

## METHOD IN FUNDAMENTAL THEOLOGY: REFLECTIONS ON DAVID TRACY'S *BLESSED RAGE FOR ORDER*

As the country enters into the third century of its independent existence, we have to confess that in spite of many calls for an American Catholic theology, no such thing yet exists. Although there is perhaps no need for a theology that is distinctively national, one might hope that at least some systematic works published by Catholics in this country might be of such a nature that European readers would regret being deprived of an opportunity to read them, as is rarely now the case.

Tracy's *Blessed Rage for Order* is a happy exception to this somber generalization.<sup>1</sup> As a piece of creative scholarship, it should command wide interest all over the world. It is an American book not only in the sense of having been written in this country, but in the further sense that it could hardly have been written anywhere else. The author's concerns and outlooks are characteristically American; he draws for the most part on philosophical currents, exegetical trends, and religious questions that have been especially lively on this continent. In his philosophical orientations he is still heavily influenced by the transcendental Thomism of his master, Bernard Lonergan, but this influence is now overshadowed by that of the process philosophy of Whitehead and Hartshorne. Tracy grapples extensively with language analysis in the Anglo-American tradition and comes generally closer to the moderate positions of Frederick Ferré, Max Black, and Ian Barbour, who have worked in the United States, than to the harder line pursued by their British confreres Ayer and Flew, Hare and Braithwaite. He shares the concern for the autonomy of science voiced in this country by Paul Tillich and Van Harvey. He makes use of the studies of Peter Berger, Robert Bellah, and Clifton Geertz in the sociology of religion. His interpretation of the New Testament is influenced by Robert Funk, John Dominic Crossan, and Dan O. Via. Above all, Tracy reflects the influence of four recent or present colleagues at the University of Chicago Divinity School. He accepts Schubert Ogden's process doctrine of God, Langdon Gilkey's commitment to modernity, Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutical theory, and the exegetical principles of Norman Perrin. So closely does Tracy hew to the ideas of these colleagues that his work reads in some respects more like the *Programmschrift* of a school than like the speculations of a private individual.

The main theme of the book is theological method, and more specifically the method of fundamental, as contrasted with confessional

<sup>1</sup>David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology*. New York: Seabury, 1975. Pp. xiv + 271. \$12.95. Page references in my article will be to this work.

or dogmatic, theology. After four chapters dealing with the formal aspects of method, Tracy adds six more in which he illustrates his method by applying it to four central theological problems: the nature of religion, the notion of God, Christology, and the transformation of society. The work is therefore much more than what Rahner would call a "formal fundamental theology." It is a reasoned explanation of an approach to many central Christian doctrines—though each of these is considered within the perspectives of fundamental theology rather than from within a specific confessional allegiance.

Since I intend in this article to concentrate on my difficulties against some of Tracy's positions, I should like to make it clear at the outset that his book is an exceptionally good one. He covers a vast range of questions in the areas of metaphysics, hermeneutics, exegesis, and doctrinal theology, and in each of these areas exhibits a remarkable mastery of the pertinent recent literature. He explains accurately and concisely the basic positions of leading thinkers on each point he treats, and yet gives us far more than a prudent commentary on the thought of others. Making their thought his own, Tracy is able to speak for himself. The thread of his argument is clear, his positions are consistent, and his conclusions follow rigorously from his premises. The thorough, methodical, and comprehensive character of this book virtually assures its impact on the theological scene.

Among Tracy's many contributions I would signalize especially his ability to broaden the dialogue in which theology is engaged. He successfully breaks out of the tendency of theological literature to address itself only to a narrow circle of believers. By seeking to build as much as possible on common human experience and on the methodologies of nontheological disciplines, he achieves contact with a very diverse public. Because he points up the secular significance of the doctrine of God and of Christology, he may be reckoned among the apologists. Yet he avoids any special pleading for traditional doctrines; he is as much concerned to criticize as to defend. His willingness to indulge hardheaded rational criticism of his own tradition sets him apart from the great majority of apologists, at least in earlier generations.

