Faculté de théologie (TECO)

Systematic Theology and the Culture of Pluralism

Karl Barth's Theology of Retrieval in Dialogue with David Tracy's Revisionism

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DEDICATION

In Loving Memory of

My mother, Margaret (Died May 8 1984)
My grandmother, Veronica (Died December 13 2006)
My father, Matthias (Died December 3 2009)
My rector in the minor seminary, Rev. Fr. Simeon Ugwu (Died October 21 1990)

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ABSTRACT

The contemporary culture of pluralism has greatly impacted on Christian theology. With the "theory of inclusiveness" embedded in the notion of pluralism, theology has been struggling to demonstrate how to address this culture in such a way as to maintain a balance between an inclusiveness that tends to exclude one's particularity in order to be viewed as rational, and an inclusiveness that makes insistence on one's particularity appear totally "irrational". Karl Barth and David Tracy addressed this culture of pluralism with similar theological concerns, but with significantly different tactical approaches. While Barth anchored his theology on the church in order to maintain its particularity and distinctiveness in the midst of plurality, Tracy anchored his on public in order to maintain its scientificity and rationality among plurality. Barth's approach (known here under the name "theology of retrieval") is a prototype of confessional theology which is concerned with conserving the church's confession in theological discourses. For this school, theology is first and foremost a church's confession anchored on faith-commitment of the theologian, before it seeks to become "scientific" through rational explanation of this faith. Tracy's approach (known as "revisionism"), on the other hand, typifies the academic theology that seeks to first establish the rationality of theology as a condition for its admission into the scientific community. Although it doesn't altogether exclude the confessions of the church, this type of theology does not approach theology "confessionally" but rather "rationally". This means that those confessions have to be rationally revised so that they can be "rationally" confessed.

Barth's and Tracy's different trajectories and emphases tend to create a discontinuity between academic and confessional theologies in systematic theology's engagement with two basic cultures of pluralism namely, religious pluralism and theology's relationship with other rationalities. The objectives of this research are to determine first, whether and how systematic theology can be done in the context of religious pluralism without losing its distinctive Christian characteristics; and secondly, whether, and in what ways, systematic theology can be regarded as a "professional course" in terms of being a public discourse, and still remain within the precincts of the church as a confessional subject. In other words, this work seeks to understand whether public theology can in any way "correlate" with church theology, or whether the two are mutually exclusive.

RÉSUMÉ

La culture contemporaine du pluralisme a eu un grand impact sur la théologie chrétienne. Avec la «théorie de l'inclusivité» intégrée dans la notion de pluralisme, la théologie a eu du mal à démontrer comment aborder cette culture de manière à maintenir un équilibre entre une inclusivité qui a tendance à exclure sa particularité pour être considérée comme rationnelle, et une inclusivité qui fait que l'insistance sur sa particularité apparaît totalement «irrationnelle». Karl Barth et David Tracy ont abordé cette culture du pluralisme avec des préoccupations théologiques similaires, mais avec des différences notables dans leurs approches tactiques. Tandis que Barth ancrait sa théologie sur l'Église pour maintenir sa particularité et son caractère distinctif au milieu de la pluralité, Tracy l'ancrait sur le public afin de maintenir sa scientificité et sa rationalité au milieu de la pluralité. L'approche de Barth (connue ici sous le nom de «théologie de recouvrement») est un prototype de la théologie confessionnelle qui se préoccupe de conserver la confession de l'Église dans les discours théologiques. Pour cette école, la théologie est d'abord et avant tout une confession d'Église ancrée sur l'engagement de foi du théologien, avant de chercher à devenir «scientifique» par une explication rationnelle de cette foi. L'approche de Tracy (connue sous le nom de «révisionnisme»), d'autre part, porte sur la théologie universitaire qui cherche à établir d'abord la rationalité de la théologie comme condition pour son admission dans la communauté scientifique. Bien que ce type n’exclue pas tout à fait les confessions de l'Église, il n'approche pas la théologie «confessionnellement» mais plutôt «rationnellement». Cela signifie que ces tendances doivent être rationnellement révisées afin qu'elles puissent être «rationnellement» avouées et donc, acceptables.

Les différentes trajectoires et accents de Barth et Tracy ont tendance à créer une discontinuité entre la théologie académique et la théologie confessionnelle dans l'engagement de la théologie systématique, dans deux cultures fondamentales du pluralisme: le pluralisme religieux et la relation de la théologie avec d'autres rationalités. Les objectifs de cette recherche sont d'abord de déterminer si et comment la théologie systématique peut être faite dans le contexte du pluralisme religieux sans perdre ses caractéristiques chrétiennes distinctives; deuxièmement, de déterminer si et comment la théologie systématique peut être considérée comme un «cours professionnel», en termes de discours public, et reste encore dans les enceintes de l'Église comme sujet confessionnel. En d'autres

termes, ce travail cherche à comprendre si la théologie publique peut en quelque sorte être «corrélée» avec la théologie confessionnelle, ou si les deux sont mutuellement exclusives.

Keywords - *Mots-clés*: Systematic Theology; Culture of Pluralism; Theology of Retrieval; Revisionism; Confessional Theology, Public Theology, Academic Theology, Postliberalism, Analogical Imagination; Theological Rationality, Karl Barth, David Tracy.

ABBREVIATIONS

AD	*Ad Gentes divinitus* (Vatican II's Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity
AI	David TRACY, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*, New York, Crossroad, 1981
BRO	David TRACY, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology*, New York, The Seabury Press, (1975), 1996.
CD	Karl BARTH, *Church Dogmatics*, (eds. G. W. BROMILEY and T. F. TORRANCE, (14 volumes) Second Edition, Massachusetts, Hendrickson Publishers, 2010. References to individual volumes will be made by volume number, part number, paragraph number and page number.
FQI	Karl BARTH, *Anselm - Fides Quaerens Intellectum: Anselm's Proof of the Existence of God in the Context of his Theological Scheme*, SCM, 1960, Oregon, Pickwick Publications, 2009
LG	*Lumen Gentium*: Vatican II's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church
NA	*Nostra aetate*: Vatican II's Declaration on the Relations of the Church to Non-Christian Religions
NT	New Testament of the Bible
OT	Old Testament of the Bible
Romans	Karl BARTH, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. from the sixth ediction by Edwyn C. HOSKYNS, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1933.
Römerbrief	Karl BARTH, *Der Römerbrief (Zwiete Fassung)* 1922, Zurich, 1999.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Pluralism has become a keyword in contemporary scholarship. Whereas different fields of study regularly apply the word in their various researches, it can hardly mean the same thing for everybody. But the general consensus seems to be that the word "pluralism" connotes a type of response to various diversities in the world. These responses can take the following forms: political, religious, cultural, philosophical and theological. In each of them, the idea is to determine how and in which ways various and varied people with fundamental differences can coexist within the same society or within the same scholarly environment and still maintain some atmosphere of understanding.

But although "pluralism" has become very popular in usage, its precise meaning still remains hazy and vague. However, Diana Eck[1] has given us some insights to consider when thinking about pluralism in general. According to her, there are four points to note when considering the issue of pluralism. The first is to avoid the equation of pluralism with diversity alone. She rather describes pluralism as the "energetic engagement with diversity"; noting that diversity has led to the creation of religious ghettoes with little traffic between or among these various religions. Therefore, mere diversity without real encounter and relationship will yield, according to her, increasing tensions in the society. The second point is that pluralism is not just tolerance, but rather the "active seeking of understanding across lines of difference". She argues that "tolerance is a necessary public virtue" which does not require religions to know anything about one another. In this sense therefore, she maintains that mere tolerance does not remove ignorance of one another, and that therefore, a foundation based on it is too shallow to make any positive contribution. The third point is that pluralism is not relativism, but rather "the encounter of commitments". She claims that the new paradigm of pluralism does not require people to leave their individual identities and commitments behind since pluralism is in fact the encounter of commitments. To this end therefore, she contends that one needs to hold her deepest differences; although this must be done not in isolation but rather in relationship to one another. The fourth point is that pluralism is "based on dialogue and encounter". In dialogue, there

[1] Diana L. ECK, *What is Pluralism*, in *The Pluralism Project, Harvard University*, cf., http://pluralism.org/what-is-pluralism/ consulted 4/10/2016.

are moments of speaking and moments of listening which reveals to the dialoguing partners common understandings and differences. She thinks that the goal of dialogue is not to get everyone to agree with every other one. She, in fact, believes that "pluralism involves the commitment to being at the table – with one's commitments".

Our usage of the word pluralism in this work will take the above points into consideration. However, we will be limited to two basic forms of pluralism namely, religious pluralism and theological culture of pluralism. By "religious pluralism", we mean the theological responses to religious diversity. These theological responses must be distinguished from philosophical responses. Michael Barnes Norton has emphasized this point when he argues that theological treatments of religious diversity tend explicitly to be grounded in faith commitments that characterize particular religious traditions, while philosophical accounts tend to adopt a more or less disinterested attitude by focusing on the epistemological or ethical issues raised by religious diversity[2]. But he nonetheless agrees that in spite of their methodological differences, theological and philosophical accounts inform and influence each other. Although we shall seriously take note of this mutual influence, we have to make it clear from the onset that our interest is more on the theological rather than on the philosophical responses to diversity. Again, when we talk of religious pluralism in this work, we do not mean religious pluralism "de jure"; we are rather focusing on its "de facto" outlook. In this way, our argument will not be focusing on countries that have inscribed religious pluralism in their state laws, but rather, we are only interested in the fact of religious pluralism and how theology has responded and can respond to it.

By "theological culture of pluralism", we do not claim to discuss "cultural pluralism" as such – a discussion which would have veered us off into an unfamiliar and delicate anthropological and sociological questions of the coexistence of different cultures within the same environment. There are so many Anthropologists and sociologists who have tried to define the notion of cultural pluralism in this regard[3]. But perhaps, Pantoja et al. have given a more concise

[2] Cf., Michael Barnes NORTON, *Religious Pluralism*, in *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (A Peer-Reviewed Academic Resource), ISSN 2161-0002, http://www.iep.utm.edu/rel-plur/#H9 consulted 4/10/2016.

[3] Cf., for instance, Peggy Reeves SANDAY, *Cultural and Structural Pluralism in the U.S.*, in Peggy Reeves SANDAY (ed.), *Anthropology and the Public Interest: Field Work and Theory*, New York, Academic Press, 1976.

definition when they said: "cultural pluralism is the condition in a society in which individuals, on the basis of ascribed or attained characteristics, are able to form and develop communities along the differences of race, age, sex, religion, language and cultural lifestyle"[4]. However, although occasionally we shall be referring to some differences in cultural lifestyles (and therefore find ourselves in the realm of cultural pluralism), when we talk of theological culture of pluralism, or even of "cultural pluralism" in this work, we don't mean specifically any of these sociological or anthropological questions. We rather mean different theological cultures that emphasize on the one hand, the universalist character of theology, and on the other hand, its particularist character. The first theological culture focuses attention on how theology can be done within the same intellectual environment as other contemporary rationalities, using the same methods of enquiry. In this sense, it emphasizes the academic character of theology more than its ecclesial or confessional character. The second theological culture has its interests focused on how to preserve the distinctive nature of theology. It therefore places its emphasis on the ecclesial or confessional character of theology even when it is done in the universities. These two theological cultures' emphases can be said to be an extension of the ancient theological polemics of the relationship between faith and reason. Although this research is not specifically focused on this ancient polemics but rather on the contemporary question of the role of the church in today's academic theology, elements of this ancient polemics will continue to influence any discussion on this contemporary question.

Are academic theologies and confessional theologies mutually exclusive? Can one engage in academic theology and still remain indebted to the church as an institution? To respond to these and similar questions, this research will examine the theological paths of Karl Barth and David Tracy respectively. The choices we made are not haphazard. Karl Barth is a perfect representation of scholars that can be termed "theologians of the church"; and therefore, his theology can be labelled as "confessional theology". On the other hand, David Tracy has been a strong proponent of the idea of theology as a public discourse. His logic and arguments point to the fact that his theology can be described as "academic theology". These two theologians

[4] Antonia PANTOJA, Wilhelmina PERRY and Barbara BLOUROCK, *Towards the Development of Theory: Cultural Pluralism Redefined*, in *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*, vol. 4, 1, Art. 11 (1976), p. 125-146, p. 130.

represent two theological schools that have been termed "theologies of retrieval" and "revisionist theologies" respectively[5]. This work intends to institute a dialogue between Barth's retrieval and Tracy's revisionism in order to respond to the question of how systematic theology can respond to the culture of pluralism.

Barth felt that his colleagues' insistence on anchoring theology on external support in order to satisfy the Enlightenment taste for rationality actually distanced theology from its roots by sacrificing theological distinctiveness on the altar of general scientific methodologies. He therefore decided that, to salvage theology, what was needed was for theology to focus on its norm as its source. Those classical Trinitarian, incarnational, and soteriological teachings of the church have therefore to be retrieved if theology stands any chance of surviving as a distinct discipline. But to properly retrieve these classical teachings, the church has to be the proper place for theology. Theology, in fact, has to be a function of the church. In other words, it is the Church's internal critique rather than that of any "non-church scientific criteria" that gives authenticity to theological propositions. For the church to fulfil this function, theology has to be anchored first of all on Christian revelation before any question of human rationality as such is considered. Thus, Barth made the doctrine of revelation the starting point of his theology; and began his vigorous, and sometimes vicious, attack on anything he perceived as a real or potential obstacle to Christian revelation. Starting from the very concept of religion itself which he sees as not only having taken the place of revelation but also as a shrewd human way of circumventing God, he began a theological revolution that was to continue well after the twentieth century. That revolution centres on the absolute necessity of the church for any theological discourse. It was not as if the role of the church in theological discourse had been dormant before Barth's theological revolution; it was not as if knowledge of God was lacking before he came on board. His revolution was aimed at re-focusing attention on the point of departure for theology. He did not want to remain within the "how" of the knowledge of God, but rather the "where" of that knowledge. In comparing Barth's emphasis with that of Tillich, Sven Ensminger puts it this way: "Tillich starts from the epistemological question of 'how can God be known?' whereas Barth

[5] The origin of the coinages and/or explication of the terms "retrieval" and "revisionism" will be done respectively in parts II and III of this work.

begins with the ontological question of 'where does God make Godhead known?'"[6]. The triple form of the Word of God as revealed, written and proclaimed became Barth's way of situating theology within the context of the church. Thus his theology became equated with the confession of the church. However, in a contemporary context of pluralism, especially where the language of revelation no longer carry the same weight and awe as it used to carry, what becomes the fate of a theology centred exclusively on such language?

David Tracy comes in handy to propose another anchor for theology in an epoch where traditional theological anchor appears to be waning. He thinks that it was high time those traditional theological self-understandings got revised in order to make sense to the contemporary mode of understanding. He thus decided to bring in the issue of 'common human experience' as another source of theology which, he says, must be critically correlated with the Christian fact. He thinks that this is the only way by which theology can continue to be relevant; but this time, no longer as a church's private confession, rather, as an academic and public discourse in which anybody irrespective of faith affiliation can, willingly and in a rational manner, engage in, following a shared concept of rationality. It was thus that Tracy began his revisionist theology as a prelude to his more important project of making theology in its entirety an entirely public discourse. Tracy is not so much interested in the "where" of Barth as in the "how" of theological rationality. And even when he delves into the doctrine of God, it is to establish 'how' the concept of that God can be rationally apprehended in a purely academic setting. He did not want theology to be regarded as a *special* science; he just want to establish it as a *science*. This is why he thinks that it is the community of scientific enquiry rather than the church as a community of faith which should have the last say in theology. In this sense, theology should no longer enjoy the "ecclesiastical protection" it used to have, but should rather come out in the public and fight for self-survival, just like any other scientific discipline. In this public arena, what is paramount is a "shared concept of reason" advanced in such a way as to be available to all professionals: "to affirm serious pluralism is to affirm a strenuous pluralism of scholarly professionals where each should be heard because each thinker, as theologian or social scientist, precisely as dedicated to his or her professional task, will advance

[6] Sven ENSMINGER, *Karl Barth's Theology as a Resource for a Christian Theology of Religions*, London, Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2014, p. 42.

reasons, evidence, warrants, backings, arguments for the analysis offered for our common study"[7]. In this way, theology becomes a purely academic subject where professionals rather than ecclesiastics determine its rationality.

The objectives of this research are to determine (following Barth's and Tracy's theological trajectories) first, whether and how systematic theology can be done in the context of religious pluralism without losing its distinctive Christian characteristics; and secondly, whether, and in what ways, systematic theology can be regarded as a "professional course" in terms of being a public discourse, and still remain within the precincts of the church as a confessional subject. In other words, we shall be seeking to understand whether public theology can, in any way, "correlate" with church theology, or whether the two are mutually exclusive.

Our work is dived into four asymmetrical parts. Part I (with two chapters) deals with Christian theology in general and the question of pluralism. Chapter one will discuss the concept of religion in order to understand the real challenges of religious pluralism. These challenges will lead us to discuss, in chapter two, how theology has responded with stereotypical attitudes that often create more problems than provide solutions, through their tendencies to either absolutize Christianity or make light of Christian particularity.

Part II (also with two chapters) introduces Karl Barth's response to the culture of pluralism through his theology of retrieval. Chapter three will take a cursory historical look at the Enlightenment challenge, the early Christian responses, and how perceived inadequacies in these responses led Karl Barth to his theology of retrieval. Chapter four will complement chapter three by examining Barth's theory of religions in the light of his theology of retrieval. Here, both his "despised" approach to other religions in the famous paragraph 17 of his *Church Dogmaitcs*, and his "more welcoming" approach in paragraph 69 will be examined in the light of the current culture of pluralism. Our discovery that Barth's effort to preserve the role of the church in theological discourse often obscures him to the importance of placing theology out as a public discourse, will lead us to conclude that his retrieval theology appears to alienate theology from the committee of contemporary rationalities. For this reason, we think that, taken in isolation, it might not satisfy the cravings of

[7] David TRACY, *Introductory Address*, in David TRACY, Hans KÜNG, Johann B. METZ (ed.), *Toward Vatican III: The Work that Needs to be Done*, Dublin, Gill and Macmillan, 1978, p. 12.

contemporary scholars who would want to see theology engage more with other rationalities in this contemporary culture of pluralism.

Part III will examine David Tracy's revisionist theology in the light of this culture of pluralism. In chapter five, we will survey the secularist and pluralist cultures, and Tracy's presentation of revisionist theology as a panacea for these cultures. The major argument of Tracy's revisionism is that theology has to come out of the church's closet and become entirely a public discourse. Thus, 'theology as a public discourse' is the outcome of his revisionist theology. This outcome will be the main object of chapter six, where we shall carefully examine Tracy's proposals and arguments for public theology. Here, he made a serious case for systematic theology as a public discourse using his notion of classic. But Tracy's emphases on academic theology very often overlook the role of the church as an institution in theological discourse. He seems to be more comfortable with the church staying on the side-line while "professionals" take over the entire theological discourse. But the question becomes: must academic theology and confessional theology be radically separated?

To answer this question, we shall bring Karl Barth to dialogue with David Tracy in Part IV. Chapter seven will bring out the similarities in Barth's and Tracy's theological concerns, the cultural differences that gave rise to their different theological emphases, the divergence in their theological methods, and the convergence in their insistence on the universal truth claim for any theology. From the way they allowed dogmatic and fundamental theological principles to determine their entire theologies respectively, we shall suggest that, left like that, it might be impossible to argue for the public character of theology when theology becomes confessional, and vice versa. But perhaps when approached from the perspective of belonging to the same "reflective axis" of theology, dogmatic and fundamental theologies can come together in a joint systematic theological enterprise that can make theology develop public character even while remaining a function of the church. We think that this approach will guarantee that in its engagement with pluralism theology will retain its particularity without isolating itself.

PART I

RELIGION, CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY AND THE QUESTION OF PLURALISM

INTRODUCTION

The first real confrontation of Christian theology with pluralism had to do with the question of religious pluralism. In fact, it might be safe to suggest that later developments of theological cultures of pluralism were remote offshoots of the early Christian encounters with other religions, and how theology struggled to respond to them.

This part of our work will therefore examine how Christian theology has responded to this question of religious pluralism by historically tracing the origin of the concept of religion, and how it eventually became a generic term for almost every belief-system despite its "Christian origin". Precisely because the term "religion" has become a generic term, theological attitudes towards religious diversity has assumed certain stereotypes that almost all the time tend to end in vicious circle. However, if one hopes to adequately address the question of pluralism in our contemporary world-setting, these traditional stereotypical responses need to be surpassed.

CHAPTER 1

THE CONCEPT OF RELIGION AND THE CHALLENGES OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

INTRODUCTION

The word "religion" is frequently and easily used today by almost everybody. However, it is open to various and varied definitions that could have both limiting and enlarging effects depending on the perspective from where one choses to define it. Paul Tillich observed that if one narrows the meaning of religion to the cult of gods (*cultus deorum*), then one runs the risk of excluding from religious realm what he calls the "premythological" as well as the "postmythological" stages of human history. The premythological stage, according to him, refers to the stage when there were not yet gods, e.g. shamanism; and the postmythological stage refers to the stage when there were no longer gods, e.g. the development of Zen Buddhism. He therefore thinks that, to include these two stages, one must find a definition of religion in which the relation to gods is not a necessary element. This could even be taken broadly to include certain secular movements that show decisive characteristics of religions proper, even though they are at the same time profoundly different. It is in this latter broader sense that he chooses to define religion as "the state of being grasped by an ultimate concern, a concern which qualifies all other concerns as preliminary and which itself contains the answer to the question of the meaning of our life"[1].

One advantage of this broad view of Tillich is that, it brings out the platform where Christianity is neither excluded from the definition of the word 'religion', nor does it encapsulate, and thereby exclusively appropriate it. One great disadvantage though, is that such secular movements as Marxism would be legitimately included in this view, and there would be no logical basis for excluding them. However, we shall stick to this view as a working definition for now because, it is only from this perspective that one can legitimately talk of "pluralism"

[1] Cf. Paul TILLICH, *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions*, New York and London, Columbia University Press, 1963, p. 3-5.

in religion. It is also from this broader view-point that the Christian theology of religions has been operating.

However, both from the narrow meaning of religion as the *cultus deorum*, and from its broader meaning as *ultimate concern*, what constitutes religion differ according to different convictions. If one takes religion in the restricted sense of *cultus deorum*, then, giving the fact that there are different conceptions of gods, one would expect to have different cults of these different gods. If one takes the Tillichian position of understanding religion as *ultimate concern*, there is still bound to be differences in understanding of religion giving the fact that what a person *P* takes as his/her ultimate concern might not correspond to what another person *S* takes as his/her own ultimate concern. In spite of these glaring differences however, there must be some elements common to these different conceptions that make it possible to categorize all of them under one generic term *religion*. If this is not the case, then it doesn't make sense to talk of Christian and non-Christian religions, for instance. But these common elements (under which banner we categorize various convictions that lead to certain ways of acting and living), rather than help bring together these diverse convictions, have, over the years, actually led to conflicts. The reason is that when this one generic name *religion* is applied to all of them, the debate about which of them is true and which is false (or, to put it more moderately, which of them is truer than the others) arises. This type of comparison has brought about conflicts and bitter wars. To defend one's position, it almost seems that it is not just enough to state what one believes; one goes the extra mile of stating what he/she thinks the other believes, especially in relation to one's own belief system. But in venturing into the belief system of the other, one is not always objective. When one sees the other from the spectrum of one's own belief system, and measures the veracity or otherwise of the other's belief with tools fashioned from one's own religious garden, it is difficult to remain neutral. To use the expression of Alan Race, "it is not possible for the theologian to place his own faith in parenthesis while he examines the faith of others"[2]. This problem is actually one of the greatest challenges of religious pluralism in Christian theology.

To understand the depth of this challenge, we are going to attempt in this chapter to trace the evolution of the concept of religion

[2] Alan RACE, *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions*, New York, Orbis Books, 1982, p. 5.

and see how its "Christian origin" has influenced its application to non-Christian religions. Although this dilemma of using the Christian notion of religion to explain non-Christian realities that have been tagged "religious" has not been satisfactorily surmounted, this chapter will also seek to explain what we think is non-Christian religions (with the exception of Judaism[3]). We are going to attempt to bring out the nature of their doctrines and the sources of their affirmation on God/gods/ultimate concern. Finally, from what we are able to say about non-Christian religions, we shall try to establish what we think are the principal differences between Christianity and non-Christian religions.

1. THE CONCEPT OF RELIGION

The word "religion" has come to be used today as a generic term comprising varied but analogous occurrences or experiences. However, there was a gradual evolution and development of the word before it finally became an all-encompassing term used to describe what is known today as religion, with philosophy playing considerable role in its present understanding. Peter Henrici has given us a concise recapitulation of the history of the evolution of the concept of religion[4]. Perhaps, Cicero is credited with introducing the Latin word *religio* into religious and theological language when he began his influential dialogue *De natura deorum* by emphasising that some knowledge of the nature of the gods is *ad moderandam religionem necessaria*[5]. According to Henrici, Cicero sometimes uses the word *religio* in combination with *pietas* and *sanctitas* (i.e. piety and holiness) which in their Latin understanding, are not primarily linked to the world of religion. But the usage of the word *religio* here focuses

[3] The exclusion of Judaism is purely deliberate given that "Christians and Jews have such a common spiritual heritage" (cf. Nostra Aetate nº 4). Christianity is historically linked to Judaism. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – the God of the Patriarchs whom the Jews worship – is in fact the Father of Jesus Christ. Christians and Jews share a common Scripture (at least the Old Testament). This does not however suggest that Judaism is not distinctively different from Christianity. But when it comes to discussing religious pluralism vis-à-vis Christianity, we want to ensure that we discuss religions that have no such historical link with Christianity so that the radical distinction between Christianity and those other religions will be highlighted. Judaism (as the nearest cousin to Christianity) will not bring out such radical distinction that we are looking for in this section of our work.

[4] Cf. Peter HENRICI, *The Concept of Religion from Cicero to Schleiermacher: Origin, History, and Problems with the Term*, in Karl Josef BECKER and Ilaria MORALI (ed.), *Catholic Engagement with World Religions: A Comprehensive Study*, New York, Orbis Books, 2010, p. 1-22 (This section of our work is mainly a recap of Henrici's major arguments).

[5] P. HENRICI, *The Concept of Religion*, p. 2.

on the appropriate human relationship to the gods. As belonging to *deorum pius cultus* ("due worship of the gods"), *religio* is contrasted to *superstitio* in which *est timor inanis deorum* ("there is inane fear of the gods")[6]. From its earliest usage and understanding by the Romans, religion was intrinsically connected to the Roman public or state so much so that opposition to the Roman religion was viewed as dangerous to the state.

However, Henrici argues that Cicero's understanding of *religio* is not limited to *cultus deorum* as an empty relationship, but that such *cultus* must be based on justice. He referred to Cicero's *De inventione rhetorica*, where he defined *religio* as a virtue affiliated with justice, and basing his understanding of *religio* on the etymology of the adjective *religiosus*, which is derived from the verb *relegere* (=to take up repeatedly, to attend to something repeatedly): *qui…omnia quae ad cultum deorum pertinerent, retractarent et tamquam relegerent, ii sunt dicti religiosi ex relegendo, tamquam ex eligendo elegantes* ("Those who should anew deal and collect all what pertains to the divine cult, are called *religiosi* from *relegere* so as *elegantes* from *eligere*")[7].

The early Christian confrontation with other religions motivated writers of the immediate post-apostolic age in the Greek milieu to engage in apologetic refutations of other religions by propagating Christianity as superior, and calling on the readers to join this *vera religio*. These Christian writers leaned heavily on the antique schools of philosophy and their criticism of religion. Although writers in Latin at first used the word *religio* reluctantly to apply to the Christian faith as *vera religio*, it soon gained popularity through the writings of such scholars as Tertullian, Marcus Minucius Felix, Arnobius the Elder, etc. But it was Augustine's reinterpretation of *religio* through such works as *De vera religione* (390/391) and *De Civitate Dei* (413-426), which had a major impact on subsequent theological and philosophical thought. Since most arguments in favour of Christianity were based on philosophical reasoning because *religio* and *sapentia* were considered to be inseparable (Christian doctrines were also referred to as a "philosophy"), as writers were arguing for "true religion", they were also arguing for "true philosophy". In fact, it was Origen's and Augustine's urge to support the contents of Christian faith by philosophical means that generated Christian theology[8]. It was

[6] P. HENRICI, *The Concept of Religion*, p. 2.
[7] Nat d. II 72, Loeb II, p. 739, cf. P. HENRICI, p. 3.
[8] Cf., P. HENRICI, *The Concept of Religion*, p. 5.

believed that philosophical modes of reasoning make for accessibility to human minds across cultural and religious boundaries. Hence, there is a close relationship between religion and philosophy. Doctrine and worship are connected together; and the church typifies an example of such close connection. The Church is therefore *vera religio* because in it, the soul worships the eternal God and not some creaturely things[9].

During the period of Christianity's confrontation with Islam, it was shown that discussions involving the two religions were possible without resort to the word "religion". The preferred alternative words to refer to Islam as a separate form of belief were *secta*, *lex*, or *fides*. It was only in the writings of Nicholas of Cusa that Cicero's *religio* reappeared when he uses it on a Christian basis to represent the ideal of a *religio una in rituum varietate*[10]. The Reformation era, with the question of what is the true denomination or religion, saw Jean Bodin suggest *naturalis religio* as a correct way of living[11]. The term 'natural religion' became thenceforth for Christian apologists their *demonstratio religiosa*, pointing the way to Christianity in their disputes with atheists and libertines. But for Deists, it represented the minimum to which all religions and Christianity in particular were to be reduced. With David Hume's rejection of "natural religion", he became the first major philosopher to use the term in a neutral and pluralistic manner applicable to all historically existing religions[12].

At the close of the Age of Enlightenment, the shortcomings of natural religion were so evident that the need for historical dimensions in a religion was recognized and emphasized in Rousseau's *religion civile* (popular religion). The notion of religion in line with reason became more inclusive, comprising, for instance, "radical evil" and man's need for salvation (Kant), as well as the evolution of all religions to the state of revealed religion as in Christian dogma (Hegel). Schleiermacher, on his part, based religion on innate, deeply personal feelings that can be found in all its manifestations[13].

Note how the above considerations of the evolution of the word 'religion' not only have Christian connotation but also are philosophically and culturally laden. First, the understanding of what religion means is based on Christian apprehension of that word.

[9] Cf. Wolfhart PANNENBERG, *Systematic Theology* vol.1, trans. by Geoffrey Bromiley, London and New York, T & T Clark International, (1994), 2004, p. 120- 122.
[10] P. HENRICI, *The Concept of Religion*, p. 6-9.
[11] P. HENRICI, *The Concept of Religion*, p.10-11.
[12] P. HENRICI, *The Concept of Religion*, p.14.
[13] Cf., P. HENRICI, *The Concept of Religion*, p. 15-20.

Secondly, the category and mode of thought under which the term evolved is Eurocentric. In considering the belief systems of non-Christians especially of non-Western extraction, will this term suffice? This is the first challenge of using this word as a generic term applicable to all belief systems. Nonetheless, it is outside our immediate reach to find another word to use in describing non-Christian belief-systems. We are therefore condemned to continue to make use of the word "religion".

2. NON-CHRISTIAN BELIEF-SYSTEMS AS ALSO "RELIGIONS"

Because of its "Christian origin", the first theological discussion about non-Christian religion had to do with the question of salvation of these other faith-believers. From the first century Christianity, Christian apologists wrestled with this question especially as it concerned those who lived before Christ. Their immediate preoccupation was first, with the Jews, and then, with the Greeks and the Romans, together constituting the then known world. With the arrival of the gospel to Rome and to the Greek pagan world, it was assumed that Christianity had reached all the corners of the earth. Not until the late 15th and the early 16th century European exploration of the Americas and the discovery of immense tribes of people quite oblivious of the gospel did that faulty geographical notion of the earth give way, and a renewed concerted theological discussion of non-Christian religions emerged. The opening up of the "far"-Eastern axis of the world in later centuries revealed yet other vast Asian centuries-old forms of religions that far pre-dated Christianity. It soon dawned on Christianity that this world is a "market-place of possibilities"[14] where different religions jostle with one another. This new insight into the religious world of other faith-believers led theologians to intensify their interests in the subject of religion. The radical difference between Christianity and non-Christian religions has become more obvious than before. But the need for dialogue with these non-Christian religions has even become more urgent than ever. Such dialogue has to start with an attempt at understanding what these non-Christian religions are and how they are different from Christianity. What follows is a brief discussion of the different categories of non-Christian religions.

[14] This expression was coined by Alan RACE, cf. *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, p. 1.

2.1. Non-Theistic Religions

The non-theistic[15] religions generally give a psychological account of the nature of religion by pinning the origin of religious consciousness in ourselves. It was O. Pfleiderer who distinguished this psychological account from the metaphysical account which finds the basis of religion in God and his revelation[16]. Both are geared toward the human well-being, but with completely different approaches. The non-theistic religions are more anthropocentric than theocentric, which is the hallmark of theistic religions. In this regard, we will simply define non-theistic religion as a psychological consciousness of the self, geared towards self-mastery ('*awakened*' in Buddhist's terminology), in the hope that that would lead to the mastery of one's environment and the universe at large. God does not play any role in such a religion, and, "rites" and "worships" are not systematized. Rather, each individual develops his/her own method of achieving self-mastery[17]. The Christian concept of *cultus deorum* does not therefore apply to non-theistic religions. The Tillichian *ultimate concern* does not also apply if by *ultimate concern* we mean a particular object. There are no objects, but there are convictions and goals, and attempts to reach such goals. Their convictions however, go deeper than mere ideologies (they have some moral ideals attached to them that regulate their lives, and they are soteriological); and it is on the basis of these facts that we can categorize them as religions, even though the Western concept of religion may be foreign to them. In our estimation, Confucianism and the ancient Buddhism come under this category.

[15] Care must be taken not to equate non-theistic with atheistic. Whereas atheism out-rightly denies the existence of God, non-theism may or may not deny such existence. But whether or not there is God is of no consequence to their "religion". Thiers is not a cult rendered to a God. But they have a concept of "salvation" which is completely different from the Christian (and other monotheistic) concept of salvation. See footnote 18 below for further explanation.

[16] Cf. W. PANNENBERG, *Systematic Theology*, p. 132-134. Pfleiderer however did not say that non-theistic religions have psychological account of religion. On the contrary, he postulated Christian understanding of God as being the norm in psychological concept of religion because such a concept of God relaxes the tension present in the nature of self-consciousness between human dependence (as a natural creature) and freedom. We, however loosely allude here to the Buddhist practice of self-awareness (which they claim, gives them inner peace of mind without necessary recourse to any divinity) as an example of a psychological account of religion. We will also loosely take a metaphysical account of the nature of religion as being generally the tenet of monotheistic religions. But we must admit however, that we are not using the two accounts in the same understanding that Pfleiderer used them.

[17] The *gurus* can teach their students certain methods; but they insist that such methods are no more than formula to help the students discover and develop their own proper methods given their own proper dispositions.

2.2. Theistic Religions

Unlike the non-theistic religions that may not take interest in the concept of God, in theistic religions, God plays an important role. But we have to further distinguish between monotheistic and non-monotheistic religions.

2.2.1. Non-Monotheistic Religions

In non-monotheistic religions, the concept of a Supreme Being is alien. What we have is rather a college of divinities, each with a specific function, and never interfering with the function of the other (except when it comes to exhibition of power and prowess to determine which is more powerful than the other). Most polytheistic religions come under this category. They have the idea of the divine, but their 'salvation'[18] is often not regarded as heaven-oriented; it is rather mostly seen as earth-oriented. This means that most of their moral ideals are geared towards a better living here on earth, or a better reincarnation after death. We will therefore define non-monotheistic religions as a postulation of extra-terrestrial realities whose existence help to regulate the socio-moral and political lives of their adherents here on earth, and possibly elevate them to the status of spirits depending on how well and how long they lived on earth[19]. Non-monotheistic religions are also soteriological, aiming at saving human and other beings. Most are offshoots of natural religion which gradually developed into forms of cultic worship. Worship characterizes all theistic religions. But in non-monotheistic religions, this worship is not rendered to a single Supreme God; rather, there are as different worships as there are gods. There is no "revelation" in the form claimed by the three great monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. But people could be "inspired" by events

[18] Richard Swinburne has defined religion as a system which offers salvation; and by 'salvation' he means simply 'deep well-being'. He hoped that this definition will include both theistic and non-theistic religions. Cf. Richard SWINBURNE, *Faith and Reason*, (Second Edition), New York, Oxford University Press, (1981), 2005, p.60; cf. also chapter 3 for his explanation of his usage of 'salvation'. We are also using the term 'salvation' here in its Swinburnean understanding and not in its Christian usage.

[19] The African idea of "Ancestor veneration" is meant to indicate that when one fulfils the requirements of becoming an ancestor (=living a morally balanced life, dying at a ripe-old age, not dying in questionable circumstances e.g. tragically, having begotten male successors in the form of male children, etc.), he takes his seat among the community of ancestors and is thus venerated along with them. In generations to come he could also be elevated to the status of a divinity and certain function is attributed to him, and, he is then worshipped. On the other hand, in ancient Hinduism and some forms of African Traditional religions, certain natural powers are deified and venerated in forms that are of mystical nature.

happening around them, and give such events some "spiritual" or "divine" interpretation. Events which we attribute to global warming today were usually interpreted as divine warnings and as signs of impending dangers and catastrophes. In order to escape such dangers, worshippers were advised to fulfil their obligations to either their gods, or to their fellow humans. Religion here functions to regulate the moral behaviours of people and encourages them to fulfil their obligations towards gods and neighbours.

2.2.2. Monotheistic Religions

Monotheistic religions share all the features of theistic religions with non-monotheistic ones, but have other features that are lacking in the latter. One of the great features of the three great monotheistic religions is their claim to a special revelation from God. They are all (but not exclusively) sometimes pejoratively called religions of the book[20]. They have well documented Scriptures which they claim, are the revealed word of God. However, their interpretation of what constitutes revelation, the nature and manner of such revelation, differ considerably. Judaism, for instance, is the oldest of the three Abrahamic religions; and both Christianity and Islam somehow trace their root to it but not at all in the same way and in the same scale. For Judaism, what constitutes revelation is the *Torah*, whose Decalogue was written directly by Yahweh on the Mount Sinai and given to Moses as a covenantal pact with the chosen Hebrew people of Israel. For Islam, however, revelation is the Qur'an which, they claim, was dictated by Allah to the prophet Mohammed through the archangel Gabriel; an event they claim, lasted for 23 years (610-632). The difference between these two and Christianity is that for the Christians, although the Bible is inspired and the biblical authors wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, when it comes to the question of "Revelation", it is the revelation of God in the covenant to Israel and in Jesus Christ. Therefore, it is this singular claim of

[20] It should be noted here that the expression "People of the Book" was first used in the Qur'an to designate the non-Muslims who nonetheless, have claims to revealed scriptures. Among this group are the Jews and the Christians, but also includes the Sabians and the Magians (cf., S. V. DESIKA CHAR, *Hinduism and Islam in India: Caste, Religion, and Society from Antiquity to Early Modern Times*, Princeton, Markus Wiener Publishers, 1997, p. 127). But whereas Judaism accepts this appellation as a Jewish identity rooted in the Torah, Christianity (and particularly Catholicism) rejects the expression. They see the Christian faith not as a "religion of the book" but rather as a "religion of the Word of God" or a "religion of the revelation of the Word of God". Whereas the person of Jesus Christ is the epitome of that revelation, the unfolding of this Christian revelation is not limited to the Word of God found in the Scripture but includes also the Sacred Tradition and the Magisterium of the Church.

Christianity that Jesus Christ is the revelation of God that distinguishes her uniquely from the rest of the religions of the world.

Our delimitations in this chapter exclude Judaism. But it is important that we briefly consider Islam and see how it differs from Christianity as a religion. Apart from the necessity of trying to understand Islam in the face of the current surge in Islamic terrorism, Islam is the second single largest religion in the world today after Christianity[21].

2.2.3. Islam: Like/Unlike Christianity

From the first time of its appearance, Islam presented itself as a "pure" religion ordained by Allah to "correct" the two preceding monotheistic religions of Judaism and Christianity. It sees itself as a "primordial monotheism written into Adam's very nature and which the prophets had to repeat incessantly without adding anything new"[22]. Literally speaking, the word *islam* means "confident submission" to the Creator of the universe; and anyone who submits to this Creator is a *muslim*. Among those it recognizes as having submitted to God, and therefore, as *muslims*, were Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad (whom they claim, is the last and the greatest of all the prophets). "Religion (*din*), in the eyes of God, is *islam*" (sura 3:19). As a religion, Islam has creeds, rites, and morality. Maurice Borrmans (whose research we are relying upon for this sub-section) listed six articles in the Islamic creed namely: to believe in God, in the Angels, the Books, the Prophets, Eschatology, and Predestination. He also says that their rites are five in number namely: bearing witness, prayer, almsgiving, fasting, and pilgrimage. Finally, in their morality,

[21] According to Pew-Templeton Global Religious Futures, as of 2010, there were 2.2 billion Christians around the world, or about one-in-three (31%) people worldwide. This makes Christianity the world's largest religion. The world's Christian population is expected to grow to 2.9 billion in 2050. Nearly one-in-three people worldwide (31%) are expected to be Christian at mid-century, the same share as in 2010. Cf., http://www.globalreligiousfutures.org/religions/christians (consulted on 5/7/2016). In the same data, as of 2010, there were 1.6 billion Muslims around the world, representing 23% of all people worldwide. This makes Islam the world's second-largest religion. The number of Muslims around the world is projected to increase rapidly in the decades ahead, growing to nearly 2.8 billion in 2050. Muslims are expected to grow twice as fast as the overall global population. Consequently, Muslims are projected to rise from 23% of the world's population in 2010 to 30% in 2050. Cf., http://www.globalreligiousfutures.org/religions/muslims (consulted on 5/7/2016).

[22] Maurice BORRMANS, *Islam as It Understands Itself*, in Karl Josef BECKER and Ilaria MORALI (ed.), *Catholic Engagement with World Religions: A Comprehensive Study*, New York, Orbis Books, 2010, p. 487-511, p. 501.

one has to understand its rules as they are formulated in the Law (Shari'a)[23].

Islam (just like Christianity and Judaism) believes that there is only one God. And they believe that this one God is objectively the same in all three religions. The Qur'an says: "Our God and your God is one, and to Him we are submitted" (sura 29:46). Christianity affirms a similar thing in *Lumen Gentium*, which reminds Christians that the plan of salvation includes among others, the Muslims, because, "these profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, mankind's judge on the last day"[24]. However, this One God is apprehended differently by Muslims and Christians. For Islam, God is forever unknowable. What he reveals in the Qur'an is "only his will over humans, concerning their destiny, worship, and morality"[25]. For them, therefore, God is pure transcendence.

This is not, however, the case in Christianity. The Christians affirm that they can enter into the inner knowledge of God's mystery, thanks to the incarnation and the saving acts of Jesus Christ (his crucifixion and resurrection). They claim that through Jesus Christ, God has revealed Himself as eternal love between three hypostases – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Christianity therefore proclaims the mystery of one sole God in three persons – the Trinity. The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 said that this "supreme Reality, incomprehensible and ineffable" is the "divine substance, essence or nature, which alone is the principle of all things, without which nothing else could exist; and this Reality neither engenders nor is engendered"[26]. Christianity doesn't see any contradiction in the Trinitarian doctrine as Muslims (who see in it an introduction of multiplicity in God) do. Whereas Muslims see in the doctrine of trinity "a lesser form of polytheism", for Christians, God revealed Himself in Jesus Christ as one and triune (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). Borrmans however sees in this doctrine a "linguistic division" of attributing external actions to the persons of the trinity so that, "through this 'linguistic division' creation is more particularly attributed to the Father, redemption to the Son, and sanctification to

[23] Cf., M. BORRMANS, *Islam as It Understands Itself*, p. 487.
[24] *Lumen Gentium*, nº 16, in Austin FLANNERY (ed.), *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, Dublin, Dominican Publications, 1981.
[25] M. BORRMANS, *Islam as It Understands Itself*, p. 500.
[26] Cf., M. BORRMANS, *Islam as It Understands Itself*, P. 500.

the Holy Spirit"[27]. He therefore concluded that Trinity, for Christianity, should not be confused with tritheism or divine triad (as the Qur'an would suppose). It is rather the mystery of the inner being of God revealed by Jesus through grace. Unlike the Muslim's absolute transcendent unique being whom philosophy by itself could reach, God, for Christians, is a Trinitarian unique transcendent and immanent being revealed gradually by the biblical history of salvation.

From the foregoing, we can see that "revelation" means different things for both Christians and Muslims. For the Muslims, pure religion was revealed to Adam the primordial man; and the prophets, from Adam to Muhammad, are all perfect Muslims whose duty is simply to bring to their generation the same message of the unique God in an unadulterated manner. To bring any "innovation" is considered very sinful. In this sense, one can consider their doctrine and dogma as being "static". For Christianity however, salvation is a history of succession of divine interventions, starting with the messages of the various prophets, and culminating in the incarnation of Jesus Christ as the messiah and the revelation of God. There is however, a continual progression of revelation which can only be completed with the return of Jesus at the end of human history. Unlike the Muslim creed, the Christian creed is awash with "innovations". In fact, "the Christian Apostles' Creed is entirely a meditation on the mystery of the three Persons in God and especially on the person of Jesus and his work in history"[28]. It is therefore not a contradiction to speak of a "development" or a history of dogma; but this "development" must not be understood as if it implies a development in God (and thus undermines the immutability of God).

3. Christian Distinctiveness as a Religion

We concluded our discussion on the similarities and differences between Christianity and Islam by speaking of salvation in Christianity as a history of divine interventions in human history. This history climaxed in the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. But the history continues and will continue until it finds its final completion in the *Parousia* at the end of human history. The implication of this historical nature of salvation is that in Christianity, there is a necessary institutional mediation of religion. According to Karl Rahner, "if

[27] M. Borrmans, *Islam as It Understands Itself*, p. 500.
[28] M. Borrmans, *Islam as It Understands Itself*, p. 501.

salvation history as the history of God's transcendental self-communication to man is a history which can be experienced in time and space, then it follows from this perspective too that in the Christian understanding religion is necessarily ecclesial religion"[29]. For Christianity therefore, the church is an essential component of religion. This is one of the distinctiveness[30] of Christianity as a religion. Other religions are not ecclesial in character. In fact, most of them teach that individuals can and should appropriate their religions in a private sort of interiority. Buddhism and Hinduism even encourage people to discover their proper individual paths. Such individually-discovered paths are what constitute religion for them.

Not so for Christianity. While interpersonal relationship with God is an essential part of Christianity, religion devoid of the concept of ecclesial community (the church) is an empty concept. But as Rahner insists, this does not thereby render the doctrine of the church and of its social constitution the core of the ultimate truth of Christianity[31]. He is very clear about the central truth of Christianity: "Jesus Christ, faith and love, entrusting oneself to the darkness of existence and into the incomprehensibility of God in trust and in the company of Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen one, these are the central realities for a Christian"[32]. For him, for a person to fail to realize these, means that, "basically his ecclessiality and his feeling of belonging to the concrete church would only be an empty illusion and a deceptive façade"[33]. One can therefore say that, for Rahner, neither "believing without belonging" nor "belonging without believing"[34], suffices in Christianity. For him, believing and belonging go together if, by "belief" we understand the central truth of Christianity and, by "belonging" we understand an acknowledgment of the church as a necessary and essential aspect of Christian religion. There is no other religion where believing and belonging (understood in the way we

[29] Karl RAHNER, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, New York, Crossroad, (1978), 1982, p. 323.
[30] We prefer at this stage to use the word "distinctiveness" instead of the much contentious word "uniqueness". Our reason is purely methodological because we are dealing here with what distinguishes Christianity from the non-Christian religions. We shall not go into the "facts" or "myths" of Christian uniqueness here.
[31] K. RAHNER, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, p. 324.
[32] K. RAHNER, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, p. 324.
[33] K. RAHNER, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, p. 324.
[34] Here we are playing on words using the title of a book written by Grace Davie describing the religious situation in Great Britain and in which she observes the growing tendency in people to stay away from churches on Sundays, yet, claiming at the same time to still believe in Christianity. Cf. Grace DAVIE, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1994.

explained above) are more intrinsically connected together than Christianity[35].

Closely connected to the issue of 'belief', is the question of 'faith'. While phenomena analogous to Christian faith are present in all religion, and while the three great monotheistic religions regard faith as the correct response to God's word, Avery Dulles is convinced that "the idea that faith should govern our whole relationship to God is… specifically Christian"[36]. He emphasizes the importance of faith to the Christian believer. Faith is a condition for salvation. We shall understand faith here in its dual components which Swinburne categorizes as "belief-that" (or propositional belief), and "acting on the assumption that".

Swinburne has argued that to believe that so-and-so is to believe so-and-so against such-and-such. In other words, belief is relative to alternatives. And since the normal alternative is its negation, "to believe that *p* is to believe that *p* is more probable or more likely than not-*p*"[37]. Not to believe that *p* is probable is not to believe that *p* is true. And if we believe that *p* is not true, then, we cannot rationally have faith in *p*. Christian faith means believing-that Christian propositions are not only more probable than their alternatives, but that they are true. If I don't believe, for instance, that Jesus Christ is really the Son of God who came into the world to suffer and to die in order to redeem humankind, then how can I possibly enter into a relationship with him? Propositional belief is therefore very important in Christianity. This is because belief must have consequences for action. And Swinburne argues that this in part is "a matter of the way in which one seeks to achieve one's purposes, the goals or ends one seeks to achieve"[38]. If I believe that *X* will achieve a purpose *Z* and that *Y* will not achieve that purpose; and if the options available to me are only *X* and *Y* for the purpose of achieving *Z*, then I will do *X* instead of *Y*. Such propositional belief, we would like to suggest, is what ties Christian faith to salvation.

[35] It was precisely because of this emphasis on 'belonging' that most people, especially in the sub-Saharan Africa, accepted Christianity in the first place. It perfectly fitted into their religious and cultural worldviews where believing and belonging go hand in hand in such a way that separating one from the other is rationally incomprehensible.

[36] Avery DULLES, *Faith and Belief*, in Karl Josef BECKER and Ilaria MORALI (ed.), *Catholic Engagement with World Religions: A Comprehensive Study*, New York, Orbis Books, 2010, p. 303-314, p.303.

[37] R. SWINBURNE, *Faith and Reason*, p. 5.

[38] R. SWINBURNE, *Faith and Reason*, p. 9.

Added to the *belief-that* is, 'acting on the assumption that'. For Swinburne, "to act on an assumption that *p* (or to act as if *p*) is to do those actions which you would do if you believed that *p*"[39]. When Jesus, for instance, invited Peter to come over to him on water, it appears that he was inviting him to act on the assumption that humans could walk on waters. These two components of belief ('belief-that', and 'acting on the assumption that') are what constitute Christian faith which Dulles says, governs our whole relationship to God in a way that is distinctively Christian. We think also that probably this was partly what Luther had in mind when he defined faith as "a living, daring confidence in God's grace, so sure and certain that the believer would stake his life on it a thousand times"[40]. His insistence that only living faith is genuine and salvific, could be (in our opinion) interpreted in Swinburne's vocabularies that, belief must have consequences for action[41].

4. THE DIFFICULTY OF CHRISTIAN DISCOURSE ABOUT NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS

Having seen the plurality of religious beliefs and convictions and how they resemble and/or differ from Christianity, it is now time to explain some of the difficulties of Christian discourse about non-Christian religions. Christian religion is basically a religion of revelation and not a religion of the book. The revelation of God in Jesus Christ is so-central to Christianity that it is taken to be the essential distinctiveness of Christian religion. The issue becomes whether to place religion above revelation or vice versa. Without trying to pre-empt what we are going to tackle in the next part of our work concerning Karl Barth's theological project, suffice it to say that this problem was the concern of Barth for which he has been often denigrated. But the issue of the relationship between Christianity and non-Christian religions continues to present a serious theological challenge to Christianity.

[39] R. SWINBURNE, *Faith and Reason*, p. 34.
[40] Martin LUTHER, "Preface to Romans" (1522) in *Luther's Works 35*, Philadelphia and St. Louis, Concordia, 1955, p. 370-371, quoted by A. DULLES, *Faith and Belief*, p. 308.
[41] The words 'faith' and 'belief' are being used here in their classical traditional correlatedness where faith (*fides qua creditur*) and belief (*fides quae creditur*) were taken as two sides of the same coin. We are not using them in their separatist fashion prevalent in Protestant Modernists like Auguste Sabatier who tried to separate the two by arguing that whereas faith is an act of the heart and will and as such saves the soul, belief is only an intellectual act incapable of saving the soul. Cf. A. DULLES, *Faith and Belief*, p. 311-313.

It is true that in every "religion", there is a belief or conviction or concern about something. It is equally true that to the extent one models his/her life or behaviour to that object of concern, one is faithful. But what precisely should be the relationship between Christianity and non-Christian religions? Should that relationship be stated in the form of the traditional relationship between theology and science expressed in its Diltheyan vocabulary of "incompatible methodologies and epistemologies"?[42] Do we use the Christian Scripture as a lens through which to view the non-Christian religions, or do we try to understand them only through analogies? Are religions radically different, or are they radically different ways of talking about the same thing? Is there a risk of embracing Toynbee's "historian's approach to religion" with his vision of oneness of religions and his argument that all higher religions are both carriers of truth and historical entities shrouded in enculturation; and that when the "essence" of religions is differentiated from their "accidents" we can actually arrive at a "common essence" – God?[43] But even at that, it presupposes monotheistic religions that might be inclined to having a single God as a 'common essence'. What of the non-monotheistic religions, and even the non-theistic religions? Should we, as some propose, detach the concept of God from the nature of religion, and take God simply as one religious view among others? This leads to anthropological view of religion as a dimension of human life [Schleiermacher]. But Pannenberg rejects this reduction of the concept of religion to anthropology on the basis that religion is a two-sided entity embracing deity and humanity, even when, in the relationship, deity emerges as preeminent[44].

