

*The Analogical Imagination:
Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*

By David Tracy
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Review By

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In the Preface to his study David Tracy states the task he sets out for himself:

The need is to form a new and inevitably complex theological strategy that will avoid privatism by articulating the genuine claims of religions to truth (p. xi).

He claims that theology, by its very nature, asks fundamental existential questions because theology reflects on the reality of God, but it must develop public, not private, criteria and discourse. Recognizing theology addresses three publics: society, academy and church, each of which demands public criteria and discourse, Tracy's main focus is on Systematic Theology, which he understands as fundamentally a hermeneutical enterprise and his development of that understanding is to claim,

The issue of both the meaning and truth of religion is related to the analogous issue of the meaning and truth of art. The central claim advanced is a claim to both meaning and truth in our common human experience of any classic. (p. xii).

Tracy recognizes the contemporary emergence of a sociological imagination which he sees as analogous to the earlier rise of historical consciousness and it is in such a social reality that the theologian must work. In such a context the theologian makes his claim.

What is that claim? A claim to public response bearing meaning and truth on the most serious and difficult questions, both personal and communal, that any human being or society must face: Has existence any ultimate meaning? Is a fundamental trust to be found amidst the fears, anxieties and terror of existence? Is there some reality, some force, even some one, who speaks a word of truth that can be recognized and trusted? Religions ask and respond to such fundamental questions of the meaning and truth

of our existence as human beings in solitude, and in society, history and the cosmos. Theologians, by definition, risk an intellectual life on the wager that religious traditions can be studied as authentic responses to just such questions. The nature of these fundamental questions cuts across the spectrum of publics. Lurking beneath the surface of our everyday lives, exploding into explicitness in the limit-situations inevitable in any life, are questions which logically must be and historically are called religious questions.

To formulate such questions honestly and well, to respond to them with passion and rigor, is the work of all theology. (p. 4)

With such a vision of theology's work, Tracy sets out to create a space in human endeavor for such an undertaking. Claiming the common human experience of encountering a classic in the spectrum of human culture, Tracy points specifically to the classic in art which is universally recognized. He then claims the same holds true for the religious experience; there have been religious expressions that can rightfully be designated classic. As cited above,

The issue of both the meaning and truth of religion is related to the analogous issue of the meaning and truth of art.

For Tracy, a Christian theologian, the classic religious expression is the event of Jesus Christ. In Part I Tracy will develop his claim that a religious classic can be portrayed through reasoning that is publicly recognized – there can be no appeal to an external norm or private vision. This section he entitles “Publicness in Systematic Theology.” From there he will go on to apply what he has claimed to the event of Jesus Christ. Section Two he entitles, “Interpreting the Christian Classic.”

The Preface announces the major question of Tracy's *The Analogical Imagination*: “In a culture of pluralism must each religious tradition finally either dissolve into some lowest common denominator or accept a marginal existence as one interesting but purely private option?” Tracy is not willing to accept either option. A theological strategy must be found that can articulate the genuine claims of religion to truth. This is the task he sets for himself: a responsible affirmation of pluralism through the discovery of public criteria by which truth can be affirmed.

Theology must develop public criteria of truth and discourse because it deals with the fundamental questions of existence and because it speaks of God. Recognizing that the theologian addresses three arenas, society, academy and church, Tracy insists that the criteria of publicness applies in all three areas.

Theology is the generic name for three disciplines: fundamental, systematic and practical theologies. Publicness is demanded of each. The primary focus of fundamental theology is the academy, of systemic theology, the church and of

practical theology, society. They differ not only in their primary reference group, but also in terms of their modes of argument, ethical stance, religious stance and in terms of expressing claims to meaning and truth.

On the way to a responsible pluralism all conversation partners must agree to certain basic rules for the discussion. Two constants are present: the interpretation of a religious tradition and the interpretation of the religious dimension of the contemporary situation from which and to which the theologian speaks. In regard to the first, it is incumbent upon the theologian to make explicit his or her general method of interpretation, to develop “criteria of appropriateness” whereby specific interpretations of the tradition may be judged by the wider theological community. In regard to the interpretation of the contemporary situation, there must be an analysis of the “religious” questions, the question of the meaning of human existence in the present situation.

There are major differences as well. Tracy addresses the question as to what constitutes a public claim to truth in the three sub-disciplines of theology. Fundamental theology’s defining characteristic is “a reasoned insistence on employing the approach and methods of some established academic discipline to explicate and adjudicate the truth claims of the interpreted religious tradition and the truth claims of the contemporary situation.” (p. 62) Various models are available but whichever model is chosen fundamental questions and answers are articulated in such a way that any attentive, intelligent, reasonable and responsible person can understand and judge them in keeping with fully public criteria for argument. Personal faith may not enter the argument for the truth claims in fundamental theology.