## I

If there is any single term that aptly describes Tracy's theological stance, it is, I believe, "revisionist."<sup>2</sup> By itself this term could signify

<sup>2</sup>For Tracy, revisionism is one of five theological "models." The other four he labels orthodoxy, liberalism, neo-orthodoxy, and radicalism. To explain, compare, and criticize these models would take us too far afield. Suffice it to note that, for Tracy, models represent mutually incompatible options. Every theologian is in consistency bound to choose one model and to reject all the others. Tracy's concept of model thus differs from the

almost anything. Scarcely any significant theologian of the past or present has failed to revise somewhat the tradition as it has come down to him. For Tracy, however, "revisionist" has a very specific, almost technical, meaning. In the first place, the revisionist theologian, as conceived by Tracy, cannot be definitively committed to any particular doctrine, church, or religion. Pursuing an open-ended inquiry, the revisionist is prepared to let the evidence take him where it may, even, conceivably, to the point of rejecting Christianity itself. The primary loyalty of the theologian, according to Tracy, is not to church or tradition but to the community of scientific inquiry. The morality of scientific knowledge, in his estimation, demands that the theologian assume a critical posture towards the beliefs of his own religious tradition until these have been confirmed by a methodical application of publicly available criteria. Such is the clear import of Tracy's first chapter.

My own difficulties begin to arise at this point. When Tracy talks of the theologian's "scientific attitude" and of commitment to the "morality of autonomous critical inquiry," I wonder what concept of science is at work here. Is his notion of criticism basically that of Kant and the Enlightenment? Does he take it for granted that no assent is justified unless it can be fully verified by reduction to self-evident grounds? Is he assuming that reason and science must necessarily proceed by way of explicit argument? In safeguarding the autonomy of the scientific community, is he prepared to forfeit the autonomy of the community of faith? Does he tacitly presuppose that in religious knowledge value judgments can have no constitutive role or that, if they do, they can be sufficiently grasped by the detached, disinterested, uncommitted observer? As a revisionist, Tracy is quite prepared to challenge the reigning models of theology, but he seems less prepared to call into question certain popular conceptions of science. The references to Paul Tillich in this portion of the book lead one to suspect that Tracy has been affected by Tillich's unduly positivistic conception of science.

A second mark of revisionism, as Tracy understands the term, is its commitment to the faith of secularity, by which he means "that fundamental attitude which affirms the ultimate significance and final worth of our lives, our thoughts and actions, here and now, in nature and in history" (p. 8). The revisionist theologian, Tracy declares, is undis-

---

generally inclusivist concept urged, e.g., in my *Models of the Church* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1974). Tracy's "models" would be, in my terminology, methodological types. I have employed the notion of model to establish the sense in which pluralism is, up to a point, legitimate; Tracy uses the notion to clarify the limits of pluralism. In the remainder of this review I shall explain why I do not feel completely at home with revisionism as Tracy explains it. This does not mean that I can situate myself comfortably in any of his other models.

turbed by the imperatives to obedience or the presumptions for belief that were manifested in traditional theological practice; for "his basic faith, his fundamental attitude towards reality, is the same faith shared implicitly or explicitly by his secular contemporaries" (*ibid.*). No vision of Christianity that infringes on the basic secular faith merits serious consideration. In Tracy's theology, therefore, any supernaturalist belief in another or higher world is antecedently excluded. To that extent Tracy's "secularity" is dogmatic, even though he is at pains to distinguish it from "secularism."

Personally I have no difficulty in accepting the "worthwhileness of existence"—even if existence be understood as confined to the present world. The Christian warrants tell us that creation is good, even if secular experience sometimes leaves this point ambiguous. I fail to understand, however, what Tracy means by asserting that our lives and actions, here and now, within history, have ultimate significance and final worth. For the believer, only God has ultimate meaning and value, and in comparison with Him every other reality and value is subordinate and relative. With reference to the individual person, ultimate value might be attributed to that final blessedness which the Christian tradition has always understood as being promised in the life to come. If Tracy means to exclude a priori the very possibility that such belief in a future consummation might be valid, I am uneasy with the method. I cannot see how a methodological postulate can properly be allowed to prejudge whether eternal life is a reality or an illusion. If the belief in a happier afterlife turns out to be well founded, it would seem to follow that our life within history does not have ultimate worth. Under some circumstances, to die might be more "worthwhile" than to remain alive.