Although this Pannenberg's idea of religion is a typical case of a narrow definition of religion as *cultus deorum* which Tillich has earlier said, precludes the premythological and the postmythological stages of human history, one cannot but define religion from an interested point of view given our analysis of different phenomena that come under the name. There is a great difficulty of attempting to define religion from a purely disinterested point of view. A concept is difficult to formulate unless with a particular category. One cannot, for instance, formulate the concept of God *category-less-ly*. It must

[42] Cf. Paul RIGBY, John VAN DEN HENGEL, Paul O'GRADY, *The Nature of Doctrine and Scientific Progress*, in *Theological Studies* 52 (1991), p. 669-688.
[43] Cf., Arnold TOYNBEE, *An Historian's Approach to Religion*, Oxford University Press, (1956), 1979.
[44] Cf., W. PANNENBERG, *Systematic Theology*, p. 138-142.

have to start with a particular religious category. The same is very true of the concept of religion itself. One has to start from the point of view of what Swinburne calls *belief-that*, or propositional belief. But the danger is that this immediately introduces the element of comparison and eventually that of judgment. Swinburne always insists that belief is relative to alternatives, meaning that one believes one proposition as against other proposition(s) in such a way that what the belief in the former amounts to depends on what are the latter. And he says that the normal alternative with which a belief is contrasted is its negation. Although strictly speaking, we are not talking about a particular propositional belief here (e.g. *belief-that* there is God) and its negation (e.g. *belief-that* there is no God), we are talking about an alternative and the sum total of its negation namely, Christian religion and non-Christian religions. We already noted earlier that it was Christianity that appropriated the Latin word *religio* and gave it its current meaning.

We cannot therefore avoid speaking about religion with Christian category. From this point of view, it is very difficult to find a single definition of religion that will globe every phenomenon under the name of religion that is non-Christian. We could only do so if we adopt the escapist's attitude of Nicholas of Cusa (in his *De pace fidei*, written after the Turks took over Constantinople in 1453) by reducing all religions to one in the hope that this will end persecutions due to religious differences. Such a reduction will detach the concept of religion from cultic practice and rite. There will then be only one religion but many forms of worship: *religio una in rituum varietate*[45]. From the point of view of Christian theology of religions however, we cannot subscribe to such a reduction. To do such would mean that we have no more basis to talk of Christian and non-Christian religions. We would rather be talking of Christian and non-Christian worship or rite. But there are certain phenomena under the name of religion which have no rites or worship pattern, and which we must take into consideration in discussions about non-Christian religions.

After all said and done, it is very difficult to talk about non-Christian religions while using the name "religion". But it is precisely from this difficult positon that one can understand the real issue at stake while discussing the question of pluralism (especially that of religious pluralism).

[45] *De Pace fidei* 1, & 3, quoted by W. PANNENBERG, *Systematic Theology*, p. 123.

5. THEOLOGY AND THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF PLURALISM: STATUS QUAESTIONIS

From our exposition of the evolution of the concept of religion and its Christian re-appropriation, it is clear that Christian theology simultaneously developed alongside the consciousness of pluralism. At least from the point of view of its religious application, the consciousness of the plurality of religions led Christian thinkers to argue for the Christian form of worship as the *vera religio*. In this sense, even as early as the post-apostolic writings, theology had already taken a stand as to the distinctiveness of Christianity and the superiority of its claims.

It is therefore very difficult to be convinced by Roger Haight's argument that contrary to the popular claims among theologians, a pluralist Christology which 'affirms Jesus Christ in a way that does not construe Christianity as the one and only true faith and way of salvation uniquely superior to all others' is in fact orthodox[46]. The "unorthodoxy" of this so-called pluralist Christology dates back to these early writings which, although they were concerned about the question of salvation for the holy men and women who lived before Christ, never deviated from their principal thesis that Jesus Christ is the unique Mediator between God and man, and that salvation comes only through faith in Him. Perhaps, if holy men and women who predated Christ (and even those who predated the Hebrew people) are regarded as saints, it is only by virtue of the fact that they anticipated Christ through their righteousness. One could therefore label them "ante-Christians" because they belonged to the *vera religio* which predates but prefigures historical Christianity.

Although the theological consciousness of pluralism dates back to these post-apostolic periods, going right back to that period to examine the state of the question will be an exercise that requires tracing the entire history of theology – an exercise that is outside our current scope. For this reason, we shall only limit ourselves to the period starting from the modern era especially in the post-Enlightenment period when certain philosophical and theological schools helped position pluralism (as commonly understood today) in the limelight. But at the heart of the pluralist movement is the problem of how to reconcile the uniqueness of Christianity (its claim to unique

[46] Cf. Roger HAIGHT, *Pluralist Christology as Orthodox*, in Paul F. KNITTER (ed.), *The Myth of Religious Superiority: Multifaith Explorations of Religious Pluralism*, New York, Orbis Books, 2005, p. 151-161.

salvation) with the recognition of salvific value of other religions. This worry however, began with some historical philosophical influences.

Immanuel Kant's critical writings which either doubted the capacity of humans to know God's nature or his existence[47], or grounded religion in morality[48], opened the way for the argument that multiple religions can actually reveal this true essence of religion (which he says is the promotion of morality) and therefore, that multiple religions can simultaneously be true. Even though he accorded some privileges to Christianity as the best of all moral religions, his followers would cash in on his philosophical postulations to take the argument further.

Schleiermacher's explanation of religion as a matter of intuition or human feeling[49], and of its characterization as the 'feeling of absolute dependence,[50] encourages the argument that a plurality of religious traditions can become places where this feeling can be experienced. Hence, despite his according enormous privilege to Christianity, the tone was already set for contemporary pluralist arguments.

Hegel's re-casting of the history of religions as the progressive unfolding of absolute spirit, with its culmination in Christianity as the "consummate religion"[51], could be taken further as a foundation for a veritable pluralist argument. If the various historical traditions can manifest the basic religious essence, albeit not with the same clarity, then it implies that these various traditions are progressive paths to the same absolute spirit.

However, it was perhaps William James, more than any of his predecessors, who set the tone for a clear-cut pluralist argument with his claim that no religion has a monopoly of genuine experience of the divine[52], but that all religions must be included in it. In fact, he takes the individual's personal experience rather than the religious rituals,

[47] Immanuel KANT, *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) trans. and ed. by Paul GUYER and Allen W. WOOD, Cambridge, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998.
[48] Immanuel KANT, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* (1793), translated and edited by Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson (1934), New York, Harper & Brothers, 1960.
[49] Friedrich SCHLEIERMACHER, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers* (1799), trans. John Oman, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958.
[50] Friedrich SCHLEIERMACHER, *The Christian Faith* (1821-22, 1830), trans. of the 2nd edition by H. R. MACKINTOSH and J. S. STEWART, Edinburgh, T & T. Clark, 1928.
[51] G. W. F. HEGEL, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, 3 vols. (1824, 1827, 1831) ed. Peter C. HODGSON, New York: Oxford UP, 2007.
[52] William JAMES, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), New York, New American Library, 1958.

doctrines, and traditions as the core or the essentials of religion. If this is the case, then the implication is that no single religion has a monopoly of these individual experiences.

It is evident that the modern discussion on religious pluralism started within the context of analytic philosophy of religion. According to Norton, the accounts of religious pluralism within this context tend to focus on the diversity of conflicting claims as the primary issue at stake[53]. The responses to these epistemic conflicts gave rise to the exclusivist, inclusivist and pluralist perspectives. The exclusivist's view that there cannot be more than one correct claim in the case of contradictory claims – in this case, one's own belief claims – set the tone for pluralist's position that, in the case of conflicting claims, no particular set of beliefs can be reasonably taken as more correct than the others. In fact, because there are no criteria of judgement to resolve the claims and the counter-claims, the pluralists conclude that all have equal footing. While the pluralists are not necessarily advocating for people to abandon their own beliefs, they advise that they should have openness to the possibility of other's beliefs being equally justified.

It was from this perspective that John Hick developed his "pluralistic hypothesis"[54] based on his conviction that the world is religiously ambiguous and as such, efforts to argue for or against any religious or nonreligious interpretation of the world, is an exercise in futility. But he took his hypothesis further to postulate that no single religion can be said to stand out in terms of its claims to transform the world. In fact, each religion is viewed as a separate culturally conditioned way through which one can experience the Ultimate Reality. Therefore, "these traditions are accordingly to be regarded as alternative soteriological 'spaces' within which, or 'ways' along which, men and women can find salvation/liberation/ultimate fulfilment"[55]. Although Hick's pluralistic hypothesis did not escape harsh criticisms[56], he has continued to influence a whole lot of philosophers and theologians who have continued to develop and modify his thoughts. His purported "Copernican Revolution" in the

[53] Cf., M. B. NORTON, *Religious Pluralism*, p. 7.
[54] John HICK, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*, (2d. ed), New Haven, Yale University Press, (1989), 2004.
[55] J. HICK, *An Interpretation of Religion*, p. 240.
[56] Cf., for instance, S. Mark HEIM, *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion*, Mayknoll, NY, Orbis, 2006; Alvin PLANTINGA, *Pluralism: A Defense of Religious Exclusivism*, in Thomas D. SENOr (ed.), *The Rationality of Belief and the Plurality of Faith: Essays in Honor of William P. Alston*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell UP, 1995.

early 1970s claimed to be capable of drawing "a new map for the universe of the faith"[57]. This Copernican revolution involves a paradigm shift from Christocentrism to Theo-centrism, so that God rather than Christ becomes the focus of Christian theology. In this way, all religions would then have a common meeting-point.

This call for a common meeting-point has become a rallying call not only for the pluralist theology of religions but also for theology's engagement with other contemporary rationalities. Academic theology engaged in the question of theological rationality is using a search for "common methodology" as a point of intersection between theology and other sciences. In theology of religions, engagement with other religions has become so central that some even think that Christian doctrines must somehow be linked to the doctrines of other religions in order to be relevant. Wilfred Smith asserted, for instance, that, "from now on any serious intellectual statement of Christian faith must include, if it is to serve its purposes among men, some doctrine of other religions"[58]. And Paul Knitter corroborated this belief by stating that in the world of today, "religious people have to be religious interreligiously"; and that "to walk one's own faith-path, one needs to be walking with others from different paths"[59].

However, although theological and dialogical approaches to other religions and rationalities are of essence in our contemporary world, these types of "pluralists'" approach tend to undermine the very essence of Christianity and of theology. It is for this reason that we shall revisit, in the next chapter, the major theological attitudes to diversity in order to argue that if we want to overcome the so-called exclusivist and inclusivist approaches that have been termed "Christian absolutism", it is not with the type of pluralism that are being circulated. It is true that Gordon Kaufman has argued that, "it should be clear that if our objective is to proceed along a road toward greater mutual understanding with those with whom we now disagree on fundamental issues, we cannot continue to follow our usual practice of simply taking it for granted that our received religious traditions provide us with everything we need"[60].

[57] Cf., John HICK, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1973.
[58] Wilfred Cantwell SMITH, *The Faith of Other Men*, New York, Harper Torchbooks, 1972, p. 133.
[59] Paul F. KNITTER, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, New York, Orbis Books, 2002, p. xi.
[60] Gordon D. KAUFMAN, *Religious Diversity, Historical Consciousness, and Christian Theology*, in John HICK and Paul F. KNITTER (ed.), *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, New York, Orbis Books, 1987, p. 3-14, p.4-5.

But the question, however, is: does this imply that our received traditions provided us with many things we do not need, and therefore ought to be discarded? This appears to be the covert conclusions imbedded in some pluralist arguments, especially when Christianity is forced to shed off many of its traditional self-understanding in order to comply with the so-called acceptable scientific principles. Certainly, Christianity and Christian theology are not, and should not be, static; but dynamism (and pluralism, for that matter) should not be interpreted as a spirited effort to force them to cast-off whatever is viewed as distinct and particular in them so that they can "cohere" with the rest of religions and rationalities.

CHAPTER 2

MAJOR THEOLOGICAL ATTITUDES TO DIVERSITY OF RELIGION: THREE STEREOTYPES THAT END IN VICIOUS CIRCLE

INTRODUCTION

The increasing Christian awareness of the plurality of religious beliefs coincided with the Western awareness of the reality of non-Western realities. As theologians were researching on non-Christian religions, sociologists and anthropologists were also researching on the so-called mentality of the primitive people. These researches often criss-cross each other and provide veritable insights into one's research. Although sociological and anthropological accounts of religion greatly differ from theological accounts, Evans-Prichard's chronicled study of the most important theories of the primitive religions[1] has given theologians great food for thought, especially with his conviction that, "to understand fully the nature of revealed religion, we have to understand the nature of so-called natural religion, for nothing could have been revealed about anything if men had not already had an idea about that thing"[2]. Without going into the veracity or otherwise of his claim[3], suffice it to say that this type of assertion plays into the hands of the so-called pluralist theologians.

However, in order to understand their claim, it is important to analyse the earlier claims they are contesting. It was Alan Race who first introduced the categories of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism, in Christian theological account of pluralism[4]. Since these categories were introduced, theological works in this area have been stereotyped along this divide. The result is that many often find themselves denying some of these allegations levelled against their

[1] Cf. E. E. EVANS- PRITCHARD, *Theories of Primitive Religion*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1965.
[2] E. E. EVANS- PRITCHARD, *Theories of Primitive Religion*, p. 2.
[3] We do not wish to delve into the contentious issue of whether natural theology is necessary to give religious belief positive epistemic value. We prefer to leave any such considerations for now in order not to lose focus on our main issue here namely, the consideration of the three stereotypes that have hampered theological studies of different religions.
[4] Alan RACE, *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions*, New York, Orbis Books, 1982.

works, instead of engaging in more positive contribution. For instance, the categorization has led some into thinking that if one does not subscribe to the pluralist position as stereotyped by Race, then one automatically is either an exclusivist or an inclusivist. It is therefore important to first understand these stereotypes in order to hope to move beyond them.

1. THE STEREOTYPES

1.1. Exclusivism

This category is regarded as representing Christian absolutism. The issue at stake here is the question of Christology; or more specifically, what has been termed a *constitutive* Christology[5] which argues that all salvation is constituted by the saving act of God in Jesus Christ. Exclusivism is traced back to the New Testament with certain passages that are considered to have explicit exclusive tendencies. Race points to such passages as: "There is no salvation through anyone else, nor is there any other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved" (Acts 4: 12); "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). The exclusivist adherents have often hinged their arguments on scriptural passages like these. And in the opinion of St Cyprian (regarding the controversy surrounding Christians who were already baptized and in danger of leaving the faith) which he summarized in the popular dictum of "*Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*" (Outside the Church no salvation), these exclusivists found a veritable armour to wage their war. Hans Küng believes that it was Pope Boniface VIII's Papal Bull *Unam Sanctam* of 18 November 1302 which gave the phrase the most radical and exclusivist interpretation to date. He cited Boniface's interpretation as found in Denzinger's *Enchiridion* 468 f. thus:

> We are required by faith to believe and hold that there is one holy, catholic and apostolic Church; we firmly believe it and unreservedly profess it; outside it there is neither salvation nor remission of sins. … Further, we declare, say, define and proclaim that to submit to the

[5] Cf. for instance, Schubert M. OGDEN, *Is There Only One True Religion or Are There Many?*, Dallas, Southern Methodist University Press, 1992, p. 31, 84, 92-96 for a more detailed explanation and critique of the theory of constitutive Christology. We shall certainly return to this issue much later.

> Roman Pontiff is, for every human creature, an utter necessity of salvation[6].

Küng however dismissed such an interpretation of 'outside the church no salvation' as realistically untenable given the fact that statistically the Catholic Church and Christendom as a whole are what he called "a *small and insignificant minority*"[7] in comparison to the rest of the people of the world who are 'outside the Church'[8]. But even apart from the Catholic appropriation of the exclusive interpretation of 'outside the Church no salvation', exclusivism as a tenet in Christendom is not an exclusive preserve of the Catholic Church[9]. Christianity generally regards the revelation in Jesus Christ as the norm by which all religion must be measured, interpreted and evaluated. Therefore, the exclusivist tendency has always been part and parcel of Christianity.

However, Paul Knitter argues that exclusivism as a tenet in Christian thought became more widespread with the evolution of Christian Evangelical movements in the eighteenth-century Europe and America. He chronicles how, the many Protestant Christians in America, discontented about the way current liberal notions were eroding the heart of Jesus' message, decided it was time to go back to the fundamentals, thus giving birth to Fundamentalism, which, he

[6] Cf. Hans KÜNG, *The World Religions in God's Plan of Salvation*, in Joseph NEUNER (ed.), *Christian Revelation and World Religions*, London, Burns & Oates, 1967, p. 25-66, p. 26.
[7] H. KÜNG, *The World Religions in God's Plan of Salvation*, p. 28.
[8] However, one wonders from where Küng got his statistics. According to data sourced from 'International Bulletin of Missionary Research', the global progressive population from the year 1900 to mid-2010 is as follows: 1900= 1,619,625,000; 1970= 3,698,683,000; mid-2000= 6,124,119,000; mid-2010= 6,906,560,000. The corresponding Christian population is as follows: 1900= 558,158,000 of which 266,580,000 are Roman Catholics (totalling 34.5% of the global population); 1970= 1,234,969,000 of which 665,895,000 are Roman Catholics (together forming 33.4% of the global population); mid-2000= 2,004,559,000 of which 1,046,605,000 were Roman Catholics (making a total of 32.7% of the global population); mid-2010= 2,292,454,000 of which 1,155,627,000 are Roman Catholics (together forming 33.2% of the global population). Now Küng wrote in 1967, and his period of writing corresponds to the 1970 category when the global Christian population was 33.4% of the world population. Except there is another dictionary meaning of the words 'small' 'insignificant' and 'minority', there is no way anybody could describe such a percentage as small and insignificant. When you break it down, the percentage shows that one person in every three human beings in the world at that period was a Christian. 1/3 of a population is obviously not a majority; but it is certainly not a small and insignificant minority. For a more detailed statistics of global population by religion, cf., Todd M. JOHNSON, David B. BARRETT, and Peter F. CROSSING (compiled), *Christianity 2010: A View from the New Atlas of Global Christianity*, in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 34,1 (January 2010), p. 29-36.
[9] Alan Race cites the pronouncements of the three great Protestant International Missionary Conferences at Edinburgh (1910), Jerusalem (1928), and Tambaram (1938) as having been markedly dominated by notes of exclusivism, cf. Alan RACE, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, p. 11.

says, was a Christian counter-attack on liberalism[10]. Their main area of concern and worry, according to him, hinged on three main liberal views which they believed were most destructive of Christianity namely: belief in evolution that questions the authenticity of the biblical creation narratives; comparative religious studies that places Christianity on the same level with other religions; and, the birth of Protestant "Social Gospels" which gives the impression that social action rather than spiritual transformation brings about God's kingdom[11]. For them therefore, a return to the fundamentals would therefore mean a proclamation of the absolute authority of the Bible with its accompanying verbal inspiration and inerrancy, an emphasis on personal relationship with Jesus Christ as the one and only saviour of the humankind, an application of a hermeneutic of suspicion to historical-critical method of biblical interpretation and other modern theological "discoveries".

It will be noticed that resistance against pluralism in theology might have had its origin in the basic arguments of the fundamentalists. If there is resistance against the theory of evolution and against comparative religious studies on the presupposition that these theories undermine Christianity, then any talk of theological method that is disposed towards these theories would be resisted. If, a return to the fundamentals implies an application of a hermeneutic of suspicion to historical-critical method of biblical interpretation, then any talk of correlating the Christian message with the situation will be viewed with suspicion. For those "willing to take adventure" therefore, inclusivism appears to be the alternative.

1.2. Inclusivism

Although inclusivism is still regarded by some as the other component of Christian absolutism, it is distinguished from, but related to, exclusivism. As Race would put it: "Inclusivism in the Christian theology of religions is both an acceptance and a rejection of the other faiths, a dialectical 'yes' and 'no'"[12]. Unlike the confrontational nature of exclusivism, the watchword in inclusivism is integration. It recognizes and accepts that certain values can be found in other religions, but insists that these values are not sufficient

[10] Cf., Paul F. KNITTER, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions*, New York, Orbis Books, 1985, p. 75-96.
[11] P. KNITTER, *No Other Name?* p. 76.
[12] A. Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, p. 38.

enough to stand on their own. They must be integrated into Christianity in order to find their fulfilment. Race also traces certain tendencies of inclusivism back to the New Testament, with many passages in Luke and Acts forming the bedrock on which the inclusivist theologians hinge their arguments. Among the many passages he cites in relation to a dialectical 'yes' and 'no' to other religions, is Paul's famous speech in the Areopagus (cf. Acts. 17:22-31). Here Paul acknowledges that the god the Athenians worshipped as "unknown" is in fact the same God of Jesus Christ. But he says that while the Athenians worshipped him as unknown, He is made explicit in Christianity through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In other words, the "unknown God" of the Athens is of great value, but has to be integrated into Christianity to find its perfection and fulfilment. This passage, according to Race, is in line with the entire ecclesiology of Luke which sees Jesus as not only fulfilling God's providential activities in history since Abraham, thus applying only to the Jewish community (as is found in Matthew's account of the genealogy of Jesus), but more importantly, extending back to the beginning of creation . Luke's account of the genealogy of Jesus dates back to 'Adam, son of God', thus, incorporating the entire history of humanity (cf. Luke 3:38). Race believes that "the central ideas of Luke, mainly that Jesus is the culmination of God's providential activity in history, reappear in later inclusivist theories, and are to some extent a foundation for them"[13].

As a contemporary Christian attitude toward other religions, inclusivism has found favour more in Catholic theology than in Protestant or Orthodox theologies. Paul Knitter traces and chronicles the evolution and development of contemporary inclusivism through Karl Rahner who opened the door for what was to be a radical change in Vatican II ecclesiology. Indeed, given the antecedent of the Catholic attitude towards other faiths, beginning from the patristic period and stretching up to the twentieth century, the Vatican II's aggiornamento was truly a very radical change. Knitter described the

[13] A. Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, p. 41. However, this does not imply that we have to categorize Luke as an inclusivist theologian in the manner in which the term has assumed an understanding in the contemporary theology of religions. Such a categorization is anachronistic because exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism, are contemporary theological terms that were unknown to the New Testament writers. The theological problems that the New Testament writers addressed with regards to religious pluralism were not exactly the same theological problems that are being addressed today. Therefore, if we refer to the New Testament for some elements analogous to what we are talking about today in theology of religions, it is simply by way of analogy.

Catholic attitudes in the preceding centuries as "a teeter-tottering between two fundamental beliefs: God's universal love and desire to save, and the necessity of the church for salvation"[14]. While holding that a balancing of the two had sometimes tilted to the side of the Church's importance at the expense of God's universal love, he nonetheless acknowledged that the *logos spermatikos* (seminal word) which most of the patristic fathers agreed is available for everybody to partake in, is a way of saying that all have a link (explicitly or implicitly) to Christ, and therefore are Christians either *simpliciter* or *secundum quid*. However, he argues that it was with the "Christendom-ization" of Christianity under Emperor Theodosius, and with the Popes assuming political leadership in such a way that the security of the empire and that of the church were interlinked, that a balance gradually shifted to the church as the source and summit of salvation.

According to him, Augustine played a major role here with his doctrine of "double predestination" which was meant to be a response to Pelagianism's heretical teaching of the possibility of salvation through human efforts alone without grace. The double predestination i.e., that God from eternity predestined some to salvation and others to perdition, was only meant to insist contra Pelagius that without grace, humanity was lost. Gradually, the pagans and their religions came to be equated with "humanity lost without grace"; and this was officialised and broadened in the Council of Florence to include not only the heathens but also the Jews, the heretics and the Schismatics, who are all condemned to "everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels" if they die outside the Church. He further argues that not even the generally accepted scholastic dictum in the Middle Ages that "*facienti quod est in se Deus non denegat gratiam suam*" (God does not withhold grace from those who do what they can) was enough to shift back the balance to God's universal salvific will from the necessity of the church because, the general belief seemed to be that 'those who do what they can' were found only in the Church and among Christians[15].

However, he went further to say that when a faulty geographical notion that the gospel had been preached throughout the world gave way in 15th and 16th centuries European explorations, a discovery of a vast majority of people and culture who were "outside the Church"

[14] P. KNITTER, *No Other Name?* p. 121.
[15] Cf. P. KNITTER, *No Other Name?* p. 122.

through no fault of their own gave way to a consideration of their possible salvation. It was then that the Council of Trent while distinguishing between baptism *in re* (with water) and baptism *in voto* (through desire), recognized both as ways of salvation. The pagans could therefore be saved by implicit desire even if they were not baptized *in re*. He believes that this marked the official beginning of a shift in Catholic theology of religions from exclusivism to inclusivism whereby the doctrine of "implicit desire" was evoked to try to strike a balance between God's universal love and the necessity of the church. The church was no longer understood to be the exclusive but rather an inclusive way of salvation. As he puts it, "Catholic belief moved from holding '*outside* the church, no salvation,' to '*without* the church, no salvation'"[16]. This understanding of other faiths as implicitly included in the church was to be a major breakthrough of Vatican II Council. But it was magisterially pioneered[17] by the great Catholic theologian of the twentieth century, Karl Rahner.

Rahner has always been an advocate of a transcendental Christology which is "a Christology which asks about the *a priori* possibilities in man which make the coming of the message of Christ possible"[18]. This *a priori* possibilities present in all humans does not conflict with or negate the Incarnation or the place of Jesus Christ in the history of salvation. Rahner sees it this way: "although the hypostatic union is a unique event in its own essence, and viewed in itself it is the highest conceivable event, it is nevertheless an intrinsic moment within the whole process by which grace is bestowed upon all spiritual creatures"[19]. Jesus Christ remains an *absolute* saviour but in terms of a *causa finalis* (final cause) of salvation rather than its efficient cause. There is already a "free decision of God for a supernatural order of salvation, for his self-communication"[20] intended and destined for everybody. God is therefore the efficient

[16] P. KNITTER, *No Other Name?* p. 123.
[17] Paul Knitter described Rahner as "a pioneer in exploring uncharted religious terrain" cf. P. KNITTER, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, p. 68; while Karl Becker sees Rahner's 1961 lecture "Das Christentum und die nichtchristlichen Religionen" (Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions) as "an objective breakthrough" in Christian theology of religions, cf. Karl J. BECKER, *History of German Theology of Religions*, in Karl Josef BECKER and Ilaria MORALI (ed.), *Catholic Engagement with World Religions: A Comprehensive Study*, New York, Orbis Books, 2010, p. 317-325, p. 319; and finally, on his part, Alan Race described Rahner as "the major architect of the post-conciliar Catholic contribution to the subject" (of Christian theology of religions) cf. A. RACE, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, p. 45.
[18] Karl RAHNER, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction of the Idea of Christianity*, New York, Crossroad, 1978, p. 207.
[19] K. RAHNER, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, p. 201.
[20] K. RAHNER, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, p. 201.

cause of salvation. But as a moving power of that decision, Christ orders and tailors this love of God towards its goal as its final cause. In virtue therefore of this supernatural salvific will of God that is operative in every human being, Rahner's telling "discovery" is that (Jesus) "Christ is (also) present and operative in non-Christian believers and hence in non-Christian religions in and through his *Spirit*"[21]. The implication of this is very obvious: Non-Christian religions could be recognized as lawful religions[22] where the grace of God operates anonymously for salvation. With the legitimization of non-Christian religions as lawful religions, it is not surprising that Rahner does not advocate for a cat and mouse type of relationship between Christianity and non-Christian religions but rather that of distant cousins: "… Christianity does not simply confront the members of an extra-Christian religion as a mere non-Christian but as someone who can and must already be regarded in this or that respect as an anonymous Christian"[23]. A re-formulation of Paul's speech at the Areopagus of Athens, one would say.

This pioneering work of Rahner, and especially his theory of "anonymous Christian" (though not without strong criticisms), has given other theologians the encouragement to move some steps further in Christian theology of religions. Heinz Robert Schlette for instance, while maintaining the uniqueness of Christ and Christianity, nevertheless, described Christianity as an "extraordinary" or special path to salvation, while non-Christian religions are described as "ordinary or general paths to salvation[24]. Küng agrees wholeheartedly with Schlette and even went a step further by declaring: "The world religions teach the truth of Christ, whom in their error they do not recognize for what he really is: the Truth"[25]. He insists however that despite their errors, the religions teach the truth of Christ when they recognize man's need of salvation; when they recognize God's graciousness; and when they listen to the voice of their prophets[26]. His conclusion is that not only can every human being (being under God's grace) be saved, but also that "every world religion is under God's grace and can be a way of salvation"[27]. All these theological opinions

[21] K. RAHNER, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, p. 316.
[22] Cf. Karl RAHNER, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 5, London, Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966, p. 121.
[23] K. RAHNER, *Theological Investigations*, p. 131.
[24] Cf. K. BECKER, *History of German Theology of Religions*, p. 320.
[25] H. KÜNG, *The World Religions in God's Plan of Salvation*, p. 53.
[26] Cf., H. KÜNG, *The World Religions in God's Plan of Salvation*, p. 53-54.
[27] H. KÜNG, *The World Religions in God's Plan of Salvation*, p. 56-57.

aim at proclaiming one thing: "The Church is not the exclusive club of salvation; rather, it is the conscious embodiment of the salvific power of Christ, which has always been active in the world even before the Incarnation"[28].

This proclamation was not left as mere individual theological opinions only; even some official Magisterium documents made similar declarations[29]. It was not, however, until Vatican Council II that documents on non-Christians and their religions began to exist[30]. Three principal documents of the Council are explicit on non-Christian Religions namely, The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate*, and the decree On the Missionary Mandate of the Church, *Ad Gentes*. *Lumen Gentium* (LG) for instance, while proclaiming that all men are called to be part of the people of God since all "are called by the grace of God to salvation"[31], expressly declared that non-Christians "can attain eternal salvation"[32], thus putting to rest the apparent hesitations in the past to make such an express statement in apparent contradiction to the bull *Cantate Domino* issued by the Council of Florence in 1442 condemning both the pagans, the Jews, the heretics, and the schismatics, who are outside the church, to eternal fire. LG 6 however did not present itself as contradicting *Cantate Domino*, but only as applying Pius IX's doctrine of invincible ignorance to "clarify" or "modify" the former. This is why it included among those who can attain to salvation those "who through no fault of their own do not know the gospel of Christ or His Church", as well as "those who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit

[28] A. RACE, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, p. 48.

[29] For instance, on the occasion of the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of December 9 1854, Pope Pius IX admonished the bishops gathered in Rome during the Consistorial Allocution *Singulari Quandam* to strive toward "driving from the minds of men that opinion, impious as it is baleful, according to which in every religion might be found the way to eternal salvation". While denying the possibility of salvation outside the church, he nevertheless admitted of the possibility of invincible ignorance when he said: "It is also necessary to hold as certain, that those who know nothing of true religion, when their ignorance is invincible, are not guilty of it before the eyes of the Lord". Quoted by Ilaria MORALI, *Salvation, Religions, and Dialogue in the Roman Magisterium: From Pius IX to Vatican II and Postconciliar Popes*, in Karl Josef BECKER and Ilaria MORALI (ed.), *Catholic Engagement with World Religions: A Comprehensive Study*, New York, Orbis Books, 2010, p. 122-142, p. 124-125.

[30] Cf., I. MORALI, *Salvation, Religions, and Dialogue in the Roman Magisterium*, p. 122.

[31] *Lumen Gentium*, nº 12, in Austin FLANNERY (ed.), *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, Dublin, Dominican Publications, 1981. All subsequent citations from the Vatican II document come from this edition, unless otherwise stated.

[32] *Lumen Gentium*, nº 16.

knowledge of God"[33]. It could be said therefore that what was lacking in the *Cantate Domino* was the non-application of the doctrine of invincible ignorance in dealing with those "outside the church". *Ad Gentes* (AD) even expressly admitted that "… God in ways known to Himself can lead those inculpably ignorant of the Gospel to find that faith without which it is impossible to please Him"[34]. The Council thus views whatever is good and true (*quidquid boni et veri*) as may be found among non-Christian persons (*Lumen Gentium*), or actions which might be religious (*Ad Gentes*), as "*praeparationes evangelicae*" (preparations for the Gospel)[35], reminiscent of the Thomistic principle that grace does not destroy nature but perfects it (*gratia non tollit naturam, sed perficit*). *Nostra Aetate* (NA) then specifically stated that the Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions, calling them "rays of that Truth which enlightens all men[36].

In all this however, the Council never failed to underline the uniqueness of Christ's mediation as the Way, the Truth and the Life. It only talks of other faiths as possible "ways", or, to use the language of NA, "rays of that Truth" found in Christ. Even at that, Morali says that, "the language of 'ways' is… not, as some theologians have erroneously thought, to be understood in the Rahnerian sense of supernatural mediations of salvation; rather more simply, it is to be understood as a reference to the hidden activity of grace"[37]. In fact, the patristic doctrine of *semina Verbi* (seeds of the Word), was adopted by the Council when it speaks (in relation to other religions) of *semina verbi latentia* (hidden seeds)[38]. And it seems that the subtle difference between Rahner's brand of inclusivism and that of the Vatican II is that whereas Rahner speaks of the religions as "ways of salvation", Vatican II prefers to refer to them as "rays of Truth".

1.3. Pluralism

Pluralistic movements arose out of the perceived inability of exclusivism and inclusivism to address satisfactorily the challenges of the diversity (especially of religions) to Christianity. Although relatively new in comparison to the earlier two, evidence of pluralistic

[33] LG, nº 16.
[34] *Ad Gentes* nº 7.
[35] LG 16, and AG 3, respectively.
[36] NA 2.
[37] I. MORALI, *Salvation, Religions, and Dialogue in the Roman Magisterium*, p. 130.
[38] AG 11.

thoughts could be traced back to Nicholas of Cusa who, in his *De docta ignoratia* of 1440, made reference to variety of religions, sects, and regions which lead people to different opinions and judgements[39]. However, it was in his *De pace fidei* (The Peace between the Different Forms of Faith), written after the takeover of Constantinople by the Turks in 1453 that he tried to proffer a solution to the ensuing religious unrest by suggesting that the divine plan to end the persecutions due to religious differences is the reduction of all religions to one in such a way that the concept of religion is detached from cultic practices and rites. If that is done, then what remains is simply one religion with many forms of worship: *religio una in rituum varietate*[40]. He was convinced that the spiritual veneration of God, which he believed was the core of religion, is found in every religious rite. In a picturesque imagery of a conversation in heaven between the representatives of the various world religions in the *De pace fidei*, he visualized the divine Logos explaining their unity thus:

> "There is only one religion, only one cult of all who are living according to the principles of Reason (the Logos-Reason), which underlies the different rites. … The cult of gods everywhere witnesses to Divinity…. So in the heaven of (Logos-) Reason the concord of the religions was established"[41].

Tillich traces the root of the rise of philosophies of religion to this universalism whereby Christianity is subsumed under the universal concept of religion, a concept which he says, seems harmless, but which dangers were pointed out by theologians who insisted on maintaining the uniqueness of Christianity by contrasting revelation (which is properly restricted to Christianity as the "true" religion) with religion, or, more properly, "false" religion (which is used to refer to all other non-Christian religions)[42]. The point here, however, is that Nicholas of Cusa's writings anticipated what would over the centuries be termed pluralism marked by strong elements of tolerance[43] and accommodation.

[39] *De docta ignor*. 3.1, quoted by Wolfhart PANNENBERG, *Systematic Theology*, p. 122.
[40] *De pace fid*. 1, and also 3, quoted by W. PANNENBERG, *Systematic Theology*, p. 123.
[41] Quoted by Paul TILLICH, *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions*, New York and London, Columbia University Press, 1963, p. 40-41.
[42] Cf., P. TILLICH, *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions*, p. 41-42.
[43] Alan Race distinguished between tolerance as a Christian moral imperative, and tolerance as a Christian theological necessity. Whereas the former poses no problem even for the inclusivist theologians, the latter, which implicitly implies that 'knowledge of God is partial in all faiths, including the Christian' and as such, 'religions must acknowledge their need of each other if the full truth about God is to be available to mankind', is the hallmark of 'tolerant pluralism' and

Gavin D'Costa has presented two sets of characteristics of pluralism which he termed positive and negative characteristics respectively. On the "positive" level, he says that pluralism in its component forms holds one or more of the following characteristics: (a) that other religions are means to salvation; (b) that other religious founders or religious books have a revelatory status equal to that of Jesus Christ and the Old and New Testaments; (c) that adherents of other religions should not be the objects of missionary endeavour because they are already being redeemed by God through their own religions – in this sense there is no necessity for explicit baptism and entrance into the Church for salvation; (d) that Christianity has new ontological truth to discover in dialogue with other religions; (e) that Christianity has entered a new era where it must now dispense with its exclusive or inclusive claims about Jesus Christ and the Church and learn to live peacefully, growing through dialogue with other religions as equal partners. On the "negative" level, he presented the following as characteristics which pluralism holds: (a) the ancient teaching of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*… is now invalid and should not be applied to other religions in its classical form; (b) the doctrine of Christ as the one and only God-Man and mediator, the unique and exclusive self-revelation of God as triune, requires adjustment in the light of other world religions, for the classical doctrine is the basis of teachings such as (a) above; (c) the doctrine of God as Trinity in the form of Father, Son (Jesus), and Holy Spirit also requires adjustment in the light of the world religions, for if it is understood restrictively whereby the Spirit is ontologically inseparable from the Son, we are led to (a) above[44].

D'Costa has thus concisely captured the essential traits of the various forms of pluralism which not only preaches tolerance and accommodation, but goes further to insist that these two could only be achieved not in the light of the present Christian doctrines but in their reformed or revised forms. In other words, pluralists are generally

may not go down well with a lot of traditional Christians. This type of theological tolerance was propagated by Arnold Toynbee when, while holding to the truth of Christianity, he attributed revelation to all the higher religions, and insisted that they also come from God and as such, each presents some facet of God's truth. Cf. Alan RACE, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, p. 72.

[44] Gavin D'COSTA, *Pluralist Arguments: Prominent Tendencies and Methods*, in Karl Josef BECKER and Ilaria MORALI (ed.), *Catholic Engagement with World Religions: A Comprehensive Study*, New York, Orbis Books, 2010, p. 329-344, p. 329-330. Here D'Costa explains his use of 'positive' as indicating that the claims and characteristics he labelled positive are oriented toward saying positive things about other religions. On the other hand, the term 'negative' is employed to indicate that the characteristics under the name are critiques of the various classical doctrinal positions.

dissatisfied with the orthodox doctrines of God, Jesus Christ and the Church, and therefore advocate for their revisions, reformations and eventual reformulations.

John Hick's (whose brand of pluralism D'Costa regards as "one of the most influential and highly developed positions"[45]) "Copernican revolution" for instance, advocates for a paradigm shift away from Christocentrism and ecclesiocentrism of earlier Christian approaches to other religions, to theocentrism. His conviction is that with this shift, "one then sees the great world religions as different human responses to the one divine Reality, embodying different perceptions which have been formed in different historical and cultural circumstances"[46]. But this theocentric view of Christianity is not without serious implication to the traditional Christology. The Christian claim to the incarnation of Jesus Christ as God-Man is no longer to be taken as an essential Christian belief and reality, but should be interpreted mythologically, that is, as something which is not literally true, although it could be said to be practically true by virtue of the appropriateness of attitude it evokes on its hearers.

Hick modelled his arguments on the findings of biblical scholars that Jesus neither designated himself as Messiah or Son of God, nor did he allow others to designate him as such[47]. The myth of the incarnation, according to him, is traceable to the Jewish image of the "son of God", which is a title used, but not necessarily reserved, for the Messiah. One finds other extraordinary religious figures being also referred to as "son of God". In this sense therefore, one can find uniqueness or specialness but not exclusivity in the title. Exclusivity, according to him, only crept in with the encounter of the church with the Greco-Roman culture when that image of the son of God was tied to the notion of Jesus' incarnation and deification to suit the new cultural trend and understanding of the divinity being embodied in human flesh – a phenomenon he says was widespread. Knitter believes that it was with this deification that, "the mythic, poetic language of incarnation 'hardened into a prose and escalated from a metaphorical son of God to a metaphysical God the Son, of the same substance as the Father, within the triune Godhead'"[48].

[45] G. D'COSTA, *Pluralist Arguments*, p. 331.
[46] J. HICK, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, p. 131; cf., also John HICK, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1989, p. 235-236, where he holds that religions "constitute different ways of experiencing, conceiving and living in relation to an ultimate divine Reality which transcends all our varied visions of it".
[47] J. HICK, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, p. 113-114.
[48] P. KNITTER, *No Other Name*? p. 150.

For Hick however, even if it could be said that Jesus has a decisive ontological relationship with God, it is a relationship that is not exclusively his because such a relationship can also be found in the prophets and holy books of other religions. It is therefore a non-normative type of relationship. Moreover, such an expression of the experience of Jesus in the language of the absolutes served its purpose as "an effective way, within that cultural milieu, of expressing Jesus' significance as the one through whom men had transformingly encountered God"[49]. But he argues however, that today, such a myth of incarnation no longer serves any purpose except to inflate the Christian superiority ego and claims to uniqueness in the face of other religions of the world. He therefore advocates that such a myth be understood for what it is – a myth, a metaphor, a symbol, or a poetry, and not, a factual statement. In this way, he hopes that theological fundamentalism would have been outgrown in the area of literal interpretation of the incarnation, just as, for instance, biblical fundamentalism was outgrown in the area of literal interpretation of the creation of the world in six days. He prefers that rather than looking for "metaphysical facts" in the incarnation, one should be concerned with the divine *agape* which the incarnation indicates. And he believes that this divine *agape* is not just represented by Jesus but is in fact numerically identified with him as "the eternal divine *agape* made flesh"[50]. However, the *agape* is only but a section of God's *agape* and not its entirety. In this way, there would be room for other God's agapes and saviours found in other religions. He stated this more succinctly:

> "We want to say of Jesus that he was totus Deus, 'wholly God,' in the sense that his agape was genuinely the agape of God at work on earth, but not that he was totum Dei, 'the whole of God,' in the sense that the divine agape was expressed without remainder in each or even in some of his actions"[51].

Hick's writings have influenced a lot of other writers in their efforts to develop a theology of religions that is pluralistic in character. Alan Race for instance proposes what he calls "action-christology" according which the "importance" of Jesus does not lie in his possession of any extra divine quality absent in other human beings but rather in the fact that, "he focusses in himself the purposes

[49] J. HICK, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, p. 116ff.
[50] Cf., J. HICK, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, p. 148-149.
[51] J. HICK, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, p. 159.

of God for the world and the human response which God is continually… working to elicit"[52]. Such action-christology, according to him, 'takes seriously the genuine historical nature of Jesus' and 'avoids the problem of incoherence in the language of pre-existence' by being 'frankly mythological'[53]. In this way, Jesus would retain his "decisiveness" but not as the 'focus for all the light everywhere revealed in the world' but rather, 'for the vision he has brought in one cultural setting'[54]. It is however left to be seen whether and how a Jesus without any extra divine quality absent in other humans could remain a Jesus of Christianity.

Paul Knitter followed in the footstep of Hick in proposing for a theocentric Christology which makes Jesus Christ universally relevant but not normative. He invented what he called a "relational uniqueness"[55] for Jesus according to whom his uniqueness would no longer be seen as either constitutive or normative (characteristics of exclusive and inclusive uniqueness respectively) but rather "a uniqueness defined by its ability to relate to… other unique religious figures"[56]. He maintains that this relational uniqueness is especially important in defining the salvific role of Jesus. Jesus is 'truly' a way for salvation, but not the 'only' one. Jesus Christ is unique in his own way but there are other unique representations of God[57] (a reaffirmation of the Hindu understanding of Jesus Christ according to which Jesus is perceived as just one of the unique representations [or avatars] of the Ultimate Reality or God among others, one would say). He argues that Christians must engage in dialogue with other religious traditions in the spirit of openness to finding other liberators and saviours equally important and unique as Jesus. He maintains that claiming Jesus as normative or definitive prevents Christians from being fully open to the truths in other religious traditions. He insists that just as there was the need to evolve from ecclesiocentrism to christocentrism, so also has there become a need to move further up to theocentrism. And, he claims that this theocentric model "holds the greatest promise for the future of interreligious dialogue and for the continued evolution of the meaning of Jesus Christ for the world"[58]

[52] A. RACE, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, p. 128.
[53] A. RACE, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, p. 128-129.
[54] Cf., A. RACE, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, p.135-136.
[55] P. KNITTER, *No Other Name?* p. 171.
[56] P. KNITTER, *No Other Name?* p. 171-172.
[57] Cf. Paul KNITTER, *Jesus and the Other Names: Christian Mission and Global Responsibility*, New York, Orbis Books, (1996), 2001, p. 61-101.
[58] P. KNITTER, *No Other Name?* p. 166-167.

because it has a nonnormative understanding of Christ, and is consistent with contemporary methods of Christology.

However, because of glaring criticism that no truth claim and especially revelation of God can really be said to be true without being normative, he abandoned the language of theocentrism in favour of a soteriocentric approach with a focus on the concrete ways in which religions can promote human well-being and contribute to the ecological well-being of the entire planet[59] – an approach which he believes, moves beyond christocentrism, ecclesiocentrism, and theocentrism. This is an approach in which he seeks to develop ecclesiology and missiology not from the framework of Christology, but from that of pneumatology. Within this framework, the Spirit will no longer be understood only as "the Spirit of Christ" but, "we must also recognize the Spirit as genuinely *different* from the Word – as the Spirit who 'fills and renews the Earth' and who works beyond the Church"[60]. D'Costa has however questioned this strategy of trying to bypass the problems of christocentrism, theocentrism and ecclesiocentrism, and asks whether it is possible for the Christian to make any sense of *sōtēria* without recourse to Father, Son, Spirit, and the Church[61].

Although pluralism started with theology's confrontation with other religions, it extends to theology's relationship with other sciences and the justification of its claim as one of the contemporary rationalities. If the traditional Christian self-understanding is revised and the church's role in delimiting the scope of theology wanes, some argue, it is only then that theology can be done with integrity as a rational subject. For such people, academic theology, integrated within the pluralist culture, holds the future for theology as a discipline. But such "academic" theology tends to discredit confessional theology as having nothing to do with the university because it is seen as resisting the culture of pluralism. However, does this imply that one must remain within this stereotyped pluralism in order to be seen to do theology in a culture of pluralism?

[59] Cf. Paul KNITTER, *One Earth Many Religions: Multifaith Dialogue and Global Responsibility*, Maryknoll, New York, 1995; cf., also P. KNITTER, *Jesus and the Other Names*, p. 61-101.
[60] P. KNITTER, *Jesus and the Other Names*, p. 112.
[61] Cf. G. D'COSTA, *Pluralist Arguments*, p. 334-338.

2. MOVING BEYOND THE STEREOTYPES: A NEW SYSTEMATIC APPROACH TO PLURALISM

In an age characterized by culture of pluralism, pluralism as an approach to learning has become not just an option but somehow a fundamental necessity. However, it is our belief that one can argue from the perspective of pluralism without necessarily being a "pluralist" in the manner described above. In matters of theology especially, one has to move beyond the "reactionary" pluralism with which early pluralist theologians started. Such reactionary approach had always ended in the same stereotype as the earlier approaches it was meant to "correct". One thing that these three stereotypes have in common is that all of them begin from the standpoint of comparison: Christianity compared with other religions is uniquely privileged to have an exclusive access to salvation (exclusivism); or is open to letting others inside given certain conditions (inclusivism); or has to shade off certain elements so that it will operate on some equal footing with the rest (pluralism). At the end, all of them tend to end in a vicious circle by creating more problems than they pretended to solve. Today's theology, however, has moved beyond comparison to real dialogue. In a dialogue, the aim is not to compare but to understand. And for systematic theology, the dialoguing partner is not just other religions, but must include the different cultures of the world and their modes of thought, as well as other rationalities. If one remains within the three stereotypes of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism, much progress may not be made in theological researches in our contemporary world. To adequately address the historical context of the contemporary world of pluralism, one has therefore, to move beyond the stereotypical "pluralism". This work is an attempt to do so by examining the works of Karl Barth and David Tracy.

In the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries' theological researches, two dominant propositions have been made as ways of doing theology that would guarantee the survival of theology in our pluralistic world. One such proposition thinks that the best way to go about it is to retrieve the past heritages of theology and establish theology as an "independent" or "quasi-independent" field of learning without necessarily leaning on other fields for support. In this way, in the midst of plurality of subjects, theology will be distinctively recognizable. This proposition believes that theology had lost its credibility for the very reason that it had left its proper domain and allowed other modes of thought to dictate for it; and by so doing, it has gotten lost without any distinctive characteristics. The proposition

consequently thinks that the way forward for theology that will guarantee its distinctiveness is the way of retrieval; and has consequently become known as "theology of retrieval".

Well, from the end of the twentieth-century to the beginning of the twenty-first century, another proposition began to emerge. It was felt that with the increasing consciousness of pluralism, theology could not afford to remain within a restricted area. It was felt that those past theological heritages, in order to be relevant for the people of today, have to be revised and re-formulated to meet up with today's critical criteria of learning. As a result, "revisionist theology" was born. It is argued that if theology is feeling lost in the maze of contemporary choices, it is not because it has not retrieved its classical teachings but because it has not updated them.

Retrieval theologies, just like revisionism, have many proponents. For the purposes of our present research however, we have decided to examine what we consider the most vocal of these approaches. On the side of the theologies of retrieval, Karl Barth easily comes up as an indefatigable proponent of such theology. On the other side of the spectrum, David Tracy has carved a niche for himself as an indubitable front-runner in revisionist theology. It is certain that both theologies tried to respond to the contemporary awareness of plurality, but in manners and methods quite different from one another. The former anchored its argument on the belief that for theology to be recognizable in a culture of pluralism, it must remain a function of the church. The later felt that the way forward for theology in the same culture of pluralism is for it to reverse its classical teachings and develop public character so that it can work with others as a truly academic subject using a shared concept of reason.

Our work is to examine the two propositions in the light of the current culture of pluralism, and find out whether if one is held, the other cannot hold; or whether the two can come together to guarantee that systematic theology done within the culture of pluralism will safeguard theology's and Christianity's distinctiveness even when dialoguing with other religions and rationalities.

3. KARL BARTH AND DAVID TRACY: A TALE OF TWO WORRIES

The Enlightenment's demand for liberation, freedom and autonomy dealt a heavy blow to religion in general and Christian theology in particular. Theology since that Age of Enlightenment has

become an exercise in self-identification and self-authentication, no thanks to that epoch's critique of dogma. With its double-faced tool of autonomy and criticism, the Enlightenment sought to elevate reason above authority and thus, to extricate science from the grip of religion. Kant, a leading figure of that age, elevated autonomy to the level of becoming even a moral imperative. He says: "Autonomy of the Will is a property of it by which it is a law to itself independently of any property of objects of volition"[62]. As he sees it, autonomy of the will goes hand in hand with the autonomy of reason. By autonomy of reason he means to say that anything that cannot be subjected to rational (understood as scientific) justification amounted to gross irrationality or, at best, it is a superstition. He painted a concise picture of what Enlightenment is all about:

> Enlightenment is man's release from his self-incurred tutelage… man's inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another. Self-incurred is this tutelage when its cause lies not in lack of reason but in lack of resolution and courage to use it without direction from another… "Have the courage to use your own reason" – that is the moral Enlightenment[63].

Of course this is a veiled attack on religion and religious authority. Theologians after Kant scrambled to respond to him in order to salvage something of religion from his devastating critique. Schleiermacher tried to shift theological focus from dogmatics to religious experience – something that Barth fought vehemently to oppose, insisting rather that while it can eventually lead to theology, religion as such, is not theological. In fact, he thinks that part of the mess that theology had got into could be traceable to the scholastics' attempts in the past to found theology on similar non-theological basis. He views such attempts as unscientific. Any scientific presentation, as he sees it, must be based on the object of that particular knowledge. A "scientific" theology must thus be based on the proper object of theology. His opening words in *Church Dogmatics* are telling: "As a theological discipline dogmatics is the scientific self-examination of the Christian Church with respect to the content of its distinctive talk about God"[64]. The word "distinctive"

[62] Immanuel KANT, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* (2nd edition), trans. and intro. by Lewis White BECK, New York, Pearson, 1989, p. 59.
[63] Immanuel KANT, *What is Enlightenment?* trans. and intro. by L. W. Beck, New York, Pearson, 1989, p. 85.
[64] Karl BARTH, *Church Dogmatics*, Volume I/1 – The Doctrine of the Word of God, (eds. G. W. BROMILEY and T. F. TORRANCE), Second Edition, Massachusetts, Hendrickson Publishers,

here is meant to call attention to the fact that Christian talk about God is different from other talks about God. The former has its own peculiarities which must form the basis for any theological discussion. Not to distinguish the two senses is to fall into "unscientificity" which he is trying to avoid. That is why he made it clear from the onset that "theology is a function of the Church"[65]. What makes theology scientific, in Barth's view, is thus its adherence to the Word of God as attested to in the scripture. God has to speak first, and then the theologian needs to listen to God by responding appropriately. Therefore, for him, the Word of God is the criterion for all systematic theology. And this Word of God is to be distinguished from historical criticism of the Bible. Such "Biblicism" (as he calls it) is a literalist view of the scripture which, in his view, does not amount to theology.

While holding that as part of culture, theology has some relation to other cultural forms such as literal criticism or philosophy, he nonetheless pointed out that such a relation is often characterized by antagonism. This antagonistic relationship is very evident when other cultural forms see theological postulations as being at variance with the commonly accepted criteria of scientificity. With such hostilities from other disciplines, Barth felt that for theology to be meaningful and therefore relevant, it has to be rooted in the church as its proper and particular community. This is what he means by insisting that theology is a function of the church. Being a function of the church, theology for Barth, should have its centre determined, not by religious experience or self-consciousness of individuals as Schleiermacher preached, but rather by revelation. It was from this perspective that Barth started his process of retrieving the theological heritage of the past centred basically on the theology of revelation. He strongly believed that, in order to "compete" favourably in an atmosphere of pluralism, theology has to present a clear and distinct image of itself which can be easily recognizable by anyone. Without such distinctiveness, he believes that theology might as well be on its way to disappearing. In Barth's proposal, human experience plays a secondary role in theological enquiry; the major tool has to be the biblical text.

But the contemporary Chicago theologian, David Tracy, thinks otherwise. He does not believe that theology should have one major

2010, § 1. Henceforth, all subsequent citations of *Church Dogmatics* are from this edition and will be cited as CD, followed by the volume, part, and then the paragraph and the page thus: CD I/1, § 1 p. 3.

[65] CD I/1, § 1 p. 3.

source but two sources: the Christian texts and the Common Human Experience and Language. In his proposal, these two sources somehow maintain a 50-50 ratio in theological enquiry. This is why he says that the results of their various investigations must be correlated together. For him, it is not just enough that Christian theology should be appropriate to the Christian texts and tradition; if such theology is not adequate to common human experience, then it is not an adequate theology for the contemporary world. Barth wanted to avoid Schleiermacher's "experience" which he views as being foreign to theology. But Tracy actually embraced it as vital for theology. From the start of his major theological work[66], Tracy fashioned a two-winged method of authenticating theology (appropriateness to Christian texts and adequacy to common human experience) by justifying them in Schleiermacher's slogan that "the thesis of faith must become the hypotheses of the theologian". He sees Schleiermacher's "*thesis of faith*" as implying "criteria of appropriateness" and the "*hypotheses of the theologian*" as implying "criteria of adequacy"[67]. He believes that for a Christian text to develop 'criteria of adequacy', such a text needs to be historically reconstructed in such a way that it can aid the contemporary theologian to understand what such text means for the Christians of today. Thus, it was this process of developing criteria of adequacy to human experience that gave birth to Tracy's revisionist theology.