The systematic theologian’s major task is the reinterpretation of the tradition for the present situation. Where the fundamental theologian will relate the reality of God to our fundamental trust in existence (our common faith), the confessional systematic theologian will relate that reality to their arguments for a distinctively Christian understanding of faith. (p. 65)

Christian theology...consists in explicating in public terms and in accordance with the demands of its own primary confessions, the full meaning and truth of the original “illuminating event”...which occasioned and continues to inform its understanding of all reality. (p. 66)

Thus the task of the systematic theologian is an hermeneutical task. The “illuminating event” Tracy calls a religious classic. As in a classic work of art, the religious classic contains the possibility of ever new “disclosures.” Classics Tracy defines as texts, events, images, persons, rituals and symbols which are assumed to disclose permanent possibilities of meaning and truth. The hermeneutical theologian seeks to articulate the truth – disclosure of the reality of God embedded in the tradition for the contemporary situation.

There is today a strong case being made by many theologians for the necessity of any theological theory or argument yielding to the demand of praxis.

Praxis...must be related to theory, not as theory's application or even goal as in all conscious and unconscious mechanical notions of practice or technique. Rather praxis is 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. (p. 69)

Tracy states his response to the theologians of praxis as follows:

The very notion of praxis is grounded in a distinction, not a separation; truth as transformation always also involves truth as disclosure; speaking the truth is never separable but is distinguishable from doing the truth; cognitive claims are not simply validated through authentic praxes any more than causes are validated through the presence of martyrs; the crises of cognitive claims does not simply dissipate when the shift of emphasis to the social-ethical crisis of a global humanity comes more clearly into central focus.... (p. 79)

In sum: fundamental theology seeks metaphysical and existential adequacy to experience; systematic theology seeks the disclosure of the original "illuminating event" in the present situation; practical theology emphasizes the necessity of truth as transformative. Tracy hopes for the possibility of collaboration between these sub-disciplines and the communal recognition of the real need for all three.

Tracy moves the focus now to systematic theology asking from the perspective of fundamental theology what one can argue on obviously public grounds for the public status of all good systematic theology. The question is simply, "Is systematic theology public discourse?"

It is Tracy's contention that systematic theology is hermeneutical. This means that systematic theology's task is to interpret, mediate and translate the meaning and truth of the tradition. Where this is not the case, where the notion of authority shifts from a truth disclosed to mind and heart to an external norm for the obedient will, theologians can no longer interpret and translate the tradition but "only repeat the shop-worn conclusions of the tradition." (p. 99)

Eventually, the central, classical symbols and doctrines of the tradition become mere "fundamentals" to be externally accepted and endlessly repeated. (p. 99)

Tracy points to the contrast of an hermeneutical theology:

The heart of any hermeneutical position is the recognition that all interpretation is a mediation of past and present, a translation carried on within the effective history of a tradition to retrieve its sometimes strange, sometimes familiar meanings. (p. 99)

How is this done? Recognizing that one begins within a tradition which has shaped one, that one is socialized, acculturated and thus without the possibility of finding some position “above” one’s own historicity,

...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. (p. 100)

Tracy refers to Hans-Georg Gadamer’s model of conversation as a model for understanding the dialogue with the tradition.

Real conversation occurs only when the participants allow the question, the subject matter, to assume primacy. It occurs only when our usual fears about our own self-image die....That fear dies only because we are carried along, and sometimes away, by the subject matter itself into the rare event or happening named “thinking” and “understanding.” For understanding *happens*; it *occurs* not as the pure result of personal achievement but in the back-and-forth movement of the conversation itself. (p. 101)

...The word “hermeneutical” best describes this realized experience of understanding in conversation. For every event of understanding, in order to produce a new interpretation, mediates between our past experience and the understanding embodied in our linguistic tradition and the present event of understanding occasioned by a fidelity to the logic of the question in the back-and-forth movement of the conversation. (p. 101)

Using the model of conversation Tracy shows how one enters into the history of the illuminating event. When interpreting a classic one recognizes its “excess of meaning” demands constant interpretation and is at the same time timeless –

“a certain kind of timelessness –namely the timeliness of a classic expression radically rooted in its own historical time and calling to my own historicity. That is, the classical text is not in some timeless moment which needs mere repetition. Rather its kind of timelessness as permanent timeliness is the only one proper to any expression of the finite, temporal, historical beings we are....The classic text’s fate is that only its constant reinterpretation by later finite, historical, temporal beings who will risk asking its questions and listening, critically and tactfully, to its responses can actualize the event of understanding beyond its present fixation in a text. (p. 102)

To be understood a classic cannot be repeated; it must be interpreted. Thus Tracy claims

All contemporary systematic theology can be understood as fundamentally hermeneutical. This position implies that systematic theologians, by definition, will understand themselves as radically finite and historical thinkers who have risked a trust in a particular religious tradition – They seek, therefore, to retrieve, interpret, translate, mediate the resources – ...of the classic events of understanding of those fundamental religious questions embedded in the classic events, images, persons, rituals, texts and symbols of the tradition. (p. 104)

Tracy moves on to the normative role of the classics. He begins with the assertion “classics exist.” It is true of all cultures. He claims,

We all find ourselves compelled both to recognize and on occasion to articulate our reasons for recognition that certain expressions of the human spirit so disclose a compelling truth about our lives that we cannot deny them some kind of normative status. (p. 108)

Such expressions we call “classic.” Tracy defines the classic thus:

My thesis is that which we mean in naming certain texts, events, images, rituals, symbols and persons “classics” is that here we recognize nothing less than the disclosure of a reality we cannot but name truth....some disclosure of reality in a moment that must be called one of “recognition” which surprises, provokes, challenges, shocks and eventually transforms us; an experience that upsets conventional opinion and expands the sense of the possible; indeed a realized experience of that which is essential, that which endures. (p. 108)

The experience of a classic work of art is used as an illustration of Tracy’s point. Citing Gadamer, he writes,

The actual experience of the work of art can be called a realized experience of an event of truthwhen I experience any classic work of art, I do not experience myself as an autonomous subject aesthetically appreciating the good qualities of an aesthetic object set over against me. Indeed, when I reflect after the experience upon the experience itself, shorn of prior theories of “aesthetics,” I find that my subjectivity is never in control of the experience, nor is the work of art actually experienced as an object with certain qualities over against me. Rather the work of art encounters me with the surprise, impact, even shock of reality itself. In experiencing art, I recognize a truth I somehow know but know I did not really know except through the experience of recognition of the essential compelled by the work of art. (p. 111F)

I am transformed by the truth which I encounter. I experience self-transcendence not as an achievement; rather it happens, it occurs. I am caught up in the disclosure of the work.

Gadamer uses the phenomenon of the "game" to describe this encounter. In playing a game I lose myself in the play moving into the "rules" of the game.

The game becomes not an object over against a self-conscious subject but an experienced relational and releasing mode of being in the world distinct from the ordinary, nonplayful one. In every game, I enter the world where I play so fully that finally the game plays me. (p. 114)

This is what happens when one encounters a genuine work of art. One finds oneself in the grip of an event, a happening, a disclosure, a claim to truth which cannot be denied.

Tracy notes the process of encountering the text. The first movement is the reception of the text. Secondly, if the text is a classic it will carry a force that will claim attention. The third step of interpretation involves the "game" spoken of above.

The dialogue will demand that the interpreter enter into the back-and-forth movement of that disclosure in the dialectics of a self-transcending freedom released by the text upon a finite, historical, dialogical reader and received by the text from a now dialoguing reader. (p. 120)

The fourth step involves the larger conversation of the entire community of inquirers.

To illustrate our claim that an encounter with a classic work of art demands our attention and discloses truth which we cannot but recognize as an encounter with reality, Tracy describes the production of a classic. The discussion of that creative artistic process leads him to conclude:

In the paradigmatic expressions of the human spirit - in those texts, events, persons, actions, images, rituals, symbols which bear within them a classic as authoritative status, we find in our experienced recognition of their claim to attention the presence of what we cannot but name "truth." ... That truth is at once a disclosure and a concealment of what, at our best and most self-transcending in interpreting the classics, we cannot but name "reality." (p. 130)

Tracy therefore argues for his contention that the systematic theologian is the interpreter of religious classics.

Systematic theology intends to provide an interpretation, 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. (p. 131)

Applying this understanding of systematic theology's task to the specific task of the Christian thinker, Tracy declares,

In Christian systematics, that self-understanding is itself further grounded in the *particular* events and persons of Jewish and Christian history: decisively grounded, for the Christian, in God's own self-manifestation as my God in this classic event and person, Jesus Christ. (p. 131)

But now the crux of the matter is reached: how does the systematic theologian address the wider public with discussion characterized by "publicness" thus stopping the retreat of Christian faith into the sphere of privateness and yet remain faithful to

the radical particularity of the relationship of my gift's disclosure to the particular events of God's action in ancient Israel, in Jesus of Nazareth, in the history of the Christian church? (p. 132)

Acknowledging the dilemma, Tracy believes it can be overcome. The means of overcoming the dilemma is the recognition of the public nature of the classic:

grounded in some realized experience of a claim to attention, unfolding as cognitive disclosures of both meaning and truth and ethically transformative of personal, social and historical life. (p. 132)

Tracy therefore contends,

Whenever any systematic theologian produces a classic interpretation of a particular classic religious tradition (as both Barth and Rahner have), then that new expression should be accorded a public status in the culture.... (p. 132F)

Every classic...is a text, event, image, person or symbol which unites particularity of origin and expression with a disclosure of meaning and truth available, in principle, to all human beings. (p. 133)

And again:

Any person's intensification of particularity via a struggle with the fundamental questions of existence in a particular tradition, if that struggle is somehow united to the logos of appropriate expression, will yield a form of aesthetically sharable public discourse. (p. 134)

Chapter four deals with the interpretation of the religious classics. The classic, Tracy claims, has these two marks: permanence and excess of meaning. They

demand interpretation, never mere repetition nor simplistic rejection. The interpreter must plunge in, get caught up in the subject matter of the classic. Engaging a major classic or being engaged by it is to be engaged by the questions of the truth of existence. This is the task of the systematic theologian – to interpret the religious classics of a culture.

