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“Whoever Seeks the Truth is Seeking God”:
A Study of the Concept of Truth in the Theology of David Tracy

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Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto bakalářskou práci napsal samostatně a výhradně s použitím citovaných pramenů.

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*“Gott ist die Wahrheit. Wer die Wahrheit sucht, der
sucht Gott, ob es ihm klar ist oder nicht.“*

*“God is truth. Whoever seeks the truth is seeking
God, whether consciously or unconsciously.”*

Edith Stein

(Letter of 23.3.1938; In *Edith Steins Werke IX*. Freiburg: Herder, 1977, p. 102)

Věnováno rodičům

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Anotace

Tato práce se zabývá pojetím pravdy v teologii amerického teologa Davida Tracyho (*1939). V úvodní kapitole je zdůvodněna volba tématu a představena osnova a metoda této studie. Kapitola 2 nabízí stručný přehled základních témat a vývoje Tracyho teologie a poukazuje na klíčový význam otázky pravdy v Tracyho teologickém projektu. Kapitola 3 zkoumá Tracyho rozlišení třech různých, ale vzájemně vztažených, pojetí pravdy v fundamentální, systematické a praktické teologii. Kapitola 4 se zabývá základními aspekty Tracyho hermeneutiky jak na obecné rovině jako teorie lidského poznání, tak na konkrétní rovině jako nástroje pro interpretaci křesťanské tradice. V závěrečné kapitole jsou shrnuty hlavní aspekty Tracyho chápání pravdy spolu s jeho některými obecnými důsledky pro teologii. Práce dokládá, že Tracyho mnohvrstevné hermeneutické pojetí pravdy umožňuje teologii ocenit pluralitu současné kultury a teologie a zároveň se vyhnout nebezpečí relativismu, který ignoruje potřebu kritérií pravdivosti. Tracyho přístup tak představuje možný základ pro teologickou práci v současném postmoderním kontextu.

Abstract

The aim of the present thesis is to offer an interpretative and expository account of the concept of truth in the theology of David Tracy (*1939). In the Introduction the reasons for the choice of the topic and the structure and method of this study are presented. Chapter 2 offers a brief overview of the foundations and developments of Tracy's theology and shows the central position of the question of truth in Tracy's theological project. Chapter 3 explores Tracy's distinction of different but mutually interrelated notions of truth in fundamental, systematic and practical theologies. In Chapter 4 the fundamental aspects of Tracy's hermeneutics are discussed both in general as theory of human understanding and concretely as a tool for interpretation of Christian tradition. In the final Conclusion the main aspects of Tracy's understanding of truth are summarized and several implications for theology are drawn. Tracy's multifaceted hermeneutical concept of truth is argued to allow theology to affirm plurality of contemporary culture and theology and, at the same time, to avoid the danger of falling into relativism unconcerned with criteria of truthfulness. Tracy's approach thus represents a viable option for construing Christian theology in contemporary post-modern context.

1. Introduction

1.1 Theology and Reflection on Truth

In his encyclical on the relation of faith and reason, *Fides et ratio*, Pope John Paul II wished to reaffirm “the need to reflect upon truth” because, “at the present time ... the search for ultimate truth seems often to be neglected.”¹ Admittedly, even without the Pope’s exhortations, for many theologians the question of truth would still be an interesting one. In fact, the debate over the concepts of truth in theology and philosophy has been flourishing in recent years.² The present work is a study of the concept of truth in the theology of David Tracy and is understood as a contribution to this debate.

A critical reflection on the concepts of truth is of utmost importance for Christian theology. Stated rather simply, there are three different, however inseparable, sets of reasons for this claim. First and most general, we all as human beings share a certain need for finding the right ways of living our lives, we share a deep longing for finding some meaning and orientation amidst “the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties” of our time.³ It is obvious that Christian theology must not ignore this universal human quest, on both individual and communal level, for what the former Czech president Václav Havel once named “living in truth”.⁴

The second set of reasons derives from the analysis of the present situation of Christianity in the fast globalizing world culture.⁵ The public opinion about what counts as good, plausible, and reliable, is influenced strongly by the powers of economic market and mass

¹ JOHN PAUL II. *Fides et ratio* (14 September 1998); par. 5, 6; available online:

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_ip-ii_enc_14091998_fides-et-ratio_en.html (May 2005).

² See, for example, EGGENSPERGER, T.; ENGEL, U. (eds.) *Wahrheit: Recherchen zwischen Hochscholastik und Postmoderne*. Mainz: Mathias-Grünwald, 1995; PUNTEL, L. B. *Wahrheitstheorien in der neueren Philosophie: eine kritisch-systematische Darstellung*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1993; KREINER, A. *Ende der Wahrheit? Zum Wahrheitsverständnis in Philosophie und Theologie*. Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1992; KÜHN, U.; MARKERT, M.; PETZOLDT, M. (eds.) *Christlicher Wahrheitsanspruch zwischen Fundamentalismus und Pluralität*. Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2002; GUARINO, T. G. *Revelation and Truth: Unity and Plurality in Contemporary Theology*. Scranton: University of Scranton, 1993; JONES G. *Critical Theology: Questions of Truth and Method*. New York: Paragon House, 1995; MARSHALL, B. D. *Trinity and Truth*. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2000.

³ Cf. Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* 1; *Documents of the II Vatican Council*, available online:

http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html (July 2004).

⁴ HAVEL, V. *Moc bezmocných*. Praha: LN, 1990; this essay was written in 1978.

⁵ It should be noted that the present work inevitably accentuates predominantly and grows out from the situation in Europe.

media with their own claims about what leads to a succeeded and happy life.⁶ Rather than seekers of “the truth that shall make us free”,⁷ by many contemporaries Christians are viewed at best as harmless consumers of a product called “religion”. Thus one should not be surprised by a talk of a Czech economist conceiving Christian faith as “a private property” and suggesting, among other things, a privatization of all theological faculties in the Czech Republic into the hands of the churches.⁸ Any discourse on the question of faith is often considered obsolescent, at worse even inimical to human progress, freedom and maturity. It seems it is exactly the claim to truth of various religious communities that awakes a great suspicion, mainly because of the fear of “fundamentalism”.⁹ On the other hand there is an insistence often articulated by theologians of various Christian denominations on the mistake of embracing any relativism unconcerned with the question of truth as a possible strategy for Christianity in contemporary culture. Thus, for example, the famous Protestant theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg warns against relativizing of truth and pleads for “courage to resistance instead of readiness to conform oneself to the mentality of time”¹⁰, and Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger speaks about a deep crises of Christianity in Europe “which rests on the crises of its claim to truth”.¹¹ The present thesis is based on the assumption that indeed we should not sweep Christianity’s irritating claim to truth under the carpet. We should, rather, deal with the question of how this claim to truth should be properly understood and articulated. In other words, what do we really mean when we claim that Christian faith is true? How can we prove or defend this claim? How should we conceive the relation of the truth of Christian faith to the truth (and/or falsity) of the vast plurality of other religious ways and “worldviews”? Moreover, it seems quite obvious that trying to answer the question of what theology means

⁶ „Extra mercatum et media nulla vita nec salus“ might run this message according to Józef Niewiadomski; cf. NIEWIADOMSKI, J. *Herbergsuche: Auf dem Weg zu einer christlichen Identität in der modernen Kultur*. Münster: Thaur, 1999.

⁷ Cf. John 8,32.

⁸ In the opinion of this economist, the price for the faculties should be “one Czech crown” – let this serve as an example of the value attributed to academic theology by many contemporaries! Cf. LOUŽEK, M. *Církev potřebuje konkurenci*; Loužek gave this talk at the seminar „The Relation of State and Churches“ organized by the Center for Economics and Politics (founded by the Czech president Václav Klaus) in Prague on February 24, 2004; published online: <http://www.cepin.cz/cepin/asp/clanek.asp?id=n8zxt6428PYj> (April 2004).

⁹ This has become much more manifest after the events of the September 11, 2001.

¹⁰ PANNENBERG, W. Angst um die Kirche. Zwischen Wahrheit und Pluralismus. *Evangelische Kommentare* 27 (1994), p. 709-713, cit. p. 711.

¹¹ RATZINGER, J. Der angezweifelte Wahrheitsanspruch - Die Krise des Christentums am Beginn des dritten Jahrtausends. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (January 8, 2000). In the course of my work on this thesis Joseph Ratzinger has become Pope Benedict XVI.

by “truth” is closely related to trying to answer the question of what is the relation of theology to other, both scientific and non-scientific, modes of the search for truth and meaning. Hence a serious critical reflection on the concept of truth is also indispensable for the defense of the (often disputed) right for theology to be present in the public and academic debate.

The third, and with the previous ones intimately interconnected set of reasons for the importance of the reflection on truth lies on “inner” ecclesial and theological grounds. As Christians we live out our lives inspired by a message that has been handed on to us through centuries in a process commonly called “tradition”. Christian Church has been from its very beginnings confronted with questions concerning the warrants of continuity and orthodoxy in the development of Christian tradition. The formulas like *regula veritatis* (the rule of truth) or *regula fidei* (the rule of faith)¹² have been related to the search for what should, in the words of a liturgical prayer, “grant that we be not swept away in the darkness of error but may ever remain transparent to the splendor of the truth”.¹³ Indeed, the problem of continuities and discontinuities in understanding and expressing the truth of Christian faith in history remains a key question for theology.

Moreover, ecumenical efforts of the last century have made us more aware of a large variety of visions of lived Christianity. Recalling a sheer plurality of current theology is surely a truism.¹⁴ However less obvious is what a proper theological strategy for dealing with this variety of different and often competing ways of doing theology and construing the Christian identity. Is it possible to identify a single official instance or method as a unique, universal and infallible source and guard of theological truth? Or, conversely, is every theology determined by its particular context to such an extent that it makes it impossible to examine its claims by any universal criteria, so that every theologian has the right to do his or her particular theology in its own independent way undisturbed by the claims of other theologians? Should any criticism of particular theologies be considered with suspicion as intolerant imposing rules and holding back freedom of theological imagination? But would not this cause slipping of theology into a noncommittal playing with purely private ideas

¹² These formulas were first associated with Irenaeus of Lyon (died ca. 202) and Vincent of Lérins (died before 450); cf. JEANROND, W. G. *Theological Hermeneutics. Development and Significance*. London: SCM, 1997, p. 18-30, 167-169.

¹³ *Roman Catholic Missal*, 13th Sunday in ordinary time.

¹⁴ Cf. RAHNER, K. Der Pluralismus in der Theologie und die Einheit des Bekenntnisses der Kirche. In *Schriften zur Theologie IX*. Zürich: Benziger, 1970, p. 11-33.

whose only rule in the end would be “everybody can say anything”? Obviously, such questions present extreme positions and other alternatives are possible. One of the assumptions of the present thesis is that theology, in order not to lapse into a mere frivolous and rambling speech, indeed needs to be concerned with the problem of searching some rules for Christian discourse and action. It seems to me that otherwise what the word “Christian” actually means would inevitably become totally blurred and any theological reflection on Christian identity in this world would become meaningless and superfluous. I believe that the Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams is absolutely right with his claim, that “it is, after all, possible to be a bad, silly, or mistaken theologian.”¹⁵ However, given this, how can we discern between good and bad theology? What are the criteria on which we can judge the truth or falsity of a particular theology? And how should be such criteria incorporated into a theological enterprise so that this could be considered a successful search for truth? Accordingly, it is quite evident that the question of criteria of truthfulness in theology is closely connected to the question of a proper method for doing theology, and hence to the question of what theology actually is. In other words, we come to know what theology is when we know how it should be done and by which criteria it can be judged as true or false.

1.2 Why David Tracy?

The present work deals with how the questions raised above have been worked out in the theology of David Tracy. There are several reasons for choosing his theology as a subject of this thesis. Firstly, as shall be shown below, the question of truth plays a central role in Tracy’s theology. His theology is concerned to a large extent with the issues of theological method, particularly of the search of a proper way of constructing theology, which would enable the Christian message being understood, proclaimed and handed on in a contemporary pluralist society, and at the same time remained faithful to Christian tradition. In this thesis, I hope to show the main aspects of Tracy’s unique approach, and to discuss its viability in current theological debate.

¹⁵ WILLIAMS, R. The Unity of Christian Truth. In *On Christian theology*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2000, p. 16-28, cit. p. 17.

Secondly, Tracy's theology is currently often claimed to represent one of the most influential contributions to theological discussions in the last decades.¹⁶ However, relatively little secondary literature on Tracy's theology is available hitherto, and, to the best of my knowledge, no study dealing primarily with Tracy's understanding of truth has been published yet.¹⁷ This work should present such a study dealing directly and predominantly with Tracy's understanding of truth, and thus, at the same time, it should provide a brief and intelligible introduction into Tracy's thinking.

Thirdly, Tracy's theology, though rooted in the Roman-Catholic tradition, is not confined by strictly denominational concerns but shows strive for genuine ecumenical openness, which is, as I believe, most needed today.¹⁸

Fourthly, the width of the spectrum of topics and the depth of their treatment by Tracy promises that Tracy's theology has (at least tacitly) something important to say not only rather generally about issues concerning theological method, but also about how these issues influence and shape concretely our practical quest for adequate ways of addressing the mystery of God in prayer and action. In other words, I hope that Tracy's theology has also a potential for shedding some light on the relation of theology and spirituality.¹⁹

1.3 Aims, Method, and Structure of This Study

My aim in this work is to present an interpretative and expository study of the concept of truth in the theology of David Tracy. It should be noted that it is hardly possible to distill straightforwardly Tracy's "theology of truth" out from his wide-ranging theological project. On one hand, one can say that the question of truth is in Tracy's theology all-pervasive. On the other hand, Tracy himself has not produced an explicit and detailed account of his concept

¹⁶ Thus, for example, a recent study of Gaspar Martinez deals with Tracy's theology as, along with the theologies of Johann Baptist Metz and Gustavo Gutiérrez, one of the major post-Vatican II developments of the shift in Catholic theology brought about by Karl Rahner. MARTINEZ, G. *Confronting the Mystery of God: Political, Liberation, and Public Theologies*. New York: Continuum, 2001.

¹⁷ For a brief and sketchy exception see Jennifer L. Rike's introductory chapter in the "Festschrift" published on the occasion of Tracy's fiftieth birthday; RIKE, J. L. Introduction: Radical Pluralism and Truth in the Thought of David Tracy. In JEANROND, W. G.; RIKE, J. L. (eds.) *Radical Pluralism and Truth: David Tracy and the hermeneutics of religion*. New York: Crossroad, 1991, p. ix-xxii.

¹⁸ One only needs to take a look at the index of authors cited in any of Tracy's books. Admittedly, Roman-Catholic and Protestant authors have hitherto represented the majority of Tracy's conversation partners as compared to a relatively small number of Eastern-Orthodox theologians.

