

David Tracy,

Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology
New York: The Seabury Press, 1975, pp. xiv, 271. \$12.95

In place of the "perennial" philosophy of Aristotle—and the Church recognized and recommended Scholastic Theology—today, we are faced with a plurality of theologies, not to speak of the multitude of new philosophical schools they assume for their basis. Some are baffled and confused by this Babel of tongues among those who try to build the tower of faith. But David Tracy in the book under review starts with the assumption that the present pluralism is a good thing allowing each theologian "to learn incomparably more about reality by disclosing really different ways of viewing both our common humanity and Christianity" provided each one attempts to articulate and defend an explicit method of inquiry. The present world is disenchanted with mystification both from the Church authorities and from secular thinkers. The contemporary theologian, ethically committed to the discipline of scientific thought, is forced "to assume a critical posture towards his own and his tradition's beliefs" (p. 7) in order to attain a self-understanding of that tradition. The book is quite impressive because of the thorough knowledge the author shows concerning contemporary theological literature in the West, both Catholic and Protestant.

Tracy reduces contemporary theology to five basic models: The *Orthodox* theologian denying all relevance to the claims of modernity tries to interpret the traditional faith to the committed believer providing him with sophisticated tools for a systematic understanding of the basic beliefs of his Church community. The *Liberal* theologian, on the other hand, formally committed to the basic cognitive claims and ethical values of modernity, tries to reconcile these with the cognitive claims and fundamental values of the Christian vision to which he is equally committed. But seeing that this attempt of the Liberals failed to present a realistic estimate of the human situation and its limitations, the *Neo-Orthodox* school argues that only an explicit recognition of the unique gift of faith in the Word of God can provide an adequate foundation for a truly Christian theology. This model of theology takes "the basic existential attitudes of Christian faith, trust and agapic love" for the subject-referent, and the wholly other God of Jesus Christ as the object

referent. The *Radical* theological model including the Death of God theology takes as referent "the subject committed to post modern, contemporary, secular intellectual values" and tries to reformulate traditional Christianity by denying its central belief in God and affirming "Jesus either as the paradigm of a life lived for others or as the decisive incarnational manifestation of a liberated humanity."

The fifth model described by Tracy is, what he calls, the *Revisionist* school and includes Roman Catholic thinkers like Leslie Dewart, Gregory Baum and Michael Novak and, Protestant theologians like Langdon Gilkey and Gordon Kauffman. Committed to continuing the critical task of the classical liberals and modernists in a genuinely post-liberal situation, these try to set right the earlier limitations in the light of new resources like history, philosophy and sociology and the achievement of other models of theological reflection. The author, who is a defender of this revisionist model as the most appropriate today, examines the fundamental theses of this model and formulates its criteria and modes of analyses. He starts with the assumption that the two sources of Christian theology are Scriptures or Christian texts designated as "message", "Kerygma", "witness" or "tradition", and the contemporary human experience and language. The theological task would be the critical correlation of these two, and the method would be to create a phenomenology of the "religious dimension" present in the common experience, and to apply to the Christian texts the historical and hermeneutical analysis; these two would then be correlated by an explicitly transcendental mode of reflection on their meaning.

But in this critical reflection there are a number of variables that have to be carefully evaluated such as experience, meaning, truth and consciousness. Experience is not merely the hard data of sense perception nor even the non-sensuous experience of the self, but their critical mediation through cultural, historical, scientific, philosophical and theological analysis. Experience becomes meaningful to the extent it resonates to and discloses our existence as a self. Similarly, consciousness is not merely the act of self-affirmation or of self-awareness implicit in every conscious act, but the unity behind the diverse acts as a single knowing and a single knower. Even the historico-hermeneutical theory has to be further developed from its earlier "Romanticist" psychological formulation in the context of the later insights into the "speech-event of discourse" aspect which goes beyond the hermeneutical circle and the hermeneutical understanding of the objec-

re and extra-linguistic referents of the text itself. This is a clear warning against the psychologizing tendency apparent in contemporary theological thinking at the expense of objectivity and ideality of meaning. It also shows the limitations of hermeneutics as tool for theology for determining the sense and referents of texts.