Tracy's intention is very clear from the beginning: theology has to go beyond the confines of the church into the public domain in order to be relevant in the contemporary order of being in the world. This implies that every theological postulation has to be verified using publicly accepted criteria of verification. If there is any proposition that relies solely on the strength of the church's proclamation without at the same time being open to everybody in the public domain to access and independently verify, such propositions must be revised and updated to meet up with the standards of the contemporary world. He feels that it is only through this process of "demythologizing" that theology can remain relevant in the contemporary world of pluralism. In short, for Tracy, theology must develop public character as the only way to "prove" not only its scientific status but also as a way of surviving in a pluralistic world. Anything short of publicness in

[66] David TRACY, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology*, New York, The Seabury Press, (1975), 1996.
[67] Cf. D. TRACY, *Blessed Rage for Order*, p. 45, and also endnote 10, p. 57.

theological discourse will not only negate the fundamental existential question that theology claims to ask, but will also confine theology to a private domain and consequently negate its claim as a serious academic subject. A pluralistic world requires a public theology.

Karl Barth and David Tracy thus represent two dominant methods of doing theology today that aim at guaranteeing the survival of theology in an increasing pluralistic world. Barth believes such survival has to do with retrieving the medieval heritage and riches of theology by refocusing attention on Christian revelation as the mainstream of theological discourse. Theology cannot just become a footnote of other disciplines but must in fact establish its own identity in its own proper domain which is the church. When theology thus becomes distinctively identifiable by its proper methods, its voice can once more be heard again in the midst of plurality of voices. Tracy, on his part, believes that a way forward for theology in the midst of pluralism is to throw itself open to the public arena where any intelligent researcher can use methods intelligible to the scientific community to break into the interiority of theological discourse without necessarily waiting for the church's pronouncements on such discourse. In fact, if the church's pronouncement runs contrary to the acceptable scientific reasoning, such pronouncement must be radically revised and updated.

4. MAIN HYPOTHESIS

Our hypothesis is this: *It is possible for theology to develop public character (Tracy) and still remain a function of the church (Barth)*. When it comes to the question of a systematic theological approach to pluralism, Barth and Tracy have two different but complementary emphases none of which must be neglected. In fact, the bane of the three stereotypes has been the neglect of one emphasis or the other in their arguments for the place of theology not only among the religions of the world but also among the various rationalities of the world.

Barth's emphasis lies on the indispensability of the church's institution in theological discourse. Tracy, on the other hand places his own emphasis on the publicness of theology as a way of salvaging it from decadence. One's area of specialization certainly influences one's method of approach. Barth was a dogmatic theologian thorough and thorough. It was therefore not surprising that dogmatic methods coloured his entire theological propositions. While he made tremendous use of many philosophical works in his writings, he was

careful not to confuse philosophy with theology. Tracy, with his specialization in fundamental theology, is more philosophically oriented. He does not see anything wrong with doing theology with philosophical categories. In fact, he contends that in their contemporary self-understanding, both philosophy and theology live basically within the same hermeneutic circle. This is why he says:

> "Both disciplines must be involved in "philosophical reflection upon our common human experience and language" in a manner that might be said to include two moments: a phenomenological moment to disclose the meaning and meaningfulness of that experience and a transcendental moment to disclose the true conditions of the possibility of that experience"[68].

It is for this reason that he often sees everything from the perspective of fundamental theology even when he writes what he labelled 'systematic theology'. If however, Tracy was ready to use these two moments (philosophical and theological) to tackle the culture of pluralism, he should equally be made aware that fundamental theology is just one single moment in theological discourse. Other components of theology must equally claim rights to be heard in a discourse involving theology as a discipline. And when it involves the questions of religious pluralism and the relationship of theology to other contemporary rationalities, it becomes clearer that these questions must be tackled from as wide a perspective as possible.

Therefore, to effectively address the culture of pluralism, it appears that neither dogmatic theology nor fundamental theology taken in isolation from one another is adequate enough. By the very meaning of the word "pluralism", it is evident that to be as pluralist as possible, one must not remain within the bounds of any particular theological sub-discipline. Any systematic theological approach to pluralism should be able to develop public character by guaranteeing its scientific status; but should also remain within the precinct of the church to preserve its "Christian-ness". In this way, without shedding off its distinctive Christian status theology will continue to thrive as a "scientific" subject in the universities.

[68] D. TRACY, *Blessed Rage for Order*, p. 69.

PART II

KARL BARTH'S RESPONSE TO PLURALITY: THEOLOGY OF RETRIEVAL

INTRODUCTION

In his article in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, John Webster brought together a cluster of theologies which, though diverse and differently occasioned, converge at being dissatisfied with the response of the mainstream theology to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries' critiques of the Christian religion – a response which they hold, distanced theology from its object and legacies of the past. He called such a cluster of theologies "theologies of retrieval", sharing certain characteristics such as being 'objectivist' or 'realist', focusing on the rediscovery of the Trinitarian, incarnational, and soteriological teaching of the classical Christianity of the great ecumenical councils. Theologians in this category, according to him, believe that, to properly rediscover such teachings, theology must look to its norm as its source and not focus on external criteria and methods employed in other social scientific arena outside theology. If there is insecurity of theology in modern intellectual culture, they contend, it is not that theology does not meet up with the criteria of critical reasoning of the modern times; it is rather because it has alienated itself from its own subject matter. Therefore, to salvage theology means to retrieve theology's own proper *die Sache*. At the heart of such a cluster of theologies termed 'retrieval', Webster places the theology of Karl Barth[1]. Thanks to Webster, we have adopted this coinage "theology of retrieval" throughout this work to describe Barth's brand of theology.

Indeed, Karl Barth's entrance into the theological world can be described in the above terms as having as its point of departure, the retrieval of theology from the liberal direction in which it was moving; a direction which tended to lose sight of God's otherness and transcendence; that focused purely on the historical and critical reading of the Bible to the detriment of the reality of God's revelation. His personal experience of disappointment and scandal of the World War I facilitated his resolve to advance against his theological root which he felt, used God to serve human purpose by trying to theologically justify the war. He felt that the theology of his day was under such a social and cultural influence that it lost sight of its true object. Describing Schleiermacher's theology as "cultural theology",

[1] Cf., John WEBSTER, *Theologies of Retrieval*, in John WEBSTER, Kathryn TANNER, and Iain TORRANCE (ed.), The *Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 583-599.

he accused him of "utterly and unequivocally" identifying the kingdom of God with the advance of civilization[2]. This is why he dismissed both Schleiermacher and the entire nineteenth century theology as being characterized by its "unqualified and direct affirmation of modern cultural consciousness"[3]. He subsequently took upon himself the project of trying to re-establish theology on the basis of the Word of God; thus breaking with liberal theological trend of his day. In fact, T. F. Torrance is of the opinion that the primary factor that led Barth to break away with liberal theology was this discovery of "the new world within the Bible, as week by week he ploughed over the ground in careful laborious exegesis"[4]. Barth's aim, according to him, was to have an undiluted and unfiltered access to the Word of God, in contradistinction from what was being circulated under the name of the "Word of God" which, he felt, had already passed through the prism of the modern cultural criteria. In other words, Barth was advocating for a break with cultural theology and a return to mystical theology. And to use Webster's vocabulary, theology needed to be "retrieved" from its current entanglement with culture and restored to its "pure" state[5].

This zeal for purity of theology led Barth to the adoption of Kierkegaard's 'infinite qualitative distinction' to describe the real dissimilarity between God and creation, whereby he emphasized God's absoluteness and the creaturely relativity – an absoluteness that almost annihilated the creature in his earlier work of *Romans* before he gradually shifted ground in the theological development of his

[2] Cf. Karl BARTH, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century: Its Background and History*, London, SCM Press, 1972, p. 434-435.
[3] K. BARTH, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 437.
[4] T. F. TORRANCE, *Karl Barth: An Introduction to his Early Theology 1910-31*, London, SCM Press, 1962, p. 34.
[5] We must however sound a caveat here - that Barth be not presented as thereby being anti-culture or anti-modern. We subscribe to Ian Boyd's contention that "what Barth objected to was not that modern theology was *interested* in modern cultural consciousness, or *related* to it, but that it tended to *identify* Christianity with the development of that consciousness". He went further to argue that Barth "did not expect the theologians of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to remain untouched by their times, but he did expect them to retain some notion of their own distinctive task and criterion". Cf. Ian R. BOYD, *Dogmatics Among the Ruins: German Expressionism and the Enlightenment as Contexts for Karl Barth's Theological Development*, Bern, Peter Lang, 2004, p. 25. Boyd's contention is that Barth's early theology was a search for a way forward through the ruins of Enlightenment theology and culture; and that it was this search that led him to dogmatics. We cannot agree less with this view especially as we hope to argue later on that even if there was such a fundamental diastasis in Barth's early work between God and the world, and thus between theology and culture, the later Barth was to "open up" his theology to culture notably with his *The Humanity of God*; and that it is thanks partly to this opening up that we shall argue for the possibility of theology developing public character without ceasing to be a function of the church.

Church Dogmatics. A cursory survey of his theological development shows that ever before he decided to retrieve theology from its bondage by parting ways with liberalism, Barth drank deep from the waters of liberal theology, thanks to his sojourn at Marburg – a sojourn that contributed immensely to "the making of an outsider"[6].

But why did it become so important for Barth to insist on retrieving theology's past heritage; and why did theology go terribly wrong according to his assessment of it? This will be the subject matter of this part of our work. First in chapter 3, we shall explore the challenges posed by the Enlightenment, and how the early Christian responses were deemed inadequate by Barth. It was because of this perceived inadequacy that he decided to embark on his theology of retrieval. Chapter 4 will examine Barth's theory of religions in the light of his theology of retrieval.

[6] A very detailed account of the Marburg influence on the development of Karl Barth's dialectical theology and his eventual break with liberalism has been done in the highly influential work of Bruce L. MCCORMACK, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995, p. 27-125.

CHAPTER 3

THE ENLIGHTENMENT CHALLENGE, EARLY CHRISTIAN RESPONSES, AND KARL BARTH'S THEOLOGY OF RETRIEVAL

INTRODUCTION

At the turn of the nineteenth century, Christian theology found itself struggling to cope up with the rigours of the critical reasoning procedures already adopted as the norm of intellectual discourse. That "theological tsunami" occasioned by over-emphasis on reason and individualism to the detriment of revelation and tradition, not only spilt over into the twentieth century theology, but actually became one of the important defining issues of that theology. Barth's theology of retrieval was in fact, one of the various ways through which theologians of that epoch tried to clean up the debris of the tsunami. He felt that the 19th century theology played into the hands of the Enlightenment, and consequently lost its bearing. The only way out, in his estimation, was to dismantle that theological foundation laid by the 19th century theologians and begin a more solid one. In this way, he hoped to safeguard theology from total disintegration. This chapter will take a cursory look at the challenges posed by the Enlightenment to Christian theology, and how theologians tried to respond to such challenges. It is important to have this background in order to understand why Barth felt that his colleagues failed to give adequate responses to the challenges.

1. THE CHALLENGES OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT TO CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

The Enlightenment epoch of the human history remains a very important period in the general intellectual development of humankind. But it also brought with it some challenges not only to other intellectual assumptions of the time, but more importantly to theology. With the explosion of modern science in the seventeenth century and the attempt by the eighteenth-century Enlightenment to adopt the scientific method as the general criteria with which every other human intellectual sphere must be measured, the plausibility of theology within this type of culture was questioned. Given that the

Christian talk about God, which was taken for absolute truth prior to this epoch, did not actually meet up with the criteria set by the Enlightenment's scientifically-guaranteed measure of truth, such Christian and other traditions' measure of truth was put under great suspicion.

Following the successful Copernican revolution in astronomy, the epoch learnt to no longer take things at face value. This determination not to take things at face value, described as "critique of appearances"[1] produced astonishing results that led to a completely new understanding of the world. Empirically, it appears that the sun goes round the earth. Nothing appears more "obvious" than that. Over the centuries, humanity had been deceived by this appearance, and had consequently modelled her reasoning on that assumption. Suddenly, Copernicus invited people to look again. With the looking again, it was discovered that the opposite was in fact the case. Since this closer looking produced revealing results, it was only logical to apply this "look-again-ism" not only to every other sphere of human endeavour but to humanity itself. And since humanity's face value (that is, her initial appearance) has to do with the tradition of the past, it is not surprising that "the critique of appearance, applied to human life, became the critique of tradition"[2]. Having brought this critique to the heart of human tradition itself, the church's tradition which was at the heart of human tradition, was greatly affected. All those traditional assumptions and dogmas of the church were put under great suspicion. With this scenario playing out, was Christian theology and even Christianity itself brought to its final resting place? The whole project of the so-called modern theology is an attempt to respond to this challenge.

Certainly the Enlightenment cannot be identified as an outright atheistic movement. Thinkers of that epoch did not set out to deny the existence of God. But, having taken a closer look at the Christian portrayal of the image and nature of God vis-à-vis the application of the critique of appearance, they were convinced that the "god" that existed was the one that can be identified generically, hence, religion was understood not as dependent on tradition but as in fact natural to humankind.

[1] Cf., Carl E. BRAATEN and Robert W. JENSON (ed.), *A Map of Twentieth-Century Theology: Readings from Karl Barth to Radical Pluralism*, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1995, p. 2. (Substantial historical information in this sub-section is extracted from this book).
[2] C. BRAATEN and R. JENSON (ed.), *A Map of Twentieth-Century Theology*.

However, when one of the leading players of the Enlightenment, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) took a "closer look" at the assumptions of the natural religion theorists, he ended up with his own "Copernican revolution" in philosophy. Kant posited and revolutionized the idea that the world as perceived depends on the qualities of, and the categories in, the perceiver's mind. By so doing, he thereby reversed the age-long held view that things existed independently of the perceiver. Instead therefore of being taken as passive recipients of information about the world, he argues that we rather impose certain innate or *a priori* categories on all our experience through the 'spectacles' we wear that colour such experiences. In fact for him, if we removed those 'spectacles', we would not be able to experience anything at all.

He distinguished between the *phenomena* (the world of appearance) and the *noumena* (the world as it is, or simply things-in-themselves), and posited that it is only the *phenomena* that are available as object of human knowledge; the *noumena* are unknowable. The implication is that there is no completely objective knowledge of 'things-in-themselves', that is, totally independent of the activity of the knowing mind. He therefore ruled out the possibility of the knowledge of God, immortality and human freedom through pure or theoretical reason (since reason was limited to this finite world); he rather took them as postulates of morality which existence must be assumed for there to be a good ethical system and for the fulfilment of our moral duty. In other words, God, immortality and human freedom are necessary postulates for a practical reason. With this, he reduced Christianity to a "religion within the limits of reason alone", and argues that the only rationally justifiable form of religion is the one arrived at through practical reason. Christian messages such as the dogmas and the historical figure of Christ become what Kereszty calls "symbolic expressions" of this pure rational faith[3]. They can only be held unto, especially by the uneducated, until such a time when they finally arrive at the rational faith. This "rational faith" is the realm of morality, and this is what Kant equates with the arrival of the Kingdom of God: "Mankind (rational earthly existence in general) in its complete moral perfection is that which alone can render a world the object of a divine decree and the end of creation"[4].

[3] Cf., Roch A. KERESZTY, *Jesus Christ: Fundamentals of Christology* (Revised and Updated edition), Communio Book, New York, St. Pauls, 2002, p. 286.
[4] I. KANT, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, p. 54.

In positing the impossibility of the knowledge of God through pure or theoretical reason, Kant claimed to have done away with knowledge in order to make room for faith. This Kantian claim is a dismissal of the claim of natural theology. God, for him, is not a matter of knowledge but of faith. His objective reality can neither be proved nor disproved by speculative reasoning. He can at most be apprehended in the moral order which is the only place where He can operate. But the ideal of the moral person is something that is open to every human being. Jesus Christ is only the most perfect example of such ideal namely, the idea of a morally perfect humanity. It can thus be said that Kant's "Christology" is a purely ethical Christology devoid of any divine nature theology of the great Councils. Christology in other words, is reduced to anthropology.

Having dismantled the Christian traditional concept of God built on the cognitive procedures of metaphysics, a shadow was cast on the whole idea of metaphysics itself. If at all metaphysics was to be retained, it was a metaphysics that did not have a place for a Christian concept of God. The Causality theory of the Middle Ages gave way to the mechanistic understanding of the universe. But to understand the universe in terms of machine had telling implications on the Christian concept of God. Because it can be "a metaphor of harmony"[5] (in the sense that despite its diverse components, a machine works harmoniously to produce great results), to understand the universe as a universal machine implies that its creator (God) has to be a "universal Engineer" – a seemingly harmless inference until we dare to "look again". Braaten and Jenson analysed it thus:

> "A good engineer's creation does not need frequent repair or adjustment; an omnipotent Engineer's creation would never need it. Therefore, the God of the machine-cosmos cannot be active in creation once it is there; every 'intervention' would only show that God had been incompetent in the first place"[6].

On this logic therefore, one cannot talk of God's intervention in human affairs; thus, incarnation as held in Christendom is unreal. Once this logic was upheld, Christianity would have been completely uprooted and theology ceased to occupy any place in the academic world.

[5] C. E. BRAATEN and R. W. JENSON (ed.), *A Map of Twentieth-Century Theology*, p. 3.
[6] C. E. BRAATEN and R. W. JENSON (ed.), *A Map of Twentieth-Century Theology*, p. 3.

2. CHRISTIAN RESPONSES TO THE CHALLENGES OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT

Fortunately enough, the logic was not upheld for long. Two responses did occur within Christianity – one from theology and the other from philosophy – both of which were to be of paramount importance in the shaping of the twentieth-century theology.

2.1. Theological Response

Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) was a leading theologian of that epoch, and he responded using the same critique of appearance, but pointing out where the Enlightenment intellectuals derailed in their arguments. Rather than trying to defend the traditional notion of God, he accepted the Enlightenment postulation that religion defended on purely metaphysics is untenable; neither should religion correspond to morality in such a way as if to suggest that without the former, the latter is impossible to attain. But the novelty of Schleiermacher laid in his insistence (against the Enlightenment supposition) that knowledge and morality were neither the whole nor the centre of life. He thinks that such Enlightenment supposition presents a superficial vision of humanity that gives no room for religion. To find religion, he says, one should search for it neither in ethics nor in metaphysics. This is because religion, properly understood, is rather a mode of 'feeling' or of 'taste'. These are experiences that are *sui generis* and more basic than the experiences of 'acting' in ethics and 'knowing' in metaphysics. Whereas knowledge and morality present parts (even if very important) of human life, it is feeling that gives that grasp of wholeness. And this grasp of wholeness is what he identified as religion. Hence, the "cultured despisers of religion"[7] are despising what they actually do not know. They (the despisers of religion) attack the creeds and the doctrinal formulations thinking that these constituted religion. But as important as the creeds and doctrines are in religion, Schleiermacher considers them secondary. What rather he takes as primary is the religious experience; and he insists that this does not require any rational justification or any moral principle. This religious experience is a feeling for the universal, and he considers this as self-authenticating:

[7] Cf. Friedrich SCHLEIERMACHER, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, partly reproduced in Keith CLEMENTS, *Friedrich Schleiermacher: Pioneer of Modern Theology*, London, Collins, 1987.

> "If you have only given attention to these dogmas and opinions…, you do not yet know religion itself, and what you despise is not it. Why have you not penetrated deeper to find the kernel of this shell? …Why do you not regard the religious life itself, and first those pious exaltations of the mind in which all other known activities are set aside or almost suppressed, and the whole soul is dissolved in the immediate feeling of the Infinite and Eternal? In such moments the disposition you pretend to despise reveals itself in primordial and visible form. He only who has studied and truly known man in these emotions can rediscover religion in those outward manifestations"[8].

These emotions or feelings are what he identified as religion. He considers the feeling as a fundamental function of every human being because he sees it as a mode of experience present in every human experience. If this is the case, then it is impossible not to be religious. But he also believes that being religious implies being religious in a particular religious tradition. This is why he insists that there is only one occasion in which religion becomes actual namely, in a particular religious community united by that strive toward a common religious feeling. Therefore, for him, human choice is not between being religious and not being religious, but rather between belonging to different historically-actual particular religions. In making such a choice, one ought to be guided by a particular religion among others which guarantees this grasp of wholeness in its entirety; and Schleiermacher thinks that Christianity is unique in this guide as it concentrates every religious feeling in the person and figure of Jesus Christ.

Schleiermacher's procedural methodology of beginning first with the analysis of human experience and trying thereafter to locate the place for religion is what would thenceforth be termed Neo-Protestantism or Liberal theology – a movement that both influenced and scared Karl Barth. This procedure has the capability of reducing theology to mere sociology or psychology, and this would form the bedrock criticism rendered by Barth against such manner of doing theology. With such procedure, it is easy to locate religion within the realm of human history; and, to equate religion with Christianity means to equate the "history" of God with the history of man – an equation that often sickened Barth who was keen on maintaining that "infinite qualitative distinction" between God and man.

[8] F. SCHLEIERMACHER, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, p. 72.

2.2. Philosophical Response

On the philosophical front, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) provided a different proposal for tackling the Enlightenment challenges. For him, neither natural religion nor "feeling" could salvage Christianity in the face of the Enlightenment critique. If Christianity needed to be salvaged at all, this had to be done using the same tools fashioned by the Enlightenment namely, critical reasoning. But such critical reasoning begins with a process of conceptual therapy in order to determine whether and how the world is a rational place to live in the first place. Robert Stern takes a quotation from Hegel's *Introduction to the Lectures on the History of Philosophy* as an epigraph for Hegel's philosophy as a whole. In his own adapted translation, Stern cites Hegel thus: "In everything that is supposed to be scientific, reason must be awake and reflection applied. To him who looks at the world rationally the world looks rationally back; the two exist in a reciprocal relationship"[9]. The undertone in this quotation is that, for Hegel, what makes the world seemingly irrational is the incorrect way of looking at it. However, an alteration in this manner of looking will reveal that the world is rational. Every human enquiry is therefore geared toward bringing this rationality of the world to consciousness and thereby restoring order where there seemed to be contradictions. When all aporia are logically eliminated, the world becomes rational and people will find in it a true home to live in. This task of helping to overcome human despair in the face of apparent contradictions, he believes, should be the greatest contribution of philosophy to human development. He thinks that it is only when we alter our current manner of thinking about reality that we can truly achieve absolute knowledge. But what does he propose?

To summarize Hegel's argument, we can state it as follows: The world as we currently view it appears to contain elements of contradictions and incomprehensibility because we do not view it correctly. Efforts to "resolve" those contradictions only lead to further contradictions. Instead of trying to use the current philosophical assumption to try to eliminate the contradictions, philosophy should rather take a reflective stance by trying to eliminate such mode of thought under whose assumptions the world has been appearing as irrational. When such mode of thought is eliminated, the world would once more become rational and "homely" as it should be, even with

[9] Cf., Robert STERN, *Hegel and the Phenomenology of Spirit*, London, Routledge, 2002, p. 11.

the persistent existence of such "contradictions". The mode of thought that Hegel is talking about is the human habit of thinking in oppositional way. He calls this a 'one –sided' manner of thinking. It is an 'either/or' form of reasoning: "we believe that something is *either* finite *or* infinite, one *or* many, free *or* necessitated, human *or* divine, autonomous *or* part of a community, and so on"[10]. Such manner of reasoning, according to him, brings dichotomy that makes it difficult for reason to make sense of things. But a correct manner of reasoning will eliminate such dichotomy by going back to the starting point of our assumption and finding out how problematic such starting point has been that has really affected the rest of our arguments. The either/or method will oppose freedom and necessity for instance. If this starting-point is taken at the face value, then one might begin to take arbitrary choices as the only ones that are autonomous, free from constraints. But if this arbitrariness is the measure of autonomy, how desirable would it be? Thus we find ourselves in a state of confusion and irrationality. Hegel's way of "resolving" this quagmire is to go back to the starting point of our argument and show that freedom does not necessarily involve lack of constraint. In fact, when we appropriate constraint, we will discover that freedom and necessity are not mutually exclusive but can coexist at the same time.

With this manner of reasoning, Hegel believed he had overcome the Enlightenment sense of dislocation. Where Enlightenment repudiated reason, or social reform, or science, Hegel rather chose to investigate the conceptual assumptions that underlie the development of these ideas. He believed that the result of such investigation would lead to the elimination of the one-sided mode of thinking thereby satisfying reason in our conception of the world and making the Enlightenment project to be beneficial to humanity. This is the area he believes that his philosopher-colleagues went astray, by trying to "satisfy reason with a 'monochromatic formalism'"[11] by declaring that the variety of phenomena are in fact all one. He singled out Schelling's identity-philosophy as the major culprit, even while acknowledging his (Schelling's) importance in pioneering philosophical rejuvenation as far as respect for reason is concerned. However, he believes that such identity-philosophy needs to be transcended and to take a dialectical outlook in order for philosophy to properly answer its irrationalist critics.

[10] R. STERN, *Hegel and the Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 13.
[11] R. STERN, *Hegel and the Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 32.

Whether Hegel is correct in his interpretation of Schelling's identity-philosophy is outside our scope to determine. But it is obvious he wanted to avoid Schelling's tendency to monism with such view that 'all is one'. He rather chose the aphorism that "The True is the whole" which according to Stern, is intended to associate himself with holism as against monism. This holism is 'identity-in-difference' as distinguished from Schelling's conception of reality as self-identical and lacking in differentiation. According to Stern, "Hegel calls Spirit the subject that embodies this relation of identity-in-difference to the world, by finding itself in its 'other', so that while it is not cut off from the world (radical dualism), it is not indistinguishable from it either (monism)"[12]. It was with this new mode – the non-dualistic way of thinking (popularly characterized as *dialectical*) that Hegel tried to reconcile reason and religion – a theme that is of our main interest here.

As already noted, Hegel's main preoccupation was to bridge the various dichotomies that have arisen as a result of the Enlightenment mode of reflection. Such dichotomies have been embedded in the consciousness of human beings and he felt that unless they are eliminated, contradictions would continue to uphold and the world would continue to be seen as unsuitable to live in because it does not satisfy reason. For the purposes of our research, we are only interested in the dichotomy between faith and reason and therefore the opposition between God and humans. Hegel's aim is to demonstrate how religious belief can be incorporated within philosophy. He was convinced that the Enlightenment attack on religion stemmed from their inability to integrate faith within philosophical mode of reasoning. If this was properly done, he believes that the opposition between transcendent and worldly would have been overcome. According to him,

> "There is indeed one Spirit of both, but its consciousness does not embrace both together, and religion appears as a part of existence, of conduct and activity, whose other part is the life lived in its real world. As we now know that Spirit in its own world and Spirit conscious of itself as Spirit, or Spirit in religion, are the same, the perfection of religion consists in the two becoming identical with each other"[13].

[12] R. STERN, *Hegel and the Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 34.
[13] *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 412, quoted by R. STERN, *Hegel and the Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 184.

For him, such 'perfect religion' must be different from the type of religion that the Enlightenment despised. He believes that the desired 'perfect religion' can only come about through a process of reconstruction of the development of religion from 'natural religion' to 'religion in the form of art' and finally to 'revealed religion'. His aim is to demonstrate that the philosophical rationalism was present in the development of religion and that it was only through this process of development that such outlook assumed a non-philosophical form as seen in revealed religions. But even at that, the rationalistic picture is still present in religious consciousness; hence religious consciousness is compatible with philosophy. According to his preferred 'history' of religious development, it all started with natural religion when humankind had inseparable relation to nature. With a shift from the countryside to the cities, religion took the form of art and signified humankind's relation to the *polis* so that the gods came to embody the state. These forms however, have secular outlook and do not satisfy the religious consciousness until they are transcended to a more religious outlook that has a conception of the divine that really satisfies that consciousness. It was at this point that Hegel introduced his third and final stage of the development of religion namely the revealed religion. Stern summarized Hegel's steps thus:

> "We have moved from the doctrine that 'Absolute Being is substance' (which gives priority to God as a self-subsistent and independent reality), to 'The Self as absolute Being' (which gives priority to humanity as having the kind of subjectivity that God is seen to lack); we must now move to the final stage of religion, in which 'Absolute Being is subject' (where God will be seen as achieving self-consciousness *through* humanity, so that neither side takes undialectical precedence over the other)[14].

Here, we notice that Hegel is applying his famous logic of *thesis, antithesis,* and *synthesis*, characteristic of dialectical method. This final stage of religion, according to him, is the stage when God can be encountered in human beings; and this is the stage that he believes religious consciousness can recover itself without ever returning back to the previous two stages. It is also the only stage where he thinks the divine can be conceived as absolute. He holds Christianity as the highest form of religious consciousness because it is only in it that the Spirit which is the end of divine cosmic process,

[14] R. STERN, *Hegel and the Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 190.

becomes present, real and accessible to all including the so-called 'ordinary uncultured consciousness'.

Hegel's theology is based on what can be termed a philosophical Christianity which nonetheless he considers to be superior to Christian faith because according to him, his philosophy explains the 'naïve representations' of Christian faith such as "Father", "Son" and "Holy Spirit". According to such speculative theory of Christian doctrine, the Absolute is God the Father (the thesis); and when it objectifies itself, it posits the eternal, that is Son of God which signifies the world of finitude as against the Infinite (the antithesis). The synthesis would then be the difference between the Father and the Son which is overcome in the Spirit as the principle of reconciliation – the universal synthesis. With such acclaimed explanations, the "mysteries" of the Christian doctrines are thought to have been replaced by understanding. However, Kereszty objected thus:

> "In the end, what he (Hegel) grasped was not God but only Man, whose notion he dialectically identified with God. Instead of unveiling the mystery of God, he merely reduced it to ideal humanity that is to be realized in the course of history. From Hegel there is only one step to Feuerbach's explicit claim that all theology is in reality a self-alienated anthropology"[15].

Indeed one should legitimately ask whether the Christian gospel is based on a philosophical synthesis of deity and humanity as Hegel claimed. If it is rightly based on the Word that became a historical individual, then what is the "synthesis" between that historical individual and Hegel's "synthesized" fusion of deity and humanity? In other words, the "ugly ditch", the sharp distinction between "accidental truths of history and necessary truths of reason" which Gotthold Lessing (1729-1781) observed as the logical aftermath of the Enlightenment critical spirit[16], still persists. Hegel though, felt that it is of no value for religious consciousness to get involved in such historical question about the person of Jesus Christ. He felt that such method was the very mistake the Enlightenment made. But one cannot avoid the historical mode of thinking if one is not to fall back to Docetism of the monophysites.

[15] R. KERESZTY, *Jesus Christ: Fundamentals of Christology*, p. 294.
[16] For more on Lessing's argument, cf., C. BRAATEN and R. JENSON, *A Map of Twentieth-Century Theology*, p. 7ff.

2.3. Reactions against Hegelian Philosophical Response

Well, however influential to Christian theology it would prove to be, Hegel's metaphysical Christology was to equally evoke massive reactions. Braaten and Jensen[17] identified three major reactions, each with a different approach to Lessing's "ugly ditch" scenario.

The first is the "historical-critical" positivism which aimed at building Christology directly on the life of Jesus hence, a priori philosophy was considered as not useful as far as the discovery of the real person of Jesus was concerned. It is not through the dogmatic perspective but the historical one that the true person of Jesus Christ will be unravelled. But rather than close the ditch between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith, this approach widened it. Thus was born the famous "life of Jesus" movement – a movement that was current during Barth's entrance into theology and from which he momentarily drank its waters before he fell out with its then "president", Adolf von Harnack.

The second reaction took the form of confessional theology. Gottfried Thomasius (1802-1873) championed this school with intent on integrating the historical dimension of the life of Jesus into the traditional Christological framework. He proposes his so-called "kenotic" Christology according to which Jesus relinquished certain divine attributes in becoming man. Thomasius was worried about the displacement of the two-nature Christology as a result of the historicization of revelation and wanted to salvage that traditional teaching. He distinguishes between 'immanent' attributes which are those things that are essential to God as God such as truth, holiness and love. These things exist in God without any reference to the world; and God cannot surrender them. On the contrary, the 'relative' divine attributes presuppose the existence of the world. These are attributes like omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence which can be surrendered by God without undermining what he is immanently and essentially as God. These relative attributes that were surrendered as a precondition to incarnation, were again taken up in the exaltation. What Thomasius hoped to achieve by this distinction was to maintain that even if God surrendered certain divine attributes in order to assume human nature, he still retains the essential attributes that makes him who he is.

[17] Cf., C. BRAATEN and R. JENSON, *A Map of Twentieth-Century Theology*, p. 9ff.

The third reaction came from the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard who wanted to close the Lessing's "ugly ditch" between historical facts and eternal truths with a "leap of faith". By this, Kierkegaard means to argue that the ditch can neither be closed by metaphysical speculation nor by historical demonstration. For him, Christ is an "absolute paradox" who can only be known by maintaining the "infinite qualitative difference" between God and man. In his *Practice of Christianity* he says:

> "But take away the possibility of offense, as has been done in Christendom, and all Christianity becomes direct communication, and then Christianity is abolished, has become something easy, a superficial something that neither wounds nor heals deeply enough; it has become the false invention of purely human compassion that forgets the infinite qualitative difference between God and man"[18].

As we shall see, this famous phrase was to prove decisive when Barth began the process of discovering the new world of the Bible. This does not however imply that Kierkegaard's great "leap of faith" satisfactorily bridged the ditch between historicity and dogmatism. But Barth found in him, a theological method that is true to itself needing no external grounding other than in itself. In fact, he was to adopt it as his "system" if he must be said to have a system at all. When accused of developing his own "system" of interpretation not faithful to the historical-critical method of exegesis, he replied in the preface to the second edition of the *Romans* thus:

> "If I have a system, it is limited to a recognition of what Kierkegaard called the 'infinite qualitative distinction' between time and eternity, and to my regarding this as possessing negative as well as positive significance: 'God is in heaven, and thou art on earth'"[19].

He went on to insist that the relation between the two, that is, God and man, is not only the theme of the Bible but, in point of fact, the essence of philosophy.

[18] Søren KIERKEGAARD, *Practice of Christianity*, trans. and eds. Howard V. HONG and Edna H. HONG, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1991, p. 140.
[19] Karl BARTH, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. from the sixth edition by Edwyn C. HOSKYNS, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1933, p. 10. Further reference to this book will be done simply as *Romans*.

3. TWENTIETH-CENTURY THEOLOGY AS THE CRISIS OF NEO-PROTESTANTISM

The twentieth-century theology began as the crisis of the nineteenth-century Neo-Protestantism which was partly internal and partly external namely, the newly found plausibility of Christian God as created by Schleiermacher and Hegel, and the incapability of Neo-Protestantism to meet up with the challenges of a historical event respectively[20]. At the turn of the century, Hegelianism had waned, and the liberal theologians were unwilling to continue following their father-founder Schleiermacher in his "feeling" theology. Instead they went back to Kant's moralism. Three prominent theologians namely, Albrecht Ritschl, Ernst Troeltsch and Adolph von Harnack were at the forefront of this turn back to Kant.

Albrecht Ritschl (1822-1889) was a church historian and a historian of dogma who, through his elaborate systematization of liberalism, challenged Schleiermacher's reigning theory of religion by insisting that religion works in the realm of the will and not primarily in the realm of feeling. As a dogmatic theologian, Ritschl refused to accept the notion that theology needs a metaphysical mooring in order to function properly, insisting that the only foundation that theology needs is a historical critical foundation. The revelation of God in the historical person of Jesus Christ should, according him, be the starting point of theology. He believes that it is only with the gift bestowed on people by Jesus that they are able to trust God. But because Jesus is a historical figure, he maintains that in order to come into contact with him so as to receive this gift, such contact must take the form of a historical contact. Therefore he takes critical investigations of the historical sources as not only inevitable but indeed a *conditio sine qua non* it is impossible to really come in contact with Jesus. Thus it can be said that Ritschl sought to liberate theology from two tendencies he considered "un-theological" namely, the subjective turn of Schleiermacher, and, the speculative rationalism of Hegel.

The importance for our research, of Ritschlianism as a theological movement, with its characteristic commitment to churchly theology, is evident. Ritschl influenced, among others, such scholars as Wilhelm Herrmann, Adolf von Harnack, and Martin Rade, who were teachers of the young Barth. Ritschlianism was however radicalized by a one time student of Ritschl, Ernst Troeltsch (1865-

[20] Cf., C. BRAATEN and R. JENSON, *A Map of Twentieth-Century Theology*, p. 12.

1923) who was convinced that historical-critical foundation in theology, when carried through with radical consistency, would inevitably lead to the abandonment of dogmatic assumption which has been the bedrock of Ritschlian School. In fact, Troeltsch's conclusion was that a radical consistency of the argument of historicity is that no one can logically make a case for the superiority of one religion over the other hence, the argument of the historicity proponents that within the history of religions, Christianity is superior, cannot be sustained. He therefore abandoned the dogmatic assumptions of Ritschlian School and focused rather on the scientifically oriented history of religions; thus the birth of *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* ("history of religions school") which he led. His 1902 publication of *Absolutheit des Christentums und die Religionsgeschichte* (*The Absoluteness of Christianity*[21]) marked the climax of the Liberal form of theology.

Meanwhile, Wilhelm Herrmann, who was a Ritschlian himself, offered an alternative theology aimed at overcoming all historicism in theology. This alternative was to wield such influence that for many students, at the turn of the century, the only choice left for them was that between Troeltsch and Herrmann[22]. Herrmann gradually broke away from Ritschl in his quest to completely erase metaphysics from theology, finding succour in what McCormack calls "a very strict concentration on the inner life of Jesus"[23]. Already, this meant a slight detour from Ritschl's historicity as a foundation for theology, and a move closer to Schleiermacher with his quest for the condition for the possibility of religion. His central theological theme focused on the way to religion; and his fundamental concern was to show that the knowledge of faith or religious knowledge is a special kind of knowledge that can never be judged as depending on other forms of cognitive knowledge. He therefore regarded Kant as wrong not to have distinguished these two types of knowledge namely, religious and scientific knowledge. He maintains that science cannot have any access to God, insisting that to have such access, what is required is to have an encounter with God – an encounter which experience is so overwhelming to be doubted. But he noted that to have such an experience of God, it is not enough to just long for God; it is rather

[21] Cf., Ernst TROELTSCH, *The Absoluteness of Christianity and the History of Religions* (1902), translated by David REID, with an introduction by James Luther ADAMS, Louisville, Kentucky, Westminster John Knox, (1971), 2005.
[22] Cf., B. MCCORMACK, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, p. 41 (most of the historical sketch in this section are indebted to McCormack's work).
[23] B. MCCORMACK, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, p. 51.

God himself who determines when and how to make himself "available" to be experienced. One can already see at this point, the background from where Barth was coming.

It is therefore evident that the Herrmann that influenced Barth was not the Ritschlian Herrmann but the Schleiermacherian Herrmann; in other words, a thorough-going 'Liberal' Herrmann[24]; a Herrmann whose central theological theme was 'the way to religion'; a Herrmann that repudiated science as having no access to God; who was very suspicious of natural theology and who maintained that, "…we can only come to God because He has come to us in history"[25]. He located the origin of religion in the heart of the individual, arguing, like Schleiermacher, against the reduction of religion to universally valid propositions. For him, even though the reality of God cannot be proved, still it is possible for every person to experience Him. This immediate experience of God in the individual is made possible by the

[24] Christophe Chalamet has, however, called attention to the often one-sided presentation of the influence of Herrmann on Barth, as a typical liberal theologian whose brand of liberalism initiated Barth into his initial love affair with Protestant Liberalism before he abandoned liberalism in favour of a dialectical theology that shaped his thought thereafter. Against this popular one-sided presentation of Herrmann as a thorough-going liberal theologian, Chalamet argues that Herrmann's theology is in fact thoroughly dialectical. According to him, "to portray Herrmann's theology as 'liberal' does not do justice to Herrmann. His thought certainly contains liberal tendencies, but it is by no means sufficient to label it as 'liberal'" (cf., Christophe CHALAMET, *Dialectical Theologians: Wilhelm Herrmann, Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann*, Zürich, Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2005, p. 12.) He insists that the dialectical theology, with which Barth was to be eventually associated, was a precious inheritance he got from Herrmann. He sees Herrmann's theology as a decisive key to the understanding of the presence of dialectics in both Rudolf Bultmann and Karl Barth (the two greatest students of Herrmann). He contends that Bultmann's programme of demythologizing is a direct prolongation of Herrmann's theological intent; and that even when he had distanced himself from Herrmann, Barth continued to work with the two sides of Herrmann's theology namely, the positive side (the Gospel) and the critical side (the Law), only that Barth dramatically changed the way of dealing with the two sides by reversing the order (p. 13). According to him, Bultmann's disagreement with Barth stems from the fact that he (Bultmann) preferred sticking with Herrmann's order instead of following Barth in his new-found way of understanding the relationship between these two aspects. But the fact, according to him, is that it is in Herrmann rather than in Kierkegaard or Hegel, that one can find the root of the dialectical character of Barth and Bultmann. It was he who taught both how to maintain the tension between Law and Gospel, veiling and unveiling, judgement and grace, cross and resurrection, no and yes, God's absolute and personal being, and how to speak of God hidden in his revelation. To this extent therefore, Barth and Bultmann could be said to have "spoken the same language". But while Bultmann "remained strongly influenced by Herrmann and his way of understanding the dialectic of the Law and the Gospel, against all objectifications and distortions of faith as mere intellectual assent", Barth, in a typically Reformed fashion, was led "toward a profound desire to preserve God's glory against any kind of confusion between the realm of God and the realm of the world" (p. 287). But even at that, Chalamet insists that it was Herrmann who "provided the initial impetus which led Barth to become – and always remain – sensitive to the danger of confusing God with the world" (p. 290).

[25] Quoted by B. MCCORMACK, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, p. 55.

historical reality of the life of Jesus. He contends, in the words of Jeffrey Pugh, that, "it is by virtue of the life of Jesus that our certainty of God is grounded"[26]. Thus we see him trying to strike a balance between Schleiermacher's immediacy position and a strong Christocentric concentration. This, as we shall see, was one of the strong factors that led Barth to be disillusioned with Liberal Protestantism and made him to rebel against his teachers. But whether or not Barth continued with the two sides of Herrmann's theology as Chalamet had argued will not further occupy our space here, as entering further into the argument would deviate from the central focus of this section of our research namely, the theological landscape and the resultant crisis from which Barth sought to "retrieve" theology.

That landscape cannot be complete without mentioning the personality of Adolf von Harnack (1851-1930). Barth's deep christocentrism was partly derived from Harnack, who, in a bid to find authentic Christianity, did not focus on the dogmas of the church or the formula of biblical writers, but, rather, sought to discover the essence of Christianity in the founder of Christianity itself as he is presented in the gospels. He, therefore, took the gospel as the essence of Christianity, and argues that it is only that which can be established authoritatively by the gospel that can be taken as Christianity. He thinks that without the appearance of the historical Jesus, the Christological confessions of the primitive church in forms of dogma would not have any starting-point. His primary concern therefore was to re-direct the Church back to its foundation in Jesus Christ and de-emphasis the place of dogma as a condition for true faith. And he did so by distinguishing between the gospel of Jesus and the gospel about Jesus, or the 'first Gospel' and the 'second Gospel' respectively as he preferred to label them, claiming that the first is "an authentic movement of God in history". The second, however, because it involves questions concerning dogmatic and metaphysical statements, is dismissed as embodying "a counterfeit gospel"[27]. For him, the Christological dogma of the early Church is nothing but intellectualism at work and it distorts the real Christ. He doesn't believe that faith depends on dogma (because its formula are often

[26] Jeffrey C. PUGH, *The Anselmic Shift: Christology and Method in Karl Barth's Theology*, New York, Peter Lang, 1990, p.16.
[27] Cf., J. PUGH, *The Anselmic Shift*, p. 21.

incorrect); and this is his point of attack on Greek theology of the early Church.

Of course, there are many issues raised against Harnack's reduction of the Greek theology of the early Church to a counterfeit gospel[28], but our concern here is to point out that Barth's deep-seated Christological concentration derived largely from Harnack. However, as we shall notice in the sections that follow, the controversy surrounding the exact interpretation of the meaning of the centrality of Jesus Christ will see Barth take a great distance from his teacher, Harnack.

4. KARL BARTH'S PROCESS OF RETRIEVAL

Karl Barth's Berlin and Marburg connections gave him the privilege of studying under the leading Liberal theologians of the day. It was in Berlin that he came in contact with Adolf von Harnack, under whom he studied Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure reason*, Friedrich Schleiermacher's *Speeches on Religion to its Cultured Despisers*, and Wilhelm Herrmann's *Ethics*[29]. The Marburg Neo-Kantian philosophical school permitted him to evaluate whether his liberalism could withstand the test of philosophical challenges. Having thus equipped himself with "sufficient" tools for evangelization, he went into the field as a pastor in the parish of Safenwil, Switzerland, only to discover how insufficiently equipped he was. His liberalism could not provide sufficient answers to the daily challenges of the industrial people of his parish. The reality on the ground and his liberal-based preaching were two totally different things. He therefore decided it was time to read the Bible differently. Instead of reading it simply as a source of historical discovery of who Jesus really is, he discovered that the Bible is all about the Kingdom of God. But such Kingdom evidently could not be equated with the progress and promises of Liberalism which actually contradicted what was obtainable in his parish and among his parishioners. With the (in)famous "Declaration of German Intellectuals" on October 4, 1914, at the beginning of World War I, done on behalf of "emperor and

[28] Pugh, for instance, is of the opinion that, "by the differentiation between the authentic Jesus and the Greek philosophic mind, in which the doctrines of the Trinity, the Incarnation of the Logos, and Christ's pre-existence found their genesis, Harnack and his theological program dispatch the entire structure of Christological doctrine and reduce Christ to an experientially based teacher". Cf. J. PUGH, *The Anselmic Shift*, p. 22.

[29] Cf. B. MCCORMACK, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, p. 37.

fatherland", and which implicated most of his liberal theological teachers, Barth was convinced that time had come to say a noble goodbye to Liberalism and try to discover the real Kingdom of God.

4.1. The Discovery of the New World of the Bible

It was clear to Barth that if such a Kingdom existed, then it couldn't be brought about by any other than God himself. The Bible provided a strange new reality. In fact, it was his immersion into the world of the Bible that changed his entire theological outlook. Already in his Aarau lecture of January 16, 1916 titled *The Righteousness of God* (an essay that was to reappear in the first volume of his "collected essays" in 1924) Barth says: "The righteousness of God is not a question, not a riddle, not a problem. It is a fact – the deepest, innermost, surest fact of our lives. There is nothing more certain than that which the conscience gives for our sake"[30]. But in order to approach this "fact", he insists that one does not need critical reason. Although he acknowledges that critical reason is capable of small and great things, when it comes to "the great thing" however, he says it can only be discovered when one lets the conscience speak. Because he maintains that the conscience is the only place 'between heaven and earth where God's righteousness is revealed to us', to let the conscience speak is to make God's righteousness certain. But he admits that it is not always easy to retain this constant awareness of God's righteousness because of the constant interruption and interference from our critical reason. Hence, "we suffer from unrighteousness". Thus, according to him, there is constant opposition between the righteous will and the unrighteous will. We desire the righteousness of God but it eludes us because, as he says, we "think, speak, and act" according to "a singular gigantic 'as if'". But he insists that this righteousness is not something we can get through acting 'as if', rather it is a completely God's affair and comes only from God[31].

However, he decries the fact that many people act 'as if' they were God thereby trying to domesticate God's righteousness – a practice he labels as both pride and despondency that leads to the building of the Tower of Babel. He claims that this tendency is a dangerous trend that tends to transform God's righteousness into varieties of human righteousness, one of which is the moral principle

[30] Karl BARTH, *The Righteousness of God* in *The Word of God and Theology*, trans. Amy MARGA, London, T & T Clark International, 2011, p. 1-13, p. 3.
[31] Cf., K. BARTH, *The Righteousness of God*, p. 4-6.

with which people have used in justifying "the greatest atrocities of life" namely "the capitalistic order of society and the War"[32]. Among the variety of human righteousness that Barth berates are the righteousness of the State and religious righteousness. In fact he described religion as an illusion. He just couldn't reconcile Christianity's supposed principle with what was obtainable in the so-called "Christian Europe":

> "It is a wonderful illusion when we comfort ourselves with the fact that in our Europe the 'religious life' runs its inexorable course – next to capitalism, prostitution, land speculation, alcoholism, tax evasion, and militarism, even church proclamation and ethics. And we are Christians! Our nation is a Christian nation! It is a wonderful illusion but still an illusion, a self-deception!"[33].

He was prompted to wonder whether one can really gain anything from the so-called religion. He thinks that every "Christian" notion of God that people created only made a mockery of God in the face of savage cultures of the "civilized" and "Christian" Europe and America. He thinks that to overcome these contradictions that have made God problematic, one needs to evolve a different way of entering into relationship with the righteousness of God. This way must come directly through God himself and not through the ways of religion or moral principles. And what is required is not reflecting or reasoning but rather stillness, and allowing God to speak. In fact, this is Barth's definition of faith: "Faith means refraining from all kinds of murmuring, becoming quiet and letting God, the righteous God, speak with us, for there is no other"[34]. Real progress and real religion can only become possible *after* and not *before* God might have spoken.

Barth had already in 1916 started a reflection on a theme that was to forcefully occupy him in *Romans* where he developed the theme of the righteousness of God in the third chapter. It was indeed in his quest to discover the world of the Bible that he came face to face with the "strangeness" of that world. On February 6 1917 he delivered a lecture in the church of Leutwil at the instance of his friend Eduard Thurneysen. The lecture was titled *The New World in the Bible*[35]. To the burning question 'what is in the Bible that made the biblical personages act in strange ways, obeying commands that

[32] K. BARTH, *The Righteousness of God*, p. 8.
[33] K. BARTH, *The Righteousness of God*, p. 9
[34] K. BARTH, *The Righteousness of God*, p. 12.
[35] Cf., Karl BARTH, *The New World in the Bible*, in *The Word of God and Theology*, p. 15-29.

apparently seemed arbitrary' Barth replied in a summary form: "… in the Bible, there is *a new world*, the world of God"[36]; and insists that to enter into such a new world, our human mode of interpretation is not required. He maintains with Luther that "the Scripture interprets itself". To interpret the Scripture as mere history is to ask the question *why*; a question that he says the Bible does not provide an answer to. For him, the best a historian can get in answer to his/her numerous '*whys*' asked in relation to the events of the Bible is simply the answer 'just because' – an answer which he considers not proper to the study of history. Therefore, to get a simple 'just because' answer to the Bible's 'whys?' is not satisfactory. Consequently, he thinks that one should not look for such 'just because' answer. For him, what the Bible provides as an answer to our inquiry is: "*God* is the decisive reason. Because *God* lives, speaks, and acts, there is a reason…!"[37] According to him, here human history stops and God's history takes over; a new world is revealed that projects into our old world. This new world, as he interprets it, seems to contradict and reverse everything that is in the old order.

Starting from its concept of good and evil evident from the praiseworthy models that often surprises us, Barth points out how the Bible is full of eerie and weird instances of sayings that ordinarily reverse our world order of things. But he says these reversals are to show that the Bible contains not the activities of humans but rather the activity of God. Therefore, it is of no use to search for religion or piety in the Bible. The Bible rather contains the "other" which is the new and the greater thing:

> "It is precisely not the right human thought about God that form the content of the Bible, but rather the right thought of God about humans. The Bible does not tell us how we are supposed to talk with God, but rather what God says to us. It does not say how we are to find our way to him, but how God has sought and found the way to us. It does not show the right relationship into which we must place ourselves with him, but the covenant which God has made with all those who are the children of Abraham in faith, and which God has sealed in Jesus Christ once and for all. This is what stands in the Bible. The Word of God stands in the Bible"[38].

Barth has now distanced himself from his liberal root: if one is to evoke the Bible, it is as a revelation and not as a religion; it is to

[36] K. BARTH, *The New World in the Bible*, p. 18.
[37] K. BARTH, *The New World in the Bible*, p. 21.
[38] K. BARTH, *The New World in the Bible*, p. 25.

reveal the piety of God and not the piety of Christians or other belief-systems. The direction in which Barth's theology was taking was already becoming evident. He was already clear that he was neither following the direction of Schleiermacher nor imbibing the historical-critical method of reading the Bible. He rather had opted, as the starting point of his theology, the return to the Bible as literally the Word of God. It was therefore not surprising that he chose as the topic of his Elgersburg lecture of October 3, 1922, the theme, *The Word of God as the Task of Theology*[39]. Here he lamented the constant crave among theologians to evolve different variations of theological methods, dismissing such attitude as nothing but "a turning of the sick man in his bed from one side to the other for a little diversion", and describing the ensuing theology that emerges from them as "middle-of-the-road theology" that does not lessen the burden of the theologian.

He argues that people don't need theologians for their basic existential needs (people can take care of such needs without theologians); they only come to theologians to listen to them speak of God and provide answers to the ultimate questions. But he insists that such ultimate question is not about people's existence such as their spiritual life, or religion or piety. It is rather about God's existence. And the answers that theologians must provide should not be answers that commend or condemns the great things such as culture, spiritual life or piety. To remain within these later answers is, according to him, to send the enquirer where he/she came from, and invariably to declare theology a persona non grata.

Barth acknowledges that when applied to academic theology, what he proposes about placing God in the foreground disregards methodological and scientific presuppositions. But he insists that the existence of theology in the academy is not to be justified and established *a priori*; it is only (as he puts it) an emergency measure taken as a permanent exception to the rule. It is taken because of the need in the academic circle to express that which other branches of knowledge do not find comfortable expressing in the way that theology expresses it. But he cautions that in finding itself in the academy, theology has no right to exist the way other sciences exist because the answer it provides is not the same answers that those other sciences provide. In this way, he thinks that theology must not be

[39] Cf., Karl BARTH, *The Word of God as the Task of Theology* in *The Word of God and Theology*, p. 171-198.

equated with religious studies; otherwise, it forfeits its right of existence in the universities. In his assessment, religious studies faculties study religion as something that can be known. But once it approaches it from this premise, then questions emanate that are simply questions that will lead to further questions. They are not the ultimate question that theology occupies itself with, and for which others come to it for answers.