¹⁹ I believe that obscured understanding of this relation lies behind the many people's (including believing Christians) conviction about total pointlessness of all academic theology.

of truth yet, nor appears the question of truth within Tracy's theology as a single, easily identifiable and clearly structured theory. Therefore, two qualifications must be made. First, this study, due to its short extent, must remain very modest in its aims. Only minor parts (however, hopefully, the representative ones) of Tracy's theology will be outlined, particularly those, which help best to illustrate and clarify the main aspects of his understanding of truth. Second, a rather arbitrary decision regarding the starting points and the structure of this work will be made. This means, *inter alia*, that the exposition of Tracy's ideas will not be always strictly chronological, which should, however, help to keep the focus of the work on the concept of truth in Tracy.

The next chapter will be introductory in its thrust. It should point out the main starting points, themes, and some major philosophical and theological sources of inspiration of Tracy's theological project. It will bring a short description of the social and intellectual context in which Tracy's theology has grown up, together with an overview of foundations and developments of Tracy's theology. The aim of that part will be to show the different aspects of the question of truth in Tracy's theology, which will be further dealt with in following chapters. Chapter 3 will explore Tracy's efforts to identify and characterize different notions and criteria of "truth" in different fields or modes of theology – in fundamental, systematic, and practical theology. In other words, the question "What do we mean by truth?" will be the main thrust of this part. Chapter 4 will deal with Tracy's reflections on how the truth in theology can be determined and articulated. Hence the question "How can we find and express truth?" will play a central role in this chapter, and the focus will be on fundamental features of Tracy's hermeneutics as a tool for understanding and accomplishing theology's tasks. The final Conclusion should bring the key characteristics of Tracy's concept of truth together with some implications for theology.

This work will present no extra critical part. Instead, when necessary, I will try to introduce some important criticisms of Tracy's theology together with attempts for clarifications throughout the whole work.

There is certainly some risk in writing a thesis on a still living and active theologian. It must be respected, that his work may undergo profound changes and develop in unpredictable ways. Nevertheless, I believe that a study of this kind can be, in the framework of theological research, significant for at least two reasons. First, it might provide a reading of Tracy's

currently available works, which might help to clarify his position in the wider theological debate on the question of truth. Second, by achieving this it could help to understand better the future developments of Tracy's theology.²⁰

²⁰ In 1990, when asked to give account of the development of his thought Tracy himself witnessed: "Most of us carry our continuities of desire, hope, beliefs, opinions and judgments more subconsciously than consciously as we move forward month by month, year by year. Readers and friends have proven this by helping me see more clearly where I've really "changed" in thought or sensibility than I would have realized on my own." TRACY, D. God, Dialogue and Solidarity: A Theologian's Refrain. *The Christian Century* (October 10, 1990), p. 901-904.* [Here and below an asterisk after the reference indicates that only an electronic copy of the original text was available to me, which made the exact page number citation impossible.]

2. Tracy's Theological Concerns: Foundations and Development

2.1 Social and Intellectual Context of Tracy's Theology

David Tracy was born on 6 January 1939 in Yonkers (New York, USA). He started his theological studies at St. Joseph's Seminary, Dunwoodie (New York), and, after his priestly ordination for the diocese of Bridgeport (Connecticut) in 1963, he continued his studies at the Gregorian University in Rome.²¹ There he received his Licentiate (in 1964) and Doctorate (in 1969) in Sacred Theology with a thesis on Bernard Lonergan's interpretation of Thomas Aquinas.²² After teaching at the Catholic University of America (Washington, D.C.) from 1967 to 1969 he joined the University of Chicago, where he is currently Andrew Thomas Greeley and Grace McNichols Greeley Distinguished Service Professor of Catholic Studies and Professor of Theology and of the Philosophy of Religion in the Divinity School and the Committee on Social Thought. He has lectured in numerous universities around the world, and served, among others, in the editorial board of the international theological journal *Concilium*.²³

Intellectually, the roots of Tracy's theology are, as indicated by Tracy's first book *The Achievement of Bernard Lonergan*,²⁴ in the theology of Bernard Lonergan oriented mainly to the recovery of Thomism in modern transcendental terms and to the problem of theological method. In his work *Blessed Rage for Order*²⁵ Tracy presented his own method for fundamental theology and applied this method for the reinterpretation of the Christian doctrine of God and Christology drawing mainly on modern hermeneutics and process

²¹ Tracy names "the splendid ambience of student days in Rome during the Second Vatican Council" as one of the "early formative influences" upon his theology. TRACY, D. Defending the Public Character of Theology. *The Christian Century* (April 1, 1981), p. 350-356.*

²² TRACY, D. *Lonergan's Interpretation of St. Thomas Aquinas: The Intellectualist Nature of Speculative Theology*. Dissertation, Gregorian University, Rome, 1969.

²³ The journal *Concilium* was founded in 1965 in the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council by Catholic theologians like Karl Rahner, Edward Schillebeeckx, Yves Congar, Hans Küng, Johann Baptist Metz and others, with an aim "to continue the work of Vatican II". Cf. RAHNER, K.; SCHILLEBEECKX, E. Editorial: General Introduction to *Concilium*. *Concilium* 1 (1965), p. 3-4.

²⁴ TRACY, D. *The Achievement of Bernard Lonergan*. New York: Herder & Herder, 1970.

²⁵ TRACY, D. *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology*. New York: Seabury, 1975.

thought. Tracy's later book *The Analogical Imagination*²⁶ was focused on systematic theology and marked his continuously growing incorporation of hermeneutics and questioning of some typically modern approaches to theology. This questioning has been intensified by Tracy's critical appraisal of postmodernity in *Plurality and Ambiguity*²⁷ and has led him to his current work, which is still in progress, on the attempts "to name God in a mystical-prophetic way."²⁸

It is remarkable that the subtitles of both Tracy's most extensive works - *Blessed Rage for Order* and *The Analogical Imagination* – contain the word "pluralism". Evidently, Tracy's preoccupation with method has been deeply influenced by the culturally and religiously pluralist context of the U.S. society.²⁹ Hence, for Tracy, cultural and religious plurality is not a matter of choice but a given. He has always believed that the present plurality in theology should be understood as enrichment.³⁰ However, he has also repeatedly stated that the affirmation of pluralism should not result in "a common sense eclecticism that can mask intellectual chaos"³¹ or a lazy attitude of "a repressive tolerance where all is allowed because nothing finally is taken seriously."³² Tracy opposes strongly against any tendencies to reduce all religious traditions and all theologies to some lowest common denominator or to understand them as purely "private options"? Instead, he insists on the "authentically *public* character of *all* good theology."³³ As we shall see later, his understanding of the "public" dimension of theology shapes significantly his theology. For our purposes it is therefore opportune to discuss briefly what Tracy means by this "publicness" since it represents a good starting point for the discussion of further important topics relevant to the question of truth.

²⁶ TRACY, D. *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*. New York: Crossroad, 1981.

²⁷ TRACY, D. *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987.

²⁸ TRACY, D. God, Dialogue and Solidarity.* Tracy's official University of Chicago web page just shortly notes that he "is currently writing a book on God." Cf. <http://divinity.uchicago.edu/faculty/tracy.shtml> (May 2005). The first volume of a projected trilogy entitled *This Side of God* is forthcoming.

²⁹ Recently, Gaspar Martinez analyzed in detail from historical, economic and sociological points of view the U.S. society as the context of Tracy's theology. In contrast to European countries, the situation in the United States cannot be simply conceived in terms of common secularization theories, and represents rather a complex amalgam of attitudes ranging from pleading for "civil religion" on one hand and an apparent drive for pushing the questions about fundamental principles and values to the private sphere on the other hand. MARTINEZ, G. *Confronting the Mystery of God*, p. 152-176.

³⁰ "[T]he present pluralism of theologies allows each theologian to learn incomparably more about reality by disclosing really different ways of viewing both our common humanity and Christianity." TRACY, D. *Blessed Rage for Order*, p. 3.

³¹ TRACY, D. *Blessed Rage for Order*, p. 3.

³² TRACY, D. *The Analogical Imagination*, p. ix.

³³ TRACY, D. The Necessity and Insufficiency of Fundamental Theology. In LATOURELLE, R.; O'COLLINS, G. (eds.) *Problems and Perspectives of Fundamental Theology*. New York, Paulist, 1982, p. 23-36, cit. p. 23.

2.2 The Publicness of Theology

There are several meanings of the “publicness” of theology. Most generally, Tracy says, “to speak in a public fashion means to speak in a manner that can be disclosive and transformative for any intelligent, reasonable, responsible human being.”³⁴ In other words, the disclosure of meaning and truth that theology strives to bring about must be in some sense accessible and intelligible to all human beings. Tracy’s argument for this universal character of all theological discourse runs as follows: If theology is essentially a reflection on God and if God is universal, then theological discourse cannot be purely private or particularist but must be public.³⁵ In addition to this, another reason for the public nature of theology is the universal nature of the fundamental questions which theology seeks to answer.³⁶

Here we have the first important feature of Tracy’s assumption regarding the question of truth in theology, a feature that has a strong impact on both the main themes and the contents of his work. Theology must seek to manifest the validity of Christian truth not only on the strictly inner-ecclesial ground but also with a respect to other modes of the search of truth like philosophy, science, and, indeed, any responsible human activity distinguished by asking questions and seeking answers. In 1990 Tracy expressed his lifelong conviction that “the demand for public criteria for all truth-claims remains both the initial impetus and the great hope for all contemporary theology...”³⁷ He always searches for a “global” view, a view that can be, at least potentially, shared with all others, a view incorporating the best of the views of all others. He likes to cite Kenneth Burke’s dictum: “Use all that can be used.”³⁸ Yet, to repeat the point, his desire for an ongoing dialogue with others is not a result of a naive

³⁴ TRACY, D. *Defending the Public Character of Theology*, p. 350.

³⁵ “Whatever else it is, any Christian theology is finally and radically theocentric. This insight into the universal character of the divine reality that is the always-present object of the Christian’s trust and loyalty is what ultimately impels every theology to attempt publicness. For God as understood by the Jewish, Christian and Muslim believer is either universal in actuality or sheer delusion. Theology in all its forms is finally nothing else but the attempt to reflect deliberately and critically upon that God. Theology is *logos* on *theos*. Any authentic speech on the reality of God which is really private or particularist is unworthy of that reality.” TRACY, D. *The Analogical Imagination*, p. 51.

³⁶ Tracy mentions some examples of such questions: “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?” TRACY, D. *The Analogical Imagination*, p. 4. For further analysis of these “limit-questions” cf. TRACY, D. *Blessed Rage for Order*, p. 91-109.

³⁷ TRACY, D. *God, Dialogue and Solidarity*.*

³⁸ TRACY, D. *Plurality and Ambiguity*, p. 9, 72. A cursory look at the reference indexes of all Tracy’s works betrays that Tracy indeed follows this rule – it is difficult to find a philosopher or theologian to whose work Tracy is not giving a reference.

eclecticism but of the Christian belief in God's universal salvific will,³⁹ of the belief that the gift of God's continuous self-communication which was revealed in Jesus Christ is offered to and can be experienced by all human beings.⁴⁰

There is, however, more about the meaning of the "publicness" of theology. For Tracy it also means that every theology emerges from and addresses, speaking in sociological terms, some primary social realities, which Tracy calls "publics". Here he finds also an inherent source of pluralism in theology: "Behind the pluralism of theological conclusions lies a pluralism of public roles and publics as reference groups for theological discourse."⁴¹ Tracy therefore demands theology to pay an explicit attention to the particular publics of each particular theology. He identifies three key publics for theology – the academy, the church, and the wider society, and, corresponding to them, three distinct, but mutually related, theological sub-disciplines – fundamental, systematic, and practical theology, respectively.⁴² It means, that the "style" of doing theology, and to anticipate for a moment, that what we mean by "truth" in theology, will inevitably differ in dependence on the context in which a concrete theology is primarily done and on the particular public which this theology primarily addresses. Tracy does not suggest that each theology must be clearly identifiable with one particular public. According to him, all theologies are, at least implicitly, related to all three publics even though usually one public will be primary. Chapter 3 of this thesis will bring a more thorough discussion of the different aspects of fundamental, systematic and practical theologies, focusing on the different understanding of truth in these three theological sub-disciplines.

The question of how concretely the ideal of publicness should be actualized in theology has occupied Tracy from the very beginnings of his career and has led to one of his major concerns in the 1970's and 1980's, namely the reflections on theological method. Some basic characteristics of the development of Tracy's thought on theological method will therefore be discussed in the next section.

³⁹ Cf. 1 Tim 2,3-4.

⁴⁰ Here one can find the confirmation of Martinez's thesis, that Tracy's work moves along the way paved previously by Karl Rahner; cf. MARTINEZ, G. *Confronting the Mystery of God*.

⁴¹ TRACY, D. *The Analogical Imagination*, p. 5.

⁴² TRACY, D. *The Analogical Imagination*, p. 3-98.

2.3 Method in Theology

It seems almost inappropriate to discuss Tracy's reflections on theological method in a short subchapter. In reality, Tracy's concern with method has permeated and dominated, at least till the end of the 1980's, his whole theology, a point often suggested by many commentators of Tracy's work.⁴³ Moreover, my thesis is that Tracy's concern with theological method is nothing but an aspect of *the* question that informs his whole thinking, namely the question of truth. Here my aim is to show this by presenting just contours of Tracy's theological method. These contours should serve as a framework that should be further supplemented in the next parts of this work to offer a more kaleidoscopic view of Tracy's concept of truth.

Undoubtably, Tracy's concern with method can be traced back to the influence of his theological mentor Bernard Lonergan.⁴⁴ Lonergan, not unlike Karl Rahner,⁴⁵ was unhappy about the barren neo-scholasticism prevailing in his time and strived for the re-conceptualization of Aquinas's theology in modern terms, most importantly in terms of the "turn to the subject" and the explicit incorporation of historical consciousness. What attracted Lonergan's interest was the analysis of the very fundamental operation of understanding by the knowing subject⁴⁶ accompanied with the reflections on methodology of theology. Lonergan explained his motivation for methodology at the beginning of his *Method in Theology* as follows:

A theology mediates between a cultural matrix and the significance and role of a religion in that matrix. The classicist notion of culture was normative: at least *de jure* there was but one culture that was both universal and permanent; to its norms and ideals might aspire the uncultured, whether they were the young or the people or the natives or the barbarians. Besides the classicist, there also is the empirical notion of culture. It is the set of meanings and values that informs a way of life. It may remain unchanged for years. It may be in process of slow development or rapid

⁴³ Cf. SANKS, T. H. David Tracy's theological project: an overview and some implications. *Theological Studies* 54 (1993), p. 698-727; JEANROND, W. G. Correlational Theology and the Chicago School. In BADHAM, R. A. (ed.). *Introduction to Christian Theology. Contemporary North American Perspectives*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998, p. 137-153; JEANROND, W. G. The Problem of the Starting-Point of Theological Thinking. In WEBSTER, J. (ed.). *The Possibilities of Theology: Studies in the Theology of Eberhard Jüngel in His Sixtieth Year*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994, p. 70-89.

⁴⁴ Here I draw on MARTINEZ, G. *Confronting the Mystery of God*, p. 176-215.

⁴⁵ The parallelism of Lonergan and Rahner is nicely shown by Martinez; cf. MARTINEZ, G. *Confronting the Mystery of God*, p. 178-180.