## II

In a chapter amplifying his description of the revisionist method, Tracy explains that theology has two, and only two, sources: common human experience and the Christian texts. The theologian uses these two sources in mutual "correlation"—a term coined by Tillich but, in Tracy's estimation, misused by Tillich so as to overemphasize the value of the "Christian answers."

In setting up his experiential criterion, Tracy maintains that the truth-claims of any religious tradition must be treated as uncertain until validated by reference to common human experience, which, in his estimation, has a religious dimension. Here again I have problems. I do not understand why there could not be certain uncommon experiences from which one could perceive more about the ultimate nature of reality than is given in ordinary experience. If this were true, it would seem that

theology would have at its disposal another very important source: the special experiences given at certain privileged times, and perhaps only to certain particular individuals and groups.

In a later chapter on the nature of religion, Tracy sets forth an analysis of limit experiences, both positive and negative, which he acknowledges to be uncommon, disclosive, and revelatory. Does Tracy allow that such experiences can tell us anything really new, not already implicit in our common shared experience? With Ogden he asserts that authentic religious experiences reaffirm our basic human confidence in the worthwhileness of existence; they reassure us in our common human faith (p. 103). Religious language "discloses the reassurance needed that the final reality of our lives is in fact trustworthy" (p. 135). From these statements one would gather that religious experience and religious language cannot disclose anything genuinely new, that they cannot produce a radical conversion or open up a whole new order of reality.

Yet Tracy seems to vacillate. In a footnote he acknowledges that "Christological language adds a decisive 'more'" (p. 145, n. 18). In his chapter on Christology he asserts that faith in the God of Jesus Christ "is not fundamentally arrived at as a conclusion from a phenomenological and transcendental analysis of common existence" but from disclosures given in limit situations (p. 222). If this be true, one might question the adequacy of Tracy's two sources. Should there not be at least one more source—that of Christian experience, i.e., the kind of ecstatic or peak experience to which the New Testament, for example, bears witness?<sup>3</sup> Such experiences would not indeed be unrelated to, and still less in conflict with, the deliverances of universal human experience, but they would provide a real and significant addition. Religious assertions, I suggest, must aspire to be adequate not only to "common" experience but to the whole of experience.

Tracy's treatment of religious experience, in my judgment, would be enriched if one were to add to it a criteriology of extraordinary experiences. How does one distinguish the exceptional insight from the delusion? It is hardly sufficient to reply that conformity with ordinary experience must be the test, for the recipient of special disclosures claims

<sup>3</sup>By "Christian experience" I mean experience that is intrinsically qualified by the Christian symbols through which it is communicated and expressed. With John P. Gilbert I would hold that "the symbolization of an experience is an integral part of that experience; the symbolization and articulation are not optional, but are essential components of the experience, be that experience a religious experience or an experience of some other sort. This union of experience and symbolization of experience is basic to [George Herbert] Mead's theory of the social act; an experience has no meaning until it is symbolized" ("Theological Pluralism and Religious Education," *Religious Education* 70 [Nov.-Dec. 1975] 582).

to have learned something radically new. The groundwork for such a "supernatural" criteriology, I would think, has already been laid in the rules for the discernment set forth in Scripture and in the Christian spiritual tradition. These rules are based not only on what we can know from common experience but also on the principles contained in biblical revelation.<sup>4</sup>