Secondly, in spite of the fact that theologians must speak of God, Barth says they cannot do so because they are humans. His contention is that the only way in which theologians can say to have spoken of God is to speak on the grounds of revelation and faith. A theological task would therefore involve saying that God became human, and proclaiming that statement as the Word of God. He thinks that when theologians do that, they would have provided the answer to the question put to them by those other troubled souls. For Barth, God's Word alone is the answer, an answer that is provided by way of dogmatism, way of self-criticism and way of dialectics. The three ways, according to him, are not mutually exclusive but criss-cross in any good theological work. But he singles out the way of dialectic as the best because he thinks it is superior to the others. He believes that it incorporates the truth of God (dogmatics) and the critique of humans (self-criticism) and tries to establish the relationship of both to the centre. It is in this way that he sees the way of dialectics as affirming while negating and negating while affirming. In other words, it stands at the centre of a 'Yes' and 'No'.

Having thus stated that theology ought to speak about God but cannot because of the human nature of theologians, Barth declared that theologians ought therefore to do both, that is, giving God the glory. His conclusion is that the Word of God is a necessary but impossible task of theology. This being the case, a true theologian is the theologian of the Scripture.

Already by this period, Barth had adopted dialectic as a theological method – a method that was extensively used in *Romans*. But his brand of dialectic descended from the lineage of Plato and Kierkegaard rather than from Hegel. If anything, he focused on these two authors in order to counter the Hegelian philosophical synthesis of deity and humanity. His intention in *Romans* was to destroy all synthesis using the Kierkegaard's 'infinite qualitative distinction' as his own *motu proprio* to the liberal-infested theological world. C. Braaten and R. Jenson described the dialectic of *Romans* as "a conscious renewal of Socrates' attack on Athenian certainties", arguing further that, (just) "as Socrates elicited self-contradictions to

de-construct the claim that what justice meant in Athens is what justice means in itself, so Barth's whirl of paradoxes intends to undo any direct identity between what faith can mean within the Christian *religion* and what it truly means, in the Christian *gospel*[40]. The message is clear here: Barth does not want to make the same mistake of his theological predecessors by interpreting the gospel as an aid to religion. Religion and gospel stand at two opposing poles. At one pole you have the temporality and at the other you have the eternity. Between these two poles there is the 'infinite qualitative difference'. On the side of time we have humanity, and on the side of eternity we have God. But instead of maintaining this divide, the liberals fashioned a clever way of using religion to bridge it by creating a synthesis of time and eternity. The result was that they succeeded in creating beings that Barth describes as 'almost-gods', but who he says are actually not God but idols and tyrants. According to him, a gospel properly understood is not a religious message telling humankind how to become divine; it is rather a proclamation of a God that is utterly distinct from humanity. Therefore, he sees it as wrong to equate the Gospel with an event, or an experience, or an emotion, or those other human feelings that generally go in the name of religion which are in reality human finitude. If there is any point of contact or point of interaction between God and humanity, he believes it is Jesus Christ. It is in the resurrection of Jesus Christ that the new world of the Holy Spirit touches the old one of the flesh. But even at that, he maintains that it touches it "as a tangent touches a circle, that is, without touching it"[41].

Barth is using this geometrical imagery to insist that even though the resurrection is a historical event, it is not an event in history. Therefore, he sees the Hegelian fusion of God and man in an awkward synthesis as a misunderstanding of what really "touches" us in Jesus Christ. For Barth, it is the Kingdom of God, not an overflowing of God into human nature. God remains the unknown and humanity is incapable before him. It is because he is unknown that he bestows life. Religious pretexts of knowing God through direct communication or apprehension are described by Barth as "regrettable misunderstanding" that can only be rectified when those "criminal arrogance of religion"[42] are done away with. For him, God can only

[40] C. BRAATEN and R. JENSON, *A Map of Twentieth-Century Theology*, p. 39, (emphases are theirs).
[41] K. BARTH, *Romans*, p. 30.
[42] K. BARTH, *Romans*, p. 36-37.

communicate Himself in faith when we abandon the futile effort of direct communication. But even as He communicates Himself through the Gospel, he insists that the world remains the world with all the burden of sin and death and the rest of the reality of this present existence.

Religiosity, therefore, cannot, in his opinion, obliterate the negative human conditions. But he maintains that Christ, precisely because he is the Saviour, occupies and manifests the line of death. In doing so, he bridges the distance between God and humankind by tearing the line of death open. For him, it is at this line of death that we encounter the 'No' which, because it is the final, is God's negation. And "precisely because the 'No' of God is all-embracing, it is also His 'Yes'"[43]. Barth thinks that it is exactly for the reason that God acknowledges us as his very own that he keeps his distance from us. If he were to allow Himself to be perceived directly by us without any mediation on the part of Jesus Christ, then He wouldn't be any different from those other 'ungod' or 'almost-god' created by religion's middle realm with a pretence of being able to be known directly. For Barth, to be known directly is the characteristic mark of an idol. And if God be not reduced to an idol, He must not be known directly.

Barth has now put a wedge between his new-found theology and those of the liberal school of his days. Knowledge of God has now become almost impossible; and with this impossibility, the historical-critical endeavour of trying to discover the person of Jesus Christ through a historical method became an exercise in futility. The "father" of historicism as a foundation for theology, Adolph von Harnack, could not simply relinquish his pride of place in the theological world to this once promising student-of-his-turned-rebel, Karl Barth, without a fight. The "fight" between the two took the form of a public exchange of letters on the subject of scientific theology. Our next section will briefly examine the said exchange in the context of our examination of Barth's position on the centre of theology.

4.2. Barth and the Question of a 'Centre' in Theology

If there is a central theme of Barth's theology, it is his insistence that the God who encounters us in Jesus Christ is exactly "the One who loves in freedom"[44]. In fact, he equates the being of

[43] K. BARTH, *Romans*, p. 38.
[44] CD II/1, p. 257.

God with His act of loving in freedom. Thus, it can be said that "the centre of Barth's theology is the freedom of God acting in love toward humanity in Jesus Christ, which sets us free in all spheres of life – politics, art, economics, science, and especially theology and church – for a life of co-humanity and praise of God"[45]. But it would be misleading to speak of the "centre" in a singular form, and to assume that centre as the most important in the absolute sense as if to suggest that taken alone (without reference to other parts of the work), it can give a clear-cut insight into an author's overall work. A "centre" is used in theological terms as a metaphor and ought to be understood as such so as to avoid being misled by a rigid quest into a singular centre that somehow risks excluding other vital parts of a theological inquiry.

In the case of Barth, the bitter disagreement between him and Harnack on the exact meaning and implication of the centrality of the person of Jesus Christ could be regarded as the "birth" of Barth's obsession with the theme of 'centre' in theology. Both Barth and Harnack agree on the 'centre of the gospel' as the person of Jesus Christ. But in their dispute on the nature of academic theology, they differ considerably on the exact interpretation and implication of the centrality of Jesus[46]. Fearing that the scientific nature of theology was being eroded by the current direction theologians were going, and being convinced that if unchecked theology would lose its status in the university, Harnack was prompted to construct his famous fifteen questions to the despisers of scientific theology. Barth personalized these questions as a direct attack; and the ensuing debate began between the two. Question number 14 is particularly of our interest here as it deals with the question of how Jesus Christ as the centre of the gospel is supposed to be apprehended. Whereas Harnack insists on the critical-historical study of Jesus (and thus on scientific theology) as the only credible and reliable means of knowledge of this 'centre of the gospel'[47], Barth rather sees the critical-historical study as "end" of the foundations of knowledge having not been laid by God himself but by human beings. For him, knowledge of Jesus Christ can only come

[45] Clifford GREEN (ed.), *Karl Barth: Theologian of Freedom*, Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 1991, p. 11.
[46] The public exchange of letters between Barth and Harnack is published in H. Martin RUMSCHEIDT, *Revelation and Theology: An Analysis of the Barth-Harnack Correspondence of 1923*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1972. All our references to this exchange are taken from this publication.
[47] Cf., question nº 14 of Harnack's Fifteen Questions to the Despisers of Scientific Theology, in H. M. RUMSCHEIDT, *Revelation and Theology*, p. 31.

about through "God-awakened faith"[48]. Harnack's position and interpretation threw open the comprehensibility of Jesus to everybody (regardless of religious and academic affiliation) who has an inner spiritual openness to receive the truth. But Barth, in his characteristic Reformed fashion, sees this method as going 'beyond' the Scriptures and 'apart from' the Spirit in order to discover Jesus[49] – an impossible task in his estimation. Thus, there is more of disagreement than agreement between the two men on the centrality of Jesus Christ. S. W. Sykes, while hinging the source of the disagreement on the content of the centrality of Jesus, puts it this way:

> "Where for Harnack, Jesus Christ is the centre primarily as the teacher of the Gospel, and secondarily as its personal exemplification, for Barth the doctrine of the Incarnation is primary. The Gospel is an action of its content, and the Scriptures bear witness to the genuine novelty of the fact that the Word became flesh, died, and rose again"[50].

One can therefore see clearly that Bath denies any direct comprehension of Jesus as the centre of the gospel that is got through historical means. If any 'historical reality' of Jesus is to be understood, this has to be done not through 'the historical Jesus' but through the Christ who is witnessed to as the risen one. He calls this the real 'evangelical' or the real 'historic Jesus Christ' who is known only through revelation[51]; and says that to come to this type of knowledge requires faith through the working of the Holy Spirit, and not through historicity. He agrees that from human point of view, it is indeed "totally incomprehensible" as Harnack charged. But he insists that he'd rather stick to this 'incomprehensibility' than go along the part of the so-called 'positive' theology that ends up making what is incomprehensible to become once again self-evident and transparent. He describes such theology as "an emptying and a denying of revelation" which he esteems worse than unbelief.

Evidently, Barth was still obsessed with his "Wholly other" incomprehensible notion of God given the tone of his response to Harnack. His revised *Romans* just appeared; and whether Harnack read it before he began this correspondence is unclear as no reference

[48] Cf., Barth's answer to the said question, in H. M. RUMSCHEIDT, *Revelation and Theology*, p. 35.
[49] Barth's answer to Harnack; cf., H. M. RUMSCHEIDT, *Revelation and Theology*, p. 42.
[50] S. W. SYKES, *Barth on the Centre of Theology*, in S. W. SYKES (ed.) *Karl Barth: Studies of his Theological Method*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1979, p. 17- 54, p. 28-29.
[51] Barth's answer to Harnack; cf. H. M. RUMSCHEIDT, *Revelation and Theology*, p. 45-46.

to the book was made. What is clear though is that he is opposed to everything that the book stands for.

Besides the contrasting interpretation of the exact meaning of the centrality of Jesus in the gospel, Sykes believes that a more significant difference between Barth's and Harnack's approaches to theology is to be found in Barth's "repeated insistence that for him the object of theology is determinative of the method, not vice versa, as he believed had become the case since the Enlightenment and Schleiermacher"[52]. Sykes links Barth's disagreement with Harnack as to content as having fundamental implication as to methodology. If this link is correct, then one can assume that Barth sees both Schleiermacher and Harnack as being equally guilty of this methodological reversal where the method of theology now determines its object instead of the other way round as Barth insists.

In as much as Barth does not object to the practice of making a selection from the wealth and diversity of biblical witness, he does not subscribe to the idea of defining the fundamental article of Christian faith or the essence of Christianity. For him, to make such a choice amounted to a limitation and a restriction of the Word of God. The word of God, for him, must be left entirely free. In *Church Dogmatics* he insists: "In dogmatics… traditional notions as to what is fundamental or not, central or peripheral, more or less important, have to be suspended, so that they can become a matter for vital new decision by the Word of God itself"[53]. Barth sees dogmatics not as a confession of the Church but rather as a confrontation of the Church's proclamation with the Word of God. But he maintains that such proclamations, often called dogmas and creeds, should not take the place of the Word of God as is often seen in orthodox Christianity. On the other hand, he sees Harnack's alternative proposition of trying to define the essence of Christianity as guilty of the same methodological arbitrariness of the Protestant orthodoxy. More specifically, he fears that Harnack's "essence-definition" tends to present the content of the Word of God in the form of a system. And if by 'system' is implied "a structure of principles and their consequences, founded on the presupposition of a basic view of things, constructed with the help of various sources of knowledge and axioms, and self-contained and complete in itself"[54], then he sees the freedom of obedience inherent

[52] S. W. SYKES, *Barth on the Centre of Theology*, p. 29.
[53] CD I/2 §24, p. 865.
[54] CD I/2 §24, p. 861.

in dogmatic method as being undermined by such a system. He dismisses any purported dogmatic system as "an impracticable idea, because in it it is not the Word of God but the presupposed fundamental view of things that will become the object of dogmatics"[55]. While not denying that these fundamental views of things have indeed truth content, he maintains that the interpretation of the essence of Christianity should never be a replacement for the Word of God. The reason he gave is as follows:

> "While its content is indeed the truth, it is the truth of the reality of the work and activity of God taking place within it. As such it is not to be condensed and summarised in any view, or idea, or principle. It can only be reported concretely… And this report cannot be made the business and function of the object of dogmatics"[56].

For Barth therefore, the object that must dictate dogmatic method is the Word of God. He sees all other "systems", such as the essence of Christianity, as only conceptions of the Word of God, not the Word of God in itself. For him, such conceptions are all under our control. But he believes that the centre or foundation of dogmatics should be "something which exercises control over us"[57].

It is here that Barth's different conceptions of dogmatic autonomy are highlighted. He doesn't see autonomy as independent of theonomy when it comes to dogmatics: "The autonomy in which dogmatics has to choose its method must consist solely in the recognition of its theonomy, i.e., in its free submission to the sovereignty of the Word of God alone"[58]. He goes further here to endorse Thomas Aquinas' postulation that God is the object of theology when he (Aquinas) says in the *Summa theologica* that, *Omnia pertractantur in sacra doctrina sub ratione Dei* (all things are dealt with in holy teaching in terms of God). But he insists that this can be the case if only by *Sub ratione Dei*, Aquinas must mean *sub ratione Verbi Dei*[59]. Barth's overall insistence against Schleiermacher that the real object of dogmatics must determine its subject can be deciphered here. This, in fact, is the first step that he took toward formulating his centre of theology – the so-called *a priori* formulations of the essence of Christianity or the fundamentals of

[55] CD I/2 §24, p. 861.
[56] CD I/2 §24, p. 862.
[57] CD I/2 §24, p. 866.
[58] CD I/2 §24, p. 866.
[59] CD I/2 §24, p. 866.

dogmatics have the tendency of usurping the position of the Word of God, thus, must be vehemently rejected.

Having rejected the *a priori* formulations of the fundamentals of dogmatics, Barth tries to positively fashion his own point which he thinks should be the centre of theology. He did this under his treatment of the subject matter and problems of the doctrine of reconciliation in §57 of *Church Dogmatics*. In the caption "God with Us" he writes:

> "We enter that sphere of Christian knowledge in which we have to do with the heart of the message received by and laid upon the Christian community and therefore with the heart of the Church's dogmatics: that is to say, with the heart of its subject-matter, origin and content. It has a circumference, the doctrine of creation and the doctrine of the last things, the redemption and consummation. But the covenant fulfilled in the atonement is its centre. From this point we can and must see a circumference. But we can see it only from this point. A mistaken or deficient perception here would mean error or deficiency everywhere: the weakening or obscuring of the message, the confession and dogmatics as such. From this point either everything is clear and true and helpful, or it is not so anywhere"[60].

For Barth therefore, the centre of theology is the act of God; or as he puts it, "the free act of the faithfulness of God in which he takes the lost cause of man"[61]. Atonement is important to him not merely as a doctrine but as an act. The atonement teaches the act of God which Barth equates with the being of God. It is an act in which God is God. Since, "the whole being of God is an activity, both in eternity and worldly time"[62], it can be said that for Barth, Christology is at the centre of dogmatics. And if we take into account his earlier assertion that it is only from this centre that the circumference can be clearly seen or remain obscured for ever, we can understand what he meant when he said that, "a Church Dogmatics must… be christologically determined as a whole and in all its parts"[63]. He is not contesting that earlier dogmatics like those of Schleiermacher, Ritschl, and even Harnack, before him, were Christocentric. His contention is that because they have been infested with natural theology from the onset, it is difficult for them to speak christologically even when their

[60] CD IV/I §57, p. 3.
[61] CD IV/I §57, p. 3.
[62] CD IV/I, p. 7.
[63] CD I/2, p. 123.

writings smacks of Christocentric character. As he puts it, "one cannot subsequently speak christologically, if Christology has not already been presupposed at the outset, and in its stead other presuppositions have claimed one's attention"[64].

Sykes interpreted Barth's insistence on a church dogmatics being 'christologically determined' as against merely being Christocentric as his (Barth's) "way of attempting to guarantee not merely incarnational Christology, but also that Jesus Christ is Way, Truth, and Life, the *ratio fidei* as well as the *ratio veritatis*"[65]. These "facts" about Jesus are not provable through any historical methodological "system" but rather through a "system" of faith that is got through a systematic unfolding of the Word of God. This unfolding of the Word of God is what Barth takes as the centre of theology and the foundation of all dogmatics:

> "… the unfolding and presentation of the content of the Word of God must take place fundamentally in such a way that the Word of God is understood as the centre and foundation of dogmatics and of Church proclamation, like a circle whose periphery forms the starting-point for a limited number of lines which in dogmatics are to be drawn to a certain distance in all directions. The fundamental lack of principle in the dogmatic method is clear from the fact that it does not proceed from the centre but from the periphery of the circle or, metaphor apart, from the self-positing and self-authenticating Word of God. From this starting-point, it will draw only a limited number of lines, and even these only to a certain distance; and it will refrain from drawing a second circle round the whole – or, metaphor apart, it will refrain from presenting the whole as a whole"[66].

The word "unfolding" underscores the fact that Barth is not presenting dogmatics as a body of concluded doctrines that are packaged in such a way that they remain static. For him, dogmatics is a continuous process of investigation that must begin again and again from the beginning, that is, from the starting-point. In this way, he hopes to argue that dogmatics and Church proclamations should not take the place of the Word of God which they are all called upon to rather serve. If dogmatic method succeeds in doing this, then it becomes the only genuine theological method that can be said to be somehow "pure and exemplary" according to Barth's own criteria. He believes that this method involves at the same time "obedience and

[64] CD I/2, p. 123.
[65] S. W. SYKES, *Barth on the Centre of Theology*, p. 41.
[66] CD, I/2, p. 869.

daring"[67] – elements that he says enable one to be faithful and at the same time free. His purpose here is undoubtedly to attempt to strike a balance between the unlimited freedom of Harnack's historical critical method and the unquestionable obedience to the "ecclesiastical dictatorship" that comes in form of dogmas. He believes that it is only the dogmatic method (and not the 'analytic' method for example) that can effectively (without degenerating into one or the other) guarantee such a balanced combination of obedience and daring.

However, in claiming to have "evolved" a "super" method that disallows any alternatives, one wonders whether Barth might not have after-all been guilty of "theological dictatorship which dissolves the historical ingredient of our religion and seeks to torment the conscience of others with one's own heuristic knowledge"[68] – a charge levelled against him by Harnack. It is true that Barth's obsession with a "centre" is to christologically ground his theology. But to disallow any alternative Christology other than his own proposal appears to amount to a closed system in theology which, in our pluralistically-inclined world, may not be a sustainable option. In assessing Barth's polemics on the centre of theology, Sykes has this to say:

> "The clarification of theological argument and the weighing of its force, is a slow process, necessarily involving the 'prayer of the Church'; hence, in the process, a plurality of theological systems are not merely conceivable, but inevitable, and not merely inevitable, but desirable. For in their very plurality is guaranteed the fact that theologians will not be thought to control their object, rather than in any personal disclaimers they may make. Where the discipline of theology is conceived as having a different, and more restricted, role in the life of the Church, it is freed to be as systematic and strictly conceptual as it may be"[69].

Perhaps, the full import of Sykes' remarks will be exposed when we consider, in the next section, Barth's theology of retrieval and the question of pluralism. But one thing though is clear: there seems to be a great wall of difference between what Barth proposes and what he does himself. He proposes, for instance, the need to accommodate novelty in dogmatic method: "Essentially dogmatic method consists in this openness to receive new truth, and only in

[67] CD, I/2, p. 870.
[68] Cf., Harnack's Open Letter to Professor Karl Barth in H. M. RUMSCHEIDT, *Revelation and Theology*, p. 39.
[69] S. W. SYKES, *Barth on the Centre of Theology*, p. 53-54.

this"[70]. But hardly does he treat any "new" truth that does not come from his own criteria of truth as worthy of the name. Perhaps, as we shall see in our subsequent discussions, Barth may not have after all left his own dogmatics open to the reception of new truths. And this will be one area in his theology that needs updating.

4.3. Barth and the Manner of Theology

Barth was very much indebted to Anselm of Canterbury in fashioning what he considers the manner of theology. He himself acknowledged, in the preface to the second edition of his little book on Anselm, that he was working with "a vital key, if not the key, to understanding that whole process of thought that has impressed me more and more in my *Church Dogmatics* as the only one proper to theology"[71]. Despite the fact that some commentators, in order to "correct" Barth using a diachronic method of reading, dismiss the Anselm book as presenting nothing new in the theology of Barth[72], it is obvious that Barth himself considers the book as very vital in the understanding of his theology. It is here that he conducts the

[70] CD, I/2, p. 867.

[71] Karl BARTH, *Anselm - Fides Quaerens Intellectum: Anselm's Proof of the Existence of God in the Context of his Theological Scheme*, SCM, 1960, Oregon, Pickwick Publications, 2009, p. 11.

[72] Bruce McCormack, for instance, sloppily dismissed the importance of the Anselm's book to the understanding of Barth's theology by describing it as presenting no new starting-point and no new thought-form. Cf., B. MCCORMACK, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, p. 412-449. McCormack decided to de-emphasize the significance of the Anselm book in order to prop up the importance of Pierre Maury's paper to Barth's modification of the doctrine of election which he claims, made Barth's theology thoroughly Christocentric.

However, this sloppy dismissal, with a wave of hand, of the influence of the Anselm book to the understanding of Barth's later theology has been lately challenged severally.

While agreeing with McCormack that there was no turn from dialectics to analogy in Barth starting from the Anselm book, Chalamet however insists that something new was evidently present in Barth's theology around 1930. The other aspect of Balthasar's thesis that the discovery of the *analogia fidei* helped Barth to move from a critical (that is, a philosophical type of dialectics) to a theological dialectic that helps in a better understanding of the relation between God and his creatures, is often not talked about. He says that despite the contradiction between this thesis and the main thesis of Balthasar of a turn from dialectic to analogy (which Balthasar himself noticed), he was convinced that Balthasar was on the right track by arguing that Barth moved from a critical dialectic to a theological dialectic. He says: "with von Balthasar, I do believe that there was a subtle but important modification in Barth's theology around 1931. I also agree with him when he writes that this modification had something to do with a move beyond a critical form of dialectic". Cf., C. CHALAMET, *Dialectical Theologians*, p. 225.

On his part, Timothy Stanley contends that McCormack concentrated on the first section of Barth's Anselm book (in his assessment of it) in order to refute the Balthasarian thesis of a turn from dialectic to analogy. But he argues that "a more thorough engagement with Barth's exegesis of *Proslogion* 2-4 might give crucial insight into the onto-theological nature of the 'vital key' he referred to in his preface". Cf., Timothy STANLEY, *Returning Barth to Anselm*, in *Modern Theology*, 24,3 (July 2008), p. 413-437, p. 414.

arguments about theological rationality using Anselm's dictum – *fides quaerens intellectum*. When Anselm argues that God in Himself is *ratio veritatis* – the Ultimate Truth, Barth understands it that God, being the giver of all rationality is the final recourse when it comes to talking about human rationality: "What is meant by the human *ratio* with regard to truth can… in no circumstances be one that is creative and normative"[73]. There are three meanings of *ratio* in Anselm which Barth distinguishes namely, man's knowing *ratio* as *rationalis natura* which creates in him the capacity of forming judgments; *ratio* that belongs to the object of faith itself; and *ratio veritatis* which he (Barth) calls the 'ultimate *ratio*' and identifies with the '*ratio summae naturae'* – the divine Word consubstantial with the Father; in a word, 'the *ratio* of God'. Of this third *ratio* Barth wrote: "It is not because it is *ratio* that it has truth but because God, Truth, has it"[74].

It is precisely because Barth holds the three ratios in hierarchy of *senioribus prioribus* that he insists that the lower must be dependent upon the higher. As Gunton puts it, "The correctness of human reasoning will depend upon its apprehension of the truth of its object, and not vice versa"[75]. This is why he is of the opinion that Barth's insistence on the priority of the being of God over theological language is quite in order if one observes the hierarchy established in the various ratios discussed. He puts it very strongly: "For Barth, the problem of theological *language* cannot be discussed prior to the question of the *being* of God. God comes first; our language can only rationally follow after his prevenience"[76]. Because he holds the priority of the being of God over theological language, Barth, following in his interpretation of Anselm, maintains that the aim of theology can neither be to lead to, nor to confirm people in, faith[77]. In other words, theology presupposes some existence of faith before it could proceed to seek knowledge. Reframing Anselm's dictum, he says: "It is not the existence of faith, but rather… the nature of faith, that desires knowledge. *Credo ut intelligam* means: It is my very faith itself that summons me to knowledge"[78]. What this implies is that it is only when faith occurs that knowledge of God comes. Any other

[73] K. BARTH, *Fides Quaerens Intellectum*, p. 46-47 (henceforth referred simply in the abbreviated form of FQI).
[74] Cf., FQI, p. 44-45.
[75] Colin E. GUNTON, *Becoming and Being: The Doctrine of God in Charles Hartshorne and Karl Barth*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1978, p. 121.
[76] C. GUNTON, *Becoming and Being*, p. 121 (emphases are his).
[77] Cf., FQI p. 17.
[78] FQI, p. 18.

purported "knowledge" of God that is got outside the occurrence of faith, cannot, in Barth's estimation, be regarded as true knowledge. It is therefore not surprising that historical criticism and natural theology have no places in his method of theologizing. Theology, for him, is necessitated by faith, and not by the desire to study Christianity as a form of history of religions.

In his view, for theology to be possible, one has to relate the subjective *credo* with the objective *Credo* of the Church. There has to be progression from *credere* to *intelligere*. Therefore, it is this *Credo* of the Church that makes the science of theology possible in the first place. As he puts it, "A science of faith, which denied or even questioned the Faith (the *Credo* of the Church), would *ipso facto* cease to be either 'faithful' or 'scientific'"[79].

With this Barthian understanding of theology, one can legitimately ask whether we have reached the end of rational inquiry as far as theology is concerned. Can theology, following Barth's definition of scientificity, be still regarded as a science? Is the *Credo* the only possible "rational" source of theology according to Barth's definition of rationality? Given that the "objective" Credo of the Church is even 'subjectively objective' in the sense that it is not generally objective to the entire human race but in fact only to Christians, can there possibly be an objective theology of religions? Does Christian theology not risk becoming a pariah discipline that is imprisoned in some small corner of the academic world with no visitors except its members?

Barth seemed to have foreseen these problems and tries to address them in the first volume of his *Church Dogmatics*. Here, he insists that dogmatics is a theological discipline, but maintains that theology is a function of the Church. As the church talks about God, it confesses God. Theology, in this Barthian understanding, is synonymous with confession of faith. It acquires its scientific status through self-criticism and constant revision of the God-talk. But all these must happen within the internally-established Church criteria. Barth warns that in questioning the correctness or otherwise of its utterances, theology "does not measure it by an alien standard but by its own source and object"[80]. He is ill at ease using the word "science" to describe theology. For him, theology can only be called "science" *secundum quid* and not *simpliciter*. He is not comfortable with the

[79] FQI, p. 27.
[80] CD I/I, p. 4.

way philosophy and other secular sciences are setting the pace and determining, using their standards, what should be regarded as science and what should not. If one follows the criteria set by these "alien" disciplines, he sees theology as not even qualified to go by the name of science. But he insists that, not only is theology a science, but that scientific theology has a special function which is that of criticising and correcting the talk about God using criteria set by the Church's own principle. On these proper criteria of theology, he expresses his reservation about qualifying theology as a science. Obviously he sees theology as having absolutely nothing to learn from other sciences as far as method is concerned.

For this reason, he explains that it is irrelevant for theology to try to justify itself before these other sciences on the basis of the so-called concept of science which has general validity. Such general validity would include among other things, formal consistency, inherent consistency, openness to control through a community of verifiers, antecedent credibility, impartiality or, positively stated, according to the principle of sufficient reason, and, formalisability[81]. Certainly, theology, as he sees it, cannot, without ceasing to be theology, submit itself to these standards of validity inherent in other sciences. According to him, "the only way which theology has of proving its scientific character is to devote itself to the task of knowledge as determined by its actual theme and thus to show what it means by true science"[82]. In other words, he is insinuating that there are several definitions and qualifications of science; and that no scientific theory must be allowed to have a monopoly of scientificity. He views the word "science" in its broader horizon, and not as a title restricted to few privileged disciplines. On this note, he maintains that in spite of the ambiguity of the word, theology must insist on describing itself as a science because in doing so, theology brings itself on board and makes a case against a concept of science that he considers pagan. He does not want theology to be excluded from the club of sciences; yet he does not want theology to submit itself to the method and criteria set by that club as a measure of scientificity.

Barth's intention is to ground theology in an independent method other than those proposed by the secular sciences and philosophy. He wants to ground theology exclusively in its origin in revelation. He sees theology as a reflection on revelation, the aseity of

[81] Cf., CD I/1, p. 8.
[82] CD I/I, p. 10.

God. But at the same time, he does not want to make theology an independent science. In fact, he says that it should be understood only as "a stop-gap in a disordered cosmos"[83]. In grounding theology in an independent method, Barth described dogmatics as the self-examination of the Christian Church, but with insistence that this self-examination is in respect of the content of its distinctive talk about God[84]. As an enquiry therefore, dogmatics has a limit namely, the Christian distinctive talk about God.

This is where precisely he tries to distance himself from the theology of his day. He tries to create a dichotomy between other disciplines' talk about God and Christian distinctive talk about God. For him, other disciplines can talk about God; but that does not qualify such talks as theology, or more precisely, dogmatics. The only God-talk that qualifies as theology or as dogmatics is that distinctive talk whose knowledge is not obtained arbitrarily but strictly through revelation. Therefore, it is only in the self-donation of God on the cross – in other words, only in revelation of Jesus Christ – that the Christian distinctive talk about God can and must be known. It is true that Barth does not repudiate human knowledge as important in dogmatics; but he says that human knowledge alone does not suffice. Because he roots his theology in the church, he does not see the possibility of doing dogmatics outside the church. If his definition of dogmatics as an inquiry into the Christian distinctive talk about God still holds, then one not only needs the church to do dogmatics, but in fact, "there is no possibility of dogmatics at all outside the church"[85].

However, this "outside the church" need not be interpreted in an exclusive sense. He was quick to add: "To be in the church, however, is to be called with others by Jesus Christ"[86]. The "with others" could be interpreted that Barth does not intend to strictly restrict the work of dogmatics to the circle of Christian believers only. But at the same time, he does not want to throw it wide open to the extent that it becomes an all-comers' affair. Certain acts of faith are basically required in order to undertake the work of dogmatics otherwise, theology, as he puts it, "…would become the irrelevant wisdom of spectators outside the Church"[87], and therefore "a-theology". The theological question of trying to determine to what extent reality

[83] CD I/I, p. 10.
[84] CD I/I, p. 11.
[85] CD I/I, p. 17.
[86] CD I/I, p. 17.
[87] CD I/1, p. 21.

corresponds to what Christians believe it to be, for instance, should not be pushed beyond a certain limit. If this is done, it becomes a question of fact and therefore, turns to be 'a-theology'[88]. Barth considers issues such as this as irrelevant, insisting that they are pursued not by real theologians but by 'spectators outside the Church'. For him, the only 'fact' that is 'factual' as far as theology is concerned is the fact of the *Credo* and of the *credo*. In other words, it is the fact of the divine revelation manifested in the Incarnation that should be considered as a Christian 'fact' from which theology must emanate. And even at that, as far as it remains a theological statement, it is 'an inadequate expression of its object' having not been expressed by God himself but by human beings[89]. This does not however imply that theological statements cannot be made with certainty. Barth says theological certainty is possible only if we can distinguish scientific certainty from the certainty of faith.

For him, a scientific certainty is reached, and thus a theologian is considered to have spoken absolutely, when his/her theological statements "coincide with the text, or with the necessary inferences from the text, of the sacred authority"[90]. He does not however consider such theology as having become another "scripture" not open to adjustment. If this were the case, theology would have long ended since after the period of the Fathers of the Church. He rather, still subscribes to Anselm's notion of progress in theology (for Anselm, the perfectibility of theology implies both stop and start[91]); but with a caution that such "progress" is not left at the whims and caprices of individual theologian but rather must be conditioned by the wisdom of God. This is exactly what Barth had in mind by giving dogmatics the task of criticizing and correcting God-talk. When *intelligere* becomes a deepened form of *legere*, that is, a deepened reflection of what has already been said in the Credo, one would have avoided being a liberal theologian as well as being a positivist or traditionalist – two extreme movements from which Barth exonerated Anselm[92]– and would have formed a solid bedrock of the manner in which theology should be done.

[88] Cf., FQI, p. 27.
[89] FQI, p. 29.
[90] FQI, p. 30-31.
[91] Cf., FQI, p. 32.
[92] Cf., FQI, p. 41.

5. BARTH'S THEOLOGY OF RETRIEVAL AND THE QUESTION OF PLURALISM

Barth's first step, in his theology of retrieval, is his insistence that as long as it continues to dance the "music" of the Enlightenment, theology cannot be done with credibility because it cannot justify itself within the arena of such a dance. The Enlightenment dace rather pushes it to forget itself by forgetting its object matter. What theology needed to do was to leave that dance alone and go back to take up its own proper music. The proper music for theology, according to his method, is the Word of God as found in the Bible and in the Church. It is in the Bible that one can encounter the "centre" of theology – Jesus Christ Himself – not as a historical person, but as a revealed God the Son.

However, in the contemporary world that is characteristically pluralistic, there are so many ways and methods of approaching the same issue, all of which are considered valid. Theology has developed past the canonization of one single manner of approach. In the face of this new reality, does Barth's theological method leave room for pluralism in theology? This section will first of all consider the question of theological pluralism in general, and then the question of religious pluralism within the context of theology of religions.

5.1. The Question of Theological Pluralism

From his earliest adventure into theology, Barth seemed not to have taken pluralism in theology seriously. It might be safe to suggest that because of his primary task of re-directing theology away from the liberal direction it was taking, he appeared to have always had the penchant for dismissing any dissenting theological voice with a wave of hand. He always suspected such theology as having lost its bearing. This is not to suggest however, that Barth was anti-intellectual. On the contrary, he read far and wide both from the sacred and the profane. But he was conscious not to confuse what he considered the profane methodology with the sacred or theological methodology. Because of his insistence on the distinctiveness of theology, he was adamant that if it is theology that one sets out to do, then there are certain things that are considered relevant as far as the subject matter is concerned, and there are others that should have no business whatsoever to do with theology. With the collapse of the European society and culture occasioned by the horrific World War I, the dominant liberal theology associated with the bourgeois became unresponsive to the actual needs

of the people; consequently it was considered irrelevant. In its place, Barth and his like-minded colleagues began to fashion a new paradigm to respond to the crisis of theology.

This new paradigm known as dialectical theology, focused exclusively on the Bible and made light of subjective experience and history. Revelation and proclamation of the Word of God became somehow the limit beyond which "authentic" theology could not go. Within this limit, natural theology and historical-critical method of study of the Bible had no place; theological task and preaching became identical. But if one identifies theology strictly with preaching, it will be very difficult to sustain an argument that theology is a science in the objective sense of it; and consequently, theology could hardly have a place as an academic discipline in the university.

It is true that Barth tried to move beyond "modern" theology with all its perceived shortcomings. If "to be postmodern is to signal one's dissatisfaction with at least some aspect of modernity"; if it is "to habor a revolutionary impulse: the impulse *to do things differently*"[93], then Barth can be said to have initiated a new paradigm in theology which could be termed a postmodern paradigm[94]. Within this postmodern paradigm two typologies can be identified around which theologians try to view their tasks. Hans Frei has summarised these two. According to him, in the first typology, "Christian theology is an instance of a general class or generic type and is therefore to be subsumed under general criteria of intelligibility, coherence and truth that it must share with other academic disciplines"[95]. In the second typology, "Theology is an aspect of Christianity and is therefore partly or wholly defined by its relation to the cultural or semiotic system that constitutes that religion"[96]. None of these two typologies however, can be satisfactorily used to identify Barth's theology given that he (Barth) did not "perfect" a paradigm that he initiated (to use Küng's expression). A perfection of such postmodern paradigm would have led unavoidably to pluralism. But since Barth lacked such perfectibility, he did not create room for pluralism in his theological system.

[93] Cf., Vanhoozer's Preface in Kevin J. VANHOOZER (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. xiii.
[94] Hans Küng has argued that Karl Barth is the main initiator of the postmodern paradigm in theology but that he is not the perfecter of such a paradigm. Cf., Hans KÜNG, *Theology for the Third Millennium: An Ecumenical View*, trans. Peter Heinegg, New York, Anchor Books Doubleday, 1988, p. 257-284.
[95] Hans W. FREI, *Types of Christian Theology*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1992, p. 2.
[96] H. FREI, *Types of Christian Theology*, p. 2.

Küng has argued that a theology can be said to be contemporary and timely "only if it takes a stance vis-à-vis the present-day world and opens itself to its distress and hopes"[97]. Barth's theology was certainly contemporary and timely in his epoch. Nobody took a definitive stance vis-à-vis his present-day world more than he did. Where his colleagues were either afraid or complacent to take a stance, Barth was the fearless vanguard who risked even his professorial career to stand his ground. However, in relation to our own present-day world, with all the celebration of diversity, it is time to take a second look at his theology.

The question today is no longer whether there should be only one "true" method or many. There are several and somewhat conflicting methods competing for recognition. A contemporary theology should be able to ask where and how a theological thought can begin in the midst of such plurality of methods. Barth's theology failed to take this question into serious consideration; instead, it started with the assumption that all other methods are a-theological which did not ground in revelation. This was why he repudiated historicism in theology without taking into consideration the fact that any gap between exegesis and dogmatics is bound to produce an inadequate Christian theology. Küng forcefully expressed this opinion when he said: "An unhistorical dogmatic theology is as outdated as an unhistorical exegesis, however modern it may pretend to be. A dogmatic theology that takes only inadequate (selective) notice of the findings of exegesis is itself inadequate"[98]. This is not however to suggest that Barth was not exegetical or "historical" in his dogmatics; but his brand of historicity precluded the "historical Jesus". However, today's theology cannot satisfactorily appeal to the contemporary mind without this historical-critical method for instance. Again, a plurality of theological voices have so emerged that Barth's ferocious resistance against dissenting theological voices, such as in his famous correspondence with Emile Brunner which began in 1916 and lasted for two decades[99], can no longer be sustained.

[97] H. KÜNG, *Theology for the Third Millennium*, p. 197.
[98] H. KÜNG, *Theology for the Third Millennium*, p. 194.
[99] For a detailed examination of Barth's relationship with Brunner, cf., John W. HART, *Karl Barth vs. Emile Brunner: The Formation and Dissolution of a Theological Alliance, 1916-1936*, New York, Peter Lang, 2001. However, the little sketch that follows here is indebted to John W. HART, *The Barth-Brunner Correspondence*, in George HUNSINGER (ed.), *For the Sake of the World: Karl Barth and the Future of Ecclesial Theology*, Grand Rapids/Cambridge, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004, p. 19-43. This article is actually a summary of the author's doctoral dissertation which has been published as cited above.

Starting from 1916 when they first began corresponding, their differences with regards to what constitutes the object of theology were obvious. While Barth insists that the proper object of theology is God in his revelation, Brunner holds that theology must not only speak about God, but must speak decisively about the believing subject. Barth's conception of the object of theology influenced his choice of theological method which brought a discontinuity between the divine and the human in a radically dialectical No. But Brunner's attitude was that of a search for continuity under the concept of dialogue. He doesn't believe that the Barthian metaphor of 'a tangent touching a circle' is an accurate description of the relationship between God and the world, and thus between theology and philosophy. Instead, he sees in the relationship between theology and philosophy, "a border where both touch each other, thus where they … touch like two army spearheads *over-against* each other", describing this *common* point where there is a collision as "the Law"[100]. There is therefore, *contra* Barth, a point of contact between revelation and philosophy namely the Law.

Brunner's theological enterprise from this point on became that of trying to find out this "point of connection" or "point of contact" or "point of attachment" between the Word of God in revelation and nonbelieving sinful humanity[101]. Barth on the other hand expresses his dismay with this approach to theology and maintains that theology is nothing but a relentless focus on the Scripture and on the Word of God – theology is a 'thinking after' the Word of God. While Brunner does not contest that the first and essential task of theology is that of a reflective interpretation of the Word of God, he insists that there are other task of theology namely, a polemical engagement with human reason. This is what he christened "eristics", a coinage which comes from the Greek *erizein* meaning "to debate". Thanks to his eristic conception, theology can now not only engage rational thinking outside the church by challenging false philosophical assumptions, but equally look within the church with its existential theology of the Word aimed at fighting against what he sees as "a theoretical, objectivistic dogmatics".

That this last point was a direct aim against Barth, who conceives and likens theology to "a spinning top that supports itself on only one point", is obvious. Barth's response was to liken God's

[100] J. HART, *The Barth-Brunner Correspondence*, p. 27.
[101] J. HART, *The Barth-Brunner Correspondence*, p. 30.

revelation to "a galloping horse on the loose". Such a "wild" and "powerful" animal is solely in charge of where it is going; and the task of theologians becomes only to "follow after" that animal by "clinging for dear life to the horse's tail". In his estimation, Brunner and the rest of his dialectical colleagues (as well as Catholic theology) erred by jumping on the back of the horse and becoming its rider and master. In other words, he accuses them of trying to control the Word of God. He was not therefore impressed with Brunner's *Nature and Grace*, and subsequently responded with his famous angry *Nein*! Brunner's reply was to accuse Barth of having a "sectarian spirit":

> "that you consider your peculiar doctrine, which goes way beyond anything the Church has ever taught, to be the only legitimate, Christian and Church position; that you maintain it in spite of all documentary evidence to the contrary; that you alone teach Reformation doctrine. That is the psychology of the major sects, and it is completely and utterly non-churchly. … Since Barth teaches something one way, everybody is a heretic who teaches it some other way"[102].

Brunner went ahead to accuse Barth of carrying "a year-long theological terror" that only isolated him the more, not because he represents a particular opinion, but because, "you identify this particular opinion with the article on which the Church stands or falls". This type of tension between Barth and Brunner is a call to consider a symphonic understanding of pluralism.

5.2. The Question of Religious Pluralism

Before one can discuss Barth's theological method in relation to today's question of religious pluralism without bias, it is important to situate him within the context of his age. As far as religion is concerned, Karl Barth lived within a *secular age* and not within a *pluralistic age*. Secularism deals with the tendency to focus on the world at the expense of the divine. In fact, with the arrival of the secular age, people tended to have staged a coup d'état against the gods by expelling them from our universe and taking over as its Lord and Master. Any god who stubbornly refused to go away was, not necessarily persecuted but, just totally ignored and, the business of the day was carried on as if such a god was not there. In other words, religion was at best confined to a strictly private domain in the

[102] Quoted in J. HART, *The Barth-Brunner Correspondence*, p. 40.

society. Humanity was finally "liberated" from the shackles of religion and, religion was discussed within the limits of reason alone. Certainly, there were talks about God; but these had to be done in a secular manner if they were to be taken seriously. And to talk about God in a secular fashion meant to use non-theological categories that were intelligible to the age. Even in their interpretation of the biblical concepts, exegetes must go *outside* the scripture in order to interpret the scripture. This was the age into which Karl Barth was situated.

Pluralism on the other hand, even though it is an offshoot of secularism, became a serious theological concern towards the end of Barth's theological career. His theological effort was concentrated therefore on the secular society and on the secular culture into which he was born. His concern was to prove that God-talk was not only possible, but must be done on the basis of the Scripture. He was concerned to retrieve the *purity* of theology from what he believed was the contamination from outside interference. It was not therefore surprising that he set out to do a *theology of religion* and was less concerned with today's issues of *theology of religions*. His primary interest was not with the people of other religions. He was more concerned with his fellow Christian theologians, whom he considered as having derailed from their Christian calling, by making religion rather than revelation the central theme of their theology. It is therefore within this context that we are going to situate Barth's theology vis-à-vis religious pluralism.

Although Barth was never persuaded to agree with his liberal-theologians colleagues that the central theme of Christian theology was religion, he delved into the question of religion in order to contrast it with what he believes should be that central theme. His systematic contrasting of religion with the gospel in the *Römerbrief* shows that for him, the gospel rather than religion should be the major preoccupation of theologians. If anything, religion is presented as the limit of human existence:

> "Religion, though it come disguised as the most intimate friend of men, be they Greeks or barbarians, is nevertheless the adversary. Religion is the KRISIS of culture and of barbarism. Apart from God, it is the most dangerous enemy a man has on this side of the grave. For religion is the human possibility of remembering that we must die"[103].

[103] K. BARTH, *Romans*, p. 268.

Even when he modified this existential anthropological view of religion in *Church Dogmatics*, Barth never deviated from his stance on religion as "the realm of man's attempts to justify and to sanctify himself before a capricious and arbitrary picture of God"[104]. His attack on religion is based not on sociological or anthropological, or any other scientific ground, but purely on theological ground. He approached religion from a standpoint different from the commitments of other theorists of religion[105]. If one is therefore to understand him well, then one needs to approach his arguments from this theological perspective. Our next chapter will try to examine Barth's theory of religion from this perspective in order to determine whether only such perspective guarantees that a theology of religion is distinctively Christian.

[104] CD I/2, p. 280.

[105] For a strong argument on why Barth's theory of religion should take its pride of place in the canon of religious studies, cf., Garrett GREEN, *Challenging the Religious Studies Canon: Karl Barth's Theory of Religion*, in *Journal of Religion* 75, 4 (1995), p. 473-486. But however strong and convincing Green's logic is, it will be premature to further pursue the arguments here for two basic reasons: first, our immediate objective is not to determine whether or not Barth's theory of religion should be incorporated into the religious studies canon being taught in the universities, but rather to examine how his theological method addresses the question of religious pluralism; secondly, doing so here would negate Barth's own insistence that theology should not be subsumed into the religious studies department if it will not risk total disappearance altogether in the academy. However, we shall certainly return to this topic later on in Part III of our research when we discuss David Tracy's proposal for theology to be done as a public discourse, and ask whether this can be possible if theologians prefer not to engage in religious studies polemics for fear that the public scrutiny of their theological discourse, using criteria inherent in the existing religious studies canon, would erode the purity of their theology and reduce it to mere religious studies and no longer theology as such.

CONCLUSION

A SYMPHONIC UNDERSTANDING OF PLURALISM

In an address at the meeting of the *Goethegesellschaft* in Hannover on January 8, 1957, entitled "Panorama of a Century", Barth had this to say:

> "In the Church there exists a community of concern that may be endangered, but never cancelled out, by even the most serious differences in approach. In the Church and hence in theology the commandment, 'Honor thy father and thy mother', is valid, and this commandment remains binding on the children even when they have left their parents' house. To respect and sustain the ties that bind the present to the past, in spite of deep breaches, is therefore imperative"[106].

He went ahead to expose what he felt was the strength and weaknesses of the 19th Century theology. Its strength, in his view, lies in its exposition to the world, engaging in conversation with the contemporary world and the challenging issues of their times. But this was to prove its weakness also, in that it took its confrontation with the contemporary age as its *decisive* and *primary* concern. And Barth listed three implications of this openness to the world: (1) that through the open windows and doors came so much stimulation for thought and discussion that there was hardly time or love or zeal left for the task to be accomplished within the house itself, resulting in the inability of the 19th century theology to achieve any new and positive understanding of Christian truth and truths in themselves; (2) that not a few doors inside were slammed which should have been kept open as well, resulting in reductions and oversimplifications in that theology's purported Christian understanding when it ascribed normative character to the ideas of its environment, with the consequence that both theology and the Church become impoverished and trivialized as a result of the 'notoriously foul air' that came in along with fresh air; (3) that fatal errors blew in, were admitted, and made themselves at home, resulting in these errors not only simply being tolerated, but in fact enjoying birth-right and even authority[107].

[106] Karl BARTH, *Evangelical Theology in the 19th Century*, in *The Humanity of God*, Louisville, Kentucky, Westminster John Knox Press, 1960, p. 11- 33, p. 12.
[107] Cf., K. BARTH, *Evangelical Theology in the 19th Century*, p. 18-21.

For him, these "theological catastrophes" would have been avoided had theologians of that century not taken man so seriously.

From Barth's worries regarding the so-called weaknesses of the 19th Century theology, it is evident that his understanding of pluralism was negative. He was not willing to admit of a two-way approach to theology. He thinks that any other approach that did not conform to his deep revelational approach prevents the accomplishments of important tasks that are needed to be done within the church. Although to some extents his fears might be genuine; however, if one approaches pluralism from a symphonic perspective, those fears might as well evaporate. This is why we want to end this chapter by proposing for a symphonic understanding of pluralism.

It is true that no theological treatise has ever been written without an explicit or implicit recognition of the fact of plurality in the background. But plurality as a simple awareness of multiplicity and diversity in our world is not the same as pluralism which not only emphasizes that side by side the one, the singular, there is always the many, the plural, but goes to the extent of making multiplicity the very predicate of the one. Some view pluralism in a totalitarian form of "nothing but" multiplicity, thus making pluralism the anti-climax of plurality by destroying the "one" in order to prop up the "many". In doing so however, the 'many' becomes another form of the 'one' and we are back to square one – the anti-pluralistic mode. There is no doubt that many of the so-called pluralist theologians (especially those that belong to the extreme form of the movement) end up with this tendency. These people tend to destroy the uniqueness and singularity of each world-view in their bid to "pluralitize" the world. What they fail to realize is that pluralism does not equate absence of singularity but rather means presence of several singularities each with its own uniqueness and identity which are best left to perform their individual melodies in order to form a symphony. This is our understanding of pluralism; it is not the "nothing but", the totalitarian type of pluralism. We lean rather towards the ideological, world-view type of pluralism which Heinrich Fries describes as "a plurality which is purely scientific and theoretical, which acknowledges that, in view of the differentiation of the sciences and their methods and languages, it is in practice impossible nowadays to find a synthesis which could provide us with a common view, a universal co-ordination or integration of all

perspectives"[108]. This is the type of pluralism that does not view the scientific methodologies and the findings of the historical-critical method as excrescence of authentic Christian theology, but rather as part of that great symphony which demonstrates God's ingenuity as a great composer. Barth's limiting of theology to a reflection on revelation appears to be a call to sing in unison. Whereas a song in unison has its own flavour and uniqueness, we believe that symphony far outclasses unison in sheer density and dexterity.

It might be the case, however, that Barth did not arbitrarily arrive at the "unison" with which we have equated his theology. And it is not clear whether he would have continued with such "unison" had he suddenly become younger after he had written the fourth volume of *Church Dogmatics* (the Doctrine of Reconciliation). Evidences abound in the said volume (as we shall see in the next chapter) where Barth modified (without however retracting) his earlier positions with regards to Jesus Christ as the "one and only" light, by acknowledging that alongside the light that is Jesus, there are in fact "other lights". He was even more direct in his self-assessment of *Church Dogmatics* when he wrote: "I also understand the *Church Dogmatics*… not as the conclusion, but as the initiation of a new exchange of views about the question of proper theology, the established knowledge of God, and the obedient service of God among and for men"[109]. The point we are making is that Barth might have been "forced" by circumstances to sing in unison as a reaction against what he perceived as a cacophony of voices with which Neo-Protestantism sang.

Neo-Protestantism, as epitomized by Schleiermacher, began their theology with the general story of humanity's quest for God – the human religiosity. Within this human religiosity, they tried to locate and establish the truth of Christianity. In its Neo-Protestant form therefore, the truth of Christ must find its place within the general human story. The implication of this method is obvious: the general human story conditions and directs the Christ story. And this was logically demonstrated in the activities of those liberal theologians during the World War I. Barth's dialectical theology was a systematized effort to destroy that movement in theology. In order to rebuild, he decided therefore to reverse the order: the story of Jesus

[108] Heinrich FRIES, *Theological Reflections on the Problem of Pluralism*, in *Theological Studies*, 28, 1 (1967), p. 3-26, p. 5.
[109] Karl BARTH, *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction*, Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans, 1963, p. xi-xii.

Christ – the covenant between God and humankind – must be told first, and all other human story must find a place in this story of Jesus. This procedure was seen by others as not being coherent with the overall human story that coheres with one another to form a body of scientific whole. But Barth was quick to argue that what matters in faith is its own internal coherence which makes it "rational" so to say. Therefore, as long as it is internally coherent, Christian theology can and must lay claim to scientificity. As we have noted earlier, he was ill at ease to use the word "science" to describe the intelligibility of theology. But he maintained nonetheless the use of it, if not for any other thing at least to broaden the meaning of the word "science" so that no particular form of academic endeavour will exclusively appropriate it. Each science has its distinctiveness; and the distinctiveness of theology lies in its distinctive talk about God. The ability of the church to criticize and revise its talk about God makes theology, in his view, a science.

However, when it comes to the broader question of how other "talks" about God which emanate from human stories aside the story of Jesus Christ could still be regarded as "theologies", Barth's theology failed to answer it. Karl Becker puts this issue in form of three questions regarding revelation which he says belongs in fundamental theology: "Did Christ bring a revelation for humankind? Is that the only revelation? Does it say everything about God and men that God wishes to share with us?"[110] While the first question no longer poses much problem in theology as it has relatively sufficiently been treated, the same cannot be said of the last two. And this is the core of pluralist arguments in theology. While Barth's theology tends to answer the last two questions in the affirmative thereby making a universalistic claim, most pluralistic arguments deny such a claim. But precisely in its denial of such a claim, it makes another claim which it takes to be universal. This long quotation from Karl Rahner captures the difficulty:

> "The real problem of a pluralism of convictions originates where convictions which factually are particular must, on principle, claim universal validity, if they do not want to surrender their own very essence. An example: a Mozart club and a Hindemith society, an association of entomologists and an association of patrons for an aquarium represent a particular conviction; but in no way do they

[110] Karl J. BECKER, *Theology of the Christian Economy of Salvation*, in K. F. BECKER & I. MORALI (ed.), *Catholic Engagement with World Religions*, p. 357-379, p. 359.