⁴⁶ Cf. LONERGAN, B. J. F. *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*. In CROW, F. E., DORAN, R. M. (eds.) *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*. Toronto: University of Toronto, 1997.

dissolution. When the classicist notion of culture prevails, theology is conceived as a permanent achievement, and then one discourses on its nature. When culture is conceived empirically, theology is known to be an ongoing process, and then one writes on its method.⁴⁷

In his first book on method for fundamental theology *Blessed Rage for Order* Tracy shares clearly this Lonergan's commitment to the question of method. He was influenced by Lonergan's impressive demonstration of the possibility of a critical appropriation of pre-modern theology. Through this Tracy ever more realized that theology must be rethought in order to be able to play its role in a pluralistic society. Yet, according to Tracy, though Lonergan rightly insists on the need for ongoing retrieval of Christian faith through historically informed hermeneutics, he simply presupposes the truth of Christian tradition and does not "provide critical grounds ... for the truth-value of the claims to ultimacy of religious and explicitly theological language."⁴⁸ Tracy, facing the enhanced plurality of our culture, is well aware that it is no more possible to assume the truth claims of Christian tradition without critically grounding them in a public manner. In other words, for Tracy a theological method should not only provide a way to reinterpret authentically the Christian doctrinal heritage but also to demonstrate the plausibility of the assumptions and grounds of the entire theological enterprise.⁴⁹ For this purpose Tracy proposed his own "correlation method", to which he has remained faithful while continuously revising and refining it.⁵⁰ Although Tracy designed this method first particularly for fundamental theology the main aspects of the method need not be confined strictly to the particular tasks of fundamental theology and have been incorporated and developed in his later works. Principally, Tracy says, a theologian should be

committed to what seems clearly to be the central task of contemporary Christian theology: the dramatic confrontation, the mutual illuminations and corrections, the possible basic reconciliation

⁴⁷ LONERGAN, B. J. F. *Method in Theology*. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1972, p. xi.

⁴⁸ TRACY, D. Lonergan's Foundational Theology: An Interpretation and a Critique. In MCSHANE, P. (ed) *Foundations of Theology: Papers from the International Lonergan Congress 1970*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1971, p. 214. Cited in SANKS, T. H. David Tracy's theological project, p. 700.

⁴⁹ "In any theological method which remains distinctively Christian, there logically must be criteria to assess the appropriateness of any particular theological proposal as Christian. For some theologians (including myself) there must also be criteria of intelligibility or credibility for a full theological method." TRACY, D. On Reading the Scriptures Theologically. In MARSHALL, B. D. (ed.) *Theology and Dialogue: Essays in Conversation with George Lindbeck*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1990, p. 35-68, cit. p. 36.

⁵⁰ In *Blessed Rage for Order* Tracy called his approach "the revisionist model" but in later publications he abandoned this term.

between the principal values, cognitive claims, and existential faiths of both a reinterpreted post-modern consciousness and a reinterpreted Christianity.⁵¹

This dense and succinct sentence might serve as an abbreviated description of Tracy's view of theological method. In his early formulation of this method Tracy suggested five summary theses that specify his model in a more detailed way.⁵² What follows is a list of these five theses accompanied with short comments on their meaning and on their development in Tracy's later thinking:

First thesis: "*The Two Principal Sources for Theology Are Christian Texts and Common Human Experience and Language.*"⁵³ Although Tracy uses the term "Christian texts", he means in reality the whole of Christian tradition, hence "not merely texts but also symbols, rituals, events, witnesses",⁵⁴ simply everything what counts as the Christian "classic".⁵⁵ The term "common human experience" has a universal tone and should indicate that "the task of theology involves an attempt to show the adequacy of the major Christian theological categories for *all* human experience."⁵⁶

Second thesis: "*The Theological Task Will Involve a Critical Correlation of the Results of the Investigations of the Two Sources of Theology.*"⁵⁷ Here Tracy clearly draws on Paul Tillich's method of correlation between our "situation" and the Christian "message".⁵⁸ However, while Tillich presupposed a "one-way" correlation of the "questions" of the "situation" with the "answers" provided by the Christian "message", Tracy's model of correlation works both ends.⁵⁹ Thus Tracy claims that if the "situation" is to be taken seriously, then also to its answers a critical attention must be paid, and, analogously, no one can claim that only those questions articulated explicitly in today's society are theologically relevant.⁶⁰ Therefore Tracy prefers to speak about a *mutually* critical correlation "of the

⁵¹ TRACY, D. *Blessed Rage for Order*, p. 32.

⁵² TRACY, D. *Blessed Rage for Order*, p. 43-63.

⁵³ TRACY, D. *Blessed Rage for Order*, p. 43.

⁵⁴ TRACY, D. *Blessed Rage for Order*, p. 15.

⁵⁵ For the discussion of Tracy's using of the term "classic" see below Chapters 3 and 4.

⁵⁶ TRACY, D. *Blessed Rage for Order*, p. 44; italics mine.

⁵⁷ TRACY, D. *Blessed Rage for Order*, p. 45.

⁵⁸ Cf. TILLICH, P. *Systematic Theology*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1951.

⁵⁹ Cf. JEANROND, W. G. *Correlational Theology and the Chicago School*.

⁶⁰ TRACY, D. *Blessed Rage for Order*, p. 46. Indeed, in his later works Tracy ever more stresses the critical and subversive character of the questions posed to both Church and society by the interruptive memory of the suffering and resurrection of

meaning and truth of the interpreted Christian fact (including therefore the texts, symbols, witnesses, and tradition of the past and present) and the meaning and truth of the interpreted contemporary situation.”⁶¹ Tracy draws here also on the hermeneutical thinking of Hans-Georg Gadamer who saw the process of understanding to occur appropriately in the “fusion of horizons” – the horizon of the text or piece of art to be understood, and the horizon of the present situation.⁶²

Third thesis: “*The Principal Method of Investigation of the Source ‘Common Human Experience and Language’ Can Be Described as a Phenomenology of the ‘Religious Dimension’ Present in Everyday and Scientific Experience and Language.*”⁶³ Tracy notes that since “all theological statements involve an existential dimension [...] the theologian is obliged to explicate how and why the existential meanings proper to Christian self-understanding are present in common human experience.”⁶⁴ He uses the term “religious dimension” instead of “religious experience” in order to indicate that “religion” is not just one more activity among the activities as art, morality, and science, “but is rather a dimension of or horizon to *all* human activities.”⁶⁵ Tracy has also always stressed that theology, as a consequence of its drive to publicness, should try to accomplish this task best using some form of “hermeneutical phenomenology” in collaboration with other disciplines.⁶⁶

Fourth thesis: “*The Principal Method of Investigation of the Source ‘The Christian Tradition’ Can Be Described as an Historical and Hermeneutical Investigation of Classical Christian Texts.*”⁶⁷ Just like the present situation, also the Christian tradition is accessible to us only through interpretation. Therefore hermeneutics plays a central role in Tracy’s theology. Tracy critically adopted the early Gadamerian interpretation theory by incorporating

Jesus Christ; cf. TRACY, D. On Naming the Present. In TRACY, D. *On Naming the Present - God, Hermeneutics, and Church*. New York: Orbis Books, 1994, p. 3-24.

⁶¹ TRACY, D. Particular Questions within General Consensus. In SWIDLER, L. (ed.) *Consensus in Theology? A Dialogue with Hans Küng and Edward Schillebeeckx*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980, p. 28-33.*

⁶² Cf. GADAMER, H.-G. *Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1965.

⁶³ TRACY, D. *Blessed Rage for Order*, p. 47.

⁶⁴ TRACY, D. *Blessed Rage for Order*, p. 47.

⁶⁵ TRACY, D. *Blessed Rage for Order*, p. 59.

⁶⁶ Cf. TRACY, D. *Blessed Rage for Order*, p. 47-48; TRACY, D. *The Analogical Imagination*, p. 3-46.

⁶⁷ TRACY, D. *Blessed Rage for Order*, p. 49.

the need for explanatory methods (Paul Ricoeur) and ideology critique (Jürgen Habermas).⁶⁸ In Chapter 4 further details of Tracy's hermeneutics will be discussed.

Fifth thesis: “*To Determine the Truth-Status of the Results of One's Investigations into the Meaning of Both Common Human Experience and Christian Text the Theologian Should Employ an Explicitly Transcendental or Metaphysical Mode of Reflection.*”⁶⁹ Already in the early 1970's Tracy was well aware of the fact that this thesis seems the most problematic for many theologians because historical consciousness has cast doubt on all claims of metaphysics. Nevertheless, he never stopped believing “that the very nature of the claims of theology demands public, indeed transcendental or metaphysical, explication.”⁷⁰

The question of method occupied Tracy mainly the 1970's and 1980's. Later, in 1990, Tracy himself admitted:

Like many others in our confusing theological period, I have spent a great deal of time (perhaps too much) on theological method. [...] At the same time, I have come to acknowledge far more than I did ten years ago that Karl Rahner (no stranger to questions of theological method himself) was right when he stated, “But we cannot spend all our time sharpening the knife; at some point we must cut.”⁷¹

In reality, Tracy has tried to treat the question of method together with substantive theological topics (revelation, God, Christology) in his both major books on fundamental theology (*Blessed Rage for Order*) and systematic theology (*The Analogical Imagination*). We know that initially he intended to finalize the trilogy by writing a book on practical theology.⁷² It is clear that in all this it was the question of truth what impelled him to reflect on method. Surely, Tracy has never ceased to be interested in methodological questions.⁷³ But he has never become only a “theologian of method” because in the meantime his search for truth has changed the focus.

⁶⁸ Cf. RICOEUR, P. *Interpretation Theory*. Fort Worth: Texas Christian University, 1976; HABERMAS, J. *Erkenntnis und Interesse*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1973.

⁶⁹ TRACY, D. *Blessed Rage for Order*, p. 52.

⁷⁰ TRACY, D. *God, Dialogue and Solidarity*. * For further details see the next chapter.

⁷¹ TRACY, D. *God, Dialogue and Solidarity*. *

⁷² “If I can ever successfully think my way forward to the most complex task of all, practical theology ... the principal methodological issue will be the relationship of theory and praxis in both personal and social terms, and the principal theological topics will be Spirit and Church.” TRACY, D. *God, Dialogue and Solidarity*. *

⁷³ Cf. TRACY, D. *The Uneasy Alliance Reconciled: Catholic Theological Method, Modernity, and Postmodernity*. *Theological Studies* 50 (1989), p. 548-570.

2.4 Beyond Method

Tracy has been always far from a wholesale rejection of modernity. However, in 1994 he expressed something of his view of the ambiguity of modern tradition in theology:

The history of theology is the history of the ever-shifting relationship between the reality of God and that divine reality as experienced and understood from within a *logos*, i.e. a particular horizon of intelligibility. The theologian is one who attempts the nearly impossible task of correlating *theos* and *logos*. When that central responsibility is poorly executed, the *logos* of some contemporary intelligibility overwhelms and domesticates the reality of *theos*. Then theology – as in the modern period – becomes obsessed with finding exactly the right method, the irrefutable modern rational argument, the proper horizon of intelligibility for comprehending and perhaps controlling God. To be sure, insights continue to occur. Genuine arguments are forged. Brilliant speculations ensue. Better methods, more exact and exacting hermeneutics are developed. All the modern achievements of theology are indeed significant. But we are all, willingly or unwillingly, being forced to leave modernity. We leave it with genuine new insights, thanks to the modern *logos*, into the reality of God. [...] The awesome, frightening, interruptive reality of God can seem lost even in the best modern concepts forged to articulate the relational insights of modern theologies. [...] [A]t its best, postmodern theology is an honest if sometimes desperate attempt to let God as God be heard again; disrupting modern historical consciousness, unmasking the pretensions of modern rationality, demanding that attention be paid to all those others forgotten and marginalized by the modern project. *Theos* has returned to unsettle the dominance of the modern *logos*.⁷⁴

Tracy has realized that the insights of modernity - the “turn to the subject”, the drive for clarity, the concern with method, the modern social evolutionary narrative, etc. - are for theology both emancipatory and entrapping. Although he makes sure that “many forms of thought announcing themselves as postmodern fully merit the suspicion that others cast upon them”,⁷⁵ he thinks that there are good grounds to conceive and accept our situation as more postmodern than modern. This is because postmodernity confronts us again with the *otherness* – with the irreducible otherness of our neighbours and with the uncontrollable otherness of God.⁷⁶ Hence Tracy’s thought has encountered a shift from the method-

⁷⁴ TRACY, D. The Return of God in Contemporary Theology. *Concilium* 6 (1994), p. 37-46, cit. p. 37-38.

⁷⁵ TRACY, D. Theology and the Many Faces of Postmodernity. *Theology Today* 51 (1994), p. 104-114, cit. p. 107.

⁷⁶ Drawing on Emmanuel Levinas he says: “The real face of postmodernity ... is the face of the other.” TRACY, D. Theology and the Many Faces of Postmodernity, p. 108.

centeredness to a less defined and more diffuse project that he calls “naming of God”.⁷⁷ Martinez names three main aspects of this Tracy’s turn to the other: interreligious dialogue,⁷⁸ the retrieval of premodern theology, and the attempt to overcome the modern division of form and content, thinking and feeling, theory and practice.⁷⁹

The aim of this chapter was to show the foundations, developments and shifts of Tracy’s theology. It seems to me that two points in Tracy’s thinking have remained unchanged. First it is Tracy’s major concern – the reflection on the search for truth in theology in today’s situation of enhanced plurality. Initially this concern was identified with his interest in method. Later he realized more acutely that “method is always only a heuristic guide; a useful, critical guide which, if allied to flexible criteria, can aid but never replace the actual theological inquiry.”⁸⁰ Hence his interest has shifted gradually from the rather abstract, yet relatively well-defined, search for a true method to the more concrete, yet relatively less definable, search for the true namings of the mystery of God. The second remaining point is his conviction that some form of publicly explicable hermeneutics must represent the core of this search. The next two chapters of this thesis will essentially draw on these points. Chapter 3 will be on the different notions of truth in theology reflecting the different hermeneutical contexts in which the question of truth is asked. Chapter 4 should more directly discuss the main aspects of Tracy’s radicalized praxis of hermeneutics as a way for finding and expressing truth.

⁷⁷ Cf. the interview with Tracy in HOLLAND, S. This Side of God: A Conversation with David Tracy. *Cross Currents* 52/1 (2002), p. 54-60.

⁷⁸ Cf. TRACY, D. *Dialogue with the Other: The Inter-Religious Dialogue*. Louvain: Eerdmans-Peeters, 1990.

⁷⁹ MARTINEZ, G. *Confronting the Mystery of God*, p. 211.

⁸⁰ TRACY, D. *The Uneasy Alliance Reconceived*, p. 563.