### III

The second source of theology, according to Tracy, is the Christian texts or, as he occasionally puts it, the "Christian fact." These terms are intended to be as neutral as possible and to avoid suggesting, as "Scripture," "tradition," and "gospel" might do, any normative status. The "revisionist" theologian does not go to any particular texts because he necessarily believes that they have any special authority or value, but rather, it would seem, because if he did not consult the Christian texts he would have no reason to be called a Christian theologian. Christian theology differs from religious studies not because the theologian is a believer (he need not be), but because the theologian is concerned with identifying and reflecting upon the meanings embodied in the Christian texts (p. 44).<sup>5</sup>

The foregoing observations raise questions about the commitment of the Christian theologian. Earlier in this article I indicated my reasons for doubting whether theology can suitably be done by a detached, noncommitted observer. I should contend that the theologian must, as a minimum, be passionately concerned with using the resources of Christian tradition to gain access to a more authentic life. Up to this point Tracy might agree, for he remarks that the theologian must have "some adequate pre-understanding of the subject-matter (religion)" (p. 36, n. 16). Furthermore, if there is any specifically Christian experience (as I have already suggested to be the case), Christianity would presumably be best understood by those who share the faith-commitment implied by such experience. Once the faith-commitment is withdrawn, the object on which the theologian reflects begins to

<sup>4</sup> For most theologians, discernment is an irreducibly personal mode of knowledge dependent for its exercise upon graces received, in greater or lesser abundance, from the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 12:10). Tracy refers in passing to the theological pertinence of the spiritual tradition of "discernment of spirits" (p. 236, n. 106). A further development of this line of thought might alleviate the apparent objectivism of his previous insistence on "publicly available criteria."

<sup>5</sup> A second difference between theology and religious studies, according to Tracy, is that the former must grapple with the question of truth, whereas the latter may confine its attention to historical and hermeneutical questions (p. 250, n. 4). For Tracy, the question of truth would seem to call for decision not by criteria proper to theology but by an "autonomous" critical inquiry that is heavily philosophical in character.

disappear, and we are left with nothing except, precisely, texts. The theologian's task is to reflect upon what the Christian discerns in faith. Unlike Tracy, therefore, I have some misgivings with the Schleiermacher maxim: "The theses of faith must become the hypotheses of the theologian" (p. 45).

Tracy might say that a firm religious commitment, while appropriate to the dogmatic or confessional theologian, is unnecessary, even dangerous, in fundamental theology. He reserves for a future work his treatment of dogmatic theology within a particular church tradition. I would not concede, however, that even fundamental theology can be adequately practiced by persons uncommitted to Christianity. Patrick Burns lucidly explains why fundamental theology, or apologetics, requires Christian faith:

Assertions made about universal human experience—including the experience of redemption needs—can appropriately be tested against universal human experience. Assertions made about specifically Christian experience can ultimately be tested only within a Christian faith commitment. For those as yet uncommitted, they come as an invitation, not a proof. Actually this is true of any assertion flowing from an ultimate commitment, whether that commitment is religious or non-religious. Every ultimate commitment involves risk, as Tillich was so fond of pointing out. Both Christian faith and secular humanism are ultimately verified or falsified only in terms of man's experience within an ultimate commitment.<sup>6</sup>

The credibility of the Christian claims, for Tracy, seems to consist in the agreement between the Christian texts and the evident implications of our common human experience. As an apologist, he is convinced that the Christian texts provide "an existentially appropriate symbolic representation of the fundamental faith of secularity" (p. 9). The method of correlation, as Tracy describes it, seems to be a one-way process, in which the Christian positions are shown to be consonant with the secular vision of life. I doubt whether anyone is likely to become a Christian simply in order to have his secular faith elucidated or expressed by better symbols. Heretofore Christianity has been thought to be capable of offering a new message and of correcting and transforming any vision of reality attainable apart from Christianity itself. It is not clear to me whether Tracy thinks that Christianity must justify all its convictions by proving them to be mere representations of a faith available independently of the gospel. Would Tracy admit that the maxims of secularity may be called into question by God's revelation in Christ? If not, I suspect that he has failed to escape the allurements of neo-liberalism, which he himself recognizes (p. 41, n. 65) as the chief temptation for revisionist theology.