> aspire to gain the interest of everyone. On the other hand, Christianity, a Christian denomination, the ideology of the 'Humanistic Union', a party of militant dialectical materialists regard themselves, unless they deny their own very essence, as called and equipped with a claim to truth and with a mission which is addressed to everyone, as a basically universal conviction, as a world view. However, the doctrine which says in turn that such world views are in principle impossible, that such universalistic claims must forever and everywhere be a priori false, would itself be just another such conviction with quite practical consequences"[111].

To this effect therefore, it is difficult to identify with the brand of pluralism that tends toward "nothing but". It is rather safer to associate with a symphonic understanding of it. This is because to stick to the idea of one universal rational form of theological world view (even when that form is called pluralism) is to be against the spirit of postmodernism. Such "pluralism" becomes another metanarrative – a form of absolute truth in all its totalitarianism. In his articulation of postmodern condition, Lyotard tried to dismantle this "super-story" explanatory framework with which modernity had presented its critical method as the ultimate liberation method. He calls this super-story "metanarrative" and argues that such narrative has lost its credibility in this postmodern period. He says: "The grand narrative has lost its credibility… regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation"[112]. For him, in place of such metanarratives that claim to be all encompassing, we should rather focus on the small stories, the *petits récits*, which present the multiplicity of theories and bring out the diversity of human experiences. The idea is to make sure that the "other" is not left out simply because it does not fit into a pre-fabricated system.

Such indeed was the bane of modernity which measured rationality and scientificity through a process of exclusion – whatever does not fit into the conceptual system already fashioned as a measure of rationality and scientificity is excluded from that club. Thus saw the expulsion of theology from the club of science. It was precisely against this system which repressed theology that Barth began a fight. But he did not finish it and only ended up developing yet another system of doing theology that became somewhat an "oppressor" of the

[111] Karl RAHNER, *Schriften zur Theologie* 6 (Einsiedeln, 1965), p. 47, quoted by H. FRIES, *Theological Reflections on Pluralism*, p. 5.
[112] Jean-François LYOTARD, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, and Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1984, p. 37.

"other". If pluralism in theology is to be beneficial to Christianity, maybe it is best approached from the point of view of a symphony.

Perhaps Balthasar might have, to some extent, inherited Barth's theological method in such a way that one can say that he rode on the wave of Barth's popularity. Both men can therefore be described as very strong theological allies. At a time that Barth was finding it very difficult to convince his Protestant colleagues with his new-found theology, a Catholic by the name of Hans Urs von Balthasar came up with a ground-breaking, extensive exposition and interpretation of the theology of Karl Barth[113]. In the face of surge in Western Modernism with its ill-disposition towards Christianity, notable theologians sought to respond positively to Modernity. Karl Rahner for instance offered a somewhat progressive response that sought to accommodate rather than discard modernity. Bernard Lonergan on his part believed that the way forward with modernism was to critically appropriate modernity. But Balthasar, like Barth, thought that such responses were detrimental to Christianity. They refused to reduce Christianity to the modern sensibilities, but instead decided that Christianity should rather challenge them. This is where Barth and Balthasar became close theological dialoguing partners. There is therefore a very close similarity between Barth's and Balthasar's theologies. But Balthasar's use of the concept of symphony is an important food for thought.

Balthasar likened God's revelation to a great symphony[114]. Just like an orchestra must be pluralist in order to unfold the wealth of the totality that resounds in the composer's mind, he explains, in the same way, God in his revelation performs a symphony that contains within it both the unity of God's plan and the polyphonous orchestra of Creation. Before the Word took flesh, this world orchestra was "fiddling about without any plan". But thanks to the person of Jesus Christ, the "cacophony" has become indeed a symphony under his direction. It is only in performing the divine symphony that the players can discover why they were assembled together in the first instance. Balthasar says: "Initially, they stand or sit next to one another as strangers, in mutual contradiction, as it were. Suddenly, as the music begins, they realize how they are integrated. Not in unison,

[113] Hans Urs von BALTHASAR, *The Theology of Karl Barth: Exposition and Interpretation* (1951), tr. Edward T. Oakes, San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 1992.
[114] Cf., Hans Urs von BALTHASAR, *Truth is Symphonic: Aspects of Christian Pluralism*, trans. Graham Harrison, San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 1987.

but what is far more beautiful – in sym-phony"[115]. Balthasar therefore conceives symphony as being "far more beautiful" than unison.

Granted that Barth appreciated symphony, and, not only revered Mozart, but in fact took him as his very vital theological source[116], even writing a treatise on him[117]; however, Balthasar's appropriation of symphony appears to be more global than Barth's. And Philip McCosker agrees: "Karl Barth exalts Mozart's music as the sound of creation's redeemed freedom, in which yes always trumps no, and Adrienne von Speyr celebrates a childlike Mozart united in prayer with God; but von Balthasar's vision of music, and of Mozart in particular, is richer"[118]. Its richness becomes evident when one considers Balthasar's argument for the symphonic nature of Christian truth:

> "Today, therefore, perhaps the most necessary thing to proclaim and take to heart is that Christian truth is symphonic. Sym-phony by no means implies a sickly sweet harmony lacking all tension. Great music is always dramatic: there is a continual process of intensification, followed by a release of tension at a higher level. But dissonance is not the same as cacophony. Nor is it the only way of maintaining the symphonic tension. Mozart imparts something winged, buoyant, internally vibrant to his simplest melody – how often he works with simple scales! – so that the power that enables us to recognize him after only a few bars seems to flow from an inexhaustible reservoir of blessed tension, filling and tautening every member. The Church's reservoir, which lies at its core, is 'the depth of the riches of God' in Jesus Christ. The Church exhibits this fullness in an inexhaustible multiplicity, which keeps flowing, irresistibly, from its unity"[119].

It is important to note how he calls 'the depth of the riches of God in Jesus Christ' the church's reservoir. The main tap through which to draw water from this reservoir is revelation. But at the same time, there is a multiplicity of other taps drawing water from this same reservoir; and it is not in the interest of the Church in today's contemporary world to close all other taps leaving only one or a few

[115] H. von BALTHASAR, *Truth is Symphonic*, p. 9.
[116] CD III/3, §50, p.297-299.
[117] Karl BARTH, *Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart*, tr. Clarence K. Pott, Eugene, Oregon, Wipf and Stock, 2003.
[118] Philip MCCOSKER, *Blessed Tension: Barth and von Balthasar on the Music of Mozart*, in *The Way*, 44, 4 (2005), p. 81-95, p. 93.
[119] H. von BALTHASAR, *Truth is Symphonic*, p. 15.

flowing (maybe for fear of draining the reservoir). Well, the Good News is this: the reservoir does not exhaust!

CHAPTER 4

BARTH'S THEORY OF RELIGIONS IN THE LIGHT OF HIS THEOLOGY OF RETRIEVAL

INTRODUCTION

We deliberately skipped discussing Barth's theory of religions in detail in the last chapter in order to give it the full attention it requires in this chapter. For this reason, we have decided to divide the development of his theory of religion into three periods: The first we shall title the pre-*Romans* and the *Romans* period, which shall comprise fragments of his treatment of religion from his 1916 Aarau lectures up to (and especially including) his 1922 *Romans* commentary. The second period will comprise his famous §17 of *Church Dogmatics* which can be considered his strongest treatment on the theme of religion. The third period is entitled "Barth's 'mature' theory of religion", and shall cover the arguments which started in §16 of CD I/2, suspended in §17, and only to be continued in §18. This argument is to be culminated in §69 of CD IV/3 with his treatment of the truth *extra muros ecclesiae* within his doctrine of reconciliation.

1. THE PRE-ROMANS AND ROMANS ERA

1.1. Barth's Sketchy Treatments on the Subject of Religion before *Romans*

This period covers his Aarau lecture of 1916 and his Leutwil lecture of 1917 which we partly mentioned in the previous chapter. The crux of the problem in the Aarau lecture is that, because he perceived the "religious life" of the Christian Europe as incompatible with the very dictates of the Bible, he categorizes the religious righteousness as an "illusion" and "a self-deception", and wonders what really people can gain from religion. He wondered whether any of the machineries of modern churchliness can actually help people in their search for the righteousness of God. For him, all these are part of the acting "as if" which prevents people from doing the right thing.

In this lecture, one can notice that Barth uses two expressions to describe religion namely, acting "as if", and "illusion". These two expressions were also being frequently used by other thinkers of that epoch to describe religion. In fact, the "as if" philosophy developed

out of a book on the subject matter by Hans Vaihinger published in 1911[1]. In a nutshell, Vaihinger's proposition is that in order to live peacefully in this irrational world, human beings must willingly accept falsehoods or fictions. With his endorsement of Kant's denial of the knowledge of things-in-themselves, he then suggested that it was necessary to use one's will to construct fictional explanations of phenomena "as if" there were rational grounds for believing that such a method reflects reality. It was not therefore necessary to take into consideration logical contradictions, which he suggested should simply be disregarded in order to move on. Thus, "in physics, man must proceed "as if" a material world exists independently of perceiving subjects; in behaviour, he must act "as if" ethical certainty were possible; in religion, he must believe "as if" there were a God"[2]. He is saying, in other words, that there are so many assumptions in our intellectual and moral lives which are unfounded, but which we must act "as if" they are true in order to arrive at non-rational solutions to problems that have no rational answers.

Since the appearance of this "as if" philosophy, many philosophers and theologians alike have been employing the expression in their treatises. Sigmund Freud, while accepting the validity of its usage in philosophy, denied its legitimacy as far as religious ideas are concerned[3]. He insists on the psychical genesis of religious ideas (such as the idea of 'God' in monotheism) arising out of the "father complex" – the infantile emotional need for a powerful, supernatural *pater familias*. For him, "such ideas, which put themselves forward as dogmas, are not deposits from experience or end products of cogitation, they are illusions, fulfilling the oldest, most powerful, most pressing desires of the human race"[4]. Their only "usefulness" is to serve as a psychological consolation and buffer in the face of man's fear of nature. He acknowledges that illusions are not necessarily false or unrealizable or in conflict with reality; and that so many questions remain as yet unanswered by science. But he

[1] Cf., Hans VAIHINGER, *Die Philosophie des Als Ob. System der theoretischen, praktischen und religiösen Fiktionen der Menschheit auf Grund eines idealistischen Positivismus. Mit einem Anhang über Kant und Nietzsche*, Berlin, Reuther & Reichard, 1911. This book was translated into English as, *The Philosophy of "As if": A System of the Theoretical, Practical and Religious Fictions of Mankind*, trans. C. K. Ogden, London, Routledge, 1924; repr. London, 2001.

[2] Cf. "*as if, philosophy of*" in *Encyclopædia Britannica Ultimate Reference Suite*, Chicago, Encyclopædia Britannica, 2011.

[3] Cf., Sigmund FREUD, *The Future of an Illusion* (1927), tr. J. A. Underwood and Shaun Whiteside, London, Penguin Books, 2004.

[4] S. FREUD, *The Future of an Illusion*, p. 36.

maintains that "scientific work is the sole avenue that can lead to knowledge of the reality outside ourselves"[5]. As for religious ideas, they are "far less likely" to be realized, hence, they can simply be described as "analogous to a delusion"; a wishful dream from which human beings will one day wake up.

Freud's intention here is obvious: a total dismantling of religion and every idea it stands for, and their replacement with an *a-religious*, secular society where human beings would be free from the so-called "father complex" and create a utopian society where reason and science will reign supreme, and human beings will become lords and masters of themselves and their universe. This is where his employment of the "as if" and "illusion" differs from that of Barth. Barth never envisaged such an '*a-religious'* society. If he qualified human religiosity as acting "as if" and as an "illusion", it was to demonstrate that there is something much more than "religion" that is contained in the Bible. He was not out to wipe out the idea of "God" and of "religion" as did Freud, but rather to berate humans for maintaining the idea of the divine while at the same time not allowing the divine be; not allowing God to be God; instead, acting "as if" they (humans) were God and, using human religiosity (which he describes as "illusion" comparable to building a Tower of Babel) to bridge the distance between God and humankind. By the time he presents his next paper, it had become obvious that he is searching for something beyond mere "religion" (as is commonly understood) in the bible.

This paper was the Leutwil lecture of 1917. Here, in response to the question 'What is in the Bible?' Barth gave the normal three answers found already in Protestant Liberalism namely, history, morality, and religion. According to this liberal view (which Barth seemed not to have immediately disputed), religion is seen in terms of "what we think of God, how we find the proper way to him, and how we are to relate to him in community. Thus, it reveals something that we now gladly call 'piety'"[6]. He agreed to the description of the Bible as the "charter document of piety"; but at the same time he strongly insists that the Bible contains something much more important and greater than religion and piety. In fact, he traces the root cause of divisions in Christendom to the fact that every denomination invokes the bible as their source of "proper" and "revealed" piety which thereby makes all others wrong. He even says that for those who want

[5] S. FREUD, *The Future of an Illusion*, p. 38-39.
[6] K. BARTH, *The New World in the Bible*, in *The Word of God and Theology*, p. 24.

to see it that way, every religion can be found in the Bible. But then (and this is the high point of his argument), a closer look at the Bible reveals that there is no religion in it but rather the "other" which he deems "the new" and "the greater" thing. That thing "greater" than religion and piety which the Bible contains is revelation. The Bible should be seen therefore, not so much as religion but as revelation. And if at all the Bible contains religion or piety, it is the piety or religion of God that is at stake here and not the piety or religion of the Jews or Christians or any other religious group for that matter. We notice therefore that for Barth, Christian religion shares the same common trait with the rest of the world religions: they are all human subversionary means of truncating the history of God by equating it with human history, and therefore misplacing human standpoint with the standpoint of God. We can therefore see why he described religion as an illusion and as acting "as if".

1.2. The Concept of Religion in *Romans*

A more organized concept of religion is found especially in the seventh chapter of *Romans* with the title "Freedom". Here, Barth exegetes the seventh chapter of St. Paul's letter to the Romans. Substituting Paul's usage of the term "law" to read "religion", he subdivided the chapter into three subheadings namely: The Frontier of Religion; The Meaning of Religion; and, The Reality of Religion. His intention was to argue that what "law" meant for Paul, "religion" means for the people of our time. He therefore presented his thesis about religion thus: "religion is a human possibility, and, consequently, a limited possibility, which by its ineffectiveness, establishes and authenticates the freedom of God to confer grace upon men"[7]. It is precisely because it is a limited possibility that he perceives religion as "peculiarly dangerous" in its attempt to embrace "a new and higher order" which, by its limited status, it cannot attain. On the contrary, through the impossibility of grace, rendered possible only in God, humanity can encounter freedom. In other words, what we search frantically without success to get through religion, we can effortlessly get through grace. The reason he adduced for this conclusion is this: religion is under the law and therefore committed, in the same way that a wife or a husband is bound to her/his partner as long as they are alive, and therefore not free to mingle with another

[7] K. BARTH, *Romans*, p. 229-230.

partner. But when this "necessary ordering of the relation between God and man in religion" is removed, one is no longer under the law hence, free. This freedom is achieved in Golgotha which he says is the end of law and the frontier of religion. Religion, in his view, is therefore the limit of human existence:

> "… through the slain body of Christ, we are what we are not. Observed from this scene of death 'we' live no more; we are dead to the law, dead to the possibility and necessity of religion, dead to every human possibility; we are removed, set free, unfettered. As a widow is set free by the law to be joined to another husband, so the road to that other life, where there is no duplicity, no ambiguity, is thrown open to us"[8].

It is this freedom, he says, not religion, which guarantees people's obedience to the categorical imperative and other ethical behaviours. Religion may oppose human passions, yet, it still comes within the generic term "sin" because, being within the examination of the law, it leads people to sin. In fact, he describes religious passion as analogous to death: "The frontier of religion is the line of death which separates flesh from spirit, time from eternity, human possibility from the possibility of God"[9]. It is at this frontier or limit that he says we are discharged from the law and that this strong human passion of *eritis sicut Deus* occasioned through religion will be gone for good. When this happens, Barth says religion "dies" because we shall have been discharged from the law.

However, the "death" of religion does not mean a "religion-less" society as advocated by Freud. It rather means the limit of human possibility; and as the limit, it is the final possibility. It is like taking people to the stream but not being able to carry them over. What is needed to cross the stream is no longer religion but grace. Any attempt at this point to use religion to cross over is what Barth says leads to sin. But he is careful not to conclude from this argument that the law itself (that is religion) is sin. He describes religion as "that last and noblest human possibility which encounters us at the threshold and meeting-place of two worlds, but which, nevertheless remains itself on this side (of) the abyss dividing sinners from those who are under grace"[10]. This is the critical point where grace and law confront each other. And when this confrontation is made, grace

[8] K. BARTH, *Romans*, p. 234.
[9] K. BARTH, *Romans*, p. 238.
[10] K. BARTH, *Romans*, p. 240.

comes up with its definitive 'No!' At this point there is a radical separation between God and humanity. But this radical separation does not entail a substitution of religion for a "superior" thing in order to escape sin. Barth insists that this "escapist" mentality does not help matters because people end up with another of the human possibilities. It does not take them to the divine possibility. What people need to do is not to try to escape religion but rather to try to understand the meaning and "uses" of religion. And he gave us quite a dose of functions that he thinks religion performs:

> "Religion compels us to the perception that God is not to be found in religion. Religion makes us to know that we are competent to advance no single step. Religion, as the final human possibility, commands us to halt. Religion brings us to the place where we must wait, in order that God may confront us – on the other side of the frontier of religion"[11].

All these "meanings" and "uses" of religion do not suggest that religion is equated with sin, or that it should be abrogated. On the contrary, he is suggesting that the correct uses of religion should be put in proper perspective in order not to confuse it with grace. When religion is put within its proper perspective, the real meaning of religion will be revealed, namely, "that our whole concrete and observable existence is sinful"; it means that "through religion we perceive that men have rebelled against God, and that their rebellion is a rebellion of slaves"[12]. Barth perceives religion as rebellion because he felt that it is through it that people stretch out to reach what they are not, only to end up encountering what they are. By the time they encounter what they are, they are already "fenced in and shut out". This is how religion, though not sinful in itself, becomes, in his view, the occasion of sin. Or , as he puts it, "religion is the working capital of sin; its fulcrum; the means by which men are removed from direct union with God and thrust into disunion, that is, into the recognition of their – creatureliness"[13].

Barth's ferocious attack on religion is now becoming clearer. If religion leads people to be removed from direct union with God, then one could conclude that it is better avoided than embraced. In fact, this is exactly Barth's submission when he says that when viewed from the standpoint of God religion is better left undone. Anything that

[11] K. BARTH, *Romans*, p. 242.
[12] Cf., K. BARTH, *Romans*, p. 246.
[13] K. BARTH, *Romans*, p. 248.

separates people from God is described as "death"; and since religion functions as that fulcrum of separation, Barth concludes that "Death is the meaning of religion"; it is "an abyss"; it is "terror" because in it, one is neither at peace with oneself nor in tune with the infinite[14].

A logical conclusion from these negative impressions of religion is that religion is absolutely useless and should be completely discarded. Well, this is not Barth's conclusion. In spite of all these damaging criticism, he seemed to have reserved some essential place for religion: "We cannot stand on the definition of religion, or indeed of any human possibility, as though it were merely sin. Religion is the place where every human capacity is enlightened by divine light. Placed outside the region of divinity, religion, nevertheless, represents divinity as its delegate or impress or negative"[15]. The divinity is after all represented in religion, but in clouded or blurred form just like the photographic negative represents the image captured, but in a negative form. A negative image is not only clouded and unclear, but also an inversion of the image. In the same way, Barth says that the image of the divine and of reality captured by religion appears in a clouded and inverted (negative) form and not in positive form. The problem he noticed is that people cling unto this negative image and take it to be the positive. And this is where he cautions that religion can become dangerous. But in reality, religion is holy within the sphere of human activity as a pointer to divinity, as a parable of divinity. If only human beings could recognize that they can advance no further than the possibility of religion, then religion is after all righteous and good. But the big question is: is this recognition possible within the sphere of human capability? Following Barth's arguments, his answer should be obvious: it is not possible within human capability, but it is possible within the capability of God. And the earlier human beings realized this fact and stopped making efforts on their own through human religiosity, the better he thinks it will be for the human race. Therefore, for Barth, even in its "usefulness", religion still needs divine possibility in order to come to reality with its human impossibility.

Barth's concluding treatise on religion in *Romans* is devoted to arguing that religion provides practical and not theoretical answer to the problem of sin. As the last human possibility, religion is in practice "the sure and solid answer to guilt and destiny" not in terms

[14] Cf., K. BARTH, *Romans*, p. 253.
[15] K. BARTH, *Romans*, p. 254.

of releasing people from these, but in terms of bringing people under their sway. These problems of life are not discovered and solved by religion but at least, religion discloses the truth namely, that these problems cannot be solved. Religion therefore is not meant to be enjoyed or celebrated but rather as a yoke to be borne. Barth calls it "a misfortune which every human being has to endure, though it is, in the majority of cases, a hidden suffering"[16]. When therefore Barth talks in *Church Dogmatics* about revelation being the "abolition" of religion, we shall reason with Garrett Green (as we shall see shortly) that the translation of the German term *Aufhebung* to read 'abolition' is incorrect and leads English readers of Barth to a wrong interpretation of the latter's views on religion. Barth never advocated for an abolition of religion in *Romans*.

To be noted also is that throughout his treatment of religion in this passage of *Romans*, nowhere did Barth single out any particular religion to be castigated. In fact, he was not interested in mentioning individual religions. He was only interested in the concept of religion as the limit of human possibility. It is therefore wrong to use this passage as an argument that Barth was castigating other religions. If anything, it was the Christian religion that came under great scrutiny. This scrutiny was to be taken up again in *Church Dogmatics* more forcefully in his antithesis before he presented his synthesis that Christianity is the true religion.

2. BARTH'S THEORY OF RELIGION IN *CHURCH DOGMATICS*

Barth's mind did actually change in *Church Dogmatics*. In spite of the arguments to the contrary, he would stake his neck on the document that made this change possible. In an essay he contributed to the *Christian Century*, he said:

> "… in these years I have had to rid myself of the last remnants of a philosophical, i.e. anthropological (in America one says 'humanistic' or 'naturalistic') foundation and exposition of Christian doctrine. The real document of this farewell is, in truth, not the much-read brochure *Nein*!, directed against Brunner in 1934, but rather the book about the evidence for God of Anselm of Canterbury which appeared in 1931. Among all my books I regard this as the one written with the greatest satisfaction. … For before, I had been

[16] K. BARTH, *Romans*, p. 259.

> at least partly hampered… by the eggshells of philosophical systematics"[17].

The above quotation was the summary of the changes that occurred in Barth's theology which he personally made to the editors of the *Christian Century* in 1938. Whether that change of mind led to a new starting point in his theology is still contested[18]. But it is obvious that in ridding himself of the last remnant of philosophical foundation, he developed a new methodology which he calls "a Christological concentration"[19]. This new methodology permitted his theology to appear in a new light. The new light is such that, from now on, every Christian teaching must be viewed from the perspective of Jesus Christ. It is in this new methodological clarity that he approached his concept of religion in *Church Dogmatics*. What is actually new with regards to religion is that, following his insistence that methodological clarity ensures that doctrines be understood in their concrete Christological and therefore narrative form as against their abstract philosophical form, a theory of religion must therefore

[17] Karl BARTH, *How I Changed My Mind* (with an Introduction and an Epilogue by John D. GODSEY), Richmond, John Knox Press, 1966, p. 42-43.

[18] The common belief is that Barth's study of Anselm led him to a new starting point in thought, to the extent that he had to abandon as a 'false start' the project he had already started in *Die christliche Dogmatik*, in order to begin afresh a new dogmatics which was the *Church Dogmatics*. But McCormack thinks differently. He de-emphasized the importance of the Anselm book in the theological development of Barth by arguing that the book is an exercise in dialectical theology. For him, there is no new starting point to be found in the book, and, the theological method found there was already outlined in the *Göttingen Prolegomena*. He pointed out that according to the Balthasarian notion of a turn from dialectic to analogy, 'dialectic' is understood as a system of grounding theology in philosophical categories of existentialism and phenomenology, whereas 'analogy' is effort to ground theology in revelation alone and thus develop what may be termed 'a pure' theology free from any philosophical stain. But he argues that in this sense, analogy and dialectic coexisted in Barth's theology throughout the 1920s, thus, analogy is not a new element in Anselm book. Again, he argues that Barth was still a dialectical theologian in the *Church Dogmatics*. But he refused to subscribe to an attempted recasting of the formula by Michael Beintker suggesting that from dialectal method as the leading thought-form, Barth turned to analogical method as the leading thought-form. For him, while this formulation allows for the coexistence of dialectical and analogical methods before and after the Anselm book, its defect is the presumption that there was a predominance of dialectical method in Barth prior to the Anselm book. But he insists that a careful study of the *Göttingen Dogmatics* shows a predominance, not of dialectical method but, of dogmatic method. For him, the dialectical method was only employed in such areas of investigation as the doctrine of God and Christology, which require such. This system of employing the dialectical method used in the *Göttingen Dogmatics*, continued (according to him) to be used in *Church Dogmatics* for the same areas as mentioned above. His conclusion therefore is that on the basis of a survey he made, "it is clear that what is 'new' in the Anselm book is at most a *relatively* more faithful unfolding of the dogmatic method which Barth had been employing since 1924. There is no new starting-point here, and no new thought-form". Cf. B. MCCORMACK, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, p. 421-449.

[19] K. BARTH, *How I Changed My Mind*, p. 43.

be understood as a theology of religion. He gave a clue to this when he insists that there cannot really be a non-theological introduction to theology. If therefore he abandoned his earlier Prolegomena in favour of starting directly with *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, one cannot claim that he did not make a new starting point. His "theory" of religion thus is not an abstract thing but a real concrete theology which should be understood as such. As we already indicated, his treatment of religion in CD will be sub-divided into two namely §17 on the one hand, and §§16, 18 and 69, on the other hand.

2.1. Barth's Theory of Religion in §17 of *Church Dogmatics* I/2

This passage is probably the best known Barthian passage dealing on the theme of religion. It is also the passage on which Barth's detractors (especially in the Anglophone world) nail him as an unprecedented and unrepentant exclusivist. Garrett Green has given us a clue to the possible reason why this could be so. He re-translated this particular paragraph of the CD[20], justifying his action on four major reasons. These reasons range from perceived errors contained in the earlier translation, to the unemployment in the English translation of Barth's frequent use of typographical conventions. But by far, the reason that is of paramount importance to us here is his fourth reason namely, the translation of the title of the paragraph as "The Revelation of God as the Abolition of Religion" ("*Gottes Offenbarung als Aufhebung der Religion*"). This leaves the English readers with the false impression that Barth advocates that revelation will eventually abolish religion, or that Christianity is not even a religion in the first instance.

The bone of contention here is the correct rendering of the German word *Aufhebung* into English. While agreeing that the word is ambiguous in German, which makes it difficult to get an accurate English translation, he however opted to use the word "sublimation" (in spite of its inherent danger of confusing it with the Freudian concept of *Sublimierung* which was rendered 'sublimation' in English) as a better translation of the term. His strong reason is that 'sublimation' has a close kingship to the English term 'sublime', whose connotations do a better job of suggesting Barth's meaning. The Merriam-Webster's Dictionary meanings of the word 'sublime' actually read: (a) to elevate or exalt especially in dignity or honour; to

[20] Cf., Karl BARTH, *On Religion: The Revelation of God as the Sublimation of Religion*, translated and introduced by Garrett GREEN, London and New York, T & T Clark, 2006.

render finer (as in purity or excellence) (b) to convert (something inferior) into something of higher worth[21]. Green's argument is that the word *Aufhebung* is the key to the *logic* of Barth's argument; and that any understanding of his argument must begin with the accurate interpretation of his use of this word. He agrees with J. Glenn Gray's explanation of the German verb *aufheben* and how Hegel and other German philosophers have employed the term in their works. Quoting extensively from Gray, he says:

> "The German verb *aufheben* means literally 'to lift something up' – e.g. an apple from the ground. But figuratively and intellectually it has two other, seemingly contradictory connotations. For one thing, it means 'to preserve or save or store up'; for another, it means 'to cancel out or annul'. This double meaning of a single, ordinary German word Hegel seizes upon as the core of his dialectical method of interpreting the past, a method which has played a momentous role down to the present. The historical past of individuals, peoples, even epochs is, according to him, a continuous process of cancelling out or annulling that past and yet at the same time preserving its essentials in a higher synthesis, which is a blend of the old and the new, the past and the present"[22].

If Gray's explanation of the German verb and its employment by Hegel is correct, then one can agree with Green that Barth, who also employs a dialectical 'yes' and 'no' in his theological method, must have retained his employment of the word *Aufhebung* in its dialectical connotations of annulling and preserving; in which case, the English term "sublimation" seems a better rendering of Barth's usage than "abolition". Green insists that by saying that revelation is the sublimation of religion Barth means two things: "(1) that Christians, on the basis of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ must say a resounding *no* to human religion; and (2) that on the same basis they may also say a qualified *yes* to religion"[23]. The first meaning obviously gives the impression of abolition; but the second reveals the element of preservation thus, maintaining the dialectical tension that characterizes Barth's methodology. This is why we think that the English usage of the word 'abolition' in its translation tends to emphasize Barth's dialectical *no* at the expense of his equally

[21] Cf., *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary: A Merriam-Webster*, Springfield, Massachusetts, G. & C. Merriam Company, 1975, p. 1159.
[22] J. Glenn GRAY, Introduction to G. W. F. Hegel, *On Art, Religion, Philosophy*, New York, Harper & Row, 1970, p. 14-15, quoted by Garrett GREEN, ibid., p. 6.
[23] G. GREEN, *On Religion*, p. 11.

dialectical *yes*. Even other thinkers try to bring out this dialectical *yes* and *no* in their explanations of Barth's intention. Trevor Hart for instance wrote: "[T]he *Aufhebung der Religion* is like the cross in John's Gospel, paradoxically both the crucifixion and the 'lifting up' of humanity"[24].

In order therefore to maintain this tension that Barth wants us to maintain, we shall understand the German term *Aufhebung* as 'sublimation' rather than as 'abolition', even though for purposes of consistency we shall not quote directly from Green's translation but will rather stick to the translation we have been using. Where, however the word 'abolition' appears in our citation, we shall cite it as such but shall suffix the word 'sublimation' in parenthesis.

Barth's opening statement in §17 serves as the thesis he set out to defend throughout the entire argument:

> "The revelation of God in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is the judging but also reconciling presence of God in the world of human religion, that is, in the realm of man's attempts to justify and to sanctify himself before a capricious and arbitrary picture of God. The Church is the locus of true religion, so far as through grace it lives by grace"[25].

To develop this argument, Barth had recourse to a familiar but different tripartite subdivision of his argument found earlier in *Romans*. This time, it took the form of (1) The Problem of Religion in Theology; (2) Religion as Unbelief; and (3) True Religion. These three moments can be described as the thesis, the antithesis, and the synthesis, respectively.

2.1.1. The Thesis

In his treatment of the problem of religion in theology, Barth started by limiting his scope. For him, theology has to work *only* within the limit of God's revelation in Jesus Christ; and the Holy Scripture is the *only* valid testament of such revelation. It is within this limited scope that he tried to locate the problem of human religion. However, he says that because "revelation is in fact an event which encounters man", it has as such "the aspect and character of a human phenomenon" with its historical and psychological characters similar

[24] Trevor HART, *Karl Barth, the Trinity, and Pluralism*, in Kevin J. VANHOOZER (ed.), *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age: Theological Essays on Culture and Religion*, Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997, p. 124-142, p. 140.
[25] K. BARTH, CD, I/2, p. 280.

to other human phenomena. Yet, precisely in its similarity with other human phenomena arises the problem of the understanding of revelation. Barth states this problem as follows:

> "From this aspect what we call revelation seems necessarily to be only a particular instance of the universal which is called religion. 'Christianity' or the 'Christian religion' is one predicate for a subject which may have other predicates. It is a species within a genus in which there may be other species. Apart from and alongside Christianity there is Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Shintoism and every kind of animistic, totemistic, ascetic, mystical and prophetic religion"[26].

From this perspective therefore, he insists that there is nothing of uniqueness in revelation, only singularity. In His revelation, God encounters human realities and possibilities. Revelation becomes consequently the presence of God as hidden in human religion; hence, "by God's revealing of Himself the divine particular is hidden in a human universal, the divine content in a human form, and therefore that which is divinely unique in something which is humanly only singular"[27]. It is when viewed this way that Barth says one can decipher the religious nature of revelation. In short, he says that it is not out of place to regard God's revelation also as 'Christianity' and therefore as religion. But he laid emphasis on the 'also' of this statement. According to him, not to regard revelation also as religion would amount to denial of revelation itself. But the question he puts up in his interpretation of this statement is very vital: "Does it mean that what we think we know of the nature and incidence of religion must serve as a norm and principle by which to explain the revelation of God; or, vice versa, does it mean that we have to interpret the Christian religion and all other religions by what we are told by God's revelation?"[28]. In other words, does religion determine revelation or does revelation determine and fashion religion? He sees the Neo-Protestant obsession with the concept of religion as an obsession that tended to choose the first alternative; and in doing so, succeeded in exchanging revelation for the concept of religion. In fact, he traced what he called the "sad story" of the evolution of the concept of religion and how this concept kept on assuming preeminent role in the theologians' work until finally (and unfortunately) "religion has not to

[26] CD, I/2, p. 281.
[27] CD, I/2, p. 282.
[28] CD, I/2, p. 284.

be understood in the light of revelation, but revelation in the light of religion"[29]. For him, this marked the birth of "religionism", and, theology became, for Neo-Protestantism, "the science of religion". He was also convinced that because of this reversal, theology subsequently "lost any serious intention of taking itself seriously as theology"[30].

Barth characterizes this reversal of revelation and religion as "a disruption of the life of the Church" and as "a heresy" which he says must be resisted with every drop of strength available to one, not out of fear of its consequences but rather from knowledge. He insists that the reason why it must be fought against is not because it is novel and dangerous, but rather because it did not proceed out of free theological investigation of truth. He believes that a free theological investigation will reveal where theology went wrong; and he felt that it was in the 17th and 18th centuries when theology fell prey to what he calls "the absolutism" with which people of those centuries made humanity the centre and measure and goal of all things. He did not berate theology for having participated in, and investigated this trend. He rather berated theology for having cooperated in it – a cooperation that he felt made theology to turn 'religionistic'. It was such cooperation, in his estimation, that saw theology develop enormous weakness in the very substance of faith, as it found itself vacillating in such matters as, for instance, the Lordship of Christ, without taking a firm stance. Such inability to take the Christian confessions as definite axioms was what he identified as the real problem of theology in that epoch:

> "The real catastrophe of modern Protestant theology… was not that it imperceptibly allowed itself to be told by philosophy and history and natural science what the 'free investigation of the truth' really is. … The real catastrophe was that theology lost its object, revelation in all its uniqueness. And losing that, it lost the seed of faith with which it could remove mountains, even the mountain of modern humanistic culture. That it really lost revelation is shown by the very fact that it could exchange it, and with it its own birthright, for the concept of 'religion'"[31].

Barth felt that the danger of co-ordinating revelation and religion is that one ends up putting them on the same level and therefore as equals. But he is convinced that to treat revelation and religion as equals is to miss the very point of revelation which is its

[29] CD, I/2, p. 291.
[30] CD, I/2, p. 291.
[31] CD, I/2, p. 294.

superiority over human religion. He says such superiority does not even permit one to consider religion except in the light of revelation. This is why he saw the Neo-Protestant consideration of revelation in the light of human religion as a sort of putting the cart before the horse. Be that as it may, he believes that the solution to this does not lie in a simple inversion of this Neo-Protestant order. Or, to put it as Green framed it, "'revelationism' is no antidote to 'religionism'"[32]. He doesn't accept that the relationship between revelation and religion is a coordinate type, no matter which one is placed first. In fact he sees such as the bane of the earlier theology that sought to subject both to conceptual control. But against this tendency, he insists that there is no basis of comparison between the two as both belong to different spheres. He rather sees the relationship between them as involving an *either-or*. Hence, there is more of discontinuity than continuity between revelation and religion. For him, religion begins with humanity from below, but revelation begins from the Lordship of Christ. However, he does not believe that when revelation begins from Christ above, it thereby means overlooking humanity. Certainly, humanity and human religion should, and even must, be defined and assessed. But he insists this must not be done independently but rather from above. It must not, in his estimation, be subjected to the type of discussion found the so-called "science of religion" which he says in any case does not lay claim to being theology. The truth of revelation is not open to discussion in this sense; for as he says, "revelation is denied when it is regarded as open to discussion"[33]. He believes that such purported discussion does not really speak about revelation but about human beings and their religion. He totally rejects any systematic co-ordination of God and man, and therefore of revelation and religion.

With this rejection of any coordinate relationship between revelation and religion which he calls 'religionism', what positive contribution does Barth bring to the discussion of religion? He proposes a recounting of the history (that is, telling the story) of the relationship between revelation and religion, and thus between God and man. He believes that when such story is recounted, using the methodology of 'Christological concentration' which he has discovered, the real "relationship" between revelation and religion is disclosed: "It is because we remember and apply the Christological

[32] G. GREEN, *On Religion*, p. 14.
[33] CD, I/2, p. 296.

doctrine of the *assumptio carnis* that we speak of revelation as the abolition [sublimation] of religion"[34]. This, indeed, serves as the thesis of Barth's argument here namely, that because Christian revelation sublimates religion, Christianity is not only a religion within the genus in which there are other species, but in fact, it occupies the "highest level" within that genus.

2.1.2. The Antithesis

Having just defended the thesis that Christianity is a religion, one would have expected Barth to continue with the "exaltation" of human religion as an important issue in theological discussion. He did not do that. Instead, he unleashed a very devastating criticism on religion never before witnessed even in atheistic writings. He now places his judgment on religion in his antithesis: Considered from the standpoint of revelation, religion is unbelief and the concern of godless man. In fact, the title of this subsection is translated as "Religion as Unbelief". But again, Green sees fault with this translation and offered an alternative translation to read "Religion as Faithlessness". Once more, his logic appears very convincing:

> "To say in English, as the translation in the *Church Dogmatics* does, that for Barth religion is 'unbelief' risks misunderstanding the point he is making. German uses the word *Glaube* to indicate what is covered in English by both 'belief' and 'faith'. In characterizing religion as *Unglaube*, Barth has in mind not primarily 'beliefs' or doctrines but rather a lack of *faith*, in the Reformation sense of *fiducia*, trust or confidence in the promises of God. Religion, Barth is saying, is an expression of faithlessness, the proclivity of human beings to disbelieve God's assurance of salvation in Christ and to rely instead on their own resources"[35].

This logic becomes obvious when Barth explains that the truth that God is God and that we should know Him as God, comes to us through revelation. But as religious men and women, we attempt to know this truth from our own standpoint instead of from the standpoint of God. That standpoint of God is faith. Instead therefore of attempting to apprehend this truth of God, we ought to let ourselves be apprehended by it. But this is precisely the problem – that we are unable to let the truth apprehend us, no thanks to our human

[34] CD, I/2, p. 297. Green's translation reads: "Remembering the Christological doctrine of the incarnation, and applying it logically, we speak of revelation as the *sublimation* of religion". Cf., G. GREEN, *On Religion*, p. 52.
[35] G. GREEN, *On Religion*, p. 17.

religiosity. This is why he was emphatic that, "from the standpoint of revelation, religion is clearly seen to be a human attempt to anticipate what God in His revelation wills to do and does do. It is the attempted replacement of the divine work by a human manufacture. The divine reality offered and manifested to us in revelation is replaced by a concept of God arbitrarily and wilfully evolved by man"[36]. Unlike in the thesis where he placed religion and revelation in a complementary fashion by speaking of revelation as the sublimation of religion, here, in the antithesis, he places them in an exclusive contradiction and opposition. And he insists that this contradiction of revelation and religion is hardly anything novel to Christianity by drawing an analogy about how revelation contradicted religion in both Judaism and Christianity:

> "Just as revelation had always contradicted heathen religion in the sphere of Israel and on the soil of Palestine, so now, when Jesus Christ has died for all, it contradicts it 'publicly', in its own heathen area, in an apostolic letter which remarkably enough is addressed to the Christians in Rome. There is no such thing now as an undisputed heathendom, a heathendom which is relatively possible, which can be excused. Now that revelation has come and its light has fallen on heathendom, heathen religion is shown to be the very opposite of revelation: a false religion of unbelief"[37].

At this point, one would immediately conclude that Barth's line of argument is to discredit other religions by presenting them as false in the face of Christianity. While this conclusion might be justified given the tone of Barth's language, it would be premature to make such conclusion here given that Barth earlier stated that while the church may be singled out as the *locus* of true religion, this does not however mean that the Christian religion is the true religion, fundamentally superior to all other religions on the basis of a general concept of the 'nature' of religion. This is why he rejected the Hegelian "perfect religion" theory as unacceptable. As we shall see later on, Barth had other theological motives for arguing that Christianity is the *locus* of true religion. His interest now is to dismiss all religion (Christianity inclusive) as faithlessness that necessarily opposes revelation, and revelation as contradicting all religion. If, as he believes, what is wanted in religion is *justification* and

[36] CD, I/2, p. 302.
[37] CD, I/2, p. 307.

sanctification as our own human work, then he insists that this does not correspond to, but rather contradicts, God's revelation.

By saying that religion contradicts revelation, he meant to insist that the tendency of regarding the Old Testament as the classical document of a religion of works, and the New Testament as a book of religion, must be corrected. He believes that to take the Holy Books as the book of religion is to miss the real meaning of the Bible which, he says, "is a document of revelation which contradicts every religion of works and therefore all religion as such"[38]. It has by now become clear that Barth was still, at this stage, treating Christianity as a species within a genus. Nothing at this stage has distinguished Christianity as *the true* religion. It is still battling with the general unbelief (faithlessness) characteristic of all religion. In its faithlessness, by pretending to know God outside God's self-revelation, religion becomes a veritable factory of idols which revelation must strive to remove before it can become possible for people to know God. This is why he opposes revelation to religion instead of identifying the two together as earlier Protestant theology did.

It is not just that revelation and religion are opposed to one another in Barth's theology; it is not just that it is only by revelation that religion is characterized as idolatry and self-righteousness hence, as unbelief; Barth maintains that revelation actually pronounces judgment upon all religion namely, that "religion is always self-contradictory and impossible *per se*"[39] and therefore must not be confused with revelation which is self-affirming and possible from the standpoint of God. Even in its own terms, he sees religion contradicting itself, becoming impossible, and revealing that "there is always an ultimate non-necessity about the origin and exercise of all religion"[40]. He sees religion as constantly seeking to satisfy its two basic needs namely, the conception of deity and the fulfilment of the law. And he takes this bid to satisfy these needs as the very reason why religion continuously strives to create the image of God which conforms to human's own image, and then tries to justify and sanctify oneself in conformity with that which it holds as law. He calls this actual satisfaction of religious need "a relative necessity" which has underneath it "a very definite weakness". He believes that the non-necessity of religion stems from the fact that it strives to satisfy that

[38] CD, I/2, p. 311.
[39] CD, I/2, p. 314.
[40] CD, I/2, p. 315.

which previously existed namely, the conception of deity and the fulfilment of the law; and in doing so, is only repeating something that was already there. But he insists that it is not necessary to repeat what is there already. He identifies the weakness of religion as its ever oscillatory tendency to keep on changing with the changing human culture. But as he explains, if religion keeps on changing with the changing time, it denies itself any claim to certainty and truth; and if it chooses to maintain the status quo by resisting change, it becomes obsolete and fossilised. If, on the other hand, it tries to keep the advantages of both by being both liberal and conservative, it equally takes over the twofold disadvantages as well. The bottom-line is that he maintains that whichever way, religion is always "acutely or chronically ill" and in a state of dilemma.

Barth pointed out the final result of this dilemma (the non-necessity and the weakness of all religion): religion tends towards "a critical turn" that leads to either of mysticism or atheism as a way out of the quagmire. While he sees mysticism as not attacking or negating religion directly but only as seeking to renounce the externalism and manifestations of religion by withdrawing into the inner, inward and spiritual meaning and interpretation of religion, he maintains that atheism involves an outright negation of religion and therefore, passes as the stronger form of the critical turn. However, because "absolute denial" involves a "relative affirmation", he believes that the programme of atheism is bound to fail. He thinks it does not succeed in negating religion as such but only clears the way for new religions. And since "mysticism is esoteric atheism"[41], he thinks that the real crisis of religion does not lie in the atheistic denial of religion (religion does not die because of attack of mysticism or atheism, but because of the victory of another religion[42]), but rather in something beyond the magic circle of religion itself namely, something "from outside man" – revelation.

The high point of Barth's argument in this antithesis is found in the last sentence: "The abrogation which is a genuine and dangerous attack on religion is to be found in another book, beside which the books of mysticism and atheism can only be described as completely harmless"[43]. The die is cast here. Something that abolishes

[41] CD, I/2, p. 322.
[42] Cf., CD, I/2, p. 323.
[43] CD, I/2, p. 325. Green's translation appears to have been better expressed: "That sublimation of religion, however, which signifies a real and dangerous assault upon it is found in another

(sublimates) religion is not found from "within" human realm but from "outside" human realm. This is why mysticism and atheism, by virtue of their belonging to 'the magic circle of religion', that is, by virtue of their being within human realm, are incapable of sublimating religion, no matter how hard they try. One must move "outside" to really discover that which has this power.

2.1.3. The Synthesis

If Christianity is only a species within a genus, and if that genus as a whole is unbelief or faithlessness, of what positive value is any species within the genus? This indeed is the seeming entanglement of Barth's synthesis when he tried to present Christianity as the true religion. It is here also that the import of Green's argument that the double meaning of *Aufhebung* does not justify its English translation as "abolition" but should rather be rendered "sublimation" is felt. Barth himself seems to have clarified this point when he wrote: "The abolishing [sublimation] of religion by revelation need not mean only its negation: the judgment that religion is unbelief. Religion can just as well be exalted in revelation, even though the judgment still stands"[44]. It was for this reason that, after discussing religion as unbelief [faithlessness], he immediately started talking of the true religion. To talk about "true" religion does not *abolish* the fact that religion as such is faithlessness. The argument that religion in itself and as such is never true still remains his cardinal argument. But to make his entire argument logical, he approached this synthesis by means of an analogy, using a metaphor that was to be of paramount importance. He quickly opens up this section by expressing that "we can speak of 'true' religion only in the sense in which we speak of a 'justified sinner'"[45]. This metaphor of a "justified sinner" becomes therefore the key to understanding his argument.

The concepts "to be justified" and "to be a sinner" seem apparently to be mutually exclusive. To be a sinner means 'to be guilty'; on the other hand, to be justified means 'not to be guilty'. The common curiosity arising from bringing the two terms together would naturally be that of wondering how someone could be guilty and not guilty at the same time. But this apparent confusion gives way the moment we follow Barth's logic in understanding that the sinner does

book, in comparison to which the books of mysticism and atheism can only be described as utterly harmless". Cf., G. GREEN, *On Religion*, p. 84.

[44] CD, I/2, p. 326.

[45] CD I/2, p. 325.

not become justified because he/she ceases to be a sinner but because someone else (in this case, Jesus Christ Himself) has paid the ransom for his/her sin. If someone owes another a debt, and the indebted person, out of generosity and magnanimity, decides to cancel that debt by paying for it himself, the hitherto guilty person (without ceasing to be a debtor), becomes not guilty. Barth wants us to know that it is in this sense of God's act of declaring a sinner righteous before God that we talk of a justified sinner. In actual fact however, no sinner is justified. It is not in the nature and being of a sinner to be justified. A sinner can only become justified from "without", that is, by a process that does not belong to the sinner's very nature and being but in fact alien to it. This being the case, the fact that the person remains a sinner even while being justified, is where the metaphor lies. None "abolishes" the other; but the later "sublimates" the former. It is in this same sense that Barth wants to anchor his argument that no religion is true but can only become true. Religion is a product of human culture; as such, it is unbelief (faithlessness). But by the grace of God, religion can become true. Its truthfulness stems from its being adopted by revelation. It is only when revelation adopts a religion that it can mark it out as true religion. Barth, at this point is now ready to present the climax of his presentation, and the argument that has earned him as many friends as foes:

> "There is a true religion: just as there are justified sinners. If we abide strictly by that analogy – and we are dealing not merely with an analogy, but in a comprehensive sense with the thing itself – we need have no hesitation in saying that the Christian religion is the true religion"[46].

Barth was aware, from the beginning, of the possible misrepresentation and misinterpretation of his argument here when he assures that the earlier discussion on "religion as unbelief" is not just "a preliminary polemic against the non-Christian religions, with a view to the ultimate assertion that the Christian religion is the true religion"[47]. He insists that he did not distinguish between Christian and non-Christian religions as far as his guilty-judgment verdict on religion was concerned; but that whatever applied to the non-Christian religions applied equally to Christianity. To proclaim a "not guilty" judgment on Christianity as a religion would amount to declaring that Christianity is not even a religion at all – a declaration which would

[46] CD, I/2, p. 326.
[47] CD, I/2, p. 326.

have negated his earlier statement that Christianity is a species within a genus in which there are other species. His aim in declaring Christianity as the true religion is not so much to inflate the Christian superiority ego as to make a statement of faith.

This clarification (often neglected by those who impugn the charge of exclusivism on Barth) is necessary in order to distinguish Barth's process of arriving at the conclusion that Christianity is the true religion, from the other earlier Christian apologetics that often ignored the application of divine judgment on Christianity. Barth, in distinction from these other apologetics, applied the divine judgment even more heavily on Christianity as a religion. And in such judgment, Christianity was not even a *primus inter pares*; it is just a species within a genus. The entire genus is unbelief. None is superior to the other because all are inferior to revelation. In fact, by claiming to know God on their own, they all actually contradict revelation. Christianity is only singled out as "true" because it has been adopted by revelation and not because it is a "superior" or "unspotted" religion. On account of this adoption, it has become "a justified sinner" who, while being justified in a dialectically sublimated fashion, still remains a sinner. The acquittal of Christianity from the divine judgment of unbelief passed on all religion, says Barth, is not by any inward worthiness, but rather by "the grace of God, proclaimed and effectual in His revelation". He says that when this grace of God comes at work, we discover soon that *our* Christianity remains "active idolatry and self-righteousness"; it is only Christianity as a work of faith that is the true religion[48].

His claim here is to maintain that religion (even the so-called revealed religion), in abstraction from the grace of revelation, is an exercise in idolatry. He maintains an irreconcilable gulf between revelation and the religion of revelation using a sketchy historical Old Testament and New Testament presentation of the struggle of revelation against the religion of revelation as focal point. After such a historical excursus, his conclusion was this: "The religion of revelation is indeed bound up with the revelation of God: but the revelation of God is not bound up with the religion of revelation"[49]. Put in another formula, while revelation encompasses Christianity, Christianity does not encompass revelation. There is more to

[48] Cf., CD, I/2, p. 327.
[49] CD, I/2, p. 329.

revelation than a simple practice of Christianity[50]. Barth was aware that his formula somewhat relativizes Christianity. But he insisted that such "relativizing" does not imply a weakening of Christian faith, but rather a pointer that the Christian faith depends entirely on the grace of God rather than on any intrinsic effort of human beings.

If Christianity is then so-relativized in favour of revelation, what emboldened Barth to go on to speak of Christianity as the true religion? It was at this point that Barth took up a comparative study between Christianity and other religions. But it was not just a blanket comparison; he took up a few non-Christian religions which he considers as "religions of grace". He sees in the 12th and 13th century Japanese Buddhist sects *Yodo-Shin* and *Yodo-Shin-Shu*, a "comprehensive and illuminating heathen parallel to Christianity"[51]. And together with the Indian Bhakti religion, he says they can be designated as "religions of grace". The Japanese Buddhist sects are so close to the Reformation emphases on grace alone that Barth called them the "Japanese Protestantism"[52]. But he explains that being a religion of grace does not thereby automatically make a religion a true one. Christianity, in its Protestant form, which he calls the true religion, is not called so simply because it is a religion of grace. If this were the case he says, then *Yodo-Shin* and *Yodo-Shin-Shu* would equally claim the title. According to him, to distinguish truth and error as far as religion is concerned, one thing is decisive: the name Jesus Christ. This is why, in spite of his high admiration of those Japanese variants of Buddhism, he did not consider them as true religion, instead insisting that,

> "the true and essential distinction of the Christian religion from the non-Christian, and with it its character as the religion of truth over against the religions of error, can be demonstrated only in the fact, or event, that taught by Holy Scripture the Church listens to Jesus Christ and no one else as grace and truth, not being slack but always cheerful to proclaim and believe Him, and therefore in being His own confessor and witness in the confession and witness of the

[50] Our assertion here that there is more to revelation than a simple practice of Christianity is deliberately made to argue a point. It is meant to establish the fact that revelation as we know it does not exhaust everything that God wishes to share with humanity. It is meant to prepare the way for our eventual argument that theology, to be truly contemporary or postmodern, must go beyond a simple reflection on revelation. Barth's argument is that revelation goes beyond Christianity. While we wholeheartedly agree with him, our argument will further advance the thesis that theology goes beyond revelation (as we know it).

[51] CD, I/2, p. 340.

[52] CD, I/2, p. 342.

> Church. In fact, it all amounts to this: that the Church has to be weak in order to be strong"[53].

It is now evident that Barth's theory of religion is appearing in the new light of his new-found methodology of Christological concentration. The truthfulness of Christianity does not lie in its perceived "superiority" to other religions based on any other consideration than this deep-seated theological one of Christological concentration. Only this grace of God given in the person of Jesus Christ makes it possible for a true religion to exist in the world of human religion which is basically unbelief, faithlessness, and idolatry. But to put to rest any doubt whether other religions of grace can be considered as indeed true religion, Barth climaxed his argument (which has ever since put him in a very bad light among theologians of religions) thus:

> "Therefore by the grace of God there are men who live by His grace. Or, to put it concretely, through the name of Jesus Christ there are men who believe in this name. To the extent that this is self-evident in the case of Christians and the Christian religion, we can and must say of it that *it and it alone* is the true religion"[54].

This synthesis has ever since remained the favourite reference point for people engaged in theology of religions using Barth as an example of how not to engage in such theology especially in the contemporary world of pluralism. But what do we really make of Barth's pronouncement here?