3. The Notions of Truth in Theology

3.1 The Three Publics and the Threefold Nature of Theology

As mentioned above,⁸¹ David Tracy has brought the term “public” into theology in order to indicate how theologian’s priorities and methods are shaped by the primary reference groups in which and to which the theologian speaks. He explains:

Each theologian addresses three distinct and related social realities: the wider society, the academy and the church. Some one of these publics will be a principal, yet rarely exclusive, addressee. The reality of a particular social locus will, to be sure, affect the choices of emphasis. The tasks of theology in a seminary, in a church-related university, in a pastoral setting, in a program for religious education, in a small community, in the secular academy, in an involvement in a particular cultural, political or societal movement – each of these realities and others – will affect the self-understanding of any theologian. Sometimes that influence will prove so powerful that it will effectively determine the theology. More often a social location will provide “elective affinities” for a particular emphasis in theology, including the emphasis on what will count as a genuinely theological statement.⁸²

In other words, for Tracy theology is not a single monolith enterprise but a threefold activity divided into three distinct, but interrelated, sub-disciplines: fundamental, systematic and practical theology, with their primary (however not exclusive) publics: the academy, the church, and the wider society, respectively.

For all these three modes of theology there are two constants common to all of them. These constants are the two poles of Tracy’s method of mutually critical correlation: the interpretation of the situation and the interpretation of Christian tradition.⁸³ For Tracy, the agreement on the need for these constants, together with the need to relate them critically, presents also the necessary condition for achieving enough basic consensus in theology, “by means of which disagreements can become both focused and critically, rather than

⁸¹ See the subchapter 2.2.

⁸² TRACY, D. *The Analogical Imagination*, p. 5.

⁸³ Cf. TRACY, D. *The Analogical Imagination*, p. 58-61; TRACY, D. *The Necessity and Insufficiency of Fundamental Theology*, p. 26-29.

polemically, discussable again.”⁸⁴ This is for Tracy “a route from a chaotic pluralism to a responsible one.”⁸⁵

However, there will also be some fundamental differences between fundamental, systematic and practical theologies. Tracy summarizes them under the following rubrics:⁸⁶

- (1) distinct primary reference groups
- (2) distinct modes of argument
- (3) distinct emphases in ethical stance
- (4) distinct self-understandings of the theologian’s personal faiths or beliefs
- (5) distinct formulations of what primarily counts as meaning and truth in theology

In following I will discuss these differences with a special focus on the fifth point.

3.2 Truth in Fundamental Theology

In terms of primary reference groups, fundamental theology is related primarily to the public of the “academy”. In terms of modes of argument, fundamental theologies will be therefore public in the broadest sense of the word – they “will be concerned principally to provide arguments that all reasonable persons, whether ‘religiously involved’ or not, can recognize as reasonable.”⁸⁷ In ethical terms fundamental theology should proceed in accordance with the rules for honest and critical inquiry characteristic for its academic setting.

Generally speaking, in terms of truth, fundamental theology “finds its principle task in the determination of the meaning, the internal coherence and the truth of the cognitive claims involved in the Christian tradition and in common human experience.”⁸⁸ Here we see that in fundamental theologies the fundamental criterion of truth can be understood as “adequacy to experience”.⁸⁹ Tracy illustrates this by the coherence of the experience of fundamental trust in reality with the truth-claim of the Christian tradition about the existence of gracious God as revealed in Jesus Christ:

⁸⁴ TRACY, D. Particular Questions within General Consensus.*

⁸⁵ TRACY, D. The Necessity and Insufficiency of Fundamental Theology, p. 26.

⁸⁶ TRACY, D. *The Analogical Imagination*, p. 56.

⁸⁷ TRACY, D. *The Analogical Imagination*, p. 57.

⁸⁸ TRACY, D. Modes of Theological Argument. *Theology Today* 33/4 (1977), p. 387-394, cit. p. 388.

⁸⁹ TRACY, D. *Blessed Rage for Order*, p. 71.

In the confession of Jesus as the Christ, in the further confession of Jesus Christ as Lord, Christians find a true, a limit-re-presentation of their lives as lives whose basic faith is grounded in the action of a loving God. They find that they can have faith and trust and love in the belief that even the power of sin can be transformed by the limit-forgiveness, the grace, of a loving God. What Christians find re-presented in the affirmation of Jesus Christ as Lord is no timeless truth of metaphysics. Rather they find there the factual, symbolic re-presentation of the fundamental existential truth of existence: each Christian can - and in the affirmation of Jesus Christ commits himself to try to - live a life that dares to tread not merely beyond the bound of the limits-to the everyday, but to sense something of the gracious character of the limit-of the whole of reality.⁹⁰

In other words, the truth of Christianity does not just simply present a set of information to be intellectually recognized. Rather, the truth of Christian faith can be properly understood only in its relation to human experience. The task of fundamental theology is to explicate this relation between the truth of Christian tradition and our own experience. Because of a universal nature of Christian understanding of God and since here the word “experience” means not just one particular occasion of sensory perception but rather *all* human experience, “one cannot but recognize an exigence for metaphysical or transcendental reflection.”⁹¹ Hence, the “transcendental” or “metaphysical” arguments concerning the question “what are the basic *a priori* conditions of all human living and thinking?” will be inevitably involved.⁹² As mentioned, for Tracy, the demand for transcendental reflection is grounded in the very universal logic of the Christian understanding of God and creation.⁹³ Tracy is aware of the fact that all reasoning is linguistically rendered and therefore historically and contextually embedded, which, together with the acknowledgement of the role of unconscious factors in all conscious rationality, makes the warranting of transcendental claims difficult. Nevertheless, he believes that formulating transcendental claims adequately is neither impossible nor superfluous.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ TRACY, D. *Blessed Rage for Order*, p. 221.

⁹¹ TRACY, D. *Blessed Rage for Order*, p. 53.

⁹² Tracy notes that “the choice is not really between metaphysics or no metaphysics; the only real choice is between a self-conscious and explicit metaphysics or an unconscious yet operative one.” TRACY, D. *Blessed Rage for Order*, p. 68.

⁹³ Tracy claims: “[I]f one understands the logic of the claim Jews, Christians, and Muslims make when they affirm their belief in a radically monotheistic God, transcendental reflection is that mode of rational inquiry appropriate to considering that claim.” TRACY, D. *The Uneasy Alliance Reconceived*, p. 559. This argument is in line with Tracy’s call for “publicness” in theology as explicated above in the part 2.2.

⁹⁴ “True, we are all deeply embedded in particular contexts, and this contextual reality makes the warranting of universal claims exceedingly difficult. And surely God is universal, or we are speaking either nonsense or Zeus-talk, not Yahweh-talk.” TRACY, D. *God, Dialogue and Solidarity*. * We find here another version of what John E. Thiel names “epistemic irony” of

It should be noted that the expression “adequacy to experience” might be potentially misleading. This should not simply mean the agreement of a totally unmediated experience with its subsequent description provided by the interpretation of Christian tradition. Already in *Blessed Rage for Order* Tracy pointed out that what he calls “common human experience” has a linguistic and symbolic character.⁹⁵ In other words, “experience” is not just a set of data to which a subsequent interpretation is brought, but rather a phenomenon always-already influenced by the language and symbols we have inherited and learned.⁹⁶ Hence the “adequacy to experience” as a criterion of truth in fundamental theology is best understood as a critical correlation of the meaning of basic human experience as interpreted by specifically Christian symbols and as interpreted by the symbols derived from elsewhere.

Often, fundamental theology will be apologetic in its thrust. Nevertheless, the aim will not be to provide a proof for the truth of Christian revelation on the grounds of strictly “objective reason” (in Enlightenment terms), but rather to show the coherence of the Christian tradition “with what we otherwise know from science or, more likely, with what we believe in accordance with the present consensus of rational inquirers.”⁹⁷ Normally, according to Tracy, this task is pursued in critical conversation with and by sharing the scientific paradigm of other disciplines present in the academic realm, especially philosophy. Tracy is aware of the fact that there is no real consensus among contemporary philosophers on what an adequate notion of reason is. Nevertheless, he believes that the emergence of historically and hermeneutically informed notions of rationality and science makes the conversation of theology with other sciences now more possible than some hundred years ago in the heyday of positivism.⁹⁸ Tracy’s own formulation of the notion of reason, inspired by Lonergan, can be briefly characterized as involving judgments of “relative adequacy”. The word “adequacy”

Christianity: “This epistemic irony, that Christian particularity involves assertion of universal claims reflects the most basic character of Christian faith itself.” THIEL, J. E. Pluralism in Theological Truth. *Concilium* 6 (1994), p. 57-69, cit. p. 66.

⁹⁵ TRACY, D. *Blessed Rage for Order*, p. 47-48

⁹⁶ Nicholas Lash puts the matter like this: “[T]he relationship between experience and interpretation is dialectical in character, is a matter of ‘mutually critical correlation’. [...] [T]he accounts that we give, the interpretations that we offer, make a difference to the experience itself, constitute an internally constitutive feature of that experience.” LASH, N. *Easter in Ordinary: Reflections on Human Experience and the Knowledge of God*. London: SCM, 1988, p. 248.

⁹⁷ TRACY, D. *Dialogue with the Other*, p. 45.

⁹⁸ TRACY, D. *Dialogue with the Other*, p. 44-45. Tracy is here relying on thinkers like Richard J Bernstein and Stephen Toulmin; cf. BERNSTEIN, R. J. *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics and Praxis*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1983; TOULMIN, S. *Human Understanding. Vol. 1. The Collective Use and Evolution of Concepts*. Princeton: Princeton University, 1972.

hints at the fact that the judgment is in a sense “unconditioned” since, at some point, all questions relevant to the subject, the criteria and the evidence are available to competent inquirers. The word “relative” reflects the fact that such the judgment is always “only virtually unconditioned, since every judgment is by definition open to further revision as further questions emerge.”⁹⁹

To summarize, Tracy’s account of the task of fundamental theology bears to the greatest extent the marks of his strive for publicness. The discourse of fundamental theology will usually take place in academy and should be, at least in principle, open to all, including the so-called “non-believers”,¹⁰⁰ since not the personal “faith” or “belief” but rather generally accessible philosophical arguments serve as the major backing for publicly construed claims to truth in fundamental theology. Truth in fundamental theology can then be understood as a fundamental coherence between the Christian interpretation of human experience and the knowledge about how things are coming from other serious sources of inquiry.¹⁰¹ Fundamental theology is therefore necessary but insufficient on its own. It can be appropriately understood and done only in relation to hermeneutically conceived systematic theology, to which we turn our attention in the following part.

3.3 Truth in Systematic Theology

Systematic theology¹⁰² will be usually oriented to the community of believers, i.e. Church, as their primary public. Typically, what attracts Tracy’s interest is the question of how systematic theology, which is always a reinterpretation of a particular tradition, can achieve “publicness”:

What systematic model, informed by the criteria determined for fundamental theological discourse, will allow a specific historical community of faith to articulate its particular vision of

⁹⁹ Tracy adds: “And further questions will always eventually emerge.” TRACY, D. *The Uneasy Alliance Reconceived*, p. 567. Cf. LONERGAN, B. J. F. *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*.

¹⁰⁰ Perhaps the term “ecclesially non-socialized” would be more fitting.

¹⁰¹ In other words, the task of fundamental theology is to show “the rough coherence of what truths-as-manifestations we may hermeneutically learn from revelation with what we otherwise know reasonably from science and all other uses of reason.” TRACY, D. *The Uneasy Alliance Reconceived*, p. 566.

¹⁰² Alternative expressions to “systematic theology” include “dogmatics” or “doctrinal theology”.

reality in a manner that makes it available for the wider community without being wrenched from its own historical experience?¹⁰³

Tracy suggests that all systematic theologies will ordinarily assume the truth-bearing character of the Christian tradition and they will focus on reinterpreting that tradition for the present. Therefore, their character will be principally hermeneutical.¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, this does not mean that systematic theology-as-hermeneutics is concerned only with meaning and not with truth. To show this was Tracy's major task in his book *The Analogical Imagination*.

Tracy's primary strategy is to suggest that the notion of truth in systematic theology is similar to the notion of truth in the experience of art.¹⁰⁵ In authentic experience of a work of art

[w]e find ourselves „caught up“ in its world, we are shocked, surprised, challenged by its startling beauty *and* its recognizable truth, its instinct for the essential. In the actual experience of art we do not experience the artist *behind* the work of art. Rather we recognize the truth of the work's disclosure of a world of reality transforming, if only for a moment, ourselves: our lives, our sense for possibilities and actuality, our destiny.¹⁰⁶

In other words, when confronted with a work of art we might realize new, and possibly more appropriate, ways of understanding the reality of ourselves and of the world. Hence, “the actual experience of the work of art can be called a realized experience of an event of truth.”¹⁰⁷ For Tracy, in art, and analogously in religion, the publicly recognizable bearer of meaning and truth is what he names “the classic”. The notion of “the classic” is for Tracy's understanding of truth in systematic theology crucially important.¹⁰⁸ Most succinctly, the classics are “understood as those texts, events, images, persons, rituals and symbols which are assumed to disclose permanent possibilities of meaning and truth.”¹⁰⁹ Importantly, the classics possess normative character and resist any “final” interpretation:

¹⁰³ TRACY, D. Theology as Public Discourse. *The Christian Century* (March 19, 1975), p. 280-284.*

¹⁰⁴ Cf. TRACY, D. *The Analogical Imagination*, p. 58-69.

¹⁰⁵ Tracy draws in the following on the work of Heidegger, Gadamer and Ricoeur.

¹⁰⁶ TRACY, D. *The Analogical Imagination*, p. 110.

¹⁰⁷ TRACY, D. *The Analogical Imagination*, p. 111.

¹⁰⁸ At the very beginning of *The Analogical Imagination* Tracy claims that “the heart of the argument of the entire book may be found in the argument on the phenomenon of the classic. If that argument stands, the rest of the book can follow. If that theory falls, the rest remains, at best, on shaky ground.” TRACY, D. *The Analogical Imagination*, p. x.

¹⁰⁹ TRACY, D. *The Analogical Imagination*, p. 68.

[W]hen anyone of us is caught unawares by a genuine work of art, we find ourselves in the grip of an event, a happening, a disclosure a claim to truth which we cannot deny and can only eliminate by our later controlled reflection [...] When a work of art so captures a paradigmatic experience of that event of truth, it becomes in that moment normative. Its memory enters as a catalyst into all our other memories and, now subtly, now compellingly, transforms our perception of the real. It becomes a classic: always retrievable, always in need of appreciative appropriation and critical evaluation, always disclosive and transformative with its truth of importance, always open to new application and thereby new interpretation.¹¹⁰

Said differently, the classics bear an “excess of meaning”, which demands constant reinterpretations of the classics in ever changing context. Furthermore, the peculiarity of every classic consists in the fact that it is always deeply embedded in a *particular* historical and linguistic context and, at the same time, precisely due to its historically and linguistically embedded “excess of meaning”, bears a certain kind of *universality*, namely the possibility to challenge the historically and linguistically embedded existence of the confronted subject beyond the confines of the context of its original production. Hence, fairly paradoxically, the public character of the classics is achieved not *in spite of*, but rather *because of*, its rootedness in a particular tradition.¹¹¹

Explicitly religious classics are distinguished from classics of art, morality, science and politics because they address not just one concrete area of human existence but the “whole”:

Like all classics, religious classics will involve a claim to meaning and truth as one event of disclosure and concealment of the reality of lived existence. [...] [E]xplicitly 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.¹¹²

In Christianity there will be a number of candidates for the status of classic. However, “there is one classic event and person which normatively judges and informs all other Christian classics ... the event and person of Jesus Christ.”¹¹³

Chapter 4 will offer a more thorough discussion of the question of the interpretation of the classics. To summarize for a moment, in systematic theology truth will be primarily

¹¹⁰ TRACY, D. *The Analogical Imagination*, p. 114-115.