While many in contemporary culture relegate religious questions to a primitive state of the race's development, Tracy raises the question,

Yet what if the authority of religion is not the authoritarianism in our impacted memories of "religion" but the authority of those authentic, indeed inevitable fundamental questions about the meaning of the whole codified in the questions and responses of classical religious texts, events, images, symbols, rituals and persons? (p. 155)

To be sure, the religions have been purveyors not only of authentic truth but demonic destructive power. There is a great deal of conflict of interpretations on the meaning of religion and in the modern period the claims of Feuerbach, Marx, Nietzsche and Freud that describe religion as "projection" and "illusion" must be faced. Arriving at one definition for the essence of religion is not possible. Yet Tracy will not back off; he claims,

The questions which religion addresses are the fundamental existential questions of the meaning and truth of individual, communal and historical existence as related to, indeed as both participating in and distanced from, what is sensed as the whole of reality. (p. 157F)

Religion, Tracy argues, is not just another cultural perspective alongside morality, art, science, commerce and politics. In its own self-understanding,

a religious perspective claims to speak not of a part but of the whole. (p. 159)

In a very technical philosophical argument Tracy maintains

An ability to partly state – more exactly, to metaphysically state – the abstract, general, universal and necessary features of the reality of God as the one necessary existent which can account for the reality of a limit-of, ground-to, horizon-to the whole disclosed in earlier phenomenological accounts. (p. 161)

Religion has essential characteristics even apart from a single definition of its essence and chief among them, Tracy claims, is "a limit-character." There is both a "limit-to" dimension:

a dimension present in the "limit-questions" of scientific inquiry and moral striving, and in those experiences (either negative, like anxiety as

distinct from fear, or positive, like fundamental trust, wonder and loyalty as distinct from trust in and fidelity to a particular cause), disclosive of the "limit-situation" which is the human situation. (p. 160)

and a "limit of" dimension:

The philosophical analyses of fundamental theology, therefore, free the inquirer to study the possible meanings of such recognized "situational" limit-experiences as finitude, contingency, mortality, alienation or oppression and thereby to explicate, indeed to state, the character of that reality as a limit-to our existence. In that explicit stating of a limit-to, the inquirer may also be able to disclose or show the existence of a reality here named a "limit-of" (alternatively horizon-to our ground-of). In its metaphysical or transcendental form, the analysis can also *partly* state the character of that reality of the *limit-of*. This is the case, in the Western tradition, when the metaphysical reality of God as the one necessary existent grounding all reality is explicated as the *referent* of just such limit-experiences of a religious dimension to our lives", (p. 160)

Tracy uses Karl Rahner's work to illustrate how this philosophical analysis of fundamental theology relates to the Christian conviction of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.

For Rahner, the philosopher of religion can provide persuasive philosophical arguments for the necessary existence of an absolute mystery as ultimate horizon to all thinking and living. If that argument holds, then Rahner is correct to insist that the human being, now understood as always already within that horizon of ultimate mystery, can be redescribed, in his now famous phrase, as a hearer of a *possible* revelation from this horizon, i.e., a self-manifestation by the power of ultimate mystery itself.

In the actual experience of that self-manifestation of God in Jesus Christ, the Christian believer *now*, according to Rahner, recognizes that the concrete revelation is a pure gift or grace from the incomprehensible God of Love. Then the believer "recognizes" that all reality is graced by that gift: that all reality partakes in a "transcendental" revelation disclosed in the categorical revelation of God's own self-manifestation in Jesus Christ; that revelation, as "transcendental," is always already present in this concretely graced world; that revelation as "categorized" is present in the gratuity of God's self-manifestation in the events of "salvation history," decisively present, for Rahner, in the event of the manifestation of who God is and who we are in Jesus Christ. (p. 162)

Thus we are hearers of a *possible* revelation or self-manifestation of the absolute mystery and for the Christian believer that manifestation has taken concrete shape in Jesus Christ. In these terms the religious classic

may be viewed as an event of disclosure, expressive of the "limit-of," "horizon-to," "ground-to" side of "religion." ... religious classic expressions will involve a claim to truth as the event of a disclosure – concealment of the whole of reality *by the power of the whole* – as, in some sense, a radical and finally gracious mystery. (p. 163)

An experience of such a classic religious expression will carry an authority which will give to the religious person the conviction

that their values, their style of life, their ethos are in fact grounded in the inherent structure of reality itself. (p. 163)

Tracy summarizes his contention in this discussion of the interpretation of the religious classic as follows:

First, a defining characteristic of the situational "religious dimension of common experience and language" is the "limit-to" character of the experience itself, whatever its particular existential focus. Second, a defining characteristic of any explicit religion – more exactly any classic religious expression – is a "limit-of" character bearing the status of event-gift-manifestation of and from the whole, and experienced as giving the respondent wholeness. (p. 165)

His approach in pursuing this line of argument – that the religious classic exists, claims our attention and discloses truth which we cannot but name reality – presumes an appropriate preunderstanding for the interpretation of religion. He argues:

If one is guided by a sense for those fundamental questions, if guided as well by that great modern tradition of interpretation of the *sui generis* character of religion ... The interpreter is likely to find relative adequacy in the kind of interpretations of the appropriate responses to the religious classics described in different, sometimes conflicting ways by these great modern phenomenologists of the *sui generis* character of religion. (p. 168)

... The kind of claim to attention that a religious classic, *as religious*, provokes is a claim that discloses to the interpreter some realized experience bearing some sense of recognition into the objectively awesome reality of the otherness of the whole as radical mystery. The genuinely religious person (James' "mystics" and "saints"), it seems, do experience that reality of mystery as the reality of the holy bearing overwhelming and life-transformative force, (p. 168F)

The religious person speaks of revelation, the self-manifestation of an undeniable power not one's own or at one's disposal. They cannot but acknowledge the eruption of a power manifesting itself – a power of the whole revealing the whole.

