the key aspects of his anthropology. While the assessment offered in this chapter is dependent on the adequacy of my interpretation of Tracy's anthropology, I remain confident that this dissertation has given a fair and thorough reading of his work.

Perhaps the best way to summarize Tracy's understanding of what it means to be human is to say that human beings are plural and ambiguous selves. Human persons experience *plurality* in diverse ways: through contact with "others," in their particular social contexts, within themselves, in the different commitments they make, and through

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their encounter with the divine. Human persons are also *ambiguous* beings, marked by the sinful inclination to reject their finitude and turn inward on themselves, but marked as well by the gift of God's grace in Christ which commands and enables them to become more like Jesus. Humans are finite, relational, sinful, and graced—anthropological constants which draw attention to human persons as fundamentally plural and ambiguous. For Tracy, plurality and ambiguity are “interruptions” that mitigate against any easy narrative of history that would ignore marginalized persons and forgotten sins. Recognizing that the human self is plural and ambiguous thus illuminates the complexity of human existence and resists any facile description of “human nature.”

Ultimately, the importance of an investigation of David Tracy's theological anthropology is that it helps one to understand Tracy himself. As one of the most influential theologians of the late 20<sup>th</sup>/early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, a robust understanding of Tracy's theology must account for his anthropology. As he completes his work on naming God, it is also important to remain cognizant of how he names the human.

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