¹¹¹ Cf. TRACY, D. *Modes of Theological Argument*.*

¹¹² TRACY, D. *The Analogical Imagination*, p. 163.

¹¹³ TRACY, D. *The Analogical Imagination*, p. 233.

understood as manifestation, more exactly the disclosure-concealment of new possible modes of being provoked by the confrontation with the classics – in Christianity with the event of Jesus Christ. This is not to let all theology collapse into some form of aestheticism. Rather, it reflects the fact that the notion of truth as manifestation (together with the recognition on the side of the subject) is analogical to the notions of revelation as event of God’s self-manifestation and the response of faith as recognition under grace.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, there are three important points that should be mentioned. First, the major truth-bearing classic of Christianity is the event and person of Jesus Christ as *Logos incarnated* in particular and historical flesh. It follows that theological truth should not be sought somewhere in timeless and ahistorical ideas, but in the particular and historical-contingent. Second, although, as stated above, the Christian classic bears a public character, it functions in a sense as a necessary corrective of the possible ideological distortions in the more universalist discourse of fundamental theology. This is especially because of the critical and prophetic strands inherent to Christian tradition.¹¹⁵ Third, the primordial hermeneutical notion of truth as manifestation cannot be separated from, but must be accompanied by, other notions of truth: truth as coherence with what we otherwise know to be the case (as in fundamental theology) and by the praxis truth-criteria of practical theology. The latter will be discussed in the next part.

3.4 Truth in Practical Theology

As already mentioned above, in contrast to his extensive volumes on fundamental and systematic theology, Tracy has not written a book solely dedicated to practical theology up to now yet. Nevertheless, he presented the main aspects of his understanding of truth in practical theology throughout his already published books and papers.

In terms of primary reference groups, practical theologies are related primarily to the public of society, or perhaps better said, to some concrete social, political or pastoral concerns that are argued or assumed to be in need of transformation inspired by faith. In terms of modes of argument, practical theologies will be usually less concerned with theoretical

¹¹⁴ Tracy notes that the analogy is an analogy of proportionality: revelation / faith = manifestation / recognition. TRACY, D. *The Uneasy Alliance Reconceived*, p. 564.

¹¹⁵ Tracy states: “All theological claims to the formulation of universal truth must be put under the strictly theological hermeneutics of suspicion of ‘idolatry’.” TRACY, D. *The Analogical Imagination*, p. 66.

arguments. Rather, the principal criterion for the meaning and truth of theology will be *praxis*, which Tracy understands “as practice informed by and informing, often transforming, all prior theory in relationship to the legitimate and self-involving concerns of a particular cultural, political, social or pastoral need bearing genuine religious import.”¹¹⁶

Said in the language of the bible, practical theology will understand truth in terms of the “fruits” brought forth.¹¹⁷ Moreover, the biblical and later Christian tradition teaches us that “the good fruits” are best conceived as “metanoia”,¹¹⁸ or as Tracy’s teacher Lonergan liked to put it, as “intellectual, moral and religious conversion”.¹¹⁹ Tracy says:

All theoretical claims to meaning and truth in theology, therefore, must be subject to dialectical analysis forged to discern the presence or absence of intellectual, moral and religious “conversions.” Only radical and enduring personal transformation can assure the presence of truth.¹²⁰

Hence, in practical theologies truth will be primarily understood in terms of transformative, i.e. emancipatory, liberating and justice establishing, *praxis*. Three points should be noted here. Firstly, purely Gadamerian approach highlighting the persuasive power of the classics of tradition might sometimes serve just to affirm the present, perhaps oppressive and alienating, status quo. Therefore we are in the need of some ideology critique, which can unmask the ideological distortions and illusions present in the political and social discourse of a contemporary technology and media dominated society.¹²¹ Secondly, Tracy recognizes that the emergence of *praxis*-oriented theologies helps us to see “that the major question in our situation is not the crisis of cognitive claims, but the social-ethical crisis of massive suffering and widespread oppression and alienation in an emerging global culture.”¹²² Nevertheless, this does not mean that the crisis of cognitive claims disappears when we simply appeal to *praxis*, especially when *praxis* becomes identified with some single cause and “any theories daring to be critical of the cause ... are too quickly dismissed as pre-

¹¹⁶ TRACY, D. *The Analogical Imagination*, p. 57.

¹¹⁷ Cf. Mt 7,15-20.

¹¹⁸ Cf. Mk 1,15.

¹¹⁹ Cf. LONERGAN, B. J. F. *Method in Theology*, p. 237-244, 267-271.

¹²⁰ TRACY, D. *The Analogical Imagination*, p. 71.

¹²¹ Tracy draws here on Jürgen Habermas, cf. TRACY, D. *The Analogical Imagination*, p. 73-77.

¹²² TRACY, D. *The Analogical Imagination*, p. 78.

revolutionary, ‘bourgeois’ or ‘academic’.”¹²³ Thirdly, Tracy insists that it is a mistake to separate the model of truth as transformation from other theological models of truth:

„Saying the truth” is distinct from, although never separate from, “doing the truth”. *Fides quae* is distinct from, though never separate from, *fides qua*. Cognitive claims are distinct from, though never separate from, their grounding in particular historical situations and social structures. More concretely, there is never an authentic disclosure of truth which is not also transformative. We never experience a transformative truth in authentic praxis without also discerning some disclosure of what is now recognized as the case (i.e., true). To attempt to separate truth as disclosure from truth as transformation is damaging to the fuller understanding of truth itself.¹²⁴

In other words, the pragmatic “fruits-criteria” do not represent just an optional supplement for theology. Rather, at least some aspects of what we call “practical theology” with its pragmatic “fruits-criteria” will be in reality present in all good theology.

3.5 The Diversity and Unity of Christian Truth

To sum up, the aim of this chapter was to investigate Tracy’s reflections on the different notions of truth in three distinct, but always interrelated, sub-disciplines of theology: fundamental, systematic and practical theology. In reality, there will be no theology exclusively related only to one of Tracy’s “publics” – the academy, the church or the wider society. Rather, each theology, though primarily related to one of these publics, will, at least implicitly, address all three of them. Nonetheless, the distinction between the different styles of theology is important. It shows that theology is not a single discourse with an unambiguous notion of truth. On the contrary, theology should be appropriately viewed as a discourse in which distinct and complementary notions of truth are operative. The distinction of different theological sub-disciplines, and therefore of different notions of truth, essentially reflects the movement alongside the axis from abstract to concrete.¹²⁵ In the most abstract mode of theology, in fundamental theology, the operative notion of truth will be the metaphysical and existential adequacy to experience. Systematic theologies are related to a more concrete level of the interpretation of Christian tradition and will work with the notion of truth as

¹²³ TRACY, D. *The Analogical Imagination*, p. 78.

¹²⁴ TRACY, D. *The Analogical Imagination*, p. 78.

¹²⁵ Cf. TRACY, D. *The Analogical Imagination*, p. 86, 97; TRACY, D. *Practical Theology in the Situation of Global Pluralism*. In MUDGE, L. S., POLING, J. N. (eds.) *Formation and Reflection: The Promise of Practical Theology*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987.

manifestation. Practical theologies are related to the most concrete level of praxis of the search for transformation and liberation and understand truth in terms of “orthopraxis”, of “doing” or “living in” the truth. All these three notions of truth are distinct but never separate. They mutually inform and correct each other.

To conclude this chapter, two implications can be drawn. First, Tracy’s account of different notions of truth in theology is helpful in dealing with the plurality of current theology precisely because it reflects the way by which the methods and style of each particular theology is shaped by its contextual setting.¹²⁶ In other words, Tracy’s proposition of different notions of truth is essentially hermeneutical. Second, Tracy’s understanding of the meaning of the word “truth” is “neither univocal nor equivocal but analogical.”¹²⁷ The term “analogical” means that the various notions of truth in theology will be in principle *similar-in-difference*. The similarity will reflect the fact that all theological truth will always somehow refer to God’s salvific action. The difference will be made by the plurality of contexts and modes of argument and language in which the question of truth is raised. The unity of Christian truth will always be a unity in diversity.

The theme of the unity-in-diversity of theological truth will be further elaborated in the last chapter which will deal with the practical aspects of Tracy’s hermeneutics as a way of knowing and naming the ways in which the single mystery of God addresses human beings in diverse and ever changing contexts.

¹²⁶ It should be mentioned that alternative, and possibly complementary, typological divisions of theology have been suggested. Thus, for example, Rowan Williams has proposed a threefold division of theology into *celebratory*, *communicative* and *critical* styles. Cf. WILLIAMS, R. Prologue. In *On Christian theology*, p. xii-xiv.

¹²⁷ TRACY, D. *The Analogical Imagination*, p. 88.

4. The Ways to Truth: The Praxis of Hermeneutics

4.1 The Need for Interpretation of Interpretation

When asked to contribute to the 1990 *Concilium* issue entitled *On the Threshold of the Third Millennium* Tracy reflected on the present situation of Christianity and theology facing the cultural heritage of Western modernity:

We live in an age that cannot name itself. [...] For *modernity* the present is more of the same – the same evolutionary history of the triumph and taken-for-granted superiority of Western scientific, technological, pluralistic and democratic Enlightenment. For *antimodernity*, the present is a “time of troubles” – a time when all traditions are being destroyed by the inexorable force of that same modernity. [...] For *postmodernity*, modernity and tradition alike are now exposed as self-deceiving exercises attempting to ground all knowledge and life.¹²⁸

For Tracy our situation is a complex and ambiguous one. On one hand, we still may acknowledge modernity’s contribution to technological and economic progress, its defense of reason and its turn to the subject as an individual to be liberated from mystifications and oppression. On the other hand, we have realized that modernity, once opposing all traditions, has paradoxically become one more tradition - a tradition propagating the myth of the evolutionary superiority of Western techno-economic culture, with a tendency to ignore all other traditions, and suffering from illnesses like consumerism and possessive individualism:

[W]e have seen our lifeworlds, in all their rich difference, increasingly colonized by the forces of a techno-economic social system that does not hesitate to use its power to level all memory, all resistance, all difference, and all hope. Religion becomes privatized. Art becomes marginalized. All the great classics of our and every culture become more consumer goods for a bored and anxious elite.¹²⁹

The fundamentalist movements embracing all technological achievements of modernity while rejecting its ethical and political values (pluralism, individual rights, democratic values) represent one of the responses to modernity. Radical postmodern thought announcing the “death of the modern subject” and sheer arbitrariness of deconstructed meanings and truths may represent another one. “May you live in interesting times” is an ancient Chinese curse

¹²⁸ TRACY, D. On Naming the Present, p. 3. This essay was originally published in *Concilium* 1 (1990).

¹²⁹ TRACY, D. On Naming the Present, p. 9.

cited often by Tracy.¹³⁰ Yet he always adds that the choice of when to live is not in our hands, only the question of how to live.

Tracy's book *Plurality and Ambiguity* was his major attempt to address this question by presenting the major aspects of his hermeneutics. Clearly, this is a book primarily addressing the public of academy, using philosophical, rather than explicitly theological, argumentation. Tracy draws in his diagnosis of our situation heavily on postmodern thought. According to him we find ourselves in a cultural and hermeneutical crisis, in a difficulty to understand our present and ourselves:

We late-twentieth-century Westerners find ourselves in a century where human-made mass death has been practiced, where yet another technological revolution is occurring, where global catastrophe or even extinction could occur. We find ourselves unable to proceed as if all that had not happened, is not happening, or could not happen. We find ourselves historically distanced from the classics of our tradition. We find ourselves culturally distanced from those "others" we have chosen both to ignore and oppress. We find ourselves distanced even from ourselves, suspicious of all our former ways of understanding, interpreting, and acting.¹³¹

Therefore, according to Tracy, what we need is to deepen our hermeneutical consciousness by reflecting on the very notion of interpretation. To suggest this might first seem rather odd because what we mean by "interpretation" is often identified with mere explication of the meaning of texts. However, for Tracy, "interpretation" is not an activity confined solely to reading of texts. Rather, interpretation is all-pervasive in any human life:

Interpretation seems a minor matter, but it is not. Every time we act, deliberate, judge, understand, or even experience, we are interpreting. To understand at all is to interpret. To act well is to interpret a situation demanding some action and to interpret a correct strategy for that action. To experience in other than a purely passive sense (a sense less than human) is to interpret; and to be "experienced" is to have become a good interpreter.¹³²

In other words, our approach to reality is hermeneutical. Our experience and understanding of the reality of ourselves, of others, of the world, and of God is possible only through interpretation. When insisting on this Tracy wants simply to point out that all human

¹³⁰ TRACY, D. *Theology as Public Discourse*;* TRACY, D. *On Naming the Present*, p. 9; TRACY, D. *God, Dialogue and Solidarity*;* TRACY, D. *Dialogue with the Other*, p. 3.

¹³¹ TRACY, D. *Plurality and Ambiguity*, p. 8.

¹³² TRACY, D. *Plurality and Ambiguity*, p. 9.

understanding and experience is embedded in history and language, that what we call “reality” is always-already constituted by our interpretations. Truth then, says Tracy, “is the reality we know through our best interpretations.”¹³³

Two points should be mentioned here. First, stated rather simply, to reflect on the search for truth means for Tracy to reflect on the search for appropriate ways of interpretation. Second, this search for appropriate ways of interpretation is not a matter of mere “interpretation theory”. Tracy reminds us that every interpretation involves practical application.¹³⁴ At the same time, any practice involves some theory. What Tracy attempts is to reflect on interpretation in order to learn the skills that “enrich our experience, allow for understanding, aid deliberation and judgment, and increase the possibilities of meaningful action.”¹³⁵ Practice and theory mutually inform each other. In other words, both interpretation and the reflection on interpretation, or hermeneutics, is a matter of *praxis*. How this praxis of hermeneutics should be conceived more concretely to function in theology will be explored in following.

4.2 Interpretation as Conversation

Most generally speaking, when reflecting on interpretation we can recognize at least three basic realities involved: (1) a phenomenon to be interpreted, (2) someone interpreting that phenomenon, and (3) some interaction between these first two.¹³⁶ Starting with the phenomenon requiring interpretation, this can be, in principle, “literally anything: a law, an action, a ritual, a symbol, a text, a person, an event.”¹³⁷ Nevertheless, Tracy speaks in his reflections in many cases simply about texts, this perhaps from two reasons. First, the word “text” functions often by Tracy as a metaphor for just any phenomenon being interpreted.¹³⁸

¹³³ TRACY, D. *Plurality and Ambiguity*, p. 48.

¹³⁴ Tracy says: “[W]ithout some *applicatio*, there is no hermeneutical *intelligentia* or *explicatio*.” TRACY, D. *Plurality and Ambiguity*, p. 101.

¹³⁵ TRACY, D. *Plurality and Ambiguity*, p. 9.