For the whole experienced as radical mystery is experienced as giving itself in the religious response. The whole, in manifesting itself, is also experienced as freeing the real self of the respondent to its true freedom; a freedom where the self's new ethos is experienced as grounded in reality itself – a reality both disclosed and concealed as the whole by the power of the whole. (p. 175)

Again Tracy explains the experience thus:

The same sense of radical giftedness both fascinates and frightens as it shocks and transforms the self to believe what one dare not otherwise believe: that reality is finally gracious, that the deepest longings of our minds and hearts for wholeness in ourselves, with others, with history and nature, is the case – the case granted as gift by the whole; the case expressed with relative adequacy determined by the intrinsic inadequacy of every classic religious expression. (p. 177)

We approach now the heart of Tracy's argument as he discusses the religious classic under the sub-divisions of manifestation and proclamation. Here he makes a creative and passionate appeal for a genuinely ecumenically Christian witness which brings together the strengths of the Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant traditions rather than the more narrow focus of any single tradition.

Tracy's argument rests on his contention that truth becomes a realized experience through the encounter with a religious classic. A classic expression encountered frees oneself from the ordinary attempts to distance the self from any claims that cannot be controlled as objects over against its own subjectivity.

... The interpreter of religious classics may admit that this classic testimony bears a claim to truth. That claim is, more exactly, a nonviolent appeal to the instinct of the human spirit for some relationship to the whole. (p. 194)

The truth experienced in the classic has the character of event.

When technical rationality reigns, no recognition of the event-character of truth can occur. Any interpreter of the religious classic must early decide whether to impose some standards of technical rationality upon all classical expressions or risk exposing oneself to another mode of rationality; a mode proper to the thing itself as it discloses itself to consciousness. We cannot, in fact, verify or disprove the claims of classical religious expressions through empiricist methods....truth here becomes a manifestation that lets whatever shows itself to be in its showing and its hiddenness. (p. 195)

Neither the Enlightenment model of rationality nor traditionalist models of heteronomy are capable of dealing thus with truth as event, occurrence. They

both interpret all claims to truth through the restrictive lenses of techniques developed by autonomous and heteronomous interpreters. Just as one approaches a classic in any field, so in religion one must be open to being caught up in the "conversation," the "game," open to being transformed by the truth of the whole which finds expression or which discloses itself through the concrete religious expression.

Fundamental theology warrants the claims to truth of the religious dimension to existence on ordinary public grounds; systematic theology as interpretation warrants the claims to truth of *a concrete religion* on those kinds of authentically public grounds appropriate to the kind of disclosive publicness expressed in all classics.

This is the case, moreover, for radically experiential reasons: the realized experience of the truth-character of the religious classic is an experience of its purely given character, its status as an event, a happening manifested to my experience, neither determined by nor produced by my subjectivity. (p. 198)

Tracy describes the structural similarity between the encounter with religious classics and other classics.

Any classic will produce its meaning through the related strategies of intensification of particularity and intensification of distancing in expression. The first journey of intensification into one's own particularity will ordinarily free the person (or community) from the limitations of self-consciousness into a sense of a real participation in, a belonging to, a wider and deeper reality than the self or the community. That experience of intensification, like all experience must involve some understanding and some expression. When the struggle for expression – the second, self-distancing journey of intensification – finds its appropriate genre, style and form, then the self is positively distanced from the original experience in order to express the meaning of that experience. Then a person can communicate the disclosive meaning to others who may not now share it, but can share its meaning through experiencing the now-rendered expression. (p. 199F)

There is a difference between religious classics and other classics, however. It has to do with intensity. The religious classic is an expression of the whole itself by the power of the whole.

... The authentically religious impetus is one where the intensification process is itself abandoned into a letting go of one's own efforts at intensity. One lets go because one has experienced some disclosure of the whole which cannot be denied as from the whole. (p. 201)

Finally one experiences a sense of resting in the radical and gracious mystery at the heart of human existence. Such an experience demands expression:

a demand to express that experience and its meaning and truth in a form – a text, an image, a gesture, above all, a style of life. The demand to express, to render, to communicate sets in motion the distancing process whereby the self distances itself from its own self-consciousness and finds the proper genre for some expression of that meaning and truth. (p. 201)

Summarizing the process, Tracy claims,

Both the expression and the experience of a religious "limit-of" disclosure and concealment of and by the whole remains, therefore, intrinsically dialectical throughout the entire process. The demands of the journey of intensification into the fundamental questions of the meaning of existence imply their opposite: a letting-go, a being-caught-up-in, a radical belonging-to some disclosure of the whole by the whole. And the very radicality of that belonging-to the whole posits itself by implying its opposite: I as a self recognize that I am absolutely dependent upon the whole, recognize myself as in actuality profoundly ambiguous in all my experience, my understanding, my ability and willingness to live by and in the radical mystery which envelops and empowers me. As the dialectic intensifies, this recognition of the disclosure of radical mystery posits itself as disclosure by implying its opposite: The mystery is also concealed from me by and in its disclosure as mystery. The revelation is also a revelation of hiddenness; the flooding, white light of its comprehensibility frees me to recognize the dark impenetrable incomprehensibility of both the whole and myself in the whole. (p. 202)

Then comes the command to communicate by incarnating that reality in a word, a symbol, an image, a ritual, a gesture, a life.