In the second part of the book, Tracy expands and applies the principles of the revisionist model to certain specific areas of experience, religious dimension of experience, religious language, God question, Christology, and the relation between theory and praxis. Between the Schleiermacher-Otto-Tillich transcendental conception of religion and the practical sociological approach to religion of Weber-Berger and Geertz Tracy hits upon the "limit" character of language, the most fundamental to religion, "the implicitly disclosed dimension which functions as limit of or ground to (e.g. *fundamental* faith or trust) our more ordinary ways of being-in-the-world", "a certain basic horizon or dimension of our common experience." (p. 93)

The author examines at length the relation between religion and the moral, aesthetic, scientific and political perspectives which also have an implicit dimension of self-transcendence. The principal concern for religion today is to find adequate symbols for God which would at the same time eliminate the purely mythological elements and retain "the fully religious-as-limit existential disclosure that the Judeo-Christian God acts in history: God's promise of a radically new world; a calling of prophets to proclaim that newness; acts for and promise of a limit-liberation from social and individual forces" (p. 190).

In the Christian religion this symbol is provided by "the preaching, teaching, and deeds of Jesus of Nazareth himself, through the moment when the preacher becomes that which is preached." (p. 204) Yet, for Christians, this cannot be a mere symbol but must have factual validity intrinsic to the life they actually lead. This factual validity is grounded in man's universal need for symbols, the fact of evil in human situation, and especially the meaning of the fact not merely as actualization of possibilities but as re-presentation of possibilities once actualized (p. 205). This means that through the proclamation in Word and Sacrament of the history of Jesus of Nazareth as Christ "the truth of human existence is re-presented with factual validity." (p. 217) Hence Christological language is a representative limit language in the sense that Jesus as Christ is not merely a possible approach to the Christian limit-mode-of-

being-in-the-world, a mere projection of the imagination, but also one which appropriately and truly re-presents the fundamental actualities of life for a Christian. Through the words and sacraments of the Church, Christ continues to be for the believers "a re-presentative summary of their deepest understanding of themselves as religious." (p. 222)

David Tracy's approach to theology is certainly very meaningful in the contemporary context of the West. In the tension and complementarity between the ecclesial and socio-political communities and their two world visions, which each man is called upon to share and synthesize, Tracy achieves a judicious compromise between the quasi-irreconcilable positions of different schools, like Linguistic philosophy and Phenomenological thought, and between Process philosophy and the hermeneutical approach to Scriptures. His approach to the centrality of the historical Christ as re-presentative limit may be sufficient to satisfy the role of history in a Christian's personal faith. But if the task of Christian theology is to reveal the unique role of Christ as the only mediator between God and men and as the one focal point of human history, Father Tracy explicitly states that his method is not equal to that. All that his approach can show is that in the faith of Christians is re-presented "the basic faith and the only God whom all humanity experiences," and that "in the proclamation and celebration of this Jesus Christ as Lord... for Christians that Word has all the power of a complete and true manifestation of the fundamental meaning of authentic human existence." (p. 223).

The major weakness of the book is that it is too exclusively concerned with philosophical problems and thought patterns occupying the consciousness of the West today. Tracy's revisionist model lacks width of perspective to view all men as one family with a single history and an organic existential meaning. This unity of vision is possible only if one is willing to accept the unity of human nature or essence according to the Greek view, or one Head for all humanity according to the Hebrew perspective, or one Soul or Self animating all men according to the oriental way of thinking. But contemporary Western thought in its objectivist and analytic approach to reality has lost the sense of all these three dimensions of universal unity in world thought. Hence as Husserl remarked towards the end of his life, this objectivist naturalist attitude is the original sin for which the West is now condemned to cultural exile from world thought. Hence Tracy's revisionist model is just one more route that has proved a dead end.

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