¹³⁶ TRACY, D. *Plurality and Ambiguity*, p. 10-27. Here and in following Tracy draws mainly on Gadamer; cf. also TRACY, D.; GRANT, R. M. *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984, p. 153-187; TRACY, D. *Dialogue with the Other*, p. 49-67.

¹³⁷ TRACY, D. *Plurality and Ambiguity*, p. 10-11.

¹³⁸ “Reality is constituted by the interaction between a text, *whether book or world*, and a questioning interpreter.” TRACY, D. *Plurality and Ambiguity*, p. 48; italics mine. It is little surprising that this ambiguity in the use of the word “text” has brought upon Tracy a suspicion of “radical textualizing of reality”, of a mistaken belief that all life and people can be in the end reduced to “texts”. LOUGHLIN, G. Review of ‘Plurality and Ambiguity’. *Modern Theology* 7 (October 1991), p. 483-

Second, written texts serve as a good example since they have played a central role in literate cultures.¹³⁹ As already mentioned above in the part 3.3, Tracy concentrates primarily on the classical texts that bear with them an excess of meaning and resist therefore any definitive interpretation. Unavoidably, any classic comes to its interpreter bearing with itself the history of its former interpretations, the history of its former effects in theory and practice. In other words, any classic reaches us as a piece of tradition. On the other hand, any interpreter of the classic cannot but come to these texts with some “preunderstanding” comprising of expectations concerning the subject-matter and the questions addressed by these texts. Moreover, the language we have inherited and learnt to use, the language that itself has been formed in the history of the tradition in which we find ourselves, always-already forms our preunderstanding. Neither the text nor the interpreter can escape from history or language. A totally autonomous knowing subject of the Enlightenment imagination is a naive illusion.¹⁴⁰

In a process of interpretation we are confronted with the classic’s claim to our attention, with its challenge to our present expectations, with the possibilities to see and live our lives differently. In other words, we are confronted with the classic’s claim to truth. The interaction between the interpreter and the interpreted phenomenon is, according to Tracy, best conceived as *conversation*.¹⁴¹ Conversation is for Tracy like

a game where we learn to give in to the movement required by questions worth exploring. The movement in conversation is questioning itself. Neither my present opinions on the question nor the text’s original response to the question, but the question itself, must control every

487. Loughlin specifies further his point like this: “This is not to say that reality can be understood other than within textuality, but that such understanding is always a *going out from* not a *retreat into* the literal; always, ultimately, a ‘practical syllogism’, a movement of the body.” LOUGHLIN, G. Review of ‘Plurality and Ambiguity’, p. 484. Such criticism can be perhaps moderated if we take into account the fact that Tracy’s usage of words like “conversation” and “text” is essentially metaphorical and points, in the framework of his rather abstract reflections, primarily at the rootedness of all understanding in language and history.

¹³⁹ Cf. TRACY, D. *Plurality and Ambiguity*, p. 11-14.

¹⁴⁰ Nevertheless, as we shall see below, this is not to say that we are passive prisoners of our traditions. Tracy himself makes this qualification: “Although we do belong to language and history more than they belong to us, we should be wary of using too easily such words as *belong* and *participate*.” He further clarifies that “we do need further strategies, intellectual and practical, for criticizing and suspecting the tradition as well – in this sense the Enlightenment heritage must be defended and appropriated critically but no less really than other moments in the tradition.” TRACY, D. *Plurality and Ambiguity*, p. 67, 130.

¹⁴¹ Tracy draws here again on Gadamer. Importantly, Tracy notes that “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.” TRACY, D. *Dialogue with the Other*, p. 63-64.

conversation. A conversation is a rare phenomenon [...] It is questioning itself. It is willingness to follow the question wherever it may go. It is dia-logue.¹⁴²

Tracy stresses the need to let the question of the classic take over in conversation. Surely, any interpreter cannot but enter the process of interpretation with some preunderstanding. Yet to be a good interpreter means “to put that preunderstanding at risk by allowing the classic to question the interpreter’s present expectations and standards.”¹⁴³ In other words, in a genuine conversation we should confront the other, be it an event, a person or a text, as possibly really *other* and different, not as a projection of our fears, desires and needs.¹⁴⁴ On the other hand, if we are to recognize in the otherness of the interpreted phenomenon some new possibility for us we need to discern in it “some similarity to what we have already experienced or understood.”¹⁴⁵ It follows that this similarity will always be a *similarity-in-difference*, that is, *analogy*.¹⁴⁶ Therefore, Tracy calls the proper strategy for conversation “an analogical imagination”, which

simply reminds us that conversation occurs if, and only if, we will risk ourselves by allowing the question of the text. We must follow those questions – however initially different, other, or even strange – until the unique result of this kind of interaction occurs: the exploration of possibility as possible and thus as similarity-in-difference. In such moments of recognition, what is both disclosed and concealed as other and different becomes appropriated as possibility. When possibility enters, some similarity-in-difference cannot be far behind.¹⁴⁷

It should be noted that the notion of conversation should not indicate that the interaction between an interpreter and a classic yields automatically a harmonious acknowledgement of the classic’s claim to truth. In reality, there is a whole spectrum of possible results of the interaction ranging from a thorough identification with the claim to truth of the classic, over a

¹⁴² TRACY, D. *Plurality and Ambiguity*, p. 18.

¹⁴³ TRACY, D. *Plurality and Ambiguity*, p. 16.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. TRACY, D. *Dialogue with the Other*, p. 4-5, 48-50. Tracy draws here heavily on the work of his colleague Mircea Eliade.

¹⁴⁵ TRACY, D. *Plurality and Ambiguity*, p. 20.

¹⁴⁶ For Tracy’s more detailed discussion of the history and meaning of “analogy” see the chapters 2 and 3 of TRACY, D.; COBB, J. B. Jr. *Talking About God: Doing Theology in the Context of Modern Pluralism*. New York: Seabury, 1983.

¹⁴⁷ TRACY, D. *Plurality and Ambiguity*, p. 20. Tracy illustrates what he means by “analogical imagination” elsewhere on the example of interpersonal conversation: “We understand one another, if at all, only through analogy. Who you are I know only if you will allow me to sense - through a gesture, a text, a symbol, a story, a theory, a way of life - what central vision of existence actually empowers your life. If we converse, we shall both be changed. For then our central visions will meet and conflict, join and depart, and, in that very dialectic, disclose the genuine differences, the latent negativities, the possible identities and, above all, the similarities-in-difference (the analogies) in every life and all thinking.” TRACY, D. *Defending the Public Character of Theology*. * Cf. also TRACY, D. *The Analogical Imagination*, p. 446-457.

stronger or weaker resonance, to a radical resistance to it.¹⁴⁸ In other words, Tracy's model of interpretation as conversation is not an expression of a liberal "eclecticism" wishing "to reconcile everything that strikes him, at first blush, as worth saving."¹⁴⁹ On the contrary, Tracy strongly refuses "any liberalist notion of openness that never resist the other and the different."¹⁵⁰ Genuine dialogue cannot "ignore the need for conflict and the actualities of systematic distortions in the personal (psychosis), historical (alienation and oppression) and religious (sin) dimensions of every person, culture and tradition."¹⁵¹

Tracy's process of understanding as interpretation is far from being smooth, harmonious or conflict-free. In reality, a conflict of interpretations often arises when our partner in conversation, be it a person or a text, confronts our interpretations and expectations. This conflict of interpretation calls then for arguments, methods and theories. Tracy understands arguments, methods and theories as an *interruption* of conversation, as something that disrupts, questions, modifies, corrects and helps to articulate the primary process of understanding as conversation. Often, in order to move further in the search for truth, we need the conversation to be interrupted by arguments, methods and theories especially because of the presence of other interruptive forces, of what Tracy names the "plurality of language" and the "ambiguity of history". Tracy discusses the plurality of language by exposing his hermeneutics to the challenge of "the linguistic turn" brought about by thinkers like Saussure, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Foucault, Ricoeur, Lacan and Derrida.¹⁵² Moving beyond the naive instrumental notion of language as an objective descriptive tool insulated from history and society, Tracy takes insights from the analysis of language as use, as system, as differential nonsystem to arrive finally to the notion of language as *discourse*:

¹⁴⁸ Cf. TRACY, D. *Plurality and Ambiguity*, p. 22.

¹⁴⁹ For this criticism see STOUT, J. Review of 'Plurality and Ambiguity'. *Theology Today* 44/4 (January 1988), p. 503-509, cit. p. 507.

¹⁵⁰ Tracy adds: "Certain forms of difference and otherness (sexism, racism, classism, elitism, anti-Semitism) demand resistance, not openness. They demand *exclusion* from conversation, not *inclusion* in it." TRACY, D. Response to reviews of 'Plurality and Ambiguity'. *Theology Today* 44/4 (January 1988), p. 513-519, cit. p. 514; italics mine.

¹⁵¹ TRACY, D. Defending the Public Character of Theology.*

¹⁵² Cf. TRACY, D. *Plurality and Ambiguity*, p. 47-65. Here particularly Derrida's radical deconstruction strategy presents a serious challenge for Tracy's concept of the classics since for Derrida all meaning of a text dissolves into a series of differences. Tracy acknowledges Derrida's critique of the possibility of knowledge based on pure self-presence but takes this position only as a corrective and not a constitutive one for his hermeneutics of conversation. Whereas "when Jacques Derrida enters, the conversation stops", Tracy believes that the meaning of a text is still for us eventually available through conversation, however critical this process of conversation might be in order to reach that meaning. TRACY, D. *Plurality and Ambiguity*, p. 59.

To discover discourse is to explore language as a reality beyond individual words in the dictionary, beyond both synchronic codes (*langue*) and individual use of words (*parole*); it is to rediscover society and history. Every discourse expresses conscious and unconscious ideologies, whether the someone who speaks or writes is aware of them or not.¹⁵³

Put differently, if all discourse is embedded in society and history then it might be affected not only by mere random errors in communication but by the very dark side of the “ambiguity of history”,¹⁵⁴ that is by the systemic distortions of genuine conversation – ideologies, oppression and alienation, or, to use the language of Christian tradition, by the reality of *sin*. Therefore what we need is a “hermeneutics of suspicion”, we need the help of arguments, theories and methods (especially historical critical, literary critical and socio-critical methods) that can unmask the distortions, aid the conversation and contribute to understanding. Arguments, explanations and theories cannot replace conversation, but they can bring us closer to the Habermasian “ideal-speech situation” which Tracy understands as a regulative “counterfactual” ideal.¹⁵⁵

To summarize for a moment, five points can be made. First, conversation accords primacy to the notion of truth as manifestation – the disclosure-concealment of possible new modes of being as recognized by a subject in a process of conversation. Arguments and theories are often necessary in order for conversation to proceed well. But conversation remains for Tracy a primary “truth-producing” procedure since it can also account for the disclosure of truth that we can experience in cases when arguments step back, for example, “when listening to Mozart, when at prayer, in worship, or when meditating.”¹⁵⁶ Second, the knowledge of truth we can achieve should not be considered in terms of ahistorical absolute and definitive certainty but will always be a matter of *relative adequacy*: “What we know, we know with relative adequacy, and we know it is bounded by the realities of language, society and history.”¹⁵⁷ This is not to say that all truth is always totally uncertain and therefore a sheer

¹⁵³ TRACY, D. *Plurality and Ambiguity*, p. 61.

¹⁵⁴ Tracy admits that *ambiguity* “might be too mild a word to describe the strange mixture of great good and frightening evil that our history reveals” and goes on to define ambiguity as “cognitively, the true and the false; morally, the good and the evil; religiously, the holy and the demonic.” TRACY, D. *Plurality and Ambiguity*, p. 70, 131.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. TRACY, D. *Plurality and Ambiguity*, p. 26. See also Nicholas Lash’s slightly alternative reading of Habermas on this point that tries to keep more explicitly “the *tension* between the counterfactual and possible, between tragedy and hope.” LASH, N. Conversation in Gethsemane. In JEANROND, W. G.; RIKE, J. L. (eds.) *Radical Pluralism and Truth*, p. 51-61.

¹⁵⁶ TRACY, D. Response to reviews of ‘Plurality and Ambiguity’, p. 517.

¹⁵⁷ TRACY, D. *Plurality and Ambiguity*, p. 61. See also the discussion of the term “relative adequacy” in the part 3.2.

illusion. Rather it is to stress the fact that all search for truth - precisely because of its being bounded by language, society and history - is a reality open to ongoing questioning and development. Third, any discourse might be influenced by the latent societal structures of power and violence operating by the mechanism of marginalization. Postmodern criticism might help to uncover the repressed subversive memories of those “others” whose voice would be otherwise overheard. In genuine conversation, therefore, we need to hear their voice preferentially.¹⁵⁸ Fourth, truth is not only an intellectual cognitive matter. Tracy claims that “[a]ll theory should ultimately serve the practice of reflective living”¹⁵⁹ in which conversation is always accompanied by lived solidarity.¹⁶⁰ Fifth, Tracy himself admits that the analogical imagination he proposes as a proper way of finding truth “is not merely a ‘strategy’ for conversation, but ... also a *theological* conviction.”¹⁶¹ In other words, Tracy’s trust and hope in conversation and his preferential option for analogy are grounded not only in his reflections on the developments of general philosophical hermeneutics but also in his appropriation of Christian tradition. In following we shall therefore focus on Tracy’s account of criteria for truth in the interpretation of Christian tradition.

4.3 Interpreting the Christ Event

When trying to define theology in a succinct way Tracy put the matter like this: “The theologian is one who attempts the nearly impossible task of correlating *theos* and *logos*.”¹⁶² As already mentioned in the part 2.3, this task takes on a form of establishing mutually critical correlations between an interpretation of the Christian tradition and an interpretation of contemporary situation. In establishing such correlations the process of interpretation as conversation with the subject-matter and with the claim to truth of a classic will play a crucial role. Whereas the previous part 4.2 dealt primarily with general and abstract rules for the process of interpretation as conversation, in following the focus will be on more concrete question of the criteria of truthfulness in the interpretation of Christian tradition.

¹⁵⁸ This Tracy links to “God’s option for the poor” that “is central to the Scriptures” as correctly argued by liberation theologies. Nevertheless this means not that “once the poor make their interpretations, all others are to sit back and passively receive them.” TRACY, D. *Plurality and Ambiguity*, p. 103.

¹⁵⁹ TRACY, D. *Plurality and Ambiguity*, p. 46.

¹⁶⁰ “What conversation is to the life of understanding, solidarity must be to the life of action.” TRACY, D. *Plurality and Ambiguity*, p. 113.

¹⁶¹ TRACY, D. Response to reviews of ‘Plurality and Ambiguity’, p. 514; italics mine.

¹⁶² TRACY, D. *The Return of God in Contemporary Theology*, p. 37.