Tracy moves now to discuss the classical forms of religious expression: manifestation and proclamation. The dialectical process just described,

an existential intensification of particularity, expressing itself through distancing in a sharable form – will operate dialectically at every moment in the process. (p. 203)

But now Tracy makes another proposal regarding religious expression.

When the dialectic of intensification of particularity releasing itself to a radical sense of participation predominates, the religious expression will be named "manifestation;" when the dialectic of intensification of particularity releasing itself to a sense of radical nonparticipation dominates, the religious expression will be named "proclamation." (p. 203)

The words "sacrament" and "word" are usually used to make this distinction, the former being the predominate expression of the Catholic and Orthodox traditions, while the latter has been characteristic of Protestantism. The difference is also pointed out by the terms "mystical-priestly-metaphysical-aesthetic" and "prophetic-ethical-historical." Both types are found in the Hebrew Scriptures and in the Christian tradition. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam contain both expressions although from the East they may appear more in the proclamatory mode. Likewise, although the Eastern religions are thought of as mainly in the mode of manifestation, they too must be understood in the dialectic of manifestation or proclamation. Tracy moves away from the common theological designation of the difference – word and sacrament – and uses instead the terminology of Paul Ricoeur – manifestation and proclamation – in order to see more clearly how the religious live in this dialectic and cannot be placed on one side or the other, although, of course, they lean to one pole or the other. He contends that the manifestation-proclamation dialectic is fruitful for understanding the complexity and the conflicts in Christian self-understanding, which is the focus of Tracy's work. This distinction provides the main rubric for the thought experiment Tracy is setting forth.

Tracy argues that the very positing of manifestation or proclamation implies the other; each needs the other. He begins his examination of these poles with a discussion of manifestation. He uses the work of Mircea Eliade as the clearest example of religious expression as manifestation.

... Eliade's classic achievement ... paradoxically serves a prophetic religious role to challenge the dominant prophetic, ethical, historical trajectory of Western religion in favor of its grounds in the power of manifestation.... The "archaic" ontology articulated by Eliade becomes the focal meaning for understanding religion as an eruption of power of some manifestation of the whole now experienced as the sacred cosmos.

...

By entering the ritual, by retelling the myth, even by creatively reinterpreting the symbol, we escape from the "nightmare" of history and even the "terror" of ordinary time. We finally enter true time, the time of the repetition of the actions of the whole at origin of the cosmos. *In illo tempore*, the power from the whole was first disclosed as sacred. ... only by entering into the originally nonlinguistic manifestations of power of the sacred in the ritual, the symbol, the festival, the myth, can we participate in, belong to, a realm disclosed in the other side of the ordinary: a realm which has manifested itself as sacred, which exposes the ordinary as profane, a realm which at the same time chooses *any* ordinary reality – this rock, this tree, this city, this mountain, this rite – as the medium for the saturated power of the sacred – the "center of the world." ... (p. 205F)

Thus the realm of the sacred can be experienced by being willing to enter the purely given, that sheer event of manifestation. Tracy maintains that Eliade has effectively challenged the Western Augustinian assumptions through his retrieval of the genius of Eastern Christianity:

a theology oriented to and from, not history and ethos, but the cosmos and aesthetics; a style of religious practice oriented not so much by the word of scripture as by the manifestations of the sacred in image, icon, ritual, logos and cosmological theologies; a way of being Christian that both demands a radical separation from the ordinary via the rituals and myths of the repetition of the origins of the cosmos and allows real participation in the manifestations of the sacred available to our "divinized" humanity. (p. 208)

But there is another pole; the pole of proclamation:

Those religious expressions where the power of a word of proclamation from God in an address to an ambiguous self occurs as the paradigmatic disclosure of religious reality. (p. 208)

The pole of manifestation brings to expression the sense of participation in the whole. Yet the very sense of identity in the moment of manifestation implies the non-identity of the individual, finite self. Therefore the estranged self may be addressed by a word of proclamation:

A word of defamiliarizing proclamation now experienced by the self as the transcendent, unnamable Other which has now disclosed itself in word as like a *who*: the *self* of God. ... This God speaks a word of proclamation whereby and wherein the whole discloses itself in a new manifestation by the presence of a personal, gracious, acting, judging, proclaiming God. This God acts in the word-events of ordinary history and time. (p. 209)

This word shatters our sense of participation, disconfirming any complacency in participation.

To shatter any illusions that this culture, this priesthood, this land, this ritual is enough, to defamiliarize us with ourselves and with nature, to decode our encoded myths, to inflict its passionate negations upon all our pretensions, to suspect even our nostalgic longings for the sacred cosmos, to expose all idols of the self as projections of our selves and our mad ambitions, to expose all culture as contingent, even arbitrary. ...To make us recognize that Judaism and Christianity disclose a radical world-affirmation only because they have first undergone a radical, decentering experience of world-negation in the kerygmatic, proclamatory word of address of prophetic religion. (p. 209)

...