<sup>6</sup> P. J. Burns, "An Apologetic of Liberation and Fulfilment," *Communio* 2 (1975) 340-41.

When Tracy speaks of the "Christian texts," to what is he referring? In principle, the term could apply to the documents of tradition, but he deems it proper for the fundamental theologian to confine his attention to the Bible as Christianity's "charter document" (p. 15, n. 5). For practical purposes, he relies only on the New Testament, which he treats as capable of being adequately interpreted without benefit of Christian tradition. Many Protestants, not to say Catholics and Orthodox, have recognized that the Bible is not a truly theological source when read by itself alone, apart from the whole history of interpretation which it has engendered. It does not yield its deeper significance except to those who participate existentially in the community of faith. Perhaps, when he writes his dogmatic theology, Tracy will evince a more positive attitude toward tradition, acknowledging its status as a source, even as a warrant. In point of fact, every dogmatic theologian known to me does seek to profit from the corporate insights of the believing community and of its authorized spokesmen. I do not see why the fundamental theologian should have to interpret the Bible as though it were a self-contained unit. Since I personally consider fundamental theology inseparable from dogmatics, I would feel that the fundamental theologian may legitimately draw upon the testimony of tradition.

Following Ricoeur, Tracy proposes a highly sophisticated hermeneutic method, allowing for a great multiplicity of potential meanings. The meaning is seen as objectively imbedded in the text itself, regardless of the intention of the author and of the community that uses the texts. The meaning of the New Testament, therefore, can be quite unrelated to anything the biblical authors themselves intended to say. The interpreter has the task of identifying the "referents" indicated by the "implied author." The primary referent of the New Testament, Tracy explains, is a certain "mode-of-being-in-the-world" (a term derived from Heidegger through Herbert Braun and Ricoeur). By opening up the utmost possibilities of our freedom, the biblical text becomes for us the word of God.<sup>7</sup> Since the significance of the Bible is existential, Tracy does not try to find in the Bible any ontology concerning the realities in which the Christian believes. Yet he does assert that the language of the New Testament makes cognitive claims. Central among these claims, he holds, is the insistence that the objective ground or referent of all limit language is that reality Christians name "God" (p. 136). At this point, therefore, Tracy moves to a consideration of the doctrine of God.

<sup>7</sup>This last sentence, consonant with Tracy's thought, is a paraphrase from Paul Ricoeur, "Philosophy and Religious Language," *Journal of Religion* 54 (1974) 85. This and other articles by Ricoeur are helpful for an understanding of Tracy's dense treatment of hermeneutics.



## IV

Quite correctly, in my opinion, Tracy holds that the term "God," in religious language, is initially a symbol referring to the mysterious ground that is felt to underlie our limit experiences. The theologian, however, cannot be content to dwell with the vagueness of the biblical symbols. He must investigate the precise nature of their cognitive claim and determine whether there are sufficient grounds for admitting a real referent. Transcendental method, as Tracy observes, argues persuasively that the reality of God is the necessary condition of possibility of the religious dimension in human experience. But that method, as practiced by Lonergan and Rahner, works with a concept of God from which Tracy wishes to distance himself: the God of classical theism.

In developing his own preferred concept of God, Tracy sets forth, clearly and concisely, the standard arguments for the "dipolar" God of American process theology. The principal arguments for the superiority of this form of theism over classical theism (as represented by Thomas Aquinas) are, in Tracy's opinion, its inner coherence, its religious meaningfulness, and its appropriateness to Scripture. The God of classical theism is held to be incoherent, religiously unmeaningful, and inappropriate to Scripture: incoherent, since God's absoluteness cannot be reconciled with His loving kindness; religiously unmeaningful, since He is depicted as unaffected by the plight of His human creatures; inappropriate to Scripture, for God is there represented as interacting with His people. The God of process theology is judged to be superior by all three tests.