In Christianity there are several candidates for the status of a classic. However, *the* Christian classic is *the person and event of Jesus Christ*.¹⁶³ In faith we recognize that what happened, happens now and will always happen in the Christ event is “the decisive manifestation both of who God is and who human beings are empowered and commanded to become.”¹⁶⁴ This faith, as an appropriation and response to God’s self-communication to human beings, is recognized as given by the event itself, as a sheer gift of loving God. Yet, Tracy insists that the Christ event is intrinsically related to the historical person of Jesus of Nazareth. For Christians it follows that “the event [of Christ] itself is mediated to them principally through the tradition, community and Church which remembers this Jesus and keeps alive his dangerous memory.”¹⁶⁵ Moreover, the original response to the Christ event as expressed by the earliest Christian communities in “apostolic writings” has become the normative canonic text named the New Testament.¹⁶⁶ Therefore, any later responses to the Christ event, including all doctrines and dogmas,¹⁶⁷ need to develop “criteria of appropriateness” for their witness to the original apostolic witness expressed in the Scriptures. This “appropriateness”

does not suggest that a later Christian witness must be found in identical form in the scriptures. Nor does appropriateness suggest that there can be no criticism of scriptural expressions in the light of later developments. Criteria of appropriateness insist that all later theologies in *Christian* theology are obliged to show why they are not in radical disharmony with the central Christian witness expressed in the scriptures.¹⁶⁸

Tracy’s shortest formulation of the fundamental criterion of truth in the interpretation of Christianity, his *regula fidei* (rule of faith), is the central Christian confession: “I (We) believe

¹⁶³ Cf. TRACY, D. *The Analogical Imagination*, p. 233-247.

¹⁶⁴ TRACY, D. *Dialogue with the Other*, p. 112.

¹⁶⁵ TRACY, D. *The Analogical Imagination*, p. 235.

¹⁶⁶ Tracy adds that to believe in Jesus Christ as witnessed to in the New Testament is to “believe *in* the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and thereby in the revelatory event of Sinai expressed in the Hebrew scriptures and reinterpreted as the Christian Old Testament in the light of the Christ-event witnessed to in the apostolic writings.” TRACY, D.; GRANT, R. M. *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible*, p. 176-177.

¹⁶⁷ Doctrines in general should be understood neither as complete paraphrases or a replacement of the original witness, nor as a useless abstraction from it. Rather, although the genre “doctrine”, itself present already in the New Testament, is an abstraction from the concreteness of the original narrative, symbolic and poetic language of the original witness to the Christ event, it can be enriching by bringing some clarity and order for the Church’s self-understanding. Cf. TRACY, D. *The Analogical Imagination*, p. 265-268. Tracy notes that some doctrinal expressions (like, for example, dogmas of Nicea and Chalcedon) have achieved the status of a classic. TRACY, D. *The Analogical Imagination*, p. 317.

¹⁶⁸ In this restricted sense the Bible norms but is not normed by (*norma normans sed non normata*) all later witnesses to Christ event. TRACY, D.; GRANT, R. M. *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible*, p. 176.

in Jesus Christ *with* the apostles”.¹⁶⁹ Tracy makes several important comments regarding this formula.¹⁷⁰ Thus, for example, the confession is not “I believe in Christ” so that the Wisdom-Logos tradition unrelated to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth could be sufficient. Alternatively, the confession is not “We believe in Jesus” so that, for example, some “jesusological” constructions based purely on the quest for the “historical Jesus” could replace the breadth of ecclesial confession of faith in Jesus Christ. According to Tracy it is also crucially important to keep the distinction between the Christ event and the scriptural texts which represent an authoritative witness to that event. The prepositions “*in*” and “*with*” are therefore of fundamental significance here. To understand the biblical text as revelation is to turn Christianity into a religion of the book where Christians believe not *with* but *in* the apostles.¹⁷¹ On the other hand, to remove the authoritative role of the biblical text in favor of a contemporary experience of the event of Christ alone, to reduce the confession to “We believe in Jesus Christ”, would mean that “the contemporary Christian community can never know whether its present witness to the Christ-event is in continuity with the original apostolic witness.”¹⁷² The task of theology is therefore twofold. On one hand, a theologian must fundamentally trust in the tradition that mediates the biblical texts as the original apostolic witness.¹⁷³ On the other hand, such trust does not preclude the need for publicly shareable critical and explanatory methods used in the interpretation of all tradition including the Scriptures because these methods can unfold and correct the errors and distortions of the tradition and thus renew and purify our very trust in the tradition itself.¹⁷⁴ Importantly, the need for such critical hermeneutics is based not only in the situation of contemporary

¹⁶⁹ TRACY, D.; GRANT, R. M. *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible*, p. 175. TRACY, D. *The Analogical Imagination*, p. 237; TRACY, D. *Dialogue with the Other*, p. 112.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. TRACY, D.; GRANT, R. M. *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible*, p. 177; TRACY, D. *Dialogue with the Other*, p. 112-113.

¹⁷¹ Tracy contrasts the Jewish and Christian perspective with the Islamic one. Whereas in Judaism and Christianity the Scriptures are a witness to the event of God in covenant with Israel and in Jesus Christ, in Islam the Koran (“recitation”) *is* itself the revelation. Ironically, notes Tracy, “Christian fundamentalist doctrines of ‘inerrancy’ seem more faithful to Islamic principles of interpretation than to either Jewish or Christian ones.” TRACY, D. *The Analogical Imagination*, p. 287-288.

¹⁷² TRACY, D.; GRANT, R. M. *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible*, p. 177.

¹⁷³ “To do so is to trust that the Spirit is present to the church in spite of the Church’s errors.” TRACY, D.; GRANT, R. M. *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible*, p. 185.

¹⁷⁴ Tracy draws here an analogy between trust in tradition and friendship— these both do not exclude critique. Cf. TRACY, D. *On Reading the Scriptures Theologically*, p. 63. Interestingly, Tracy’s use of the words “Scripture” and “tradition” shows that his understanding of them and of their relation goes beyond either the older Roman Catholic principle “Scripture and tradition”, or “Scripture alone” of the Reformation. Tracy’s preferred formulation is “Scripture in tradition”. Cf. TRACY, D. *On Reading the Scriptures Theologically*, p. 37-38.

interpreters, but also in the very demands of Christian tradition. This is exemplified, for example, in the prophetic and apocalyptic strands of the Scriptures or in the depiction of Christ's disciples in Mark's Gospel with its strong criticism of false interpretations and anticipation of Christ's identity.¹⁷⁵ In practice this means that contemporary Christians can, and indeed must, challenge, for example, Paul's views on women or slaves, or the portrait of Jews in John's Gospel – and they can do this not only on the basis of contemporary recognition of the evils of slavery, women's oppression and anti-Semitism, or the historical knowledge about the conflicting situation of the Johannine communities in the first century, but already on the very grounds of Paul's Christology and the Johannine vision of all reality graced in Christ.¹⁷⁶ As put by Tracy:

All traditions – and even all scriptural texts – must on their own inner Christian grounds allow themselves to judge *what is said* by *what is meant*. The event of Jesus Christ judges the texts and traditions witnessing to it and not vice versa.¹⁷⁷

To summarize for a moment, the search for truth in the interpretation of Christian tradition should essentially follow the rules for interpretation as conversation explicated in the part 4.2.¹⁷⁸ All explanatory methods (historico-critical, literary critical, ideology critique, feminist critique, etc.) play in the search for truth not a *constitutive*, but a *corrective* role.¹⁷⁹ Truth is primarily constituted by the Christ event, that is, by the gift of faith in Jesus Christ as mediated through tradition and present to us in word and sacrament. Importantly, the Christ event in which God's self-communication happens involves the human response as its constitutive element. This response will always be a response of particular human beings in particular places at particular time. It will grow out from the unique set of dispositions and relations constituting the unrepeatable identity of each person. It follows that both the responses to the Christ event and the witnesses to these responses will necessarily be diverse

¹⁷⁵ Cf. Mk 8, 27-33.

¹⁷⁶ TRACY, D.; GRANT, R. M. *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible*, p. 183-184.

¹⁷⁷ TRACY, D.; GRANT, R. M. *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible*, p. 185; italics mine.

¹⁷⁸ Tracy insists that the move here "is from the abstract to the concrete, not, as too often interpreted, from the concrete (foundationalist) to the specific." Tracy's hermeneutics of Christian tradition is therefore "coherent with but not logically dependent upon the use of general hermeneutics" discussed in the part 4.2. TRACY, D. *On Reading the Scriptures Theologically*, p. 59. Said differently, these two are mutually correlated; this is in line with Tracy's comment that the analogical imagination is not only a strategy, but also a theological conviction; see note 161.

¹⁷⁹ Hence, for example, Tracy opposes the tendency of Hans Küng to conceive the results of historical-critical exegesis as a fundamental criterion of truth in Christianity. Cf. TRACY, D. *Wahrhaftigkeit in der katholischen Theologie*. In HÄRING, H.; KUSCHEL, K.-J. (eds.) *Hans Küng. Neue Horizonte des Denkens und Glaubens. Ein Arbeitsbuch*. München: Piper, 1993, p. 193-210.

and pluralistic in its content. Indeed, the whole of Christian tradition, including the New Testament,¹⁸⁰ witnesses to this plurality of the responses to the Christ event in diverse contexts. This is also the point that Tracy points at when insisting that any Christian theology must be essentially “correlational”. Only by mutually correlating the witness of Christian tradition with our contemporary situation, only by mutually confronting the Gospel witness with all aspects of human life, only thus can theology reflect appropriately on the truth of God’s diverse action in the diverse experience of human beings. Only by construing, however tentatively, *theos* within a *logos* that is conceived open enough to account, at least potentially, for the plurality of experiences of all human beings can theology get beyond being a mere set of nice stories for Church-insiders to being a public discourse in the quest of truth.

It should be noted that not all theologians share Tracy’s commitment to correlational style of theology. Thus, for example, Tracy’s work has received a serious criticism from American protestant scholar George A. Lindbeck. Lindbeck sees in correlational theologies a danger of losing the identity of Christian faith by translating Christianity into “extrascriptural categories”. Instead, he advocates an “intratextual” approach to theology in which

it is the religion instantiated in Scripture which defines being, truth, goodness, and beauty, and the nonscriptural exemplifications of these realities need to be transformed into figures (or types or antitypes) of the scriptural ones. Intratextual theology redescribes reality within the scriptural framework rather than translating Scripture into extrascriptural categories. It is the text, so to speak, which absorbs the world, rather than the world the text.¹⁸¹

Therefore, for Lindbeck, in principle only those who appropriated the biblical narrative can take part in the discourse on Christian truth. Christian truth is thus related to the biblical texts in a way that makes it impossible to express and adjudicate this truth using categories derived from elsewhere.

In reality, also Tracy insists that the common Christian confession “We believe in Jesus Christ with the apostles” cannot be separated from the *plain sense* of the passion narrative:

¹⁸⁰ Importantly, there is not only one but four canonical Gospels. Tracy says that the differences among them are “significant enough to demand a theological affirmation of ... Christian diversity.” TRACY, D. Reading the Bible. A Plurality of Readers and a Possibility of a Shared Vision. In TRACY, D. *On Naming the Present - God, Hermeneutics, and Church*, p. 120-130, cit. p. 125.

¹⁸¹ LINDBECK, G. A. *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in the Postliberal Age*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984, p. 118.

[A]ny Christian theology which confesses its faith in the presence of Jesus Christ (and the Spirit released by Christ) ‘with the apostles’ will always need the plain sense of these narratives to achieve what neither symbol *alone*, nor doctrine *alone*, nor historical-critical reconstruction of the original apostolic witness *alone*, nor conceptual theology *alone* nor confession *alone*, can achieve: a theological clarification of how the reality of Christ’s presence is manifested through the identity of that Jesus rendered in the realistic, history-like narrative of the passion and resurrection, a narrative-confession of this one unsubstitutable Jesus of Nazareth who is the Christ of God.¹⁸²

Thus, as implied in the common confession, the passion narratives play for Tracy an indispensable role of a unifying element in the diversity of the New Testament witnesses. Nevertheless, there is no need for theology to be fixated on the Bible in such a way that we should “translate” or “absorb” all reality into the terms of scriptural texts. Rather, theology searches for what shares in the project witnessed to in the Scriptures, namely the appropriation of God’s grace in the Christ event, the response to God’s self-communication to all human beings. In the witness of the Scriptures we have an assurance *that* the Christ event happens. But *how* concretely it will happen will always depend on the concrete ways of God’s dealings with us in our concrete situations and can therefore go beyond what is currently recognized by Church as envisioned in biblical texts.¹⁸³ After all, we are saved not by a text, but by God. Alternatively, to interpret the Christ event does not simply mean to be engaged in production of texts (in a narrow sense of written signs). Although texts, like biblical narratives, can provoke, catalyze and bear witness to our response to God’s grace they cannot replace the whole of the response itself. This is what Tracy meant when he already in his *Blessed Rage for Order* insisted that the real “meaning” or the “referent” disclosed in the interpretation of the New Testament is a “certain limit-mode-of-being-in-the-world.”¹⁸⁴ The interpretation of the Christ event is, in the end, a matter of *performance*,¹⁸⁵ of a motion of

¹⁸² TRACY, D. *On Reading the Scriptures Theologically*, p. 42. The term “plain sense” Tracy owes to the work of Lindbeck’s colleague Hans Frei. The “plain sense” of the passion narratives is the obvious or direct sense they have for the Christian community when read as “realistic” and “history-like” narratives. TRACY, D. *On Reading the Scriptures Theologically*, p. 38; cf. also FREI, H. *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics*. New Haven: Yale University, 1974; FREI, H. *The Identity of Jesus Christ: The Hermeneutical Bases of Dogmatic Theology*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975.

¹⁸³ See also Raymund Schwager’s insistence that we are called not to imitation (Nachahmung) but to following (Nachfolge) of Christ. Cf. SCHWAGER, R. *Brauchen wir einen Sündenbock? Gewalt und Erlösung in den biblischen Schriften*. Thaur: Kulturverlag, 1994, p. 181-185.

¹⁸⁴ TRACY, D. *Blessed Rage for Order*, p. 221.

¹⁸⁵ Cf. LASH, N. *Performing the Scriptures*. In LASH, N. *Theology on the Way to Emmaus*. London: SCM Press, 1986, p. 37-46.

spirit and body, of a word said and an action taken, of joy felt, suffering endured and prayer uttered.

According to Tracy, we can never claim we can express the truth of the Christ event in its fullness since in the Christ event two realities meet that can never be grasped completely – the reality of human beings in their diverse and ever-new situations and the reality of the mystery of God disclosed in Jesus Christ. Moreover, the main Christian symbols include not only Incarnation, Cross and Resurrection, but also the Second Coming. Christianity is for Tracy apocalyptic: “Christ has come for us as Christians, but in an important sense he still has not come yet. We don’t know who or what Christ will be or when his coming will happen.”¹⁸⁶ Christian truth is therefore a matter of “relative adequacy” since it must respect this “always-already” but at the same time “not-yet” reality of the Christ event.¹⁸⁷

Recently,¹⁸⁸ Tracy has been ever more engaged in retrieving the apocalyptic traditions acknowledging God’s hiddenness in Christ’s cross and in human suffering, and apophatic theologies that display God’s incomprehensibility. Tracy stresses the fragmenting power of these apophatic and apocalyptic forms on our theology. Doing theology should not be attempting a system of complete or absolute account of reality but a real, yet relatively adequate, knowledge of truth achieved through “gathering of fragments” which will always remain open to revisions and new continuities. The truth of the Christ event is fundamentally an unfinished reality open to growth and development and expecting its fulfillment at the end of times. And any truly Christian theology will therefore inevitably be a consciously unfinished and fragmentary project open to ever-new reinterpretations and giving thus freedom to the Otherness of God who is beyond our control and can, through the Christ event, interrupt and transform our lives and theologies in unpredictable ways:

Theology will never again be tameable by a system – any system – modern or premodern or postmodern. For theology does not bespeak a totality. Christian theology, at its best is the voice of

¹⁸⁶ Tracy in MALCOLM, L. *The Impossible God: An Interview with David Tracy*. *Cross Currents* 119/4 (2002), p. 24-30.*

¹⁸⁷ Cf. TRACY, D. *The Analogical Imagination*, p. 265-275, 305-338.