The self finds that the response to that proclamation by the self and the people to whom the self belongs is that radical paradigmatic response of trust and obedience called faith. (p. 209)

The proclaimed word will be expressed in the realm of the secular which was formerly thought of as profane but now is recognized as the arena in which the power of the word must be heard.

... The very power of the proclaimed word – a word addressed by God to both a community and a self, a word of address shattering their security and their idols – demands that the major expression of one's *religious* experience now be found in fidelity through word and deed in this time and this history to the God who gives that word as enabling command. (p. 210)

The paradigm of proclamation does not eliminate the religious expressions of manifestation. Without them there is no place for the word to be heard and do its work. Yet the focus has definitely shifted.

The language of radical participation in the religions of manifestation will now seem extravagant, sometimes even idolatrous. The rejection of the ordinary as the separated profane will now, in the proclamation of the word about the extraordinariness of the ordinary as the central expression of God's word and action, will now itself be rejected in favor of a classical, paradigmatic religious ethic of the secular. (p. 211)

The affirmation of the secular in contemporary Jewish and Christian theology, therefore, is not properly understood as some collapse of Christianity and Judaism in the face of contemporary secularism. Rather a secular Christianity and a secular Judaism are, in fact, faithful to the paradigmatic eruption of a proclaimed and addressing word-event which founds these traditions and drives them on as their religious focal meaning. *Some* desacralization of the claims of participation via manifestation must occur whenever this kind of world-shattering and world-affirming paradigmatic religious experience of proclamation happens. For the very proclamation which affirms time and history and demands expression in and for ordinary time and history frees Jews and Christians in and for the world. When the paradigmatic religious power of that word has become a nostalgic echo, a presupposition that is no longer an impulse, then the great danger of a merely secularist Judaism, a merely secularist Christianity, a finally secularist culture emerges. (p. 211F)

But where the proclaimed word is remembered, the word of world-negation and world-affirmation, the Jew and the Christian are freed for the world. This was the case in the Reformation according to Tracy. He calls it a classic religious event. The Reformation was a response to the graced freedom of the Christian before God's Word in Jesus Christ.

Where the paradigmatic power of that word saturates the religious consciousness with its power, then the negation of all over-claims to participation, the religious negation of the focus of "magic," "superstition," "legalism," and "ritualism" will burst upon any complacent resting in any religion of manifestation, any non-dialectical solace in a too easy humanism or any hardened priestcraft. (p. 212)

The word exposes the world's real ambiguity, its possibilities for both good and evil and it points to a new time, a time of genuine newness, not just the repetition of the origins of the cosmos. If liberal Christianity loses its sense of the word of proclamation it loses its religious vitality.

It loses its religious dialectic of the world and the secular and becomes another decent, ethical vision living in, by and for a world which sets its agenda and writes the words for its decent, ethical, but ultimately irreligious tunes. The liberal churches are always in danger of losing their paradigmatic religious dialectic and becoming only psychological counseling centers or resources for societal causes. And yet the fidelity of the liberal churches to the world empowered by their listening to the Christian word of proclamation compels them, as it must, to aid all authentic causes of personal wholeness and societal justice. (p. 212)

Tracy points to Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer as leading examples of the ministry of the paradigmatic word which shatters the idols of culture. Barth so feared any claim to participation in the transcendent reality that he wanted to admit of no point of contact; such a view sees a word-centered Christianity devoid of all manifestation apart from the erupting power of the Word. Commenting on the two poles, manifestation and proclamation in their recent exponents referred to here, Eliade, Barth and Bonhoeffer, Tracy declares,

With the same kind of radicality as Eliade, Barth and Bonhoeffer will also insist, "*Only* the paradigmatic is the real." Yet their paradigm of the proclaimed word will drive them into a direct confrontation with the equally radical "*only*" of Eliade through its dialectic in and for the world, in and for time and history. For Eliade, manifestation discloses not an entry into the secular but an escape from the terror, the nightmare, the banality, the latent nihilism of ordinary time and history. Not the profane, not the secular will save us; *only* an entry into the religion of manifestation, the worlds of sacred space and the repetitions of sacred time can do that. Eliade's work serves in the contemporary period as a classic expression of the power of religion as manifestation releasing its dialectic of the sacred and the profane and its passionately religious sense of radical participation in the cosmos through the saturating repetitions of myth, ritual and symbol. His is recognizably iconic consciousness. In an analogous manner Barth and Bonhoeffer, with their distinct and sometimes conflicting positions, represent two contemporary classic expressions of Christian

faith as a faith living by the power of the proclaimed word releasing its dialectic of the word and the secular and its suspicion of "religious participation" and repetition. (p. 213F)

It is Tracy's contention that we must not be forced to choose one pole or the other. Christianity does not live by the "only" of Eliade or Barth. It is his purpose to push beyond these oppositions to find a place where both can be embraced. Both manifestation and proclamation are necessary to Christian religion.