After reading this and similar apologies for process theism, I still remain unconvinced of its preferability to classical theism. Process theology, in my opinion, tends to depict God as a particular object alongside of other objects rather than as the ultimate, encompassing ground of all reality. In so doing, it compromises what one might call the divinity of God. The God of Aquinas and Calvin is coherent in the sense that He is truly absolute, whereas the dipolar God of Whitehead and Hartshorne seems to falter between being absolute and relative, autonomous and dependent. So far as existential meaningfulness is concerned, the "absolute" God of classical theology, by reason of His infinite goodness and unlimited power, would seem to be more worthy of adoration and trust than is the sympathetic "fellow sufferer" of process theology. Finally, as regards the scriptural warrants, the classical God resembles the biblical God insofar as He has full and exclusive sovereignty over the whole of creation. The same can scarcely be said of the process God.

On the debit side, Tracy acknowledges that the process theologians have failed to engage in adequate analysis of "the subtle and complex

positions of Aquinas" (p. 188). I wonder whether the same criticism cannot fairly be made of Tracy himself. He is hardly accurate when he remarks that according to Aquinas God cannot be designated as love except by an analogy of improper attribution (p. 161). In *Sum. theol.* 1, q. 20, a. 1, Thomas asserts that God is love, and in his reply to the first objection he repudiates the opinion that this attribution is metaphorical or improper.

I acknowledge, of course, that there are problems in classical theism. Like Tracy, I have been troubled by the tendency of some representatives of this school to depict God as indifferent and unrelated to the world, though I confess I do not sense this defect in the theology of Rahner. Because God is ultimate mystery, I suspect that no theological system can give full conceptual clarity. Possibly we shall have to be content to work with a plurality of models, as does the physicist who considers light for some purposes as a wave-phenomenon and for others as a flow of particles.

Process theology, I have no doubt, has much to offer, but I cannot concede that its concept of God ought to be simply substituted for that of classical theism. Besides, we are by no means compelled to choose between Lonergan and Hartshorne. Christian thought has many other options, such as German idealism in its various forms and the recent speculations of thinkers such as Teilhard de Chardin, Piet Schoonenberg, and Wolfhart Pannenberg.

## V

From the doctrine of God Tracy passes on to Christology. In accordance with the hermeneutic method previously outlined, he formulates the significance of Christological language in existential terms. Its function, he says, is to disclose "a new, an agapic, a self-sacrificing righteousness willing to risk living at the limit where one seems to be in the presence of the righteous, loving, gracious God re-presented in Jesus the Christ" (p. 221). The proclamation of Jesus as the Christ brings with it the summons to a committed, righteous, and agapic life. Tracy's analysis of the Christian mode-of-being-in-the-world would provide some excellent themes for preaching and for spiritual reflection.

There remains, however, a puzzling ambiguity. Whereas in his chapters on God he insisted that the biblical limit language includes the cognitive claim that God is real, Christological language, in Tracy's interpretation, seems to involve no objective referent of its own. The Christ-symbol is for Tracy a "limit representation," a "supreme fiction" that reinforces our basic faith in the God we can know through our common human experience.

To all appearances, therefore, Tracy would be content to say that the early Christians were inspired to invent a good story. It is not apparent why, if a similar story were told about Martin Luther King, King would not be as much the Christ as Jesus is. In opposition to many New Testament texts which clearly call for Christological realism (e.g., 1 Cor 15:14, 1 Jn 4:2), Tracy speaks as though the historical grounding of the Christ-story were unessential. For him, the story is true if it illumines the reality of God, even though it does not illumine the reality of Jesus.