¹⁸⁸ Since Tracy’s latest work still remains largely unpublished at the closure of this thesis I can only draw here on following material: MALCOLM, L. *The Impossible God: An Interview with David Tracy*; HOLLAND, S. *This Side of God: A Conversation with David Tracy*; TRACY, D. *Form & Fragment: The Recovery of the Hidden and Incomprehensible God*. Lecture given at the Center for Theological Inquiry, Princeton, NJ in 1999; available online: <http://www.ctinquiry.org/publications/tracy.htm> (March 2003); a copy of the notes made by Drahomíra Havlíčková during the Gifford lectures given by Tracy at the University of Edinburgh in April and May 2000.

the Other through all those others who have tasted, prophetically and meditatively the Infinity disclosed in the kenotic reality of Jesus Christ.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁹ TRACY, D. *Theology and the Many Faces of Postmodernity*, p. 114.

5. Conclusion

At the outset of *The Analogical Imagination* Tracy expressed what might be viewed as a primary interest of his theology:

A simple affirmation of pluralism can mask a repressive tolerance where all is allowed because nothing is finally taken seriously. Or pluralism can cover a genial confusion. To affirm pluralism responsibly must include an affirmation of truth and public criteria for that affirmation. But how?¹⁹⁰

This study has tried to review in three steps the main aspects of Tracy's attempts to answer that question. Firstly, in Chapter 2, it provided a brief introductory account of the main themes and developments of Tracy's theology. Secondly, in Chapter 3, Tracy's distinction of different but mutually interrelated notions of truth in fundamental, systematic and practical theologies was explored. Thirdly, in Chapter 4, Tracy's hermeneutics as a practical way of the search for truth with a focus on the criteria for truth of the interpretation of Christian tradition was introduced. As a way of conclusion, I would like to summarize the main aspects of Tracy's reflections on truth and draw some tentative implications that these reflections might have for various issues in theology.

The plurality of contemporary culture and theology is a fact. What makes Tracy's theology attractive is his attempt to acknowledge this plurality as fundamentally enriching and, at the same time, not to abandon the need for dealing with the question of truth. In other words, Tracy rejects both the relativist attitude of "anything goes" unconcerned with any discernment between truth and illusion, and the fundamentalist temptation to identify all truth with a firm set of propositions held and repeated once and for all. Tracy suggests that the best way of countering the danger of falling into these traps is a reflection on theological method and its limits. Importantly, he argues that, because of the universal character of Christian understanding of God, any authentically Christian theological method should provide criteria of truthfulness that will be not private but public and universal in character, that is, which will conceive the assessment of the truth-status of theology as not reserved only to those within Christian communities, but, at least potentially, to all human beings.

¹⁹⁰ TRACY, D. *The Analogical Imagination*, p. ix.

Tracy gives primacy to the notion of truth as manifestation – the disclosure-concealment of possible new modes of being as recognized by an experiencing subject in a process of conversation with a classic. The concept of the classic is for Tracy a key element in his understanding of truth as publicly construable since every classic, though *particular* in both origin and expression, is *universal* in effect. Moreover, this Tracy's approach is valuable also because it sheds light on the important question of how the intrinsically particular Christian revelation can claim a universal significance.

For Tracy, to understand means to interpret, to interpret means to converse, and to be able to converse well means to appropriate an *analogical imagination* – a skill of exploring the possibilities of truth as similarities-in-difference to one's experience. It is hard to exaggerate the importance of Tracy's insistence that the process of conversation guided by analogical imagination cannot be understood properly as insulated from the plural and ambiguous realities of language, history and society.¹⁹¹ For the question of truth two points follow. First, any theological discourse – precisely because of being *discourse*¹⁹² – can never claim absolute certainty for its truth-claims but, at best, relative adequacy. More is not possible and, importantly, more is also not necessary.¹⁹³ Second, while insisting on the primacy of notion of truth as manifestation, Tracy accepts the need for further criteria of relative adequacy rendered in the form of concepts, arguments and theories:

To grant a primary role to symbol in all discourse, for example, is not necessarily to disparage the need for concepts. To discover that metaphors and metonyms are present in all systems of conceptual thought is not to disparage efforts at second-order thought. We enrich all thought by the use of concepts faithful to the originating symbols, metaphors, and metonyms. We often need the second-order language of concepts in order to understand first-order discourse itself. Since every claim to true manifestation is also a claim to publicness, we shall often need to interpret further the claims resulting from conversation. We shall also often need those refined forms of

¹⁹¹ By explicitly relating it to language, history and society, Tracy is here in important way widening the classical notion of analogy as found, for example, in the definition of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215): "For between creator and creature there can be noted no similarity so great that a greater dissimilarity cannot be seen between them." English translation available online: http://www.catholicculture.org/docs/doc_view.cfm?recnum=5339 (July 2005).

¹⁹² See the discussion in the part 4.2.

¹⁹³ "For relative adequacy is just that: relative, not absolute, adequacy. If one demands certainty, one is assured of failure. We can never possess absolute certainty. But we can achieve a good – that is, a relatively adequate – interpretation: relative to the power of disclosure and concealment of the text, relative to the skills and attentiveness of the interpreter, relative to the kind of conversation possible for the interpreter in a particular culture at a particular time. Somehow conversation and relative adequate interpretations suffice. [...] Sometimes less is more." TRACY, D. *Plurality and Ambiguity*, p. 22-23.

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argument – theories, methods, and explanations – to test further our best insights and all our claims that we have indeed recognized some manifestation of truth.¹⁹⁴

When conflicting claims to truth as manifestation are raised then conversation must include arguments to adjudicate their truth-status. It should be noted that although Tracy's theology is not *foundationalist* in a sense of grounding all rationality and knowledge in some ahistorical and indisputable idea, it nevertheless does affirm the need for *foundations* in a sense of some necessary criteria for conversation and the use of arguments including “de facto transcendental arguments on the conditions of possibility of conversation and argument itself.”¹⁹⁵ Tracy lists some examples of such necessary conditions for all arguments:

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 weigh all relevant evidence, including one's warrants and backings; a willingness to abide by the rules of validity, coherence, and especially possible contradictions between my theories and my actual performance.¹⁹⁶

In other words, just to claim to have experienced truth in manifestation is not enough because thus we had no criteria to discern an authentic truth from ideological convictions of a fanatic or a raving of a psychopath. The truth as manifestation must be always related to further criteria of truthfulness – the criteria of adequacy as rendered explicit by arguments in the discourse of a community of rational inquiry, and the praxis-oriented ethical criteria of personal conversion and societal transformation. Tracy shows that fundamental, systematic and practical theologies will often differ in putting different emphasis on different criteria. Nevertheless, this means not that in theology there are three different and separate kinds of truth. Rather, Tracy's threefold criteria point at distinct, but always intrinsically mutually related, aspects of truth which must appear in all good theology.¹⁹⁷

Tracy's primary strategy is to construe theology as an essentially correlational enterprise attempting to render *theos*, the mystery of God, within a *logos*, a particular horizon

¹⁹⁴ TRACY, D. *Plurality and Ambiguity*, p. 30.

¹⁹⁵ TRACY, D. *Plurality and Ambiguity*, p. 24.

¹⁹⁶ TRACY, D. *Plurality and Ambiguity*, p. 26. These criteria can be essentially linked with the “transcendental-pragmatic” criteria advocated by Jürgen Habermas and Karl-Otto Apel. Perhaps, like in Habermas and Apel, they can be said to play in Tracy a role of a “weak version” of “first philosophy” understood as “ancilla hermeneutica”. Cf. VERWEYEN, H. *Gottes letztes Wort. Grundriß der Fundamentaltheologie*. Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1991, p. 77-103. The difference of Tracy's approach consists in his insistence that his wider “model of conversation ... [is] more helpful for understanding human communication than the model of explicit argument.” TRACY, D. *Plurality and Ambiguity*, p. 118.

¹⁹⁷ “The criteria are not intended to be cumulative but demand a coherence of all three in order to function properly.” TRACY, D. *The Uneasy Alliance Reconceived*, p. 561.

of intelligibility, by establishing the mutually critical correlation between the interpretation of Christian tradition and the interpretation of contemporary situation. This should not be understood in a way that there are two separate sources of theological truth – tradition and experience. Rather, it points at the fact that theological truth cannot be conceived appropriately as truth of propositions derived from Christian tradition and unrelated to human experience. On the contrary, Christian truth is always *incarnated* - it can only be properly understood as being related to and transforming all human experience.¹⁹⁸

Several points follow. First, theology cannot be conceived adequately as separated from spirituality in a broad sense of a human response to God's action: „Theology is about the vision of life and a way of life. We should never have split practices and theology.”¹⁹⁹ Second, our search for truth will always “oscillate” in the tension between the necessary fundamental trust in Christian tradition and an acknowledgement of the fact that any simple appeal to tradition itself does not yet automatically guarantee the truthfulness of our theology. There is no shortcut to truth past the dramatic and conflicting praxis of the hermeneutics of both retrieval and suspicion. Third, to be faithful to Christian tradition does not mean to merely repeat its *tradita* but rather to be engaged in *traditio* – in a process inspired by the Gospel and generating ever-new forms of response to the ongoing action of God in human experience. Fourth, to preach Christian faith is not to provide a prescribed set of practices and patterns of thinking into which the hearer should fit but rather to invite the other to appropriate more profoundly the gift of God's grace disclosed in Jesus Christ as always-already offered to human experience.²⁰⁰ Fifth, to construct a truly *Christian* theology is, after

¹⁹⁸ For a thorough discussion of this point see a recent study on Karl Rahner: ENDEAN, P. *Karl Rahner and Ignatian Spirituality*. Oxford: Oxford University, 2004, esp. p. 32-67. Unfortunately, Tracy's predilection for religious classics in the form of “extreme cases” (mystics, saints, prophets) seduces him, for example, to follow William James with the claim that “religious experience needs to be described in its distinctive characteristics *as* religious...” TRACY, D. *Dialogue with the Other*, p. 33. Such rhetoric might unintentionally devalue the experience of God in “ordinary life” by obscuring the fact that the action of God's grace in human experience need not necessarily be always fully recognized.

¹⁹⁹ Tracy in MALCOLM, L. *The Impossible God: An Interview with David Tracy*.*

²⁰⁰ In this context Tracy's theology meets, in my view, the criteria for a non-foundationalist *apologia* of Christian faith in post-modern context as explicated in NOBLE (DOLEJŠOVÁ), I. *Accounts of Hope. A Problem of Method in Postmodern Apologia*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2001, p. 290-292.

all, impossible without being attentive to the ways in which God's grace is at work outside the institutional structures of Christian Church.²⁰¹

Truth can never be grasped completely since every truth, in the end, points to human encounter with the mystery of God. If reflection on truth has always been central to Tracy's theology then it is only logical that his focus has gradually moved from preoccupation with method to search for adequate "namings of God."²⁰² Tracy's approach to truth may be well illustrated by a quotation of Edith Stein: "God is truth. Whoever seeks the truth is seeking God, whether consciously or unconsciously."²⁰³ The fate of any true theology will always resemble that of the One who has been born and come into the world in order to "bear witness to the truth"²⁰⁴ but who had "nowhere to lay his head".²⁰⁵ A true theology will never rest in any "ism", any finished and tidy system of complete knowledge of reality because

God enters history not as a consoling "ism" but above all as an awesome, often terrifying, hope-beyond-hope. God enters history again not as a new speculation but as an unpredictable, liberating, Hidden God. For this God reveals Godself in hiddenness: in the cross and negativity, above all in the suffering of those others whom the grand narrative of modernity has set aside as non-peoples, non-memories, in a word, non-history.²⁰⁶

Two points follow. First, in order to develop a theology today, we need "to start by facing evil and suffering."²⁰⁷ Put differently, all theological speech that cannot endure the exposure to negativity of human life - to the experience of mortality, of violence, suffering, loss of meaning, and loneliness - other way than by paying no heed to it must be suspect of bringing forth not truth but illusion. Second, while radically *theocentric* Christian theology will also

²⁰¹ In the preface to his book on inter-religious dialogue Tracy writes: "I believe that we are fast approaching the day when it will not be possible to attempt a Christian systematic theology except in serious conversation with the other great ways." TRACY, D. *Dialogue with the Other*, p. XI.

²⁰² Gaspar Martinez comments this recent shift of Tracy's thinking like this: "[T]he main question is not any longer how to formulate God in a way that is adequate to modern, critical reason but how to let God be God, [...] to hear God's voice as radically other. In that respect, Tracy's theology in the postmodern situation has become more Barthian." MARTINEZ, G. *Confronting the Mystery of God*, p. 221-222.

²⁰³ "Gott ist die Wahrheit. Wer die Wahrheit sucht, der sucht Gott, ob es ihm klar ist oder nicht." STEIN, E. A letter of 23.3.1938. In *Edith Stein Werke IX*. Freiburg: Herder, 1977, p. 102.

²⁰⁴ Cf. John 18,37.

²⁰⁵ Cf. Mt 8,20.

²⁰⁶ Tracy in HOLLAND, S. *This Side of God: A Conversation with David Tracy*.*

²⁰⁷ TRACY, D. "... und bewahre uns vor dem Bösen": Die Erlösung und das Böse in heutiger Zeit. *Concilium* 1 (1998), p. 96-106, cit. p. 104.

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always be *christomorphic*,²⁰⁸ its search for truth will continuously go along the patterns of death and resurrection, of loss and recovery of words and concepts, always open for the freedom of God who is the beginning and the end of our life and of all truth.

Just four weeks after the promulgation of the encyclical *Fides et ratio* Pope John Paul II has described Edith Stein in the homily on the occasion of her canonization as “a young woman in search of the truth [who] has become a saint and martyr through the silent workings of divine grace.”²⁰⁹ Perhaps this coincidence well reflects the character of Christian truth as, in the end, manifested and justified by the witness of life of holiness as a response to self-communication of incomprehensible and ever greater God.

²⁰⁸ Cf. TRACY, D. *Theology and the Many Faces of Postmodernity*, p. 111; TRACY, D. *Form & Fragment*. *

²⁰⁹ JOHN PAUL II. *Homily for the Canonization of Edith Stein* (11 October 1998); par. 1; available online: http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/homilies/1998/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_11101998_stein_en.html (May 2005).

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