2.2. Assessing Barth's Theory of Religion in §17 of Church Dogmatics

Certainly, if one stops reading Barth's *Church Dogmatics* at this point, one would go home with the impression of an arrogant Christian imperialist for whom other religions are not even worthy of the name; and one would have, in any case, been justified. It is not uncommon to hear such judgment passed on Barth's theory of religion as that recapped by Lai Pan-chiu when he says: "Barth's view of religion is perhaps the most unpopular aspect of his theology for Christian theologians engaging in inter-religious dialogue and attempting to use the indigenous cultural resources in theology,

[53] CD, I/2, p. 344.
[54] CD, I/2, p. 346 (emphases are mine).

especially Asian theologians"[55]. D. T. Niles' recounted encounter with Barth has become anecdotal in almost every sustained attack on Barth's theory of religion. In the said encounter, Niles purportedly asked Barth how he (Barth) knew that Hinduism was unbelief having never met a Hindu before, to which Barth replied, "*a priori*"[56]. These and similar anecdotes have helped in no small measure to make a one-sided judgment on Barth's theory of religion. However, the first issue to consider is whether Barth's assault on other religions was based on real or distorted account of these other religions.

Geoff Thompson thinks that Barth's theological interpretation is confined to "a very particular, and arguably highly distorted account of those religions"[57] because he was working with what he referred to as "domesticated and conceptually-constructed" Christian view of other religions; and even more, with the Christian understanding of what a 'religion' should be. His argument is that the so-called theological motivation that informed Barth's argument is itself very problematic given that the very argument about religion which Barth resisted had already "internalized" the concept of religion as a generic term within the Christian discourse, and that Barth did not actually break free from what he was opposing namely that the religions are treated as any less homogeneous. Barth himself maintained that Christianity is only but a species within a genus; and even while presenting the species as all false in order to deny the Protestant thesis that these species are partially or variously true, Barth's judgement couldn't have been tenable given that these other religions are actually not aiming to attain what Christianity had attained through divine election. He insisted that however theologically impressive Barth's argument was, he gave no room for acknowledgment of the diversity of religious aims and thereby foreclosing any possibilities of recognizing non-oppositional and subordinate truths in the other religions. For him therefore, "it is one thing for Barth to make an argument from dogmatics that there is a universal human grasping at and self-justification before God, and to define that as unbelief. It is quite another for him unequivocally to locate that unbelief *per*

[55] Lai PAN-CHIU, *Barth's Theology of Religion and the Asian Context of Religious Pluralism,* in *Asia Journal of Theology*, 15, 2 (2001), p. 247-267, p. 247.
[56] Cf., D. T. NILES, *Karl Barth – A Personal Memory,* in *The South East Asia Journal of Theology*, 11 (1969), p. 10-11.
[57] Geoff THOMPSON, *Religious Diversity, Christian Doctrine and Karl Barth*, in *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 8, 1 (2006), p. 4-24, p. 8.

definitionem and without differentiation in the traditions, communities and practices which had come to be named 'religion'"[58].

We have to point out, however, that Thompson's article is not condemning Barth as an exclusivist. He is only arguing that to defend Barth's theory of religion based on §17 of the CD (as some do), is futile. One really has to search elsewhere in order to locate Barth's idea of 'co-existent truth' that are 'not at cross purposes' with the truth of Christianity[59]. In fact, he describes §17 of CD as "a slight, but significant truncation of the argument which Barth had begun in §16 and will continue in §18"[60]. It is precisely for this same argument that we decided to periodize Barth's theory of religion, and to set §17 apart from what we intend to label as Barth's "mature" theory of religion.

However, having said that, we must quickly clarify that the fact that §17 is a truncation of the arguments of §§16 and 18 does not imply that therefore, §17 is a travesty of the "truths" of these other paragraphs, or that it is unimportant when one discusses Barth's theory of religions. As far as dialogue with other religions is concerned, Barth was unequivocal about what we might term the starting point and foundation of such a dialogue without which a purported dialogue cannot fruitfully be engaged in. He says: "The one decisive question which confronts the Christian religion, or its adherents and representatives, in respect of its truth, is this: who and what are they in their naked reality, as they stand before the all-piercing eye of God?"[61] We consider this question very vital to any dialogue between Christianity and other religion. If a Christian is not very clear about who and what he/she is as a Christian, if the person equivocates about Christian religion without being precise about what that religion is all about, how can the person possibly engage in a dialogue with other religions? What does the person present at an inter-faith table when other dialoguing partners begin to present their own religions? This is why we think that despite its very many shortcomings, §17 of CD is still relevant as far as theology of religions is concerned.

We have to agree with Hendrik Vroom[62] who, while assessing Barth's critique of religion here, maintains that, taken within its

[58] G. THOMPSON, *Religious Diversity, Christian Doctrine and Karl Barth*, p. 8.
[59] Cf., G. THOMPSON, *Religious Diversity, Christian Doctrine and Karl Barth*, p. 18.
[60] G. THOMPSON, *Religious Diversity, Christian Doctrine and Karl Barth*, p. 9.
[61] K. BARTH, CD I/2, p. 356.
[62] Cf. Hendrik M. VROOM, *Karl Barth and the Nature of False and True Religion*, in *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue*, 22,1 (2012), p. 74-86.

context of the Confessing Church over against the German Christians, this critique is primarily a critique of Christianity that has lost sight of the essence of its faith; but insists that by maintaining an epistemologically privileged position for himself, Barth proceeded to make a sweeping critique of religion ("all") as unbelief. He detected in this sweeping *theologia religionum* some "harsh tone" and "exclusivism" even when Barth's intention was to make explicit the word of God in such a way that others can see it properly. He describes as "extremely unfortunate" Barth's attempt to let the *Wort Gottes* be heard by framing it in a sweeping pattern of thought[63]. He sees this unfortunate sweeping critique as stemming from Barth's tragic mistake of taking over the method of phenomenology of religion, which itself makes the mistake of indicating an essence of each religion by producing uniform stereotypes of what were in actual fact pluriform religions. The fundamental error of this method, says Vroom, "lies in the presupposition that religion has an essence that reveals itself to the researcher, that determines the whole religious tradition in every way and at all times (so that whatever deviates from this essence is of secondary importance)"[64]. Barth, according to him, while rejecting this method for Christianity, nevertheless readily applied it to all religion as such, and came to the conclusion that the essence of religion is *Unglaube*. But he believes that this view has to be rejected:

> "I think we need to discard such general talk about religion as such, of all religion as 100% idolatry, and the true religion as given by God. Such an approach is far too lacking in nuance. It is also wrong, for then the German Christians and the Confessing Church are both equal parts of 'our' religion"[65].

But nevertheless, he sees some positive side to Barth's emphasis on *Unglaube*. He sees in the emphasis, "a warning not to absolutize one's own formulations of truths but to reflect on them continually and to communicate them as a true word that shows us 'what really is'"[66]. This is why, despite objections to how Barth elaborates his theory of religions in this paragraph, he still sees some openings for a more nuanced approach to religion.

[63] Cf., H. VROOM, *Karl Barth and the Nature of False and True Religion*, p. 78.
[64] H. VROOM, *Karl Barth and the Nature of False and True Religion*, p. 81.
[65] H. VROOM, *Karl Barth and the Nature of False and True Religion*, p. 81.
[66] H. VROOM, *Karl Barth and the Nature of False and True Religion*, p. 82.

Paragraph 17 obviously has some wrong framings; but that should not negate the entire theory as useless. And one should not also overlook the context of Barth's writing of the said paragraph. Vroom pointed this out when he concluded thus: "It is good to see the context of section 17 – the rise of National Socialism, xenophobia, as well as anti-Semitism and essentialist theories of religion. But it is not good to speak of others in generalizing terms in other times"[67].

Without however trying to justify such "generalized term" or "harsh tones" used in paragraph 17, we have to recall that Barth's intention was not so much to discuss other religions as to discuss Christianity's relationship with revelation. If his aim was to discuss a horizontal relationship between Christianity and other religions, then such charges of "harsh tones" can forcefully be made against him. But the fact is that his interest was rather on the vertical relationship between revelation and religion. And on this vertical relationship, revelation stands apart on its own, and can neither be equated to, nor even be compared with, religion. What religion stands for (according to Barth's understanding of it) actually negates what he (Barth) understands as revelation. But (and this is the question), in a culture of pluralism, was Barth justified to have covered only the vertical relationship between revelation and religion? Wouldn't it have been more enriching if he equally covered the horizontal relationship between Christianity and other religions? Well, §17 alone is insufficient to answer these and similar questions. We need to turn to Barth's "other theories" of religion in order to attempt to provide the answers.

3. BARTH'S "MATURE" THEORY OF RELIGION

In his article already cited above[68], Geoff Thompson provided an insight which needs to be developed further. While arguing that §17 of CD is controversial as far as contemporary discussion on religious diversity is concerned, he nonetheless suggests that §§16, 17 and 18 form a body of writing where Barth argues that the content of the Word of God as attested in the scripture is constituted not by God alone but by God and man. But he thinks that Barth's argument in §17 follows from only one aspect of the remarks already started in §16 namely, that the church alone is the place in history at which the

[67] H. VROOM, *Karl Barth and the Nature of False and True Religion*, p. 85.
[68] Cf., G. THOMPSON, *Religious Diversity, Christian Doctrine and Karl Barth*.

revelation of God is achieved. However, he suggests that there is another line of argument which appeared in §16, suspended in §17, only to reappear in §18, namely, that even though the church is the only place where revelation is received, God is not bound to this membership, but that in fact, there are certain individuals 'outside the nation' who are genuine recipients of God's revelation. He concluded that this "hint" was what led Barth to discussion on the truth *extra muros ecclesiae* of §69.2 of CD IV/3.

In this section, we would like to explore Thompson's argument in our discussion of what we shall regard as Barth's mature theory of religion. First, we shall look into §§16 and 18 as prelude to §69, then go on to elaborate Barth's treatment of the truth *extra muros ecclesiae* as representing an important resource for contemporary discussion on religious pluralism.

3.1. *Church Dogmatics* §§16 and 18 as Preludes to §69

As has been indicated above, §§16, 17, and 18, form a body of [in?]coherent whole where Barth discusses the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. In §16, Barth treats what he referred to as "the subjective reality of revelation"[69] which he locates in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The objective reality of revelation is certainly Jesus Christ as the incarnate Word of God. This, according to him, must be the exclusive starting point. But then, it already presupposes the existence of humanity who renders faith and obedience to God. In other words, the statement '*God* with us' can only be a fact if 'God with *us*' is also a fact. The emphases here are on 'God' and 'us'. And he makes this point clearer when he says that the subjective reality of revelation presupposes that, "not God alone, but God and man together constitute the content of the Word of God attested in Scripture"[70], even when he maintains that the relationship between God and man can never be that of partners and workmates but rather that of the Reconciler and the pardoned sinner. With this clarification about the type of humanity he was talking about, he went on to posit that the Holy Spirit acting upon humanity is also revelation. His insistence on the visibility and outwardness rather than only the invisibility and inwardness of this "man" who, together with God, constitutes the content of the Word of God, is to emphasize the definite place of "this man" in history. It is not just every man but "special men" who visibly belongs to the

[69] CD I/2, p. 203ff.
[70] CD I/2, p. 207.

Church. But he warns that, "…it cannot be said that this membership of the nation or Church turns these men into recipients of revelation. God turns them into that"[71].

One thing that was hitherto unheard of from the mouth of Barth forms the basis of our categorizing this section as Barth's mature theory of religion. Barth says that, "God is not bound to this membership" because in the Old Testament, there were people "outside the nation of Israel" and who, in spite of their 'outside status' nonetheless, "became genuine recipients of God's revelation" if not for any other thing, at least to serve as "a corrective" to Israel. These 'outsiders' in the Old Testament eventually turn up in the New Testament as "unexpected confessors of the Messiahship of Jesus" to continue as a corrective not to the Church but rather to Israel[72]. Even though he insists that these "outsiders" or "unexpected confessors" do not call in question "the reality and clarity, the finality and exclusiveness"[73] with which the Church is the place of God's revelation; and even though he maintains the necessity of the Church for salvation as a biblical and therefore a universally Christian doctrine, Barth has inadvertently begun a horizontal relationship between Christianity and other religions, thus opening up his theology to the question of religious pluralism.

Continuing this line of argument concerning revelation in its "man-ward" aspect, he proposes in §18 as the object of discussion, "man himself as the recipient of revelation"[74]. Here he reiterated that this man-ward aspect of revelation implies that we cannot speak of the Christian *in abstracto* but rather *in concreto*. Revelation, says Barth, would cease to be what it is if humanity remains outside the closed door of it. The very circle of human existence is intersected by the circle of divine revelation. Therefore, the grace of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (which is the subjective reality of revelation) works only in the Christian *in concreto*. And as he defined it, "the Christian *in concreto* is the free man, whose freedom is safeguarded and maintained by God"[75]. It is important to note that Barth's fusion of human freedom with its maintenance by God is to safeguard the divine predetermination even while projecting human self-determination in Jesus Christ. This is what he referred to as the

[71] CD I/2, p. 210.
[72] Cf., CD I/2, p. 210.
[73] Cf., CD I/2, p.211
[74] CD, I/2, p. 362.
[75] CD I/2, p. 367.

problem of theological ethics. In this sense, determinateness of human life implies *being* and *doing* - where "the love of God is our only remaining being and the praise of God is our necessary doing"[76]. This double-pronged theological ethics was what occupied Barth throughout this §18 of *Church Dogmatics*. Christian life, according to him, begins and ends with love. He sees synoptic passages of Mt. 22:37ff, Mk. 12:29ff and Lk. 19:27ff, dealing on the question of the "first" or "great" commandment, as the *locus classicus* on revelation. While acknowledging that the Deut. 6:4 address of "Hear, O Israel…", that is, the commandment to love, is given to Israel, he nonetheless clarifies that according to the witness of the Old Testament, "Israel in the national sense, Israel 'according to the flesh' has as such no claim to be this Israel. Even if it be hearing Israel, which observes the commandment to love, it has to remain Israel by ever hearing anew. If no one can hear without being a child of God, no one can be a child of God without ever hearing anew"[77].

Barth is already moving from a culturally and geographically-laden concept of Israel to a broader concept. In this broader concept, love must have an opposite or an object, which must necessarily exclude oneself. The objects in question are God and neighbour. But he warns that love to God and love to neighbour cannot be identified as being the same. One cannot be dissolved into the other. They are not two absolute commandments but rather two commandments of one absolute Lord[78], so that we do not make the mistake of trying to love God as the neighbour or to love the neighbour as God. The divine revelation, he says, enjoins us only to love God *and* our neighbour.

The commandment to love God, according to Barth, is therefore not only the first but also the great commandment whose greater circle includes the lesser commandment to love the neighbour. But this brings up the question of who the neighbour actually is. He exegetes Mark 12:28ff and came to this conclusion: "No matter who or what he is, the neighbour is our future, and indicates the order in which God wills to be praised by us"[79]. The phrase "no matter who or what he is" is very important here in understanding the direction which Barth's theology is beginning to take. He was careful not to go too far with Luther's advice to seek neighbour within the orders of life and society in which we find ourselves. For Barth, such advice might lead to

[76] Cf., CD I/2, p. 369-371.
[77] CD I/2, p. 381-382.
[78] Cf., CD I/2, p. 404-409.
[79] CD I/2, p. 415.

restricting the concept of neighbour to people to whom we have a definite duty, or those who have claims upon us. While he believes that "a neighbour" has this claim, he insists that a scriptural concept of neighbour does not think of it as an embodiment of the Law. While acknowledging that the Old Testament concept of neighbour as somebody who is to be loved refers primarily to the fellow-Israelites, he points out that even the Old Testament concept of "people" does not refer primarily to a national community of blood, but that "neighbour" also includes "stranger that is within thy gates". As the "bearer and representative of the divine compassion" therefore, he believes that the neighbour is not a member of this or that community or even of a larger group comprising of the whole human race. It is not a question of every person being my neighbour. As he puts it, "my neighbour is my fellow-man acting towards me as a benefactor… My neighbour is the man who emerges from amongst all my fellow-men as this one thing in particular, my benefactor"[80].

It was with this notion of a benefactor that Barth analyses the parable of the Good Samaritan and came to a very important conclusion: neighbourhood is not restricted to the members of the Church but that the story of the Samaritan indicates that even those who are not conscious that they are being so, can in fact become compassionate neighbours. This is what he calls "the Christian conception of humanity" according to which humanity is touched by the mission of the church even when it does not belong to the church. The very existence of the Church in the society means that "it is impossible to be absolutely outside the Church, to have absolutely no part in it"[81] because, with her existence, a *character indelibilis*[82] is imparted to human beings around it. A very interesting outcome of this *character indelibilis* is that "our fellow-man generally, can become our neighbour, even where we do not think we see anything of the Church". In this sense, the "Gentiles" are referred to as "hidden neighbours" who stand "outside the visible Church". They are "strangers", but at the same time they are "adherents" because "they have some very important and incisive things to say to the children of the household"; they are strangers "who from the most unexpected distances come right into the apparently closed circle of the divine election and calling and carry out a kind of commission, fulfil an

[80] CD I/2, p. 420.
[81] CD I/2, p. 423.
[82] CD I/2, p. 422.

office for which there is no name, but the content of which is quite obviously a service which they have to render"[83].

Certainly, the general categorization of Barth (following the familiar stereotypical typology in theology of religions) as an exclusivist, cannot apply here. Something much more suitable than the word "intolerance" as a qualification of Barth's theory of religion is at work here. And there is no sense of "arrogance" in referring to the Gentiles as "hidden neighbours" or as both "strangers" and "adherents". We are gradually witnessing the "other side" of Barth. Having dogmatically dealt with the relationship between religion and revelation, he is now opening up to the reality that the witness of Jesus Christ (in other words, our neighbour) is found not only in the Church, but also in every person in so far as that person comes into the light of the promise: 'you shall be my witness'. Although he concedes that these other people's witnesses are "confirmatory" and not necessarily "basic witnesses", nevertheless, in their witnesses, Jesus Christ "proclaims Himself… in a second and outer circle of His revelation, which by its very nature can only be hinted at"[84]. In other words, he assumes that there is the first and inner circle of revelation, and there is, so to say, the second and outer circle. This second and outer circle was what Barth did not concede in the previous §17. Thompson described its absence in §17 as "a casualty of Barth's wider doctrinal argument"[85]. It is perhaps because most theorists of religion focus exclusively on this §17 while analysing Barth's theory of religion, that they end up labelling him (Barth) as an exclusivist. But as §§16 and 18 have shown, Barth is closer here to Karl Rahner's "anonymous Christian" theory of inclusivism than are being portrayed. In fact, Glenn Chestnutt, while refuting the charge that Barth is solely an exclusivist, argues that "there seems to be a radical inclusivity to Barth's Christological and revelational exclusivity which indicates recognition, solidarity and concern for the religious other"[86].

However, such polemics of inclusive/exclusive divide should not preoccupy us here further. We have earlier indicated that the polemics are stereotypes that end in vicious circle. We shall therefore strive to finish the exposition of what we termed Barth's "mature" theory of religion.

[83] Cf., CD I/2, p. 425.
[84] CD I/2, p. 426.
[85] G. THOMPSON, *Religious Diversity, Christian Doctrine and Karl Barth*, p. 10.
[86] Glenn A. CHESTNUTT, *Challenging the Stereotype: The Theology of Karl Barth as a Resource for Inter-religious Encounter in a European Context*, Bern, Peter Lang, 2010, p. 38.

3.2. Barth and Truth *extra muros ecclesiae*: Secular Parables of the Truth in CD §69

Until recently, the fourth volume of Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics* has not elicited much enthusiasm among scholars. The trend in Barth's research, according to Benoît Bourgine, "tends to favour the *Römerbrief* period, undoubtedly because it is the period which has had the greatest historical impact"[87]. But even if recent Barth's studies have moved beyond the *Römerbrief*, much is still being expected with regards to his Christology. Bourgine has argued strongly about the importance of Barth's Christology to the understanding of Christian self-identity. After exposing the Christology of Karl Barth in recent researches, he went on to analyse what he considers "the most significant development devoted to [Barth's] Christology" namely, the fourth volume of *Church Dogmatics* which deals with reconciliation. At the end of his exposition, he expounded four thesis which highlights the importance and indispensability of Barth's Christology as it concerns the concept of God, theological language, theological method and theological model respectively, namely: (1) Barth's Christology contributes to renewing the Christian conception of God; (2) Barth's Christology contributes to the revival of theological language by associating speculative ambition and narrative dimension; (3) Barth's Christology contributes to a revival in theological method; (4) Barth's Christology exemplifies a model of theology that one might describe as prophetic, as distinguished from a model which one might describe as sapiential[88].

Indeed, the fourth volume of CD provides Barth's most comprehensive treatment on the subject of Christology. It is here that the "Christological concentration" is forcefully at work. The preceding §§16 and 18 gave a hint at what Barth was about to formulate in this §69. The concepts of "hidden neighbours" and "the second and outer circle of revelation" are about to be christically explained. Nothing should be abstractly explained. All explanations must be concretely and christologically done. It is through this Christological grounding that Barth tries to explain the reality of

[87] Benoît BOURGINE, *The Christology of Karl Barth*, in Stuart George HALL (ed.), *Jesus Christ Today. Studies of Christology in Various Contexts. Proceedings of the Académie Internationale des Sciences Religieuses, Oxford 25-29 August 2006 and Princeton 25-30 August 2007*, Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, 2009, p. 179-208, p. 180.
[88] Cf., B. BOURGINE, *The Christology of Karl Barth*, p. 204-208.

words that are not Word, and lights that are not Light; but which nonetheless are true in spite of their being outside the first circle of revelation.

3.2.1. The Word and the words

The §69 of CD can be described as an elaborate explanation of the first statement of the *Theological Declaration* of the Confessional Synod of Barmen of 1934 (of which Barth himself was the chief drafter): "Jesus Christ as attested to us in Holy Scripture is the one Word of God whom we must hear and whom we must trust and obey in life and in death"[89]. In an attempt to explain what it means to say that Jesus Christ is the one Word of God, Barth entered into the third problem of the doctrine of reconciliation in which he conceives reconciliation as also revelation. As he argues, a balanced doctrine of reconciliation must be able to present both aspects of God's deity and humanity, God's humiliation and man's exaltation; otherwise it becomes one sided and therefore erroneous. In fact, it is within this framework in which reconciliation is conceived of as also revelation that Barth discusses his so-called secular parables of the truth: Revelation does not take place *in abstracto* but rather *in concreto* in and with reconciliation. When this is done, reconciliation becomes also revelation because, "as God acts in it, He also speaks"[90]. But he warns that whereas reconciliation is indeed revelation, the converse is not true, that is, revelation in itself and as such, is not reconciliation; rather, revelation takes place as reconciliation takes place.

Within the sphere in which reconciliation is conceived also as revelation, Barth tries to understand the person of Jesus Christ.

[89] Karl BARTH, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. IV, Part 3.1. (The Doctrine of Reconciliation), G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (ed.), Massachusetts, Hendrickson Publishers, 2010, p. 3.
The Barmen Declaration was made "in view of the errors of the "German Christians" which are ravaging the church and at the same time also shattering the unity of the German Evangelical Church". Adolph Hitler's seizure of power on January 30, 1933 plunged the German Evangelical Church into crisis. The church, like all other institutions, was to be "co-ordinated" and domesticated to the doctrines of National Socialism with its trinity of nationalism, racism and militarism. The swastika and the cross were to be welded together, Mein Kampf and the Bible placed on the same altar – and in that order. This was the program of the "German Christians", those protestant synthesizers who, by adding a fatal adjective to the name of their Lord, were to prove once again the saying of Jesus about serving two masters. In the church elections of July, 1933 the German Christians won three quarters of the vote and Ludwig Müller soon proclaimed himself "Reichsbischof", in effect a religious "Führer". The "Aryan paragraph" prohibited people of Jewish ancestry, or those married to "non-Aryans", from serving as ministers (culled from Clifford GREEN (ed.), *Karl Barth: Theologian of Freedom*, Edinburg, T & T Clark, (1989), 1991, p. 148.
[90] CD IV/3.1., p. 8.

Reconciliation as revelation implies event and reality in Jesus Christ as the mediator. It begins with the Christological statement that "Jesus Christ lives". This statement, according to him, carries with it two meanings: it means first that Jesus Christ exists in the manner of God and therefore has a transcendental priority over all else that exists. But it also means that He exists in the manner of a man with the immanent contingency associated with human existence. The full import of this coexistence of deity and humanity in a single person of Jesus Christ (after the manner of Chalcedon's formulation of "without confusion or change" yet "without separation or division") is that Barth, while still maintaining an opposition between God and the world, now sees "an inviolable and indissoluble co-existence and conjunction"[91] between the two.

The "Wholly other" abstract concept of God is gradually being modified; and in its place, Barth begins to see in Jesus Christ both the creative and creaturely actualization of being. His divine-human existence is seen as His divine-human act. He does not live in isolation of His creation but rather lives in their midst. God and humanity, in a word, live not in separation but in conjunction. "The epitome of the whole order of creation" says Barth, is that "God is the God of man and man the man of God"[92]. This order is also that of reconciliation because in it, creation is transcended and restored. He described the being of Jesus Christ as "being in spontaneous actualisation"[93]. This means that while remaining sovereign as Lord of the universe, His being is also limited by human condition. Hunsinger described this life of Jesus Christ which is lived in act as "differentiated unity and dialectical inclusion"[94]. And Barth, while maintaining that the co-existence of divine and human may take different forms, however insists that "the fact that Jesus lives as attested in the biblical testimony to this history means that there is this union between God and *each of us* men, and that it is indestructible"[95]. Thanks to this indestructible union between God and each of us, Barth can now talk of those truths that are outside the inner circle of revelation.

[91] CD IV/3.1., p. 40.
[92] CD IV/3.1., p. 43.
[93] CD IV/3.1., p. 40.
[94] George HUNSINGER, *How to Read Karl Barth: The Shape of His Theology*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 240.
[95] CD IV/3.1., p. 41 (emphases are mine).

However, by insisting at the same time that Jesus Christ as attested to us in the Scripture is the one Word of God whom we must hear, and by precluding in this regard every other prophet, Barth is not thereby contradicting this "inclusivist" theology where this indestructible union exists between God and each of us, and where certain truth can be found outside the inner circle of revelation; neither is he making a "dogmatic" statement. He is conscious of the "hardness" and the "offensive" and even the "contradictory" nature of the statement not only to non-Christian hearers but even to Christians themselves. But he explains that his statement emanated from another "hard saying" of the Gospel of John 6: 52ff (unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, you shall not have life within you) – a saying that resulted in many of Jesus' disciples leaving him and walking away. While acknowledging that such statements might provide stumbling blocks when it comes to fellowship with non-Christians, he however insists that Christians must avoid the temptation of caving in to such pressures as might lead to the suppression of the statement or rendering it so innocuous as to no longer say what it purports to say. For him, as a Christian, one has no choice other than to confess that Jesus Christ is the one and only Prophet, light of life, and Word of God. Christian freedom, says Barth, is exactly the freedom to make this confession. But he warns that in making this confession, one must avoid the tendency of making such a statement as a way of absolutizing Christian subjectivity – a tendency that is an outcome of a supreme misunderstanding of the confession. He says:

> "The statement that Jesus Christ is the one Word of God has really nothing whatever to do with the arbitrary exaltation and self-glorification of the Christian in relation to other men, of the Church in relation to other institutions, or of Christianity in relation to other conceptions. It is a Christological statement. It looks away from non-Christian and Christian alike to the One who sovereignly confronts and precedes both as *the* Prophet. As Jesus Christ is its content, the one who confesses it in no sense marks himself off from those who do not"[96].

Barth's insistence that the statement is a Christological one is important. He intends to make a subtle distinction between Christ and the Christian church. In this regard, Jesus Christ is presented as a universal prophet whose prophetic actions touch the entire humanity

[96] CD IV/3.1., p. 91.

in one way or the other. There is indeed no distinction between the Jews and the Gentiles when it comes to the illuminating light of Christ. The statement is therefore a Christological one that is not made concerning Christianity as a religion but rather, one made concerning Christ as the one Word of God. Christianity as a religion, on the other hand, does not envelop the whole of Christ in the sense of caging Him within its fold and not letting His light shine forth on others. Perceived arbitrariness in the statement arises when Christianity tries to use it as a form of weapon against other religions. When one however follows what Barth calls a "distinctive thought-form of the Bible" in making the statement that Jesus Christ is the one Word of God, one would avoid the charge of arbitrariness.

For Barth, this Christological statement that Jesus Christ is the one Word of God is made of Jesus alone and does not refer to any other subject. He insists that whereas in the Bible Jesus declares Himself to be the one Word of God; and, whereas there are both direct witness to Jesus Christ in words of the prophets and apostles and indirect witness in the message, activity and life of the Christian church, neither the Bible as such nor the Church and its doctrine is the one Word of God. It is true that in the Bible, the church, and elsewhere, there can be, and indeed there evidently are, other words and other lights; but when it comes to the one Word, he insists that this is an exclusive preserve of Jesus Christ alone.

This willingness to acknowledge that words spoken outside the circle of the Bible and the Church are not necessarily valueless and false, is itself one of the true words *extra muros ecclesiae*, and a remarkable shift (or should we say an important clarification of) his earlier "theologies" of religion. What Barth is contesting is not that there could be many such true words, but that these in themselves and as such should be described as the Word of God and be set side by side Jesus Christ as a supplement to, or even as a replacement of the latter. There is (and must remain so as far as Barth is concerned) a Christological exclusivism. This is non-negotiable even when he talks of other words. 'Other words' do not, and cannot mean 'other equal words'. But the inequality does not thereby render the less equal false or irrelevant. It only means that whereas Christianity as a religion might be a species within a genus, Jesus Christ as the one Word of God has no genus and therefore there cannot be other subordinate species. In this regard it is important to note Barth's use of upper and lower cases respectively when talking of "Word" and "word". To say that Jesus Christ is the only "word" of God is to make a false statement because there are indeed many "words" of God spoken and

heard everywhere and at every corner of the world. But that Jesus Christ is the one and only "Word" of God is to identify this Jesus with this God as the Word-became-flesh. In this sense God does not just speak through Jesus Christ; He Himself is that Word of God. Barth's intention is by now very discernible: with or without Christianity as a religion, Jesus Christ is, and must remain, the only auto-revelation of God and must enjoy that exclusivity with no one else. It is true that God does speak in many and varied ways, but when it comes to His Word, he has only spoken through Jesus Christ. For this reason Jesus Christ cannot be compared with other "prophets" that can be found in the secular world or even in other religions of the world. Whereas these other prophets can speak true words, or even speak in the name of God, they themselves cannot claim to be the Word of God in the manner of Jesus Christ.

Barth's "excessive" Christological exclusivity is at force when he begins to explain precisely the meaning of the phrase 'Jesus Christ is the one Word of God'. He insists that this means that Jesus Christ is a "total and complete" declaration of God; that in Jesus Christ, God is "exhaustively, unreservedly and totally revealed"[97]. In other words, he seems to be arguing that Jesus Christ is not just "*totus Deus*" but more importantly "totum Dei"[98]. Whereas this conclusion is significantly noticeable in Barth's argument, one needs not forget the context[99] in which he set his arguments, which was not that of Jesus Christ in

[97] Cf., CD IV/3.1., p. 99.

[98] We have already pointed out in chapter two John Hick's argument against the claim that Jesus Christ encompasses the whole of God as *totum Dei*. Whereas he accepts that Jesus Christ is *totus Deus* (wholly God), he insists that He is not thereby *totum Dei* (the whole of God) since Jesus represents just a section and not the whole of God's agape.

[99] It was never set against the context of dialogue with the religions of the world but rather against the German "Christian" practice of awarding cultic honour to the portrait of the Führer which he likened to the sin of Israel against the covenant. This sin, according to him, was not so much that of a direct apostasy as that of the combination and admixture of the service and invocation of Yahweh with the adoration of the numina of the Canaanites and other pagan peoples around. The Israelites, while not denouncing Yahweh, did not want to lose the "benefits" of rendering adorations to these other gods. Barth saw in the practice of the German Christians, a repetition of this old Israelite sin of horrible admixture. He was therefore berating them for bringing in the person of the Führer to enjoy equal status with that of Jesus Christ. It is true that they never out-rightly denied the prophecy of Jesus Christ; but to bring in the human leader as a completion of that prophecy amounted, in Barth's opinion, to serving two masters. For him, the Word spoken by Jesus Christ is already complete and adequate. But people's hearing of it could (and indeed is) incomplete and inadequate. However, this should not be a reason for people to "invent" other "words" in order that the hearing would be complete. Any attempt to do so, says Barth, would only lead people to hearing the words of another god which is obviously a false one in relation to the one God. Such a god can at best be a *Deus absconditus* which cannot be equated with the *Deus revelatus*.

relation to other religious figures but rather that of Jesus Christ among Christians who, while maintaining their firm belief in Him, try to create other cultic figures to stand alongside the one Word of God.

Again, as a Reformed theologian, Barth was also ill at ease at the growing Catholic cult of Mary and the Catholic interpretation of the Church as the reserved place of salvation. Whether he was correct in equating the Catholic honour to Mary with a worship of Mary is a different thing altogether and meant for another topic entirely. But our point here is just to signal that the context of his Christological exclusivity has more to do with secularism than with religious pluralism. The Barmen Declaration (which is the theme of this section of CD) was after all made not against non-Christians but rather against the "Christians" who tried to "manufacture" other *words* and equate them with the one *Word* of God. Whereas Barth makes room for some of these "words" to be true, nonetheless, such truth do not thereby elevate them to the level where Jesus Christ stands: "In religious or secular language many words might speak of the majesty, goodness, severity and mystery of God … But none of them says what the life of Jesus Christ says. …Being set in a different context, they cannot fail to be somewhat distorted, or at least different from what is said to us in Jesus Christ"[100].

To be clear, Barth emphasises that, if what is at issue here is the word of Christianity vis-à-vis the world religions or even the words of the Christian church or of the Bible in themselves and as such, then there could be some basis for comparison. But at issue here is not just any word but the Word of the life of Jesus Christ. He therefore clearly distinguishes between Christianity as a form of religion and Jesus Christ as the one Word of God. In this regard, what is uppermost in his mind at this point is not the uniqueness of Christianity as a form of religion but rather the uniqueness of Jesus Christ: "It is in the uniqueness of His works and gifts of His being for us and to us, that the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as Lord, and therefore the uniqueness of His authority and Word, is manifested"[101]. The "battle", therefore, is not between Christianity and the rest but rather between Jesus Christ and the rest (including Christianity as a form of religion).

[100] CD IV/3.1., p. 107.
[101] CD IV/3.1., p. 110.

3.2.2. Relationship Between the one Word and other true words

When Barth speaks of other words, he has in mind three categories of words namely, the ones spoken in the Bible; the proclamations of the Church's community *intra muros*; and finally, good words that are spoken *extra muros ecclesiae*. The following criteria of truth is what he believes determines the "truth" of those words spoken *extra muros ecclesiae*: "…in order to be true, and therefore to be words of genuine prophecy, such words must be in the closest material and substantial conformity and agreement with the one Word of God Himself and therefore with that of His one Prophet Jesus Christ"[102]. For Barth then, truth can only be so-called when it takes the form of a correspondence. The words can only claim the notion of truth if and only if, "objectively" and "subjectively", their intention is "to correspond" to the one Word and to "confirm" to it[103]. With regards to truth *intra muros ecclesiae*, this conclusion is hardly surprising given the "proximity" of these truths to the one Word Jesus Christ.

However, the same cannot be said of truths *extra muros ecclesiae*. Are there really such words in the first instance? And must such words really correspond to the one Word of God for them to be regarded as true?

To the first question, Barth admits that there really are words which can and do say the same Word but from different source and in another tongue. They have different origin and character yet they are true words. These are what he calls "secular parables". And he argues that we can also encounter "parables of the Kingdom" even in these secular parables. For him, the secular sphere, which he calls "the strange interruption of the secularism of life in the world", is so-important to us Christians that we need to at least "eavesdrop" so as to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd there too[104]. But he insists however that in eavesdropping, one is not expected to move out of the circle of the Word of God but must rather remain within it and from there sift the grain from the chaff. This is why he forecloses any attempt at eavesdropping in the area of natural theology. His angry "No!" to Emile Brunner is just a dramatic way of expressing this. He reiterated that any knowledge of God got through natural theology is an abstract one having nothing whatsoever to do with the concrete,

[102] CD IV/3.1., p. 111.
[103] Cf., CD IV/3.1., p. 111.
[104] Cf., CD IV/3.1., p. 117.

Trinitarian and relational God of the Scriptures. He insists that "words" that must be considered as true must be miraculous. Hence, even in the secular sphere, no rational process short of miracle can lead to true words. The miracle in question is the capacity of Jesus Christ to create human witnesses which is not restricted to the inner circle of revelation but in fact, transcends this circle. Since he considers natural theology as making no room for such divine intervention but tends to explain everything from a rational point of view, he dismisses every word gotten out of this rational inquiry, even if it be meaningful and practicable theologically (he says it cannot be), as incapable of serving as a true word because the process of its evolution is fundamentally defective.

Having eliminated natural theology from the wider sphere of the so-called parable of the Kingdom, Barth now mentions secularism, both in its pure and absolute form and in its mixed and relative form, as exemplifying the secular parables he has in mind. Although these two forms of secularism pose varying degrees of problem to the Kingdom, he insists that none of the problems posed by either is insurmountable when it comes to God speaking, by way of miracle, through words spoken in them. However, he described the truth spoken in these secular sphere vis-à-vis the one true Word by means of a metaphor of a circle and its periphery. These true words spoken as secular parables are segments of the periphery of a circle. They are neither the whole of the periphery nor can they be described as being the centre of the circle. Jesus Christ is both the centre and the whole of the periphery. His insistence here is to avoid giving the impression that there can be partial truths independent of Jesus Christ. While Jesus Christ can declare Himself in them, "they do not express partial truths, for the one truth of Jesus Christ is indivisible. Yet they express the one and total truth from a particular angle, and to that extent only implicitly and not explicitly in its unity and totality"[105]. Hunsinger explains it this way: "centre and periphery… are regarded as two forms of a single truth. Of these two forms, the centre is the primary, and the periphery the secondary"[106].

In a Chalcedonian pattern of indissolubility and distinctiveness, Hunsinger describes the relationship between the one Word of God and other true words as that of a dialectical inclusion[107]. Using the

[105] CD IV/3.1., p. 123.
[106] G. HUNSINGER, *How to Read Karl Barth*, p. 261.
[107] G. HUNSINGER, *How to Read Karl Barth*, p. 262.

Tillichian categories of autonomy, heteronomy and theonomy, he explains that the other lights do not enjoy a simple autonomy in relation to the one great light by being conceived of as being *alongside* this one great light (they are neither self-contained, self-sufficient, nor self-grounded). Yet, on the contrary, they cannot be conceived of as being *outside* the one great light, and therefore, a simple heteronomy in terms of being external or alien to this one great light is also ruled out. The only Tillichian category that is left is the theonomous alternative:

> "The dialectical inclusion of the centre in the periphery and of the periphery in the centre suggests a distinctive, theonomous ordering of the truth. In a theonomous situation, it might be said, a single truth is manifested in a variety of distinctive forms without either the centre losing itself in the periphery or the periphery losing itself in the centre"[108].

This is precisely why Barth insists that despite the distant proximity of these 'outside truths' to the Church, we should listen to them not as alien words or sounds but rather as segments of that periphery of which Jesus Himself is both the whole periphery and the centre.

With regards to determining the truth of the secular parables, a simple correspondence theory of truth cannot be used as in the case of *intra muros* words. But Barth proposes that the secular parables must at least not contradict the words of the Scripture but must "harmonise" with its message. To harmonise with the message of the Scripture means that, "it cannot try to say anything different or new"; it means that "it will not lead its hearers away from the Scripture, but more deeply into it"[109]. In other words, he is trying to contend that as a criterion, such words must at least be compatible to the scripture.

One can therefore deduce that for Barth, two theories namely, *theory of non-contradiction* and *compatibility theory*, together determine the truth of the secular words. When the compatibility theory is applied to the Scripture on the one hand, and to the dogma and confessions of the church on the other hand, they do not produce the same effect. Because the Scripture and the dogmas and confessions of the Church do not carry the same weight of authority, secular words' encounter with them (using compatibility theory) produces different effects. While the secular true words' encounter

[108] G. HUNSINGER, *How to Read Karl Barth*, p. 263.
[109] Cf., CD IV/3.1, p.126.

with the Scripture produces no novelty, Barth says they can certainly produce something new in relation to the dogmas and confessions of the Church. When such new words are heard, the Church has to revise and update its teaching by reformulating the traditional norms. In doing that however, he warns that the revisions are only meant to supplement and never to contradict the already known dogmas and confessions so as not to break continuity with the insights already established. Nevertheless, because of what they signify for the life of the community, these other true words, in spite of the "strangeness of its message" and in spite of the fact that they are "independent and original in their origin and nature", must be recognised as true words and as very useful to the Christian community. Sometimes even, these secular parables can act as catalyst for the revision of the Church's formulations. Therefore, (and this is a very important and significant 'novelty' in Barth's theory of religion – one of the very reasons that prompted us to label this section as his 'mature' theory of religion in the sense that he was gradually becoming aware of the non-negligibility of the reality and fact of religious pluralism) secular words that properly make use of the double-pronged theory – that of non-contradiction, and, the compatibility theory, in their encounter with Christianity can and do lead to revisionism[110].

However, Barth was careful to limit this possibility of "revision" only to the dogmas and the church's proclamations which he does not accord the same normativity and universality of authority as the scripture. In fact, he warns about the danger of trying to accord normativity and universality to the secular parables of truth:

> "If the modern Church were to attempt to canonise a free communication of its Lord in this way, it would become a different Church from that of yesterday which did not yet have it and therefore did not know this new canon. And there might well arise a Church which recognised this communication and another which did not, the *vinculum pacis* being broken between them if the former claimed universal validity and obligatoriness for its insight and confession"[111].

[110] One should however be very cautious in the use of the terminology 'revisionism' here. Whereas Barth concedes that to certain extent, the secular words' encounter with the dogmas of the church could necessitate a certain amount of revision or reformulation of the said dogma, he cannot thereby be said to be a revisionist theologian as is commonly known today, and as is being used in this research.

[111] CD IV/3.1, p. 133.

It appears that this is where Barth's "revisionism" parted ways with other revisionist theologians – that where these others take the secular parables as also sources of revelation, Barth takes them as sources of illumination.

It is as sources of illumination that Barth sees the relationship between "lights" from secular parables and the Light of Christ from the point of view of the relationship between creation and reconciliation. Since for him, Christology is "the unfolding of a drama"[112], he believes that this drama is not unfolded in the heavenly world, but rather in this creaturely world. However, he does not equate this 'unfolding' with creation but says it is related to it. In fact, for him, creation has in its view the reconciling grace of God. And precisely because of this close relationship between creation and reconciliation, Barth can talk about Word and words, Light and lights.

He sees the creaturely world as having its own God-given lights that are not extinguished by the one true Light; and calls these creaturely lights "the luminosity of the creaturely world"[113] in order to distinguish them from God's self-revelation. But although these lights do not shine with the same brightness as the Light of Christ, he says they bring illumination to humanity. They function within their limits as created lights to bring dynamism and harmony to the world. He does not describe these creaturely lights as the mask of God, let alone as revelation of God, but he gives great importance to them because he describes the creaturely world as the *theatrum gloriae Dei*[114]. He sees the world as the theatre or the location where the glory of God (His creation and reconciliation) is triumphed. Therefore, he maintains that there cannot be any hostility in the relationship between that glory of God and the theatre which is the world. In fact, creation and reconciliation go hand in hand. We cannot talk of one without the other. One gives full and adequate meaning to the other.

Although it is true that the existence of God as trinity does not depend on the existence of the world[115]; nonetheless, the self-

[112] CD IV/3.1, p. 136.
[113] CD IV/3.1, p. 139.
[114] Cf., CD IV/3.1, p. 151.
[115] McCormack offered "to register a critical correction against Barth" by making God's pre-temporal decision of election to not only precede the Trinity but also to have actually given rise to it. He argues that Barth revised the doctrine of election; and the consequence of that revision was that Jesus Christ is made to be both the electing God and the elect man. Thus, he is both the Subject and the object of election. As the Subject of election, there cannot be the so-called *Logos asarkos* (Logos without flesh) independent of the *Logos ensarkos* (Logos 'within the flesh'). He believes that the consequence of this position is that the immanent Trinity is made to be wholly identical in content with the economic Trinity. But this consequence has in itself some

revelation of God in Jesus Christ does not occur in an empty, dark void, but rather, in a sphere that has real existence with its brightness and light. This implies that with all its creatureliness, the world has its lights and truths which, though not comparable with that of God, nevertheless, still shine within its creaturely limits.

However, he does not see the relationship between these many lights and the one Light of the self-declaration of God as that of two rays from one and the same light, or two aspects of one and the same truth:

> "In God's self-declaration in Jesus Christ we do not have a mere irruption of some higher, original and true light, and therefore a mere expression of truth, but the one true light of the one truth above or alongside which there can be no other, rival truth. Are there truths outside this one? Yes, for the creature has its being and existence

implication to the doctrine of the Trinity: between Trinity and election, which comes first logically? He acknowledged that Barth did not precise his position this way; but this is exactly the point he was making – that Barth *should have* revised his doctrine of the Trinity in the light of the insight he got from his revision of the doctrine of election. Such a revision would have made the election to have logically preceded the Trinity and given rise to it. Such a position, he maintained, is consistent with that of Barth. Cf., Bruce MCCORMACK, *Grace and Being: The Role of God's Gracious Election in Karl Barth's Theological Ontology*, in John WEBSTER (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 92-110. However, this "theological bombshell" did not go unchallenged. Paul Molnar sees in McCormack's identification of *Logos asarkos* with the *Logos incarnandus* a blurring of the distinction between the immanent and economic Trinity which does not give room for God's freedom. If God cannot be God without us, then God is after all not free. He argues against McCormack that for Barth, creation, reconciliation and redemption, have no constitutive effect on the eternal existence of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Therefore, "the order between election and triunity cannot be logically reversed without in fact making creation, reconciliation and redemption necessary to God" cf. Paul D. MOLNAR, *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity in Dialogue with Karl Barth and Contemporary Theology*, Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 2002. On his own part, Hunsinger argues that McCormack made the mistake of understanding Barth's statement that the Trinity is *determined* by God's free decision of election to mean that the trinity is *constituted* by God's act. But on the contrary, he argues that something can be *determined* only if it exists. Therefore, if the trinity is determined by election, then it implies that the former is ontologically prior to and logically presupposed by the later. Consequently, with or without creation of the world, God would still be Holy Trinity. For him, when Barth states that Jesus Christ is the subject of election, he does so not *simpliciter* but *secundum quid*. Such qualification is the distinction between eternal Son as such and eternal Son as incarnate Son, which, despite their numerical sameness, are different in their modes of existence. Thus, strictly speaking, it is the eternal Son and not the Son *incarnatus*, nor even the Son *incarnandus* who is the subject of this election. cf., George HUNSINGER, *Election and Trinity: Twenty-five Thesis on the Theology of Karl Barth*, in *Modern Theology*, 24, 2 (2008), p. 179-198. On our own part, we have to maintain the "traditionalist" stance that the Trinity logically precedes the election so that the existence of the Trinity should not depend on the existence of the world. Whether the "traditionalist" view or the "revisionist" view represents the actual position of Barth himself is not the issue at stake here. But as we shall see later on when we shall reflect on the insufficiency of Barth's theology of retrieval as a method of approach to pluralism, Barth's brand of christocentrism seem to suggest the revisionist view, but this comes with serious consequences with regards to his treatment of truth *extra muros ecclesiae*.

> outside God. But as lights of the creature these truths are irruptions – in this connexion there is a real place for the term – of the one truth. If they have force, value and validity, these are not independent. Primarily and finally, they are not their own. They are merely those which are lent them by the shining of the one light of the one truth. These are lights and truths of the *theatrum* of the *gloria Dei*"[116].

Thus, whereas Barth assigns independent existence to these lights, he does not assign independent validity to them. They can have validity only in so far as they are "irruptions" of the one light of God. Here, he takes truth as a very big "whole" which may erupt into smaller fractions. But these smaller fractions are not independent of the big "whole". Their validity depends on their emanating from that big "whole" even when they are coming from another source and speaking in another tongue. The light of Jesus Christ shines; but can and do reflect in variety of ways in the cosmos. It is for this very reason that Barth insists that the one order of creation should not be understood as being just uniform but rather multiform. This implies that "it does not exclude the many, the particular, the change, the alteration, the diversity. It includes them… The only thing excluded is chaos"[117]. With the exclusion of chaos, these various and multiform reflections help make certain dark places of the cosmos clearer; but they do not thereby replace the one light of Christ. What Barth is up to is to avoid on the one hand, a dualistic understanding in which there is perceived to be two independent rays from the same light, and on the other hand, a monistic understanding in which there is perceived to be two aspects of one and the same truth. He proposes a situation in which the truth of God both "challenges and relativises" the creaturely truths, and at the same time "institutes and integrates" them[118].

For Barth, three essential characteristics distinguish the truth of God from creaturely truths. For the truth of God, it is completely binding, has unity and totality, and has irrevocable finality[119]. Although he acknowledges that the creaturely words and truths are also binding, he maintains that they do not do so *essentially*, *internally* and *absolutely* as the truth of God does. For him therefore, the creaturely lights are related to the one Light of God only as a form of witness to that one light. They are not independent lights; they don't have irrevocable finality in themselves and as such; but they can

[116] CD IV/3.1., p. 152-153.
[117] CD IV/3.1., p. 142.
[118] Cf., CD IV/3.1., p. 153.
[119] Cf., CD IV/3.1., p. 154.

acquire this finality when they are invested with the glorious finality of God. When this is done, they can bear witness concerning creation concretely and in harmony with the witness of God Himself.

4. Assessing Barth's "Mature" Theory of Religion in the Light of Religious Pluralism

The most remarkable novelty in Barth's mature theory of religion is that he granted partial truth to the creaturely words and lights – something that was not the case in his earlier treatments. With this granting of partial truth, he has given a leeway on how to do systematic theology within the culture of pluralism. It appears also that this has foreclosed all caricaturing of his theory of religion as simply exclusivist (if we are to restrict ourselves to the tripartite typology of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism). One is not arguing that there is no exclusivist bend in Barth's theology (which theology does not have that?). But a blanket qualification of his theology as nothing but exclusivism is what we are contesting. Hunsinger was careful to use the words exclusivism and inclusivism with qualifications in describing Barth's theory of religion. After a lengthy analysis of Barth's secular parables of the truth, he uses the expressions "exclusivism without triumphalism or inclusivism without compromise"[120] as better descriptions of what Barth proposes in his secular parables. Although Paul Chung sees this qualification of Hunsinger as losing sight of what he calls "Barth's deliberation concerning the irregular grace of God in Barth's thought which is open to recognizing a religious pluralism", preferring rather to decipher in Barth's theology, "a salvation without Christianity, i.e., outside the walls of Christianity" given that "salvation belongs to the mystery of God"[121], it appears that this does not negate what Hunsinger says. In fact, Chung's own position is akin to what Hunsinger put succinctly. He (Chung) says:

> "A Christian theology of religions in favour of Christian uniqueness does not in fact stand in opposition to the reality of pluralism itself because God is the One who accepts the world's pluralism and integrates all its variety and pluriformity through God's universal grace in Jesus Christ into the coming kingdom of God. Barth's deliberation of true lights and worlds (sic)…as free communications

[120] Cf., G. Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth*, p. 280.
[121] Cf., Paul S. Chung, *Karl Barth's Theology of Reconciliation in Dialogue with a Theology of Religions*, in *Mission Studies*, 25, 2 (2008), p. 211-228, p. 220.

> of God would not contradict the hermeneutical project of the fusion of horizons between Christianity and other religions"[122].

Barth himself is however very careful and cautious when it comes to such hermeneutical project of "fusion of horizons". While acknowledging that alongside Jesus Christ there may be other realities demanding to be recognised, acknowledged, confessed and attested, he however cautions that when it comes to the question of attestation of these realities, the task is not that of the Christian community but should rather be left to their own (other realities' own) authorised or unauthorized prophets[123]. Trevor Hart summarized what can be regarded as a 'true Barthian' attitude to religious pluralism when he says:

> "Barth has no qualms about referring to Christianity as the only 'true' religion; but his attitude toward religious alternatives, far from being dismissive or arrogant, is one characterized by respect and humility. It is not, however, a humility that would seek to endorse or commend the existence of such alternatives and what they do as good in themselves, but rather that of a sinner among sinners, who feels that his own glass home is rather too fragile for him to be throwing any stones"[124].

The problem with a good number of the so-called Christian pluralist theologians is that they not only recognize and acknowledge these other realities, but they go to the extent of taking over from the "prophets" of these other realities, the task of "testifying" for them; and by so doing, trying to construct the houses of these other realities for them while at the same time leaving their own Christian house to become desolate. This, however, can be analogous to amounting (in the words of Trevor Hart above) to living in a glass house and yet throwing stones.

Having said that, it is important to point out that, Karl Barth, if at all he is one, certainly is not a perfect example of a pluralist theologian in the manner of John Hick and Paul Knitter. For one, pluralism was not a serious theological issue during his peak days. However, given the fact that he had acclaimed credibility for dialoguing with the contemporary issues of his epoch, one would agree with Keith Johnson when he says:

[122] P. CHUNG, *Karl Barth's Theology of Reconciliation in Dialogue with a Theology of Religions*, p. 223.
[123] Cf., CD IV/3. 2. P. 837.
[124] T. HART, *Karl Barth, the Trinity, and Pluralism*, p. 139.

> "Were Barth writing his *Church Dogmatics* today, one can imagine him addressing several new issues in his small-print excurses. For example, one can easily picture Barth engaging proponents of 'process theology' in his discussion of the 'perfections of divine freedom' in CD II/I. Barth might also have addressed advocates of 'religious pluralism'"[125].

Although Johnson insists that "Karl Barth would have been one of the last people to be sympathetic toward a pluralist interpretation of religion"[126], a closer look at Barth's *extra muros ecclesiae* truths appears to have opened the way for a fruitful encounter with other religions (even if it is not in the manner of the "*Myth* contributors"[127]). Our argument here will be based, not on Barth's doctrine of God[128], but on his doctrine of secular parables of the Truth. In this regard, we are in agreement with Chestnutt who says that "Barth's concept of 'secular words' of the Kingdom provides the Church with criteria in order to receive words from other religions – by evaluating them and by determining what use the Church is to make of them"[129]. It is true that Barth himself did not refer explicitly to other religions in his treatment of truths *extra muros ecclesiae*; however, those close to him and, who had personal one-on-one encounter with him, tell us that he (Barth) confided in them that he did actually have other religions in

[125] Keith E. JOHNSON, *Divine Transcendence, Religious Pluralism and Barth's Doctrine of God*, in *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 5, 2 (2003), p. 200-224, p. 201.