The dialectic of the Christian religion is one in which the word does negate any claim to a mode of participation which logically approaches identity or existentially relaxes into complacency – a dialectic which, in fidelity to the word, must radically negate all idolatries, yet a dialectic which implies, includes and demands genuine manifestation. ... Christianity embraces nature in and through its doctrines of creation – transformed, to be sure, in the light of the doctrines of redemption and future eschatology. Indeed Christianity celebrates nature in and through its doctrine of incarnation as theophanous manifestation – understood, to be sure, only in the light of a shattering, defamiliarizing cross and a transformative resurrection. (p. 214)

Tracy contends that a Christianity of word without real manifestation stands in peril of becoming either fanatical or arid and cerebral and abstract. Barth understood this dealing at length with the doctrine of creation. Manifestation, Tracy argues, is always the enveloping presupposition of the erupting word of proclamation.

Manifestation envelops every word from beginning to end, even as it allows itself to be transformed by the shattering paradigmatic power of the proclaimed word. But manifestation returns, thus transformed, to reunite even the secular, the historical, the temporal, the self with the whole disclosed in nature and the cosmos. A Christianity without a sense of radical participation in the whole – that sense which Schleiermacher named the "feeling of absolute dependence," which others name a fundamental trust in the very worthwhileness of existence – is a Christianity that has lost its roots in the human experience of God's manifesting and revealing presence in all creation, in body, in nature, in spirit, not only in history. (p. 215)

The powerful, eruptive word of proclamation that defamiliarizes us from the world is yet itself rooted in the enveloping cosmos.

To speak Christian eschatological language is to speak a language where the religious power of the whole has entered time and history in the decisive proclamation of this particular word and event, where that power has freed the "profane" to become the "secular" and has liberated the present *and* the future from the exclusive hold of the sacred time of past

origin by empowering history and ethical action with religious power. (p. 216)

Tracy points to the sacramental view of Catholic Christianity:

Nature and the secular become sacrament in their transformation-sublation by the word, the "prime sacrament" and decisive manifestation or representation named Jesus Christ. There can be no negation of the cosmos or nature. Indeed a sacrament is nothing other than a decisive representation of both the events of proclaimed history and the manifestations of the sacred cosmos. (p. 216)

If the kerygmatic power of the word in the sacrament is lost, the sacrament becomes magic. But if the paradigmatic power of real manifestation is lost, the word alone will not meet the deepest needs and satisfy the deepest longings of the human heart. Christianity then becomes a righteous rigorism of duty and obligation.

How can we hold on to both poles and not lose the necessary experience of either manifestation or proclamation? Tracy believes it can be accomplished but only a radically ecumenical Christianity can accomplish it.

By themselves, Protestant, Orthodox and Catholic Christianity seem trapped in historically hardened emphases: unable alone to restore the power of both proclamation and manifestation in a manner that does not seem some uneasy compromise. ... This demand for both manifestation and proclamation is incumbent upon all Christians who recognize the reality of Jesus Christ as the Christian classic, i.e., as the decisive representation in both word and manifestation of our God and our humanity. Thus will Christocentric Christians recognize that the paradigmatic Christ event discloses the religious power of both manifestation and proclamation ... both Christian manifestation and proclamation are ultimately rooted in that God whose radical otherness in freedom posits itself to us as the radical immanence of an all-pervasive, defamiliarizing, shattering, enveloping love in cosmos, in history, in the self. (p. 218)

Part II: Interpreting the Christian Classic

Tracy applies the methodological argument of Part I to a distinctively Christian systematic theology in Part II. He has argued that there is a distinctly religious classic among the other classics generally recognized and he contends that that classic status means that the religious classic too has public status. Such religious classics are "expressions from a *particular* tradition that have found the right mode of expression to become public for all intelligent, reasonable and responsible persons." (p. 233). He asks then what are the classic texts, events, symbols, images and persons in a tradition. While in the Christian tradition there

are several candidates for classic status, there is one which is the norm of all others and which provides the focus for understanding God, self, others, society, history, nature and the whole from a Christian perspective: the event and person of Jesus Christ. Tracy claims,

One need not be a believer in Christianity to accord it (and thereby its central, paradigmatic, classic event) authentically religious status: a manifestation from the whole by the power of the whole. (p. 234)

Christology is the attempt to respond through some interpretation to the event of Jesus Christ in one's own situation.

...The Christian interpretation of this classic event recognizes *in some present experience* of the event – more precisely, in the claim disclosed in that event (paradigmatically in experiencing that event in manifestation and proclamation) as an event *from* God and by God's power. To speak religiously and theologically of the Christ event is ultimately to speak of an event from God.)p. 234)

The Jesus remembered by the tradition is experienced in the present mediated through the word, sacrament and action. Jesus remembered as the Christ is the experience of the presence of God's own self.

The expression "The event of Jesus Christ" means for the Christian tradition...that we recognize Jesus in the Christ event as the person in whom God's own self is decisively re-presented as the gift and command of love. The always already reality of a graced world is made present again decisively, paradigmatically, classically *as event* in Jesus Christ. The event, as re-presentative of reality always already present to us as human beings, is present again as the decisive *that* it happens. The event as command is also present as the not-yet-actualized reality internal for each person and for all history responding to that one decisive event of God. (p. 234)

Tracy will now examine this position to see if it is a relatively adequate interpretation of the event and, secondly, to understand how this interpretation differs from alternative interpretations.

The key for the interpretation of the event of Jesus Christ must be the claim exerted in the present by that event as the claim *that* it happens now.