Tracy, however, leaves his options open. Nowhere in these pages—not even in the footnotes taking issue with Pannenberg—does he deny that the Christ-myth accurately portrays the reality of Jesus himself. In his view, fundamental theology is more concerned with the “work” than with the person of Christ (p. 231, n. 73). By implication, therefore, he transmits to dogmatic theology the further questions regarding the ontological import of the Christian proclamation. At this point, as with several previous questions, I feel that Tracy’s understanding of fundamental theology—or at least his present exposition of fundamental theology—is too widely separated from dogmatics. In my own judgment, fundamental theology must take its starting point from the Christian faith as understood by the Church; otherwise it cannot effectively mediate between the community of faith and the community of scientific inquiry.<sup>8</sup>

I recognize, to be sure, that it is by no means easy to establish the precise relationship between the Christological language of the New Testament and the person of Jesus himself. I am by no means pleading for a biblical fundamentalism that would erase the distinction between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. My point is simply that fundamental theology cannot entirely evade this question, as Tracy seems to do. Very few Christians would be prepared to write off the real existence of Jesus and to settle for a Christ-myth that tells them something about God. In countenancing this reductionist approach, Tracy is perhaps reacting excessively against a maximizing type of apologetics that would seek to establish all the claims of faith by a positivistically conceived historical method.

## VI

In a final chapter, which reads more like an appendix than like an integral part of the book, Tracy addresses himself briefly to practical theology. The practical theologian’s task, he asserts, is “to project the

<sup>8</sup>In saying this, I of course have no intention of denying that one of the services of fundamental theology may be to criticize the Church’s present understanding of the Christian faith and to seek to deepen and correct this.

future possibilities of meaning and truth on the basis of present constructive and past historical theological resources" (p. 240). On this view, practical theology is dependent on historical and systematic theology, whereas they do not depend on it. From the whole structure of this book one may infer that Tracy is not deeply impressed by the claim of many contemporary theologians that praxis is an inner moment of systematic theology itself. Yet he does not directly contest this claim.

A considerable portion of this final chapter is devoted to neo-Marxist and, in particular, liberation theology. His assessment of Latin American liberation theology is evenhanded but severe. With some of his objections I fully concur—for example, with his remark that some liberation theologians issue a siren call to revolution on the basis of a vague assurance that "the eschatological God of the future will somehow, someday assure the revolution's success" (p. 249). His more fundamental objection, however, is that the liberation theologians are insufficiently critical of the theological tradition, that they "continue to believe in the omnipotent, all-knowing, and unrelated God of classical theism" and adhere to an exclusivist understanding of revelation and Christology (p. 245). The final note sounded in this book therefore echoes the initial theme: the necessity of radically revising the traditional Christian message in conformity with the demands of a confident secularity.

## VII

To summarize, I can frankly say that *Blessed Rage for Order* is one of the most stimulating books I have read in recent years. It makes heavy demands on the reader's attention, but repays careful study. Coming at the book from my own point of view, I have raised certain difficulties, which I trust are not due to a misreading of the author's meaning. In many cases I am not sure to what extent my difficulties are caused by Tracy's self-imposed limitations. His understanding of fundamental theology is a modest one, leaving many unanswered questions to be treated in dogmatics. With Tracy's future work in view, I should like to underscore the following questions, already elaborated in the course of this article.

With regard to secularity: Is it essential to the secular faith that our life here and now, within history, be the only life there is? Must a person's fundamental secular faith be built on common human experience, untouched by the gospel? Can the content of secular faith be modified or enriched on the basis of special limit experiences? Is it possible that the Christian faith might offer significant corrections to the faith of secularity—for example, by subordinating the values of the present life to those of the realized kingdom of God?

With regard to theology: Does the status of theology as a science demand that it appeal to public criteria and stringent rational arguments? Does the community of faith have any legitimate autonomy vis-à-vis the community of secular inquiry? Does Scripture yield its full meaning when read outside the Church and its living tradition? Can fundamental theology fully achieve its goals if it takes no cognizance of the Church and its dogmatic tradition?

With regard to God, Christ, and praxis: Has American process theology as yet come through with a concept of God that is more adequate than any other resource for a viable contemporary theism? Can one be faithful to New Testament Christology without admitting any cognitive claims concerning Jesus of Nazareth? Is Christian praxis a constitutive element in the systematic understanding of faith?

On all of these points I seem to sense a divergence between David Tracy and myself, but he leaves his position sufficiently open to future qualification so that we might, in the end, substantially agree.

*Catholic University of America  
Woodstock Theological Center*

AVERY DULLES, S.J.