[126] Against certain pluralists who lean on the transcendence, mystery and ineffability of God as providing grounds on which a pluralistic interpretation of religion should be embraced, Johnson advanced four reasons why Barth's account of 'Transcendence as Incomprehensibility' cannot be appropriated as a basis from which to argue for a pluralist theory of religions namely: (1) Barth's account resists a pluralist appropriation because it does not denote an *unknown* divine reality (as those of the pluralists do) but the God who is *known* because he has revealed himself; (2) Barth's account is grounded in God's self-revelation, not a general theory of human knowledge; (3) Barth carefully frames the subject-predicate relationship in his discussion of God's perfections (one must be careful not to let 'transcendence' or 'mystery' become a category of which 'God' is but a subset); (4) Barth's account is fundamentally Christological. Cf., K. JOHNSON, *Divine Transcendence, Religious Pluralism and Barth's Doctrine of God*, p. 207-213.

[127] "*Myth* Contributors" is a term Johnson uses to qualify the participants at a meeting at Claremont Graduate School in 1986 in which the contributors argued that the church must 'cross the Rubicon' by embracing a pluralist view of religion. Among the notable participants were John Hick, Paul Knitter and Wilfred Cantwell Smith. The essays to this conference were later published under the title "*The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*", edited by Hick and Knitter. Cf., K. JOHNSON, *Divine Transcendence*, p. 203. All the essays in this volume (it has to be noted) converge at the general notion that the purported Christian uniqueness is only but a myth, hence, Johnson's coinage – "Myth contributors".

[128] We prefer to leave the consideration of Barth's doctrine of God until we might have considered David Tracy's appropriation of the idea of God in process theology. It is only after then that one may begin to examine Barth's doctrine of God vis-à-vis theological pluralism.

[129] G. CHESTNUTT, *Challenging the Stereotype*, p. 87.

mind when he was treating the subject matter[130]. If this is true, then the question is: to what extent can Barth's extra-ecclesial truth be of any benefit to us in the discussion of religious pluralism?

It has already been noted above that it was very unlikely that Barth would have canonized religious pluralism as a theological option (even if we feel that Johnson went too far in suggesting that Barth would have been one of the last persons to be sympathetic toward a pluralist interpretation of religion). The fact that he (Barth) admitted that he had other religions in mind in his treatment of extra-ecclesial truths suggests that the Barth of the fourth volume of *Church Dogmatics* had a little soft spot for (and therefore was a little sympathetic to) other religions in a pluralistic context. But (and this is the point we should make no mistakes about) his conception of "secular" in his secular parables (as pointed out by Hunsinger) is only an apparent one, not a real one.

Hunsinger notices a "contextual ambiguity"[131] in Barth's postulation that true words can arise from the secular sphere. On the one hand, because arising from a secular setting in a fallen world (and thus having another contextual whole that exists in abstraction and even in opposition to the contextual whole established by the one true Word of God), true secular words seem to be "segments of circles with other centres". Yet on the other hand, because true, secular words can only be a segment in the periphery of the luminous circle established by and centred in the truth of the One word of God, so much so that to be alien to this one Word of God, means that no secular word can be true[132]. In order to surmount this contextual ambiguity of secular parables, Hunsinger suggests that the "secularity" in the secular parables is only apparent; the "actuality" is rather Christocentric:

> "Insofar as the one Word of God declares itself in this way, in the form of secular parables, it becomes clear that, despite all ambiguity, the real contextual whole in which these words participate is only apparently secular; in reality it is actually Christocentric"[133].

[130] Glenn Chestnutt for instance, cited Geoff Thompson as having interviewed Hans Küng during his PhD research who stated that Barth actually confided in him (Küng) that although he (Barth) did not refer to other religions explicitly, he actually had them in mind while writing the account of extra-ecclesial truth. Cf., G. CHESTNUTT, *Challenging the Stereotype*, p. 111-112.
[131] G. HUNSINGER, *How to Read Karl Barth*, p. 264.
[132] Cf., G. HUNSINGER, *How to Read Karl Barth*, p. 264.
[133] G. HUNSINGER, *How to Read Karl Barth*, p. 265.

Hunsinger's logic therefore appears to suggest that a secular word must be Christocentric in order to be true. This logic is true when considered from Barth's own logic of Christological concentration as the spectrum through which every theology must pass and be interpreted. But given this fact, the question of how to reconcile secularity and christocentrism in Barthian context arises. Can a word be both secular and Christocentric at the same time? In other words, are christocentrism and secularity mutually exclusive or can they be admissive?

At this juncture, it will be good to make a subtle distinction between direct and indirect christocentrism. A direct christocentrism (as we shall understand it here) refers explicitly to Jesus Christ. An indirect christocentrism does not refer explicitly to Jesus Christ but alludes to him in a Christian interpretation of a text. Christians and Jews share together the Old Testament as a Sacred Scripture. But while the OT makes several references to the Messiah, no mention was made to Jesus Christ as that Messiah. However, Christian appropriation of the OT as part of its Scripture witnessed Christian exegetes interpreting those OT allusions in the light of Jesus Christ. Given that Christianity was built upon the Jewish messianic expectation and proposes that the very Messiah had already come in the person of Jesus Christ, those passages became therefore indirectly Christocentric. However, while "secular" Jewish words can easily become Christocentric, the same cannot be said of words from other religions. How can those words become Christocentric (if ever they can) in the manner that Barth is proposing? Can one really "force" christocentrism upon the words of other religions? Wouldn't that amount to some sort of intellectual dishonesty?

Paul Griffiths divided theology of religions into two parts namely, a priori and a posteriori[134]. According to his division, a priori method deals with the fact of religious pluralism without ever being concerned with the concrete steps of delving into any of these other religions. Theological axioms are the only appeal resorted to as guaranteeing religious pluralism. On the other hand, a posteriori method deals with specific empirically available knowledge about concrete and actual religious communities. In his assessment of the Christian theology of religions, he opines that majority of theologians engaged in this venture has remained in the a priori section of the

[134] Cf., Paul J. GRIFFITHS, *Modalizing the Theology of Religions*, in *Journal of Religion*, 73, 3 (1993), p. 382-389.

divide, thus resulting in the typology of exclusivism ("Christianity is the only true religion"), inclusivism ("the truth of all religions is included in Christianity"), and pluralism ("all religions are true")[135].

Following Griffiths' division, one can say that Barth's extra ecclesial truths fall under the a priori section with an inclusivist bias namely, that the truth of these secular parables are included in that of Christianity. This is exactly what Hunsinger meant by suggesting that the "secularity" of these secular parables is only but apparent. The problem with Hunsinger's logic however, is that its procedure can be reversed, that is, the contrary can equally be the case. What if the perceived christocentrism in these secular parables is only apparent? What if the actuality remains secular with no or independent connection to Christology?

Should one then proceed a posteriori? Karl Rahner cautions that the issue at stake here is an inquiry in dogmatic theology and not in the history of religion or in the phenomenology of religion. He therefore warns:

> "In this question a Christian dogmatic theologian cannot do the work of a historian of religion and his a posteriori investigations because the theologian's own binding sources of faith arose without any immediate contact with the great majority of non-Christian religions"[136].

Although a priori procedure is not without its own difficulty, Griffiths appears to have subtly acknowledged the near impossibility of a systematic theology proceeding a posteriori in its dialogue with other religions when he proposes at least a *modalization* of a priori claims in the event of such difficulty of proceeding a posteriori. By a *modalized* a priori he means to say that the a priori claims can be recast in terms of possibility and necessity, so that instead of the pluralist claim that "all religions are true" we can have something like, "it is possible that there is more than one true religion"[137]. This proposition, in fact, forms the major object of the two books under review in his article. Schubert Ogden for instance, believes that the major concern of most pluralist theologians namely, whether there is only one true religion, does not exhaust the options[138]. These options, in Ogden's view, are monism (the belief that in the end there is only

[135] P. GRIFFITHS, *Modalizing the Theology of Religions*, p. 382.
[136] K. RAHNER, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, p. 312.
[137] Cf., P. GRIFFITHS, *Modalizing the Theology of Religions*, p. 382.
[138] Cf., P. GRIFFITHS, *Modalizing the Theology of Religions*, p. 382.

one true religion – here he places both exclusivism and inclusivism under the umbrella of monism), and pluralism (the belief that there are many formally true religion). Ogden's argument is that monism and pluralism do not exhaust the options because there is another option namely, modal claim that there could be many true religions. This claim is a possibility but not an established fact known a priori. He labels this option 'pluralistic inclusivism'[139].

Whether or not a change in nomenclature will help Christian theology maintain its distinctiveness is yet to be seen; and whether or not Mark Heim's proposal for multiple salvations[140] as the best way forward is still contested[141]. But Barth's truths *extra muros ecclesiae*, serves two purposes: it points to the fact that Christianity does not have a monopoly of truths; secondly, it invites Christian thinkers to dialogue with these extra ecclesial truths and realise that they can and do contain truths that are very useful for Christian self-understanding.

To say that Barth came to terms in his later years with the apparent impracticality of his theology of retrieval in adequately addressing the question of pluralism is to state the obvious. His famous gospel of "change of direction"[142] says it all. Although he maintains that this change in direction is not in opposition to the earlier change, nevertheless, it is obviously in *distinction* from it[143]. However, the distinction he was talking about was not obvious, as those secular truths were treated not as real but as apparent. In the end, he appeared to have plunged himself into some logical inconsistency: on the one hand, he is willing to acknowledge a loss in direction (the very reason that prompted him to change direction); but on the other hand, he is unwilling to let go his earlier direction that contributed to the loss in direction (his brand of christocentrism). His new direction needn't have been in opposition to the earlier direction; but it should have been in real distinction from it.

Perhaps at the moment Barth was proposing the truths *extra muros ecclesiae*, the ship was already gradually drifting away but not yet threatening to run aground. Maybe this was why he failed to make the expected 180 degrees turn of the rudder he envisioned[144]. Or

[139] P. GRIFFITHS, *Modalizing the Theology of Religions*, p. 383.
[140] Cf., S. Mark HEIM, *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion* (Faith Meets Faith) Maryknoll, NY, Orbis, 2001.
[141] For a recent criticism of Mark Heim's proposals, cf., Michael D. FEGERT, *The Insufficiency of S. Mark Heim's More Pluralistic Hypothesis*, in *Theology Today*, 69, 4 (2013), p. 497-510.
[142] Cf., Karl BARTH, *The Humanity of God*, Louisville, Kentucky, Westminster John Knox, 1960.
[143] Cf., K. BARTH, *The Humanity of God*, p. 37.
[144] Cf., K. BARTH, *The Humanity of God*, p. 41.

perhaps still, maybe he left that task to become the concern of another generation[145]. Well, this is another generation. However, an accurate 180 degrees turn would have seen Barth not only completely abandoning his earlier theological direction, but also opposing that direction – something that he never did. Instead, he defined a *genuine* revision as in no way involving a subsequent retreat, but rather, "a new beginning and attack in which what previously has been said is to be said more than ever, but now even better"[146]. A systematic theological approach to religious pluralism, if such approach seeks to preserve the Christian distinctiveness, should never involve abandoning its Christian specificity, let alone opposing it, all in the name of embracing pluralism. All the shortcomings of Barth's presentation of truth *extra muros ecclesiae* notwithstanding, it might be safe to suggest that he tried to preserve this specificity when he decided to make a turn for a new direction; although it appears that a 90 degrees turn is a safer angle from where to argue for extra ecclesial truths than Barth's purported 180 degrees turn.

[145] Cf., K. BARTH, *The Humanity of God*, p. 38.
[146] K. BARTH, *The Humanity of God*, p. 41-42.

CONCLUSION

Karl Barth's first impulse in his theology of retrieval was to work exclusively with the notion of diastasis in which God was radically separated from the world. He ended up with the concept of "Wholly Other" which, later in his own word, "showed greater similarity to the deity of the God of the philosophers than to the deity of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob"[147]. Although he was later to "retract" his steps by labelling this concept as "heretical"[148], and acknowledging that "God's deity… rightly understood, includes his *humanity*"[149]; he was unwilling to delve into the historicity of this *humanity* of God. In fact, he maintained throughout his career, his pre-Brunner conviction that the proper object of theology is God in his revelation. And even when he speaks of the 'Humanity of God' and argues that a look at Jesus Christ demonstrates decisively that God's deity does not exclude, but includes His *humanity*, he was still sceptical about according human subjectivity the status of an object of theology. Barth was just not forth-coming on this issue which entails according historicity a pride of place. For him, delving into the historicity of *Die Sache* entails going "beyond" and "outside" the Scripture which he believes proper theology is not authorized to do. He imposed his theology, and thus himself, with two fundamental limitations which logically hindered his acclaimed progress in his treatment of extra ecclesial truths namely: (1) that theology is limited fundamentally to a reflection on revelation; and (2) that revelation in Jesus Christ is the only revelation there is, as it says everything that God wishes to share with humanity.

It was in his bid to restrict himself within these limits that he treated the "secularity" of those secular parables as only 'apparent' (to use Hunsinger's explanation). The word "apparent" in this context means that those truths appear to be secular but, in point of fact, they are not. They are, in reality, Christocentric because they correspond to the one and only truth – the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Maybe this was why, on the one hand, he was willing to propagate that "[a] little 'non-religious' language from the street, the newspaper, literature, and, if one is ambitious, from the philosopher may thus, for

[147] K. BARTH, *The Humanity of God*, p. 45.
[148] Cf., K. BARTH, *The Humanity of God*, p. 43.
[149] K. BARTH, *The Humanity of God*, p. 46.

the sake of communication, occasionally be in order"[150]; but on the other hand, he is unwilling to explore that avenue of communication, insisting rather that "… we should not become particularly concerned about this"[151]. One wonders why we should not be concerned about these so-called "non-religious" languages, or even "religious languages" from other sources, if indeed they are in order.

Perhaps Barth was fearful about placing these extra ecclesial truths at par with the truth of Christianity – a very legitimate fear for that matter. Perhaps this was why he insisted on likening theology to 'a spinning top which supports itself on only one point'. But if theology truly supports itself only on one point; if it doesn't have any other "external support" so to say, outside that of revelation, then it appears contradictory to talk of extra ecclesial truths at all. By talking of extra ecclesial truths, Barth expresses his willingness to open up to other religions. But by maintaining a one-legged support for theology, he seems to be arguing that theology cannot fruitfully engage with other religions without sacrificing its Christian distinctiveness. This might be the reason why he never accorded some degree of autonomy to these other religions, but instead treated their "truths" as extension of Christian truth. But to look for oneself in another is to harm both self and the other. Put in another formulation, "[to] listen to another and only hear oneself is not to listen at all"[152].

As long as the "secularity" in Barth's secular parables remain apparent, it seems like hearing oneself while listening to another. While listening to another is an opening, hearing oneself through such listening to another is a limitation. For this reason, Chung appears to be correct when he said that, "[a]t times Barth's insight remains insufficient, unsatisfactory, but provocative and profound"[153]. It is because of the profundity of Barth's theology of retrieval that it can be considered invaluable in any systematic theological engagement with pluralism. But because of its insufficiency, it cannot sustain such engagement. Despite his arguments to the contrary, Barth seems to believe that Christianity must always shape others in any dialogue. But as Greggs argues, "the Christian should not simply believe she is engaged in shaping; in dialogue she is simultaneously being shaped.

[150] K. BARTH, *The Humanity of God*, p. 59.
[151] K. BARTH, *The Humanity of God*, p. 59.
[152] Tom GREGGS, *Bringing Barth's Critique of Religion to the Inter-faith Table*, in *Journal of Religion*, 88, 1 (2008), p. 75-94, p. 87.
[153] Paul CHUNG, *Karl Barth and Inter-Religious Dialogue: An Attempt to Bring Karl Barth to Dialogue with Religious Pluralism*, in *Asia Journal of Theology*, 15, 2 (2001), p. 232-246, p. 245.

The other can help her identify more sharply the confusions she has between religion and revelation, or religion and God"[154]. Barth's unwillingness to push further in his treatment of extra ecclesial truths seems to hinder this symbiotic shaping. He prefers instead to see these other "alien" sources autotomize whatever is considered "truthful" in them so that Christianity might appropriate and make use of those "truths". All this insistence is in a bid to maintain that "Christological concentration" which he always insisted upon.

One important clarification to make here, however, is that Barth's theology of retrieval is deemed insufficient as an approach to pluralism not because it is Christocentric but because of the type of christocentrism it propagates. Many pluralist theologians make the mistake of lumping "different" christocentrisms together with Barth's version of it as a prototype, and then pitching christocentrism against pluralism. It is imperative to state at the onset that any purported Christian theology that is not Christocentric is neither Christian nor theological as such. There cannot therefore be any opposition between christocentrism as such and any form of Christian theology (including, and especially, pluralism).

Richard Muller has, however, given some clarifications on the notion and uses of the term christocentrism[155] which we consider invaluable here. He began by emphasizing that the doctrine of Christ stands at the centre of Christian theology in general, and that any theological system that fails to recognize this doctrine as the focus of theology cannot be called Christian. Having said that however, he quickly acknowledged that, in Christian thought, there have been different approaches to the centrality of Christ. He gave a tripartite typology as characterizing almost every form of christocentrism namely, (1) soteriological christocentrism, (2) prototypical or teleological christocentrism, and (3) principial christocentrism[156]. "Soteriological christocentrism", according to him, "presents the theological affirmation of the absolute and necessary centrality of Christ to the work of salvation"[157]. This emphasis has always been the bedrock of the early Fathers and the Greek patristic theology from Augustine through Aquinas to the Middle Ages and the Reformation.

[154] T. GREGGS, *Bringing Barth's Critique of Religion to the Inter-faith Table*, p. 92.
[155] Cf., Richard A. MULLER, *A Note on "Christocentrism" and the Imprudent Use of Such Terminology*, in *Westminster Theological Journal*, 68, 2 (2006), p. 253-260.
[156] R. MULLER, *A Note on "Christocentrism" and the Imprudent Use of Such Terminology*, p. 255.
[157] R. MULLER, *A Note on "Christocentrism" and the Imprudent Use of Such Terminology*, p. 255.

The prototypical form of christocentrism, on the other hand, emphasizes the Adam-Christ typology where it places priority on Christ (the new Adam and the 'second man') over and above Adam (the 'first man' and the old Adam) in the ultimate plan of God. Under this category, Muller places the theologies of Irenaeus of Lyons as well as those of Duns Scotus and the followers in the Franciscan order.

It is however, in the third categorization, which he called the "principial" form, that Muller places the theology of Karl Barth among other nineteenth-century and twentieth-century systematicians. The characteristic of this third form is its "understanding of Christ (rather than Scripture and God) as both *principium essendi* and *principium cognoscendi theologiae*"; so much so that, apart from presupposing the previous two types, it goes further to argue speculatively that "the Christ-idea must be used as the interpretive key to understanding and elucidating all doctrinal topics"[158]. Given the different connotations and emphases of these Christocentric theologies, he maintains that a thorough distinction has to be made between them so as to avoid much of the confusions that have emanated from lack of such distinction. He contends that most uses of the term christocentrism as applying to Reformation have been almost exclusively limited to this third (Barthian) understanding of it. But he agrees with Paul Althaus who described it not as christocentrism but rather as "christomonism", insisting that:

> "It was never argued by any of the older Reformed theologians that direct encounter with Christ somehow mediated knowledge of God: their assumption was that the knowledge of God as Redeemer, grounded in and focused on Christ, was to be found in Scripture. Scripture, not Christ, was understood as the source or *principium* of the knowledge of God. Nor did this older Reformed theology even pretend that all of its doctrines – such as the divine attributes, providence, or reprobation – needed somehow to be understood in and through the historical person of Jesus of Nazareth"[159].

He argues further that while the Reformed theology of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries assumed that it was the *logos asarkos* (the pre-incarnate Word) who, together with the Holy Spirit, was responsible for the revelation of the divine plan of redemption

[158] R. MULLER, *A Note on "Christocentrism" and the Imprudent Use of Such Terminology*, p. 256
[159] R. MULLER, *A Note on "Christocentrism" and the Imprudent Use of Such Terminology*, p. 257.

throughout Scripture, so that it is the revealed Word in Scripture rather than the infinite Word that forms the basis for right knowledge of God, Barth's denial of the *logos asarkos* means that "we must seek only in the incarnate logos as manifest in Christ for the content of revelation"[160]. He sees this Barthian position not only as "christomonism" but also as reductionistic, since for it the event of Jesus Christ *is* the revelation of God and therefore the ground through which all points of doctrine must be understood. He has argued elsewhere that it is as 'revealer' rather than as 'revelation' that Christ presents the truth of God:

> "Christ is, therefore, both the Revelation itself – the fulfilment of the Word of salvation – and the perfect Revealer, whose incarnation served not only to accomplish the work of salvation but also manifest definitively the will of God. The epistemological point made by the orthodox is that Christ as Revealer can alone present the truth of God because he is one with God, the essential Word of the Father"[161].

He therefore sees Barth's position as a travesty of orthodoxy and insists that such a position applies only to a small number of writers and not to a vast majority who nevertheless are highly Christocentric in their writings. He concluded by cautioning that the use of the term 'christocentrism' must therefore be distinguished so as to avoid the confusion that has trailed its twentieth-century neo-orthodox usage. That means that when we apply the term "christocentrism" exclusively to this Barthian understanding of it, we inadvertently deny that earlier dogmaticians like Augustine and the Patristic Fathers were Christocentric – a denial that is not only grossly inadequate but equally misleading.

Muller's article is particularly relevant to our argument here because when Barth talks about Christological concentration, he means to say simply that Jesus Christ as *the* revelation of God is the ground through which every doctrine must be understood and explained. This was the mind-set with which he approached his entire theory of religion. And this was precisely why he began his famous §17 treatment of religion by making theology face only two alternatives namely: either "…what we think we know of the nature

[160] Cf., R. MULLER, *A Note on "Christocentrism" and the Imprudent Use of Such Terminology*, p. 257-258.
[161] Richard A. MULLER, *Christ – The Revelation or the Revealer? Brunner and Reformed Orthodoxy on the Doctrine of the Word of God*, in *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society*, 26, 3 (1983), p. 307-319, p. 314.

and incidence of religion must serve as a norm and principle by which to explain the revelation of God; or, vice versa, …we have to interpret the Christian religion and all other religions by what we are told by God's revelation".

The question however is this: in a pluralist setting, are the choices available limited to these two; or, is there any room for further options? It appears that in a culture of pluralism, neither the religion of revelation (Barth) nor the revelation of religion (Neo-Protestantism) will suffice as a theological approach.

PART III

DAVID TRACY'S CONFRONTATION WITH PLURALISM: REVISIONIST PUBLIC THEOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

Revisionism as a Theological Paradigm: Confrontation or Compliment to Theologies of Retrieval?

John Webster (as we saw in part II) placed Karl Barth among the leading retrieval theologians of the last century. In his general discussion on this type of theology, he observed that most work that come under the qualification "retrieval" have well-developed sense of the integrity and distinctiveness of Christian theology. It is for this reason that he says that most of them refuse to adopt the theological strategy of engaging modern culture through a process of correlation (as proposed by Tillich for instance) or through mutually hospitable conversation between received tradition and the possibilities offered by the contemporary situation (as propounded, for instance, by David Ford)[1]. He believes that the retrieval theologies generally want to present Christianity as irreducible, contending that Christianity cannot be a version of anything. For retrieval theologies, Christianity stands on its own as a unique and distinctive entity. Anthropology is not accorded any pride of place, but is rather kept within its limit in a subordinate manner when it concerns the nature and ends of human creatures. While acknowledging that, "the major achievements of theology in the mode of retrieval have been to commend a more celebratory style of theological portrayal and to rehabilitate classical sources of Christian teaching and draw attention to their potential in furthering the theological task", he however warns that the "tradition" which such theologies seek to retrieve should not be viewed as "a fully realized whole" but rather must be viewed as "an unfinished assemblage of products". This is why he insists that "a revelatory or ecclesial given which is entirely unaffected by the conditions of its reception, wholly free from the poetics of church and culture, is scarcely imaginable"[2].

It was for this reason that he advises that anti-modernism, no matter how much it can empower the re-engagement of neglected constructive tasks of theology, should not disillusion theology into thinking that the only thing needed for dogmatics to be considered successful in the present is the identification and repudiation of an error in the past. He warns that the problem is not *modern* theology

[1] Cf., J. WEBSTER, *Theologies of Retrieval*, p. 593.
[2] J. WEBSTER, *Theologies of Retrieval*, p. 596.

but simply *theology* (thus placing emphasis on theology rather than on modernity). This is because he sees all talk of God as hazardous. For him, "modern constraints bring particular challenges which can be partially defeated by attending to a broader and wiser history, but there is no pure Christian past whose retrieval can ensure theological fidelity"[3]. He then concluded with a very important statement: "The recovery of the present ecclesial vocation of systematic theology as well as the renewal of its public functions, surely require persuasion of the weightiness of its past. But however basic a task, retrieval cannot constitute the entirety of theological work"[4]. It is precisely on the strength of this strong belief that 'retrieval cannot constitute the entirety of theological work' especially in the contemporary culture of pluralism that we have decided to analyse and evaluate another theological paradigm that has been making waves in our epoch.

In Part II of our work, we concentrated on Barth's version of the theologies of retrieval and concluded that however indispensable it is in the task of Christian self-understanding, its self-imposed limitation renders it insufficient to adequately engage with pluralism. For this reason, we shall explore David Tracy's confrontation with pluralism through his revisionist public theology. But, why make the jump from retrieval to revisionism?

Revisionism generally arose out of the lack of satisfaction with the way traditional theology responded to the challenges posed by secularism. It is commonly believed among their circle that a "retrieved" theology that sticks only with the past tradition of the church without taking into consideration the present evolving shift of emphasis cannot be maintained without theology disappearing altogether from the academic world. However, revisionism has never been presented as confrontational to retrieval theology. In most cases, the goal has always been to compliment rather than to confront traditional theology. Ian Markham[5] identified two distinctiveness of revisionism as a form of theology namely, (1) the acknowledgment that methodological problems need to be faced at the outset, that is, that before one can start the work of theology, one must first of all construct a methodological prolegomena; and (2) the recognition of the importance and significance of modernity for theology.

[3] J. WEBSTER, *Theologies of Retrieval*, p. 596-597.
[4] J. WEBSTER, *Theologies of Retrieval*, p. 597.
[5] Ian S. MARKHAM, *Revisionism*, in John WEBSTER, Kathryn TANNER, and Iain TORRANCE (ed.), The *Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 600-616.

Although Barth also recognizes the possibility and even the necessity of dogmatic prolegomena, he does not see the prolegomena as something that is done before actual theology is started. He does not believe that there can be "non-theological" introduction to theology. He rather insists that "prolegomena to dogmatics are possible only as part of dogmatics itself". He further says that "the prefix *pro* in prolegomena is to be understood loosely to signify the first part of dogmatics rather than that which is prior to it"[6]. This is where his concept of prolegomena diverged from those of revisionist theologians. In the latter's' bid to construct a methodological prolegomena, they push such hard questions as this: "What sort of Christology makes sense of our contemporary experience of the biblical text in our context? Is the traditional account of providence intelligible and plausible in our scientific world?"[7] Markham observed that because of their non-satisfaction with the so-called "authority theology" according to which "that which initially establishes the truth or reality of a belief is simply its presence in the text of an authority"[8], revisionist theologians, seek to go beyond the texts in themselves and engage with the fundamental issue of seeking to know what prompted these ancient authors to write the way they wrote.

It is in the discovery of this fundamental issue that they believe that they can recreate (or reconstruct, or revise) a theology that makes sense of our historical moment. In other words, the challenges posed by modernity and post modernity are taken very seriously in a revisionist theology. The "rationalism" of the modern thought-pattern is brought into theological discourse in such a way that it is regarded rather insufficient for theology to remain within its traditional thought-pattern alone if it is to make sense to those outside the church. The key emphasis in a revisionist theology therefore, is the intelligibility of theology to those outside the circle of Christian tradition. In this regard, it has to engage with the reality of pluralism in a very serious and constructive manner. This is why pluralism is viewed in revisionist theology not as an option but as a necessity. It is however in the understanding and appropriation of what pluralism entails and what it does not entail that differences arise within the circle of revisionist theologians.

[6] CD, I/I, § 2, p. 42.
[7] I. MARKHAM, *Revisionism*, p. 600.
[8] I. MARKHAM, *Revisionism*, p. 600.

Our work in this part is limited to David Tracy's brand of revisionism. However, there are certain theological and philosophical movements which form what can be described as the roots of revisionism in general. Among these movements, Paul Tillich's concept of "correlation" stands out in a very prominent pre-eminence. It was he who first proposes that theology, being a function of the church (in agreement with Barth), must serve the needs of the church. However, he sees those needs as two-dimensional namely: the statement of the truth of the Christian message, and, the interpretation of this truth for every new generation[9]. He advocates for a back and forth movement of theology between the two poles of eternal truth of its foundation and the temporal situation in which the eternal truth must be received. And this movement must be done in a balanced manner. There has to be a correlation between these poles – the 'kerygmatic' theology and the 'apologetic' theology ('apologetic' being the 'answering theology', i.e., a theology that answers the questions implied in the 'situation').

Although Tracy tried to modify this concept of correlation (as we shall see), Tillich's overall emphasis on the need for theology to be shaped by and to shape contemporary culture has influenced in no small measures the subsequent development of revisionist theologies. But most revisionist theologians refuse to follow Tillich in his insistence that the activities of every theologian (no matter how correlational she is in her theology) must take place within the theological circle. Most revisionist theologians tend to go outside this theological circle in their bid to make their work appear scientific and acceptable by other members of the scientific community. But contrarily however, Tillich, with all his talks on correlation, would always insist that:

> "No one can call himself a theologian, even if he is called to be a teacher of theology. Every theologian is committed *and* alienated; he is always in faith *and* in doubt; he is inside *and* outside the theological circle. Sometimes the one side prevails, sometimes the other; and he is never certain which side really prevails. Therefore, one criterion alone can be applied: a person can be a theologian as long as he acknowledges the content of the theological circle as his ultimate concern"[10].

[9] Cf., Paul TILLICH, *Systematic Theology*, vol. I, Digswell Place London, James Nisbet, 1953, p. 3.
[10] P. TILLICH, *Systematic Theology*, p. 13.

As we shall see in the case of Tracy, he often tends to replace the "theological circle" with the "circle of scientific inquiry". And by so doing, gives the impression that the scientific theologian's activities can legitimately take place outside the theological circle. For now however, suffice it to say that even though the revisionist theologians borrowed the concept of correlation from Tillich, many tend to neglect Tillich's idea of theological circle. They rather prefer to acknowledge as their "ultimate concern" not the content of theological circle but rather the concept of pluralism. In this regard therefore, revisionism is convinced that pluralism ought to be of ultimate concern to our contemporary situation; but that traditional theology in its retrieved form has neglected this 'ultimate concern'. They therefore take it as their duty to revise this traditional theology in such a way that pluralism is given a pride of place in theological task.

On the philosophical root of revisionism, one should acknowledge the influence of Alfred North Whitehead and his dipolar concept of God as having influenced in no small measure the process theologians (whose basic tenets Tracy appropriated in his revisionism). The process theologians, having been convinced that relationality is an intrinsic aspect of God, were inclined to re-image the traditional God in terms of dipolarity. This means that God is to be conceived in terms of having two poles – absolute and relative – as against the monopolar notion of God as absolute. Tracy believes that this process concept of God in fact represents the authentic New Testament idea of God.

This part of our work is divided into two chapters. Chapter 5 will discuss secularism and pluralist culture, and Tracy's claim that his revisionist theology is a panacea for the raging culture of pluralism. Chapter 6 will explore Tracy's argument for theology as a public discourse, and how he claims that all recourse to privateness is a derailment of the task of theology.

CHAPTER 5

SECULARISM, PLURALIST CULTURE, AND DAVID TRACY'S REVISIONIST METHOD IN THEOLOGY AS A PANACEA

INTRODUCTION

Any subject that claims to be "scientific" must grapple with the question of method(s). Since the project of Enlightenment which has helped in no small way to drive theology to the "other side" of human activities which the Enlightenment considers completely outside its definition and delimitation of science, theology has struggled to fight back and reclaim its position in the scientific world. The major area of fight has centred on the development of methods that can be scientifically acceptable. But as Bernard Lonergan (one of the leading voices in theological methods) observed, "Method is not a set of rules to be followed meticulously by a dolt. It is a framework for collaborative creativity. It would outline the various clusters of operations to be performed by theologians when they go about their various tasks"[1]. He went ahead to say that these tasks must be conceived in the context of modern science, modern scholarship, modern philosophy, historicity, collective practicality and coresponsibility.

It was in the light of these contexts that he developed eight distinct tasks for contemporary theology which have become, somewhat, classic: research, interpretation, history, dialectic, foundations, doctrines, systematics, and communications. To properly achieve these tasks, he believes that theology has to develop a method which fulfils his description of a method as "a normative pattern of recurrent and related operations yielding cumulative and progressive results"[2]. He sees in the transcendental method (as against the categorial) the fulfilment of this basic pattern of operations. This is because for him, categories are "determinations" having a limited denotation and varying with cultural variations. They ask determinate

[1] Bernard J. F. LONERGAN, *Method in Theology* (1971), Toronto, University of Toronto Press for Lonergan Research Institute, 2013, p. xi.
[2] B. LONERGAN, *Method in Theology*, p. 4.

questions and give determinate answers. But on the other hand, he takes the transcendentals as "comprehensive in connotation, unrestricted in denotation, [and] invariant over cultural change"[3]. For this reason, the transcendentals, for him, are contained in questions prior to the answers. He understands them as moving people from ignorance to knowledge, going beyond what they know to seek what they do not yet know. Hence, he takes them as *a priori*.

David Tracy's concern with theological method is traceable to his personal close encounter with Lonergan[4]. His first work on *The Achievement of Bernard Lonergan* deals with this concern. In this book he was clear about his stance on method: "the question of method especially in the human sciences, in philosophy, and in theology are, for many of their practitioners, the principal questions on the present horizon"[5]. Already from here, one can notice a stark difference between Tracy's theological concern and that of Barth. For Tracy, the principal question in theology is the question of method; for Barth, it is the question concerning the Word of God as the criterion of dogmatics. From these questions, it is clear that while Tracy treats theology as a purely academic discipline, Barth regards it as a confessional subject. As an academic discipline, Tracy outlines what he thinks is the fundamental theological problem:

> "In its starkest terms, the theological problem is this: Can the theologian determine a basic pattern for all the patterns of related and recurrent operations involved in the theological task? Can he determine a fundamental theological method which will allow all practitioners to collaborate systematically with one another? Can he ground that pattern in a transcendental method which is not open to fundamental revision?"[6]

For this reason, Tracy feels that specialization and collaboration are highly needed in contemporary theological enterprise. In this regard, he suggested that Lonergan's functional specializations "may allow for a collaborative enterprise which at present is most desperately needed in the certainly creative but somewhat chaotic situation of contemporary theology"[7]. However, he sees Lonergan's

[3] Cf., B. LONERGAN, *Method in Theology*, p. 11.
[4] Tracy actually studied under Lonergan and was originally brought up in the latter's transcendental method in theology.
[5] David TRACY, *The Achievement of Bernard Lonergan*, New York, Herder and Herder, 1970, p. 233.
[6] D. TRACY, *The Achievement of Bernard Lonergan*, p. 238.
[7] D. TRACY, *The Achievement of Bernard Lonergan*, p. 266-267.

formulation of the foundational task for contemporary theology as "highly problematic"[8]. It is true that he concedes that it provides the basis for the methodological collaboration of the several disciplines and thus can be legitimately described as foundational; nonetheless, he maintains that, "it does not, however, provide critical grounds for the enterprise itself – more precisely, for the truth-value of the claims to ultimacy of religious and explicitly theological language"[9]. Tracy feels that it is not enough to assume the truth claims of dogmatic tradition (as Lonergan did) without a critical grounding of such a claim. For him, a contemporary fundamental theological enterprise must critically justify any such dogmatic claim. This is why he appreciates Lonergan's formulation on foundational theology as "necessary but insufficient for the full problematic involved in attempting to develop a 'foundational' Christian theology"[10]. From this point on, he made this task of attempting to overcome the perceived insufficiency in Lonergan's proposition, his life's venture. He began by constructing the concept of "revisionism" as that "foundation" that Christian theology needs in the present horizon of pluralism. But first, let us briefly trace the impact of secularism on the theological culture of the twentieth century before attempting to expose Tracy's version of responding to this challenge through his brand of revisionism.

1. SECULARISM AND THE THEOLOGICAL CULTURE OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Our current manner of being[11] has made us more and more cosmopolitan. People have become more and more "secularized" in the sense that attention has shifted from the tribe and town epoch to the secular epoch. Harvey Cox described this epoch as "technopolis" to signify a "fusion of technological and political components into the

[8] David TRACY, *Lonergan's Foundational Theology: An Interpretation and a Critique*, in Philip MCSHANE, S.J. (ed.), *Foundations of Theology: Papers from the International Lonergan Congress 1970*, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1971, p. 198.
[9] D. TRACY, *Lonergan's Foundational Theology*, p. 214.
[10] David TRACY, *Foundational Theology as Contemporary Possibility*, in Dunwoodie Review 12, 3 n. 1 (1972).
[11] Allusion here is to Merleau-Ponty's sense of "*manière d'être*", where he argues that if philosophical reflection and techniques of work (for example, film) participate in a common meaning, it is only because the philosopher and the film maker have in common a certain *manière d'être* (manner of being), cf., Maurice MERLEAU-PONTY, *Sense et non-sens*, Paris, 1948, p. 309.

base on which a new cultural style has appeared"[12]. This new cultural style is not a static monolithic manner of being in the world but has in fact taken the form of diverse pluralistic and evolutionistic ways of responding to the changing world. Theology, as part of the rational sciences, has also been in the process of mutation and umlaut. Ewert Cousins identified two major forces as having shaped theology in the twentieth century namely, war and science. With the World War I, the nineteenth century optimism of progress and moral improvement of humankind was shattered, leading in a shift from the dominant liberal theology to the neo-orthodox theology with its emphasis on the sinfulness of humankind and the tragic character of human existence. Then the world witnessed the scientific revolution that saw the notion of a static world of fixed species being transformed by Darwin's evolutionary notion of dynamically developing forms of life. In another development, the Einstein's theory of relativity knocked out the mechanistic world view of Newtonian physics so that the world was no longer depicted as "a machine, with discrete objects in abstract space interacting according to mechanical laws", but instead, the new Einstein physics "looked upon the subatomic world as a flux of energy and a network of relations".[13] These scientific breakthroughs of the twentieth century witnessed the emergence of process theology that was heavily derived from the metaphysics of Alfred North Whitehead and the evolutionary writings of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.

The process theology developed out of the twentieth century scientific "discovery" that the world is not after all static but is always in a genuine dynamic process of transformation for the better. A famous Whiteheadian description says it all: "In the past human life was lived in a bullock cart; in the future it will be lived in an aeroplane; and the change of speed amounts to a difference in quality"[14]. This remark from Whitehead set the tone in the process overall project of overturning the mainstream Greek philosophical trend of placing being in a position of primacy over becoming, and of absoluteness over relativity. One can call this a "rediscovery" of Heraclitus; and it appears that this prepared the way for a shift in the traditional conception of God. Whitehead for instance, conceives God

[12] Harvey COX, *The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective*, London, SCM Press, 1965, p. 5.
[13] Cf. Ewert H. COUSINS, *Introduction: Process Models in Culture, Philosophy, and Theology*, in Ewert H. COUSINS (ed.), *Process Theology: Basic Writings by the Key Thinkers of a Major Modern Movement*, New York, Newman Press, 1971, p.3-20.
[14] Alfred North WHITEHEAD, *Science and the Modern World*, New York, Macmillan, 1925, p. 142.

as dipolar, having primordial and consequent nature[15] so that the relationship between God and the world might be described in terms of *va-et-vient* where God is in the process and the process is in God; where God becomes "the great companion – the fellow-sufferer who understands"[16]. Such a God, according to Whitehead, is not fashioned in the image and likeness of the Egyptian, Persian, and Roman imperial rulers; he does not retain the monarchical attributes that belonged exclusively to Caesar; he is not a "ruthless moralist" as conceived by the Hebrew prophets; he is not the unmoved mover of the Aristotelian era. Rather, the God of Whitehead dwells upon the tender elements of the world operated by love. With this tender element of love, Whitehead hopes to point out that love neither rules nor is it unmoved, nor is it conscious of morals. As such, he proposes a God that does not create the world but rather saves it. He views such a God as "the poet of the world", who leads the same world by his vision of truth, beauty and goodness, but does that with tender patience.

The process theologians found favour with this Whiteheadian God, claiming that it is closer to the Christian God of revelation where God is experienced as being concerned with the sufferings and tragedies of the world – an experience which they claim simply does not fit into the Greek concept of God as a timeless and absolute being. They therefore quickly leaned on Whitehead's God as the anchor for their process theology especially in the face of increasing secularism.

Secularism (whether in philosophy or theology), with its claim that the age of metaphysics has past, can be said to be part of a larger process project. In theology, emphasis has now been shifted to how we can do theology in a secular age. It is widely believed that the current theological landscape as constructed by the medieval and modern theologians trammels the contemporary world order of secularity where unbelief is not only prevalent but in fact, belief in anything transcendent has become almost unthinkable. Theology, according to this view, has therefore found itself in one corner of the intellectual world as a mere recluse. This purported isolationism of theology in the midst of contemporary rationalities has led many Christian philosophers and theologians, driven by a rage for theological order, to start fashioning out arguments and methods in

[15] Cf. Alfred North WHITEHEAD, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, New York, Macmillan, 1929, p. 521ff.
[16] A. WHITEHEAD, *Process and Reality*, p.532.

theology which (they believe), will fit into the secular order of rationality.

Philosophers of religion, like William Alston and Alvin Plantinga, developed what they called "Reformed epistemology" according to which belief in God can be rational and justified even without arguments or evidence for the existence of God. Whereas Alston hinges his thesis on the experiential awareness of God as a justification for his existence (in other words, that "a person can be justified in holding certain kinds of beliefs in God by virtue of perceiving God as being or doing so-and-so"[17]), Plantinga argues that belief in God is a "warranted" belief and as such, it is a basic belief. Hence, like any other basic belief, belief in God needs no evidence. In fact, he claims that there is no viable *de jure* objection to Christian belief in terms of any of the senses of rationalities which he discussed[18]. On his part, Richard Swinburne developed his philosophy of theism in a trilogy fashion, beginning with *The Coherence of Theism*[19] where he argues that the claim that there is a God is internally coherent. His *The Existence of God*[20] argues that the existence of God is not only internally coherent, but that it is true. Although he acknowledges that it cannot be argued conclusively that there is a God, he insists that when the various arguments for and against the existence of God are put together, it shows that it is more probable than not that there is a God. Finally, his *Faith and Reason*[21] is concerned with the question of the relevance of such judgements of probability to religious faith.

Inasmuch as these philosophies of theism can help fine-tune theological thought however, theology as such cannot be reduced to philosophy of religion. Therefore, whether the God whose existence these philosophies of religion establish can translate from being a mere God of the philosophers to a "supernatural" and revealed God of Christianity remains to be seen[22]. But secularism continues to exert

[17] Cf. William P. ALSTON, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1991.
[18] Cf. Alvin PLANTINGA, *Warranted Christian Belief*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2000.
[19] Richard SWINBURNE, *The Coherence of Theism* (Revised Edition), Oxford, Clarendon Press, (1977), 1993.
[20] Richard SWINBURNE, *The Existence of God* (Second Edition), New York, Oxford University Press, (1979), 2004.
[21] Richard SWINBURNE, *Faith and Reason* (Second Edition), New York, Oxford University Press, (1981), 2005.
[22] Note however that the process movement's overall attempt is to establish that there need not be irreconcilability between the God of the scriptures and the God of the philosophers. They

considerable pressure on theology. In theological circle, secularism is no longer understood just as a mere absence of religion, but more importantly, as an intellectual movement that needs to be taken very seriously if theology must survive this age of rationality. Charles Taylor's book[23] has put even more pressure on theology when he argues against the popular view that secularity is caused by the rise of science and reason. He sees this view as too simplistic, incapable of explaining why people would want to abandon their faith. For him, these types of explanation for the causes of secularity in our society are "bad arguments…which leave out so many viable possibilities between fundamentalism and atheism"[24]. He argues that secularity understood as emptying of religion from autonomous social sphere is compatible with the vast majority of people still believing in God. However, he posited that there is another understanding of secularity in terms of decline of religious belief and practice. But he believes that the real issue lies in the third idea of secularity which focuses on the conditions of belief. This third idea, according to him, is related to the first two ideas but has a distinctive characteristic of making belief in God no longer axiomatic but in fact only one among several alternative beliefs; and faith becomes one human possibility among others. In this sense, belief and unbelief are no longer seen as "rival theories" but rather as "alternative ways of living our moral/spiritual life"[25].

With all these pluralistic postulates of philosophies of religion gaining ground and even threatening to altogether replace the traditional Christian theology, what does future hold for theology? While many theologians have decided to "throw in the towel" and "join the crowd" by reducing theology to mere religious science with the hope that, using the "scientific" non-confessional methods of the study of religion, they can at least maintain certain credibility in the world of academy, Tracy thinks that such "escapist's" approach will do good neither to theology nor to the world of the academy as a whole. For this reason, he went head-on to confront modernity by proposing a theological model that he believes will be beneficial both to modernity and Christianity alike. Such model, according to him, would then become a "postmodern" theological approach.

believe that the chasm between the two "Gods" can and has been bridged by their dipolar concept of God to replace the traditional classical monopolar concept.

[23] Cf. Charles TAYLOR, *A Secular Age*, Cambridge, Belknap, 2007.

[24] C. TAYLOR, *A Secular Age*, p. 4.

[25] Cf. C. TAYLOR, *A Secular Age*, p. 4-5.

2. TRACY'S PROPOSAL

Tracy's interest centres on how to maintain theological integrity in the midst of the contemporary rationalities without isolating theology. He has always suspected that traditional theology tended to isolate theology from the 'committee of nations' by sticking with the traditional methods in theology. But as he believes that the world has significantly evolved, he thinks that theology risks being completely left out if it does not revise its methods to reflect the changing world. Having perceived as problematic the foundational Christian theology's inability to deal with the new pluralism in theology, Tracy began his "new" theology[26] with two principal assumptions namely, that "the 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"; and that "each theologian must attempt to articulate and defend an explicit method of inquiry, and use that method to interpret the symbols and texts of our common life and Christianity". However, he believes that whatever explicit method one takes, it must assume what he calls "a self-consciously revisionist attitude toward the major present alternative models for a contemporary Christian theology"[27]. This revisionist attitude is what he believes will function as a panacea for the crisis (cognitive, ethical, and existential) that has impeded attempts at theologizing with integrity in today's world.

He refuses to subscribe to the idea that theology (and indeed, Christianity) has nothing to offer to the resolution of global crisis; instead, he believes that if critically reinterpreted, Christianity can really hold the key to resolution of the crisis. In fact, he maintains that in the current secular age, one can authentically maintain at the same time his/her faith in the modern experiment, and faith in the God of Jesus Christ.

But to achieve this (and this is the crux of the matter), Tracy believes that there has to be a basic revision of both traditional Christianity and traditional modernity alike. He sees neither Christianity nor modernity in their traditional self-understandings as sufficient enough to address the global crisis. If the theologian is to address these crises, he believes that the person has to come to terms

[26] Cf., David TRACY, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology*, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, (1975), 1996. Further references to this book will be done in its abbreviated form of BRO.
[27] BRO, p. 3.

with the "disenchantment of the world" occasioned by the wholesale demystification of Christianity by the Enlightenment. This implies, for him, that the person must have to challenge almost every important cognitive claim of Christianity in its traditional form. To do this further implies changing loyalty from one's church-community's belief to the methodological procedures of a particular scientific community of inquiry. In other words, a belief is to be upheld, not because tradition has believed it, but because it conforms to the procedures developed by a group of scientific community. Tracy sees the modern theologian as sharing in the morality of scientific knowledge of his contemporaries which, "imposes the ethical duty to provide the proper kind of evidence for whatever claim he advances"[28]. He thinks that one's autonomous critical inquiry cannot permit one's own tradition's belief to act as that proper kind of evidence unless such belief passes the criteria set by the community of scientific enquiry.

With this proposal, Tracy has charted a new theological course for himself. He wants to advocate for a common secular faith that would incorporate both Christianity and secularity in such a way that the two become allies rather than enemies. He thinks that revisionism is the only "proper understanding" that would render Christianity not only intellectually coherent, but also help it achieve cohesion with secularity, if it must be guaranteed continued existence and relevance in our secular world. But he advocates for a "demystification" of both Christianity and secularity so that the theologian will realise that the distance between Christian faith and secular faith are not as far removed from each other as previously thought. For Tracy, the theologian shares in both "faiths" because he believes that a reinterpreted Christianity in a revisionist's manner provides for both the basic meaning of Christian faith and for the secular faith alike. Hence, a revisionist theologian has dual commitments which she must deal with – one, to the God of Jesus Christ, and the other, to the modern experiment.

For him, dealing with this dual commitments amount to paying special attention to the deepest demands of the liberal spirit which has been impressively articulated by Bernard Lonergan's formulation of the imperatives operative in a model of self-transcendence thus: "Be attentive, be intelligent, be rational, be responsible, develop and, if necessary, change". He therefore thinks that the post-modern

[28] D. TRACY, BRO, p. 6.

intellectual must have to be "irretrievably committed"[29] to this imperative if he/she must make sense of the contemporary world. Such irretrievable commitment implies for him, a post-modern critic of modernity and a revisionist reinterpretation of Christianity – the two things he believes will guarantee the bridging of the gap between secularism and supernaturalism; between liberalism and conservatism; and between religion and revelation; and consequently, make a co-existence between a reinterpreted secularity and Christianity not only possible but in fact, imperative.

Although Tracy's proposal arose out of his disenchantment with the traditional Christian self-understanding, hence the need to re-interpret Christianity to benefit the contemporary world, this fact of disenchantment is hardly an expression of anything extraordinary[30]. A constant reinterpretation of Christianity has always been part and parcel of Christian theology. What might perhaps be considered "new" is his willingness to change allegiance from the church to the community of scientific enquiry, and consequently to challenge the cognitive claims of Christianity in its traditional form. However, if a theologian has as a "sacred duty" to challenge almost every cognitive claim of Christianity in its traditional form, one can legitimately ask

[29] Cf., D. TRACY, BRO, p. 12.

[30] Karl Barth, as one of the pillars that helped shape the 20th century Christian theology, exerted and still exerts a lot of influence. But the contemporary Barth scholarship is no longer contented with restricting theology to Barth's method. Talks are on-going about how to do dogmatics after Barth; or, more precisely (to use Benoît Bourgine's expression), how "to bring up to date Barth's theological contribution in relation with what is at stake in the academy where theology receives a *scientific* duty, in the Church, where theology has to take responsibility for a *critical* status and finally, in society, where theology assumes a *public* status". Bourgine, while acknowledging the immense contribution of Barth to a series of theologies that has been branded "theologies of retrieval", however, felt that such form of theology is not enough, wondering whether systematic theology is confined to the boundaries between reason and revelation so that it becomes exclusively a reflection on revelation. He felt that this position can hardly hold in the academic context, asking rhetorically: "How can theology justify its rationality if we consider that its very task is exclusively to explain God's Word?" He argues that, at least on the academic level, it is necessary to go beyond Barth in order for theology to give an exact account of its rationality because, "an accurate definition of its rationality and serious dialogue with other forms of rationality are… part of the theological task". In fulfilling this task, he feels that the truth of "revisionism" especially as propagated by Tillich and Tracy who "took into account the request of contemporary rationality and culture to open theological reason to other rationalities" might be "a legitimate and necessary one". He claims that if we need the "best antidote to fundamentalism", then this form of approach to theology is a sure bet. But he maintains, at the same time, the continued relevance of Barth's way of doing theology especially as it seems "perhaps the only way to prevent theology from completely disappearing". Cf., Benoît BOURGINE, *Systematic Theology after Karl Barth in the French Speaking Area*, in Günter THOMAS, Rinse H. Reeling BROUWER, and Bruce MCCORMACK (ed.), *Dogmatics After Barth: Facing Challenges in Church, Society and the Academy*, Leipzig, CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2012, p. 25-36.

whether the person is "doing" theology or "protesting against" theology. If the task of a theologian, from the very beginning, is not to explain the cognitive claims of the tradition but to challenge them, is the person still within the theological circle? Must theology be viewed as "rational" only when cognitive claims are challenged? Can't a defense of cognitive claims be also viewed as rational? Perhaps an in-depth explanation of this proposal might either help clarify or further complicate some of these issues.

3. REVISIONIST THEOLOGY: TRACY'S EXPOSÉ

Tracy began his revisionist theology by rejecting four earlier models which he found insufficient for the contemporary theology. He identified two basic phenomena which he considers obligatory in contemporary Christian theology namely, the Christian tradition, and, the contemporary understanding of human existence. He thinks that any model in theology must be able to adequately address these phenomena. It was therefore on the basis of the perceived inadequacy of the earlier models in addressing these phenomena that he rejected them; while at the same time positioning his revisionism as a better model.

He rejected Orthodox theology on the basis of its perceived inability to come to terms with cognitive, ethical, and existential counter-claims of modernity. He therefore feels that orthodox theology fails to fulfil one of the obligatory functions of contemporary Christian theology he identified above.

For Liberal theology, although he acknowledged that it promises a great commitment to the sensibilities of modernity like free and open-inquiry, autonomous judgement, critical investigation of all claims, etc., still he felt that modernists and liberals were not satisfactorily successful in the project they initiated, insisting that they only succeeded in setting up "the proper post-orthodox model for contemporary theological reflection".

He sees Neo-orthodox theology as a critical extension of liberal theology which even took a step further by insisting on an explicit recognition of the unique gift of faith in the Word of God as a *conditio sine qua non* for the foundation of a Christian theology. However, he still felt that the "gains" of neo-orthodox theology were bought at a price namely, "the price of not analysing with critical and deliberate

hardmindedness the central revelational, theistic, and Christological doctrines of the Christian tradition"[31]. He therefore saw the downfall of neo-orthodox theology as its inability to follow to a critical conclusion the project it started.

He identified Radical theology's rallying call in the dictum that, "this Wholly Other God must die in order that the authentically liberated human being may live"[32]. Yet, he maintains that whereas these "death of God" theologians might be right in the authentic question they ask about the traditional understanding of the Christian God, not to affirm the reality of God while at the same time purporting to do Christian theology is a task that seems irreconcilable.

With the rejection of these earlier models, Tracy is now ready to project his "revisionist model" which he claims is the most suitable for contemporary theological task. He describes it as a model that aims at radically continuing the critical tasks of both the liberal and modernist theologies, but going about these tasks "in a genuinely post-liberal situation" in order to be properly committed to what he feels is the central task of contemporary theology namely, "the dramatic confrontation, the mutual illuminations and corrections, the possible basic reconciliation between the principal values, cognitive claims, and existential faiths of both a reinterpreted post-modern consciousness and a reinterpreted Christianity"[33]. In this sense, revisionist theology owes a lot to liberal theology. In fact, Tracy describes it as "post-liberal[34]", maintaining the ideals of liberal theology for theological task, but developing new methodologies for going about the fulfilment of this task. These new methodologies help to balance the dual commitment of the revisionist theologian by providing her/him with a revisionist notion of secular beliefs and a revisionist understanding of Christian beliefs. In this way, the theologian maintains authentic secularity and authentic Christianity by challenging both secularity and traditional Christianity alike. He believes that two things will be discarded when this is effectively

[31] D. TRACY, BRO, p. 29.
[32] D. TRACY, BRO, p. 31.
[33] D. TRACY, BRO, p. 32.
[34] It is intriguing that Tracy first used the expression "postliberal" to qualify his revisionist theology ever before George Lindbeck ventured into his acclaimed "postliberal" theology as an alternative to Tracy's revisionist public theology. In our next chapter, we shall see the sharp reaction of the self-styled postliberal theologians (especially George Lindbeck) to Tracy's public theology while presenting their cultural-linguistic approach as an alternative. Lindbeck called his alternative "postliberal". The question therefore becomes: who is postliberal – Tracy or Lindbeck?

done, namely, a non-theistic and anti-Christian secularism (which he described as the usual self-understanding of secularity), and an anti-secular and religious supernaturalism (which he identified as the usual self-understanding of Christianity).

3.1. The Five Theses of Revisionism

In its revisionist model, Tracy described a contemporary fundamental Christian theology as "philosophical reflection upon the meanings present in common human experience and language, and upon the meanings present in the Christian fact"[35]. Already from this definition, it is evident that Tracy's revisionist theology is primarily fashioned for fundamental theology; but he insists that it also works for systematic and practical theologies. He proposes five theses by which he intended to explain this revisionist model:

Thesis 1: "*The two principal sources for theology are Christian texts and common human experience and language*". While maintaining that the Christian text or tradition is a fundamental expression of Christian faith, Tracy says it is not an exclusive one. For the Christian text to claim that Christian self-understanding in fact expresses an understanding of authentic human existence, Tracy argues that the theologian of the revisionist model must have to test that universalist claim of the scripture by developing a theology that is not only appropriate to the Christian texts and traditions, but also one that must have "criteria of adequacy"[36] to common human experience.

Thesis 2: "*The theological task will involve a critical correlation of the results of the investigations of the two sources of theology*". This is a modification of Tillich's notion of correlation whereby the "questions" expressed in the "situation" are correlated with the "answers" provided by the Christian "message". Tracy felt however, that this method of correlation is inadequate for a theology committed to two sources. Hence, his particular brand of correlation claims to be capable of correlating the principal questions and answers of each of these sources of theology.

Thesis 3: "*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*". This thesis simply states that

[35] D. TRACY, BRO, p. 43.
[36] D. TRACY, BRO, p. 44. Note that Tracy acknowledged that he borrowed this expression from Schubert Ogden, cf. endnote to chapter 3, nº. 4, p. 57.

given the contemporary task of theology as that of a search for an adequate expression of the religious dimension of our common experience and language, a phenomenology in collaboration with other philosophical methods and other human sciences that investigate the religious dimension of human existence seem to be the only credible way to success. Tracy prefers to use the phrase "religious dimension" or "horizon" instead of "religious experience". His explanation for this preference is that it indicates that "religion" is not just another human activity like art, morality, and science; but rather a dimension of or a horizon to all human activities[37]. This point will become clearer in his exposition of the concept of "limit".

Thesis 4: "*The principal method of investigation of the source 'the Christian tradition' can be described as an historical and hermeneutical investigation of classical Christian texts*". This thesis is proposing the application of the historical-critical method of the study of the Bible because he thinks that there is a theological *need* for history and hermeneutic. He believes that if the theologian of the revisionist model aims at a historical reconstruction of the basic Christian text to make them appropriate to common human experience and language, then the person must learn, as a matter of imperative, those historical methods developed by historical-critical method of the study of the Bible.

Thesis 5: "*To determine the truth-status of the results of one's investigations into the meaning of both common human experience and Christian texts the theologian should employ an explicit transcendental or metaphysical mode of reflection*". Tracy acknowledged that this thesis is the least commonly accepted among the five. But he insists that if the arguments of the first four theses hold, then the *need* for metaphysical and transcendental reflection in theology becomes obvious: "If it is correct to state that the task of theology demands that the theologian first uncover the religious and theistic meanings in both our common human experience and language and in explicitly Christian texts, then I find it impossible not to affirm the need for metaphysical or transcendental reflection to investigate the cognitive claims of those religious and theistic meanings"[38]. But he clarifies that the claim for the use of metaphysics is only limited to an investigation of cognitive claims.

[37] Cf. D. TRACY, BRO, endnote to chapter 3 nº. 24, p. 59.
[38] D. TRACY, BRO, p. 56.

Stated in a summary form, Tracy's argument for a revisionist theology can be put this way: There are two sources for theology namely, common human experience and language, and Christian texts. These two sources are to be investigated respectively by a hermeneutic phenomenology of the religious dimension in common human experience and language, and by historical and hermeneutical investigations of the meanings referred to by Christian texts. The results of these investigations should be correlated to determine their significant similarities and differences and their truth-value – a determination which is done by an explicitly transcendental or metaphysical mode of reflection[39]. His recourse to a metaphysical or transcendental mediation is due to his belief that it is impossible to resolve the religious and theistic cognitive claims of theology through the ordinary criteria of verification or falsification; hence, the necessity for a transcendental channel.

3.2. Criteria for the Two Sources of Theology

Unlike Barth who likened theology to a spinning top that supports itself on only one point, for Tracy, theology has two equal supports: common human experience and Christian facts. Theology must then take the form of philosophical reflection anchored on common human experience and the Christian facts. But he developed criteria which these sources must successfully pass through in order to be taken as theological.

When he uses the expression "common human experience" he is not referring exclusively to sense data, but more fundamentally to what he calls the "non-sensuous experience of the self", or "lived experience". He believes that it is only when an explicitly philosophical language is used as a mode of reflection that the meanings inherent in these experiences are disclosed. But he says that the criterion of meaningfulness is only one aspect of an expression that can be labelled "meaningful"; the other aspect is its internal coherence. Once a metaphor passes the criterion of meaningfulness in terms of being capable of disclosing our lived experience, once such is conceptually formulated, then he insists that it must also pass the philosophical test of internal coherence in order to be theologically acceptable. He thinks for instance that any concept with a claim to cognitive use (e.g., the concept 'God') must pass this latter criterion.

[39] Cf., D. TRACY, BRO, p. 53.

But if such concept must be taken as true, there is even a further criterion it must pass namely that of "adequacy to experience". In other words, there are three criteria which "common human experience" as a source of theology must meet in order to be taken as "theological" namely, meaningfulness, internal coherence, and adequacy to experience. This is how he expresses it:

> "The analyses of 'common human experience and language' therefore, should include philosophical reflection of the phenomenological-transcendental type and should thereby demand the application of all three sets of criteria: 'meaningfulness', 'meaning', and 'truth'. A particular experience or language is 'meaningful' when it discloses an authentic dimension of our experience as selves. It has 'meaning' when its cognitive claims can be expressed conceptually with internal coherence. It is 'true' when transcendental or metaphysical analysis shows its 'adequacy to experience' by explicating how a particular concept (e.g., time, space, self, or God) functions as a fundamental 'belief' or 'condition of possibility' of all our experience"[40].

With regards to the second source for theology – the Christian text or fact, Tracy insists that there is need for the theologian to develop criteria of appropriateness. He sees this criterion as being embedded in the heart of Christian theology. For him, the theologian must undertake the "responsibility to show how his or her present categories are appropriate understandings of the Christian understanding of existence"[41]; and this, in his views, is what distinguishes Christian theology from philosophy of religion. Unlike the philosopher of religion who might leave the task to his/her interpreters, Tracy says that the responsibility of determining the appropriateness of his/her categories to the Christian tradition lies squarely with the theologian. He maintains that this responsibility is shared by all Christian theologians alike (orthodox, liberal, revisionist, radical, etc.) irrespective of their leanings. But he equally stated that to assume this responsibility, an adequate method of interpretation for the Christian texts is needed.

In choosing his own theory of interpretation, Tracy leaned towards the interpretative works of Paul Ricoeur and Hans-Georg Gadamer rather than the interpretative procedures employed by such great theologians as Aquinas, Calvin, Luther, Barth, Rahner, etc., which, in any case, he considers "not sufficiently historically

[40] D. TRACY, BRO, p. 71.
[41] D. TRACY, BRO, p. 72.

conscious for the task of adequate interpretation"[42]. He thinks that "adequate interpretation" precludes also the famous category of "hermeneutic circle" according to which the task of interpretation is taken to be the effort of one subjective consciousness (the interpreter) to understand another consciousness (the author). He views this method as being overly determined by psychologizing tendencies. But on the contrary, he places emphasis on the written text rather than on the author's intention or the event as the place to search for the real meaning of a text:

> "What we write is the meaning, the *noema* of our speech-events, not the event itself. Once I write, it is my text alone which bears the meaning; not my intention in writing it; not my original audience's reaction to it. Furthermore, the meaning is not grasped simply by understanding the original dialogical situation of the text. Rather that meaning refers to a "world", a certain mode-of-being which precisely as "fixed" or codified by means of the particular literary genre employed in the text is also noematic or ideal. The meaning or intention of the text is now available not merely to the original conversation partner (who may or may not have properly understood it) but rather to anyone who can read"[43].

Tracy is saying in effect that the meaning of a written text undergoes a process of distanciation from the author's intention, audience, and the original dialogue situation to become available to any intelligent interpreter to read and understand. The interpreter, in other words, should not strive to "divinize" the author's intention but should rather focus on the text in such a way that the author becomes the "implied author". Therefore, for him, an adequate interpretation of a text comprises not in trying to empathize with either the "psychic state" or the cultural background of an author, but rather in overcoming the "strangeness of another horizon" by trying to understand the basic vision of "implied author" in the text and the mode-of-being-in-the-world referred to by the text. This means that, in interpreting a text (be it religious text or any text for that matter) the "logicity" of the text has priority over its "historicity". He believes that this method of interpretation can avoid the dominant "divination" theory of interpretation and at the same time not undermine the need for prior historical work in trying to reconstruct a text to be interpreted.

[42] D. TRACY, BRO, p. 73.
[43] D. TRACY, BRO, p. 75.

3.3. The Task of Critical Correlation

Tracy sees, as a major task of a theologian of the revisionist order, not necessarily the application of the criteria of adequacy to the first source of theology (common human experience and language) and the criteria of appropriateness to the second source (the Christian texts), but rather the duty of critically correlating them. He sees as a more important task for the theologian, the job of critical correlation in which the results of each investigation must be compared to the other in order to discover their similarities and differences. He believes that when this correlation is properly applied, one would discover that the limit-character of the religious dimension present to our common human experience is similar in meaning to the limit-character of the religious meaning of the New Testament language.

These basic criteria and modes of analysis were developed primarily for fundamental theology. But Tracy believes that the same will apply equally to dogmatics, since for him, "a central dogmatic concern… is to determine the meaning, meaningfulness, and truth of a given Christian symbol for contemporary experience"[44]. However, to suggest that the same principle and method of enquiry can be applied to both fundamental theology and dogmatics is one thing; to do the actual application is a different thing altogether, as evidenced from his apparent radical separation of fundamental and dogmatic theological principles[45].

Tracy's core revisionist proposal lies with this task of critical correlation of the results of the investigations between the two sources of theology. But as we shall later on see, it is not as simple as Tracy wants us to believe that one can easily correlate the two sources without sacrificing one source at the altar of the other. In the correlation that he talks about, what will be for instance, the proportionality of each source? Will it be a 50-50 scenario, or will one outweigh the other?[46] While it might be easy to agree with Tracy that

[44] D. TRACY, BRO, p. 80-81.

[45] This is more demonstrated in his treatment of Christology where he seemed not to accord any objective referent to Christological language of the New Testament but rather takes it only as a "limit representation", a "supreme fiction", a "re-presentative fact" that redescribes ordinary reality of our common human experience and makes us realise that we can live a life of wholeness and have basic faith in God. But when, however, it comes to the question of God, he insists that the objective ground or reality of all biblical limit language and experience is the claim that such Christian postulation named God is in fact real. Cf., D. TRACY, BRO, p. 204.

[46] Tracy's revisionism is based on two sources for theology – the common human experience and the Christian texts. Perhaps the chronological order in which these sources appear in Tracy's presentation does not matter. But one should be curious to find out whether their appearances

human experiences play a major role in theological discourse; and while one might be convinced that such human experiences can even become sources of theology, it is difficult to be comfortable with the idea of a correlation that places human experience at par with the Christian text as sources of theology. But this is precisely what he seems to suggest with his concept of "limit" and the argument that the limit-character of the "religious dimension" found in our common human experience is in fact similar in meaning to the limit-character of the religious meaning of the New Testament language. In other words, what one is searching for in the NT is in fact readily available in the everyday common experience.

4. TRACY'S CONCEPT OF "LIMIT"

Tracy advanced the concept of "limit" as a key category of religious language. After developing a method of enquiry which he labelled the most adequate contemporary theological tool to address the question of pluralism, he set out to apply such method to four central theological problems comprising the nature of religion, the notion of God, Christology, and the transformation of the society.

He started with the application of the revisionist method in his interpretation of the two sources for theology. He wanted to find out among other things, how and in what senses is the religious interpretation of our common human experience and language meaningful and true. He acknowledged not only the difficulty but also the undesirability of a single universal definition for the term

were haphazard or intentional. If they are intentional, then one wonders how a "Christian" theologian would start his/her "theological" work by analysing first, not the Christian texts but, the common human experience. It is true that Tracy makes room for a correlation of the results of these two analyses, but the fact that a theology starts first with common human experience and language and then, only thereafter, with the Christian text, says a lot about the leaning of such a theology. But the basic question one should ask is: are the sources for Christian theology the *common human experience* and the Christian texts, or, the *Christian texts* and the common human experience? The second order of appearance seems more adequate for a Christian theology than the first because, it is precisely the Christian texts that make Christian theology distinctively Christian. Any other human science can adequately and efficiently analyse the common human experience. But that does not thereby make it theology. On the other hand, a Christian theology that starts with the analysis of common human experience risks approaching the Christian texts with bias of such common human experience even when the person intends to correlate the results of the two enquiries at the end. In the final analysis, one would have surrendered and sacrificed distinctiveness at the altar of commonality. Although the chronological order of placement of these two sources appears to have been haphazard rather than intentional as evidenced from Tracy's alternating their order of appearance throughout his works, it appears that the major problem of Tracy is exactly his seeming equivocation about what precisely should take priority as a source of theology.

"religion" especially in the present pluralist situation. Nevertheless, he believes that the concept of "limit" can be used as a key (even if not exhaustive) category for describing certain signal characteristics peculiar to any language or experience with a properly religious dimension. The term "limit" becomes therefore an important key to unfolding Tracy's revisionist theology.

Tracy used this concept of "limit" to replicate in theology what Karl Jaspers, in his early writing, the *Psychology of World Views*[47], used his own theory of limit (*Grenze*) to achieve in psychology. Jaspers used the term *Grenze*, which literally means boundary or frontier, to refer to "the habitual forms and attitudes of the human mental apparatus, and the experiences of the mind as it recognizes these attitudes as falsely objectivized moments within its antinomical structure, and as it transcends these limits by disposing itself in new ways towards itself and its objects"[48]. He would therefrom place the concept of "limit-situation" (*Grenzsituationen*) at the centre of his philosophy, describing the limit-situations as those instants or moments in one's existence when the mind experiences some kind of fear, or nervousness or anxiety. In those moments, the mind is faced with limits of its present form. When the mind reaches this limit, what it does is that it gives itself over unrestrainedly in order to enter another realm of self-consciousness different from the former one it was used to. Jaspers brought in the theory of the unconditioned (*das Unbedingte*), and calls these limit situations unconditioned moments of human existence. In these moments, the human reason is pulled by some forceful compulsion which drives it beyond the limits of its present consciousness in order to pursue higher forms of knowledge. According to Thornhill, 'the unconditioned' is a term transported from Kantian doctrines of synthetic regress, and, is proposed by Jaspers as a vital impetus in reason, in which reasons encounters its form as conditioned or limited and desires to transcend the limits of this form[49].

Tracy borrows this concept of "limit" as the best category to use in describing any language that can be said to have a properly religious dimension. Such a language will have to imply or articulate a

[47] Karl JASPERS, *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen*, Berlin, Springer, 1919.
[48] Chris THORNHILL, *Karl Jaspers*, in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, cf., http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/jaspers/, (2006) 2011 (consulted 20/10/2016).
[49] C. THORNHILL, *Karl Jaspers* (this paragraph on Karl Jaspers's concept of 'limit-situation' is in fact, a summary of a section of this Thornhill's encyclopadia article).

"limit-experience" or a "limit-language", or a "limit-dimension"[50]. He thinks that it is only with the concept of "limit" that one will be able to understand the human phenomenon called "religion". However, he insists that "limit" is only a characteristic, not a universal definition of religion. In fact, he believes that "limit" is not limited to religious language and experience because, whereas it is true that all religious language and experience has a limit-character, it is not true that thereby all limit-language is religious. Nonetheless, he thinks that when a phenomenon bears certain features that not only express certain "limits-to" our ordinary experience (e.g. finitude, contingency, limited capacities of reason, radical transience), but in fact, discloses certain fundamental structures of our existence beyond that ordinary experience – the "limit-of" or ground to the ordinary way of being in the world (e.g. the fundamental trust in the worthwhileness of existence, the basic belief in order and value), then it becomes religious.

While Tracy acknowledges that the most important expressions of the meaning of religion remains the explicitly religious language and experience, he however claims that certain dimension of our common experience can also be justifiably described as religious. This claim is actually the high point of his analyses of "limit-concept. Below are brief analyses of his application of the concept of "limit" to his two sources for theology.

4.1. The Concept of "Limit" Applied to Common Human Experience

Tracy believes that there are "limits-to" our ordinary experience such as finitude, contingency and radical transience. These "limits-to" pose "limit-questions", or reveal "limit-situations" that disclose the religious horizon of our everyday, scientific, aesthetic, and moral experiences. He thus want to use the concept "limit" to prove that in science, morality and the world of everyday, there are limit-questions and/or situations that can be legitimately described as "religious". If we recall his bigger motive of trying to bridge the gap between his so-called secular faith and Christian faith by projecting them as two sides of the same coin in a revisionist theological model, then one would immediately understand what he is trying to use the concept of limit to establish.

[50] D. TRACY, BRO, p. 93.

He identified in science, certain limit-questions that he believes are self-evident, arising from the very scientific inquiry itself. For him, these limit-questions are not questions imposed on science from outside; rather they legitimately follow from scientific inquiry itself. He takes such questions as indicating a religious dimension to science. As he explains it, even when the inquirer has reached intellectually satisfying answers to his/her inquiry, an authentic scientific inquiry can still inquire into the very possibility of fruitful inquiry. An example is when a scientist goes out of her way to ask questions such as the following: Can these answers work if the world is not intelligible? Can the world be intelligible if it does not have an intelligent ground? Is it worthwhile to ask whether our goals, purposes, and ideals are themselves worthwhile? etc., Tracy says that these questions are limit-questions whose appropriate response can be properly described as religious.

In the area of morality also, he claims to have identified limit-questions which take the form of moral question but which do not function ethically. He sees in questions such as: "Why ought I keep my promise anyway?" as questions not requiring a moral argument because, as he says, "we cannot really produce a moral argument for being moral"[51]. For him, the answers to these and similar questions have religious or theological dimension.

As regards the world of everyday, he also believes that there are manifestations of limit experience in the everyday life, which he calls "limit-situations". He described the concept "limit-situation" as referring to "those human situations wherein a human being ineluctably finds manifest a certain ultimate limit or horizon to his or her existence"[52]. When he says limit human situations, he is referring basically to two kinds of existential situations namely: the "boundary" situations of guilt, anxiety, sickness, and the recognition of death as one's own destiny; and the "ecstatic experiences" such as intense joy, love, reassurance, creative act, etc.

The first category, according to him, demands a reflection upon the existential boundaries of our present everyday existence. He painted a picture of the announcement of a serious illness for instance, as capable of suddenly changing one's perception of the "real" world. Such world becomes "unreal" and "strange" to one as she begins to imagine the meaning of such an existential reality. One suddenly

[51] D. TRACY, BRO, p. 102.
[52] D. TRACY, BRO, p. 105.

discovers that one has reached the "boundaries" of her everyday existence.

The second category is what he calls the "self-transcending moments" in one's life. He believes that at such moments, the person "transcends" the usual lacklustre self and the usual everyday world, and experiences another dimension of reality which the language of the ordinary everyday experience is inadequate to state. He believes that these "moments" are not "acquired", so to say, by one's efforts. They just happen (in spite of oneself), or at best, they are "given" or "gifted" to one. Concretely, he pointed at those moments such as when one finds oneself authentically in a state of love, or genuinely in a state of joy, as examples of the "ecstatic experiences" that just happen or are given to us. As he says, a genuine state of love is not something that one works oneself into. One just "falls" in love. In other words, the person reaches the limit of natural human capacity for rational explanations of what she is experiencing. When one reaches such limit, Tracy believes that what follows must have religious character or dimension. In fact, he maintains that those 'limit-disclosing' characters of ecstatic experiences "serve as 'signals of transcendence', as 'rumors of angels'"[53] in people's everyday lives which help to challenge, provoke, and jar their sense of everyday. These experiences for sure, are not explicitly religious, but Tracy insists that they disclose a religious dimension of our common human experience[54]. In other words, when common human experiences reach their limits, they assume a "religious" dimension.

Younhee Kim gave a summary of Tracy's endgame through his use of the concept of 'limit' thus:

> "… by using the category of 'limit', Tracy tries to identify the religious dimension as a *common* and *autonomous* one. It is a *common* dimension in the sense that it is not a 'supernatural' realm out-there, but a *mediated* dimension within the human reflective horizon. As shown in the cognitive and ethical realm, the religious dimension is disclosed within the process of scientific or moral quest itself, not imposed extrinsically upon the inquirer by religiously-motivated force. It is, however, an *autonomous* dimension distinct from any other human activity such as science, morality, or culture because it is not subdued by or reduced to any of those realms.

[53] D. TRACY, BRO, p. 106. Tracy is actually making allusion here to the title of Berger's book from where he partly borrowed the idea of what he labelled here as "ecstatic experiences". Cf. Peter BERGER, *A Rumor of Angels*, New York, Doubleday, 1969.

[54] We shall however discuss, in the next chapter, Stephen Stell's criticism of this assumption where he argues that within other theoretical framework, this conclusion may not be sustained.

> Hence, his conclusion is that insofar as the religious dimension is understood as a *common* and *autonomous* one, viz., a final, limit-dimension to the whole of our everyday existence, religion can continue to be authentically discussed in the public realm. We can free religion from a purely privatized or dogmatized sector"[55].

4.2. The Concept of "Limit" Applied to Religious Language in the New Testament

Tracy asserts that this same concept of 'limit', when used as a single defining characteristic of religion, can be applied to explicitly religious language found in the Christian texts in order to demonstrate their meaning and meaningfulness. He believes that the New Testament use of certain important language forms may legitimately yield an authentically Christian limit-language. In fact, he makes the following claim:

> "The New Testament consistently modifies the traditional use of the language of proverbs, eschatological sayings, and parables through such procedures as intensification, transgression, and 'going to the limits' of language; these modifications allow the interpreter to propose that the sense of this language should be described as a limit-language of a genuinely religious character"[56].

He insists that when the uses of proverbs, eschatological sayings and parables in the NT are analysed, it will reveal that religious language is a limit-language disclosive of certain limit-experiences. He describes them as "logically odd", transgressing their literal temporal character and bringing the reader "beyond the limits of the everyday". He illustrates this with a biblical passage in the Gospel of Luke 17:20-21: "The Kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, 'Lo, here it is!' or 'there!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you". For him, this biblical passage is an example of a proclamatory saying which is not to be understood in terms of "wholly future" or "already here" or "both present and future". He rather takes it as a limit-language that challenges our sense of everyday time. He believes that the language does not evoke what he calls a "super-everyday, a beyond and out-of-

[55] Younhee KIM, *From "Limit" Experiences to God: A Critical Appraisal of David Tracy's Analysis of Religious Experience from the Perspective of Religious Pluralism*, in Lieven BOEVE, Hans GEYBELS and Stijn VAN DEN BOSSCHE (ed.), *Encountering Transcendence: Contributions to a Theology of Christian Religious Experience*, Leuven-Paris-Dudley, MA, 2005, p. 225-240, p. 232-233.
[56] D TRACY, BRO, p. 124.

this-world, a 'super-natural' world". Rather for him, the language transgresses the ordinary apocalyptic language and discloses "another" world that is not an apocalyptic super-everyday world. He claims that that "world" is not an extra-ordinary world but rather, a limit dimension of this world. To this end, he understands the parables not in terms of allegories or simple metaphors; but rather as stories, which, "take the reader to the point where the course of ordinary life is broken; an intensification of the everyday emerges; the unexpected happens; a strange world of meaning is projected which challenges, jars, disorients our everyday vision precisely by both showing us the limits to everyday and projecting the limit-character of the whole"[57]. He believes that there are many biblical passages which ordinarily are "strange"; like the action of the father in the parable of the Prodigal Son which is strange by "everyday" standard. This "strange" action, for him, is beyond the limit of what our ordinary language and experience might imagine. But in the action, the ordinary is broken to give way to extraordinary mode of possibility.

What this analysis is aimed at therefore, is to point out that religious language is a limit language disclosive of certain limit-experience. Tracy sees it as having the capability of bringing ordinary language forms such as proverbs, parables, etc. to the limit of language, using what he calls the strategies of "intensification" and "transgression"[58]. He thinks that when such strategies of intensification and transgression are applied, one would discover that explicitly religious experience has double sides: it is an authentic human experience in the sense that it is not trans-worldly; but at the same time, it is not correlative with our ordinary everyday activities. His argument is that the concept "limit" not only emphasizes the limitation of our ordinary language and experience (limit-to), but also acknowledges that there is a language which discloses that limit as a final limit-of dimension of all our existence.

He believes that his concept of limit rejects both supernaturalism and liberalism. He likened these "limit" categories to the language of "mystery" in Catholicism, especially in the Rahnerian understanding of it as that radically mysterious dimension to our lives which limits and grounds the rest of our activities. He thinks also that the protestant equivalent of it is the language of "scandal" in its Bultmannian sense where the "scandal of Christianity" is understood

[57] D TRACY, BRO, p. 130.
[58] Cf. D. TRACY, BRO, p. 132.

as the dialectical, the limit scandal that this God of Jesus the Christ is also and always *my* God[59]. His conclusion is that the categories 'limit-language' and 'limit-experience' are revisionist formulations aimed at avoiding the reduction of religion to either revelational positivism called fundamentalism or to the modern ideological denial of that "other" dimension of our lives. He thinks that the collapse of religious fundamentalism is not the end of religion (after all, for him, "fundamentalism of whatever tradition and by whatever criteria of truth one employs seems to me irretrievably false and illusory"[60]). He rather sees religious language (such as parables) as fiction which, like every good fiction, redescribes ordinary reality in order to disclose a new and extraordinary possibility for our lives.

For Tracy therefore, the NT language of the Christian religion does not disclose a trans-worldly or supernatural world; they rather "… redescribe the extraordinary in the ordinary in such manner that the ordinary is transgressed and a new and extraordinary, but possible mode-of-being-in-the-world is disclosed"[61]. Therefore, the world of Tracy's NT is "recognizably and authentically human".

If this is the case, then one can ask: who is Jesus Christ for Tracy? Is he an existential reality or a fictitious limit-language? Tracy seems to be more interested in the "work" rather than in the "person" of Christ. He sees the latter interest as belonging to dogmatic rather than to fundamental theology:

> "As the fundamental theologian moves into the matter-of-fact questions of Christology, he moves ever closer to the task of the dogmatic theologian. Still his task need not include the full set of Christological questions present for the dogmatic theologian. In more traditional theological language, the fundamental theologian's task involves him in questions of the 'work' more than the 'person' of Christ: questions of 'soteriology' as investigated from the viewpoint of the criteria for a fundamental-theological statement… [T]he major assumption of contemporary christologies which this entire section is challenging [is] that the only way to discuss the 'fact' of Jesus is to discuss his own actualization of a possibility rather than the fact of Jesus – as the Christ – as the re-presentation of a possibility"[62].

[59] Cf., D. TRACY, BRO, p. 133.
[60] D. TRACY, BRO, p. 135.
[61] D. TRACY, BRO, p. 134.
[62] D. TRACY, BRO, endnote nº 73, p. 231-232.

The problem with this though is that there develops a radical separation between fundamental and dogmatic theologies. Tracy is willing to discuss the 'fact' and the 'person' of the Christian God; but what appears to matter for him, as a fundamental theologian is the *work* rather than the *person* of Jesus Christ. He is not interested in according any cognitive reality to the person of Jesus Christ. He rather claims that the central cognitive claim of the NT language is its insistence that the objective ground or referent of all limit-experience and limit-language is that reality which Christians name God. He consequently decided to re-image the Christian concept of God to reflect his revisionist theological ideals. What follows is his understanding of the concept of God following in the process tradition.

5. The Question of God in Tracy's Revisionist Theology

Tracy ended his analysis of the concept of "limit" by postulating that the ground for all limit-experience and limit-language is that reality called "God" in the Christian understanding of it. But he insists that the symbolic language of the NT is insufficient to articulate this Christian theistic claim, arguing rather that one needs to develop an "explicitly conceptual language" in order to properly articulate it. He claims that, from the point of view of the analysis of our common human experience and the Christian self-understanding as expressed in the Christian text, the traditional Christian understanding of God is inadequate to carry on the project of revisionism. He describes classical theism as incoherent because one cannot reconcile God's absoluteness with his loving kindness; as religiously unminigful because it depicts God as being unaffected by human plights; and as inappropriate to Scripture because the scripture depicts God as interacting with his people. He therefore decided to opt for a position called neo-classical theism (or simply panentheism) which he claims, avoids the pitfalls of the former by being internally coherent, religiously meaningful, and appropriate to Scripture.

5.1. The Panentheistic Concept of God

Whitehead's criticism of the concepts of God as monarch, moralist, and unmoved mover, and his subsequent proposition that this

concept be replaced by notion of a tender love operating in the world[63], was the catalyst that Charles Hartshorne needed to elaborate a dipolar conception of God as abstract and concrete, absolute and relative[64]. American process theology embraced this concept of God, and neoclassical theism or panentheism became popular even among theologians. It was from this background that Tracy started his theistic argument with the understanding that the fundamental duty of a fundamental theologian is to defend or reject the traditional Christian understanding of God, using criteria other than one's own or the person's community's vision of faith.

With his belief that the meaning and truth of Christian theistic claim can only be validated when the analysis of common human experience and a hermeneutical analysis of the Christian scriptures are critically correlated he saw in the neo-classical theism or panentheism, a better "conceptual clarity" than that given in classical theism. For him, panentheism, with its metaphysical analysis, can more adequately investigate the theistic claim than the mere symbolic language of the NT alone. He therefore decided to explore this line of investigation.

As a "limit-concept", he thinks that the only mode of analysis that can investigate the concept of God is metaphysical or transcendental analysis. He believes that metaphysics develops criteria of truth that can validate or invalidate the cognitive claims for the religious language. Although he is aware that there are several charges against the use of metaphysics, he still insists that those charges arose out of a misunderstanding of the word metaphysics. He believes that many take the word as a substitute for the phrase "Philosophy of life"[65]. However, he strongly maintains that a proper understanding of the word metaphysics and its application in investigating the cognitive claims of religious language will provide a third alternative between the classical models of rationalism and fideism. This is exactly the alternative he set out to provide by pursuing a "proper" understanding of metaphysics.

[63] Cf., A. WHITEHEAD, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, New York, Macmillan, 1929.
[64] Hartshorne has quite a lot of works where he developed and perfected his neoclassical theism. For some of the most important, cf., Charles HARTSHORNE, Man's *Vision of God and the Logic of Theism*, Chicago, Willett Clark and Company, 1941; *Reality as Social Process: Studies in Metaphysics and Religion*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1953; *Anselm's Discovery: A Re-examination of the Ontological Proof for God's Existence*, La Salle, Illinois, Open Court, 1965; *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984.
[65] D. TRACY, BRO, p. 158.

He began by postulating that a metaphysical analysis properly understood, must meet two criteria namely, internal coherence and adequacy to common experience. Although he concedes that the transcendental methods of Rahner and Lonergan are authentic metaphysical modes of inquiry, he thinks that their unwillingness to break with the classical theistic tradition of Aquinas has rendered them incapable of establishing neither the internal coherence nor the adequacy to common human experience of the present Christian understanding of God. He therefore, opted for a new tradition – process thought.

This process thought has a different understanding of experience from the classical understanding. It understands experience in terms of moving, feeling, sensing, thinking, etc.; in a word, it understands experience in terms of process. And what is essential in this category is that the non-temporal and non-relational categories of 'substance' and 'being' of the classical metaphysical tradition are replaced with the categories of 'process', sociality', and 'time'. The self is now experienced as relational, temporal, and social; it is now a process of change and continuity. Tracy believes that these "new categories" have logically and liberatingly brought to conclusion the "turn to the subject" characteristic of modern metaphysics[66]; and argues that God is to be understood even as the "constitutive exemplification" of these categories.

This is the concept of God which, in this process tradition, is called *neo-classical theism*, or *panentheism*, or *dipolar theism*. This concept is said to apply change positively to God for the reason that intelligent and responsible change is a positive, not a negative, factor in all our experience. The proponents of this concept of God often lean on Newman's idea that perfection means the ability to have changed often. They argue that if God is rightly described as the perfect one, then it implies that he cannot be changeless. The two qualities are mutually exclusive in the process tradition.

Certainly, this notion of "immutability" as a negative, rather than a positive attribute of God is not an invention of the process theologians. Even Barth anticipated this when he denies the position that God is immutable in the sense of the "immovable mover" or "unchangeable changer", describing such position as akin to the pagan idea of "immobile" which is a "euphemistic description of death". He insists that the meaning of immutability includes rather than excludes

[66] Cf., D. TRACY, BRO, p. 173.

life; and that God's consistency is not a "mathematical" type of consistency or a "consistency of a supreme natural law or mechanism". Rather, the biblical notion of God as immutable implies that "He is the living God", and that "He possesses a mobility and elasticity which is no less divine than His perseverance, and which actually and necessarily confirms the divinity of His perseverance no less than its own divinity naturally requires confirmation by His divine perseverance"[67]. The point he is making is that God is truly affected by His creation, describing as "foolish" any attempt to see alteration which is contained in the idea of repentance as applying only to humans. He says: "It would be… foolish to try to see in the alteration which is certainly contained in the idea of repentance only an alteration in man in his relation to God, but not an alteration in God in His relation to man"; emphasizing that, "the fact that in His relation to creation and man God relates Himself to them in a way which is conformable to their mutability and alteration is based on the fact that they have this nature of theirs from Him and even in the perversion of it cannot evade that which they have from Him"[68].

The only difference between Barth and the process theologians in this regard, is that dipolarity in God as a theological concept did not directly found favour with Barth. Although he showed significant aversion for the classical concept of God by believing that God is genuinely and not just conceptually affected by creation, he still did not make any allusion to a dipolar concept of God in the process tradition. This might be partly because that concept had not been invented during his time. But the fact that he preferred to talk of God in terms of *becoming* instead of *being*, suggests that perhaps he could have considered the use of the word "dipolar" (albeit with qualifications) in his description of the nature of God[69] were he to re-write the *Church Dogmatics* today.

[67] Cf. Karl BARTH, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. II, Part I, G. W. BROMILEY, T. F. TORRANCE (eds.), Massachusetts, Hendrickson Publishers, 2010, §31 p. 494- 496.
[68] K. BARTH, CD II/I, p. 498 and 499.
[69] This is not however, to suggest that Barth was a pre-neoclassical theologian. Despite Barth's aversion toward classical theism similar to that of the neoclassical theologians, Colin Gunton described the neoclassical ground for such aversion as purely rationalist while that of Barth's ground is described as "Christian rational autonomy". In the comparative work he did between Charles Hartshorne's and Karl Barth's doctrines of God, he described the former's theology as "irretrievably anthropomorphic", and process theology as a whole as "a sophisticated form of animism", maintaining that, "Whatever the value of the exposure of the contradictions and moral shortcomings of the classical concept of God, it is of little benefit to overthrow a tyrant if he is replaced by an ineffectual weakling". Cf. Colin E. GUNTON, *Becoming and Being: The Doctrine of God in Charles Hartshorne and Karl Barth*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1978, cf. esp. p.215-224. However, in spite of the many reservations about some tenets of process

5.2. Dipolarity as a Limit-Concept

Tracy's love affair with panentheism is centred on his conviction that its notion of dipolarity is a limit-concept. The concept of dipolarity implies that God is both absolute and relative. His existence depends on no other being, but his actuality is relative to all other beings. He has literally two poles in his reality: the abstract pole, where he is absolute, depending on no other for existence; and the concrete pole, where, like the rest of humanity, he is relative. He affects and is affected by all others. Tracy considers this dipolarity as a limit-concept, and believes that when applied analogously to God, it appears "a genuinely coherent way to affirm the central scriptural insight that a loving and related God alone is God"[70]. He thinks that "dipolarity" as a limit-concept is internally coherent and adequate both to our common experience and to the scriptural concept of God. He believes that the concept rejects the monarchical and often tyrannical image of God and replaces it with an image of God that has persuasive and non-coercive character. For him, this later image of God best portrays the Johannine metaphor of "God is love". But although he appropriated this process dipolar concept of God, he refuses to subscribe to the Whitehead's symbolic expression of it as a "fellow-sufferer who understands", accusing that image of evoking "the picture of a kind of 'warm deism' which seems neither appropriate to our own experience of the religious dimension of existence, nor faithful to the scriptural portrait of a God who actually 'acts in history"[71].

To make a more adequate symbolic expression of the image of God in its persuasive and non-coercive character faithful to the New Testament portrayal of him, Tracy suggests that we need to look anew at what he calls the "originating Christological and eschatological limit-languages of the Christian religion"[72]. It was in the context of this "looking anew" that he fashioned his Christology in the revisionist manner. He contends that the exercise he was about to is not an "invention", but, "a rediscovery" and a "reappropriation". He maintains that we need to rediscover and reappropriate the story of

theology; and although it will be difficult to see how their re-imaging of God can be of any positive contribution to the question of religious pluralism; it is nonetheless wrong for Gunton to have qualified process theology wholly and in its entirety as a sophisticated form of animism. Certainly there are some "truths" of neoclassical theology that need to be considered.

[70] D. TRACY, BRO, p. 179.

[71] D. TRACY, BRO, p. 190.

[72] D. TRACY, BRO, p. 191.

Jesus if we must disclose new possible modes-of-being-in-the-world; arguing that a coherent conceptual analysis of the basic Christian affirmation of theism is not sufficient without the requirements of our imagination namely, story, symbol, metaphor, parable, and myth. He takes this Christological symbolism, this story of Jesus as the Christ, as being at the same time "factual and fictional". With this he posited that all Christian self-understanding is "irrevocably Christocentric", and as such, christocentrism is taken as constitutive of Christianity as a religion.

6. THE QUESTION OF CHRIST IN TRACY'S REVISIONIST THEOLOGY

Tracy withholds cognitive reality to Christ even while according such reality to the concept of Christian God. He claims that what is important with regards to Jesus Christ is his story which, he says, serves as the illuminating symbol for Christian religious understanding of existence. However, he describes such story not in terms of any cognitive reality but rather as "supreme fiction" and as "re-presentative fact". He claims to have found contemporary clarification for the character of Christology by making it at once factual and fictional:

> "In the Christian story of Jesus as the Christ we find ourselves presented with a story – a fiction – which needs reinterpretation, and with a claim to fact which needs clarification and perhaps restatement. That Christological fact, for example, is not really a metaphysical reality in traditional Christian self-understanding. A proper understanding of God is an understanding of a metaphysical reality. For the concept of God, when conceived coherently, is either necessary or impossible. The reality of God, for the Christian, is a reality which either necessarily touches all our experience or necessarily does not exist. Yet the Christological reality – the reality of God's self-manifestation in Jesus as the Christ – is not a metaphysical reality but a fact. There was and is no strict necessity for that action. Yet, for the Christian tradition, God did act in Jesus Christ. That action is represented in the limit-language of the New Testament by and about Jesus as the Christ"[73].

Tracy's argument for denying any metaphysical reality or fact to Christ is his conviction that a matter-of-fact claim cannot be validated metaphysically but rather by other "facts". He suggested

[73] D. TRACY, BRO, p. 205.

three "facts" which he says, when properly investigated, would obviously bring out Christological language as re-presentative limit-language of a revisionist model of fundamental theology. These "facts" are: the fact of our common human need for story, fiction, and symbol; the fact of "evil" in the human situation; and, the fact that facts are not exhaustively defined in terms of actualizations of possibilities, but also include re-presentations of possibilities[74].

While insisting that all Christian self-understanding is "irrevocably christocentric" he is careful to distinguish two radically different understandings of christocentrism. The first is the "exclusivist" Christology in which, according to him, its proponents understand christocentrism as meaning that "only and solely God's 'special revelation' in Jesus Christ is meaningful for a proper human self-understanding"[75]. It is not surprising, giving his concept of Jesus Christ, that he places most forms of Christian fundamentalism alongside what he calls the "sophisticated theological form" of Karl Barth's Christology as exemplifying this form of exclusive Christology. But he maintains that christocentrism is not an exclusive property of fundamentalists or Barthians, and argues that revisionism denies any exclusive Christology.

The second Christocentric position which he sees as congruent with his revisionist theology is the one he calls "inclusivist" Christology. By "inclusive" Christology, he intends to argue that the disclosure manifested by the Christian proclamation of Jesus Christ is genuinely disclosive of all reality. If at all there is any "special" or "categorical" revelation, he believes that what this manifests is "the disclosure that the only God present to all humanity at every time and place ('original' or 'transcendental' revelation) is present explicitly, actually, decisively, as my God in my response to this Jesus as the Christ"[76]. With this, Tracy announces his own version of "universal salvific will of God". But as he says, it is not just enough to announce this position; as a revisionist theologian, one is expected to show how and why this Christological understanding can be faithful to both the central meanings of our common experience, and, those of the New Testament texts. To show this, he turns to the investigation of the three "facts" which he claims are capable of validating a matter-of-fact claim that cannot be validated metaphysically.

[74] Cf., D. TRACY, BRO, p. 205.
[75] D. TRACY, BRO, p. 206.
[76] D. TRACY, BRO, p. 207.

The first "fact" is the fact of the need for fiction, which he believes every generation in human history has needed, not as a metaphysical necessity, but as a matter of fact. He therefore claims that it is only as "fictions" that we can listen again to the Christian story of Jesus because our common experience testifies to the need for such.

The second "fact" is the fact of evil or the fact that we can commit evil, which again he says, is not a metaphysical necessity. But this fact has helped to retrieve the classical Christian image of man as alienated, estranged, fallen and sinful. He thinks that when this neo-orthodox anthropological vision of man is incorporated into revisionism, then the twin objective of revisionist theology namely, common faith in the worthwhileness of existence that sustains us beyond good and evil, and, a reflective belief in a credible, a suffering and loving Christian God, will be achieved.

By far however, it is the third "fact" – the understanding that the 'facts' are not defined only in terms of actualizations of possibilities but must also include re-presentations of possibilities – that is of paramount importance to us here. Tracy states that the most logical alternative to a fact is a mere possibility. He defines a fact (as distinct from a possibility) in terms of that which actually is. But he distinguishes two ways by which possibilities may become facts. The first perceives a fact in terms of an actualization of a possibility. But the second conceives it as the re-presentation of a certain possibility in disclosive symbolic language and action. This second category of "re-presentation" is what Tracy uses to describe religious language.

For him, religious languages re-present (that is, they make present anew through symbolic expressions) those human reality that tends to be forgotten. He believes that as fictions, religious languages redescribe our everyday experience, and represents certain imaginative possible modes-of-being-in-the-world that can become actualized by us[77]. They are no longer under the category of "mere possibility" but rather now belong to the category of "fact". It is under this category that he explains the Christian sacrament which is believed to be a fact by virtue of its re-presenting the real possibility which God has made present to humanity in Christ. He says that this "fact" or "validity" of sacramental re-presentation is so factual that despite the eminent desirability of the minister's own personal

[77] D. TRACY, BRO, p. 215.

actualization of that possibility, it does not really depend upon it to be efficacious.

He now uses this distinction between the two kinds of "fact" to ask a very important Christological question namely: "what kinds of factual claims are present in the Christian confession that Jesus is the Christ"? It is here that Tracy reiterates once more his primary preoccupation with the works rather than with the person of Jesus Christ. For him, it doesn't matter whether the historical person Jesus explicitly actualized the possibility which the title "Christ" or "Messiah" entails. What is primary for him is, "the meaning and truth of the claim that this Jesus is in fact the Christ; that the representational reality present in the office of Messiah may be found in the words, deeds, and destiny of Jesus of Nazareth"[78]. He takes this as the primary question of Christology; and believes that it makes an inclusive claim to meaning and truth represented by the affirmation that Jesus is the Christ. He thinks that it avoids, among other things, what he calls the "modern psychologizing of the ontological high Christology of Chalcedon and the Joannine *Logos* tradition"[79] by challenging the assumption that only an actualization of a possibility secures the status of fact for Christological meaning. He argues rather that the factual status of the Christian affirmation of Jesus as the Christ does not really need this historical-psychological reconstruction unless one means to insist that the only kind of "fact" is an actualization of a possibility. But as he has already rejected this claim by postulating another kind of "fact" as re-presentation of possibility, he maintains that what is needed to be known in order to formulate a Christology grounded in fact is not Jesus' own consciousness of his actions and teachings but rather what his words, deeds, etc. re-present as real human possibilities for genuine relationship to God. In other words, the historical grounding of the Christ-story is not important; what seems to be paramount is the ability of such story to illumine the reality of God.

For Tracy therefore, Christology is at the heart of Christian theology, not as a "timeless truth of metaphysics" but as "the factual, symbolic re-presentation of the fundamental existential truth of existence". Christocentrism in this sense does not speak of some "new God radically different from the only God who lives"; the term rather

[78] Cf., D. TRACY, BRO, p. 216.
[79] D. TRACY, BRO, p. 217.

renders more factual the very God that is manifested everywhere[80]. It is in this sense that he insists that Christology has an inclusive character; that it fulfils certain factual understandings of human and divine reality notably, the fact that our lives are meaningful.

Although Tracy is by this, challenging the assumption of contemporary christologies namely, that the only way to discuss the "fact" of Jesus is to discuss his own actualization of a possibility, this however, leaves the question whether a coherent Christian fundamental theology can accept any Christ-story that does not of necessity illumine the reality of Jesus. If the only "fact" of Jesus is the re-presentation of a possibility, one wonders whether it is altogether unimportant that Jesus in fact actualized this possibility in history.

7. TRACY'S REVISIONIST THEOLOGY AND THE QUESTION OF PLURALISM

Pluralism is another name for Tracy's proposals in his revisionist theology. He did not hide his intention to espouse this revisionist understanding of Christianity as a panacea for the raging culture of pluralism. He believes that in a pluralist culture, theologians are not only authorized but even obligatorily mandated to approach their profession from diverse perspectives so as to appeal to wider audience. While in itself and as such, appeal to wider audience is a positive attribute, when such appeal comes at a cost of "de-supernaturalizing" God and "de-actualizing" Christ so that he remains only a re-presentative possibility, it calls into question how and whether a "de-supernaturalized" theology is needed at all in order to address the culture of pluralism.

Peter Berger's grouping of David Tracy's revisionist theology (along with the theologies of Schubert Ogden and Langdon Gilkey) among the secular theologies that converge at the rejection of the supernatural[81], has raised a number of important issues to consider. He argues that these three (typically American) theologians, in spite of their differences, have at least one thing in common: their theological procedures are a form of "disclosure" that is out-rightly reductionist – a characteristic trait of a secular theology. In fact, he believes that, "Tracy establishes beyond any residue of doubt that secular theology is no longer a Protestant exclusive; Roman Catholics are now eligible

[80] Cf., D. TRACY, BRO, p. 221-222.
[81] Peter L. BERGER, *Secular Theology and the Rejection of the Supernatural: Reflections on Recent Trends*, in *Theological Studies*, 38, 1 (1977), p. 39-56.

to be included in the 'we' of Ogden's and Gilkey's community of discourse"[82]. His specific case against Tracy is that the latter's "critical correlation" is a one-way traffic (an observation earlier pointed out by Avery Dulles[83]): only Christianity must be "corrected" using the modern spirit as the cognitive instrument for this operation[84]. Although Tracy does not suggest a one-way correlation as implied by Berger, his goal is to achieve a harmonization of the so-called secular faith with Christian faith. But the question becomes what the name of such "harmonized" faith will be, and whether such harmony will appeal to both Christians and people of other faiths.

To the first question, it will be difficult to place a name on it because it would have lost the particularities both of Christianity and of secularity. To the second question, except as a purely academic exercise, it might not be so useful to Christianity. People of other faith don't equally seem to admit of any use of it in the contemporary context of religious pluralism. Kim's assessment of Tracy's analysis of human religious experience is revealing:

> "Tracy's metaphysical justification of God may convince the inner circle of Christianity which shares his metaphysical option, but hardly those outside in the realm of public discourse. My conclusion is that Tracy's revisionist analysis of human religious experience has no use for our contemporary context of religious plurality. The reason for this limitation lies in the fact that his methodology does not overcome a Western-centric and theo-centric approach to religious experience"[85].

Therefore, it appears as if Tracy had taken a gamble that could not appeal to any of his audiences except, probably, his university colleagues.

Another area of gamble is Tracy's beliefs that theology must be approached from a detached point of view if one hopes to meet up with the criteria of adequacy to common human experience. Against this belief however, Dulles seriously doubts whether theology can suitably be done by a detached, non-committed observer, contending rather that "the theologian must, as a minimum, be passionately concerned with using the resources of Christian tradition to gain

[82] P. BERGER, *Secular Theology and the Rejection of the Supernatural*, p. 48.
[83] Cf., Avery DULLES, *Method in Fundamental Theology: Reflection on David Tracy's Blessed Rage for Order*, in *Theological Studies*, 37, 2 (1976), p. 304-316, p. 310.
[84] Cf., P. BERGER, *Secular Theology and the Rejection of the Supernatural*, p. 49.
[85] Y. KIM, *From "Limit" Experience to God*, p. 240.

access to a more authentic life"[86]. Dulles also appears to have some misgivings with Schleiermacher's maxim that "the theses of faith must become the hypotheses of the theologian" – a maxim which Tracy endorsed. He insists vehemently that even fundamental theology cannot be adequately practiced by persons uncommitted to Christianity if these reasons advanced by Patrick Burns are anything to go by:

> "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"[87].

Tracy's policy of "non-committed observer" towards the Christian faith and tradition as characterizing the fundamental theologian's approach to theological task is therefore suspect in Dulles' and Burns' estimations. Although Tracy would vehemently insist on this policy, it is difficult to sustain the argument that absolute non-commitment and non-loyalty to the Christian tradition should characterize either a *Christian* fundamental theologian or a Christian *fundamental theology*. If such non-commitment could be tolerated from religious studies scholars, at least little involvement is expected of a theologian (whether of the fundamental or dogmatic specialization) seeking to fruitfully approach the question of pluralism. One does not need to detach oneself from one's religious and/or professional commitment in order to be seen as pluralist.

Tracy's whole idea of revisionism centres on the need to reinterpret Christian self-understanding. Although this need had always been felt throughout the ages, Tracy's interpretation of the New Testament as presenting a specific limit experience, or more precisely, as "a possible mode-of-being-in-the-world", while it might be appreciated in a purely academic theology, it may not enjoy such appreciation in theology devoted to faith-commitment, i.e., in a

[86] A. DULLES, *Method in Fundamental Theology*, p. 309.
[87] Patrick. J. BURNS, *An Apologetic of Liberation and Fulfilment*, in *Communio* 2 (1975), 340-341, cited by A. DULLES, *Method in Fundamental Theology*, p. 310.

confessional theology. A theology committed to confessing the Christian faith will not reduce Christ to a fictional biblical personage; or interpret the New Testament as a limit experience that just presents a possible mode of being in this world. Surely, the Christian eschatological hope does not centre in the "world" of humankind but rather in the "world" of God. Although eschatology is not limited to the future in the literal sense (because the NT biblical future began with the past through the death and resurrection of Christ, and is being realized even now in the present with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit[88]), to treat the entire New Testament as a mode of being in this world (even when that mode is taken to be extraordinary) appears to invoke an issue that will be highly contested in confessional theology.

In fact, Berger understands Tracy's interpretation of the NT in terms of a possible mode of being in the world as amounting to a rejection of supernaturalism. He perceives this rejection also in Tracy's appropriation of the dipolar concept of God as well as in his application of the revisionist theology for Christian praxis (which forms the last chapter of Tracy's BRO). Berger's verdict: "the reader comes away with the impression that it is not enough to be modern and secular any more: one must also, it seems, be somewhere on the left politically"[89]. But against this movement to the left, he contends that as long as the world of common human experience is not the only world, then the enterprise of secular theology remains "profoundly unsatisfactory". For him, insofar as the term "supernaturalism" refers to an "other realm" of experience and reality, then, "let it be said… that a supernaturalistic theology not only continues to be possible in the contemporary situation, but that any theology worth doing will have to be supernaturalistic"[90]. Berger is, in other words, saying that Tracy's theology should be rejected because it is not supernaturalistic enough.

[88] It is outside our scope here to enter into the twentieth-century debate about the eschatological question. We are therefore not talking about the Kingdom of God as future (futurist eschatology), or the Kingdom as past (realized eschatology), or the Kingdom as present (existentialist eschatology), or even the Kingdom as past, present, and future (salvation-history eschatology). For an example of "futurist eschatology", cf., Johannes WEISS, *Jesus' Proclamation of the Kingdom* (1892), Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1971; for "realized eschatology", cf., Charles H. DODD, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (1935), London, Collins/Fontana, 1963; for "existentialist eschatology", cf., Rudolf BULTMANN, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, London, SCM Press, 1958; Rudolf BULTMANN, *Jesus and the Word* (1934), London, Collins/Fontana, 1958; for "salvation-history eschatology", cf., Oscar CULLMANN, *Christ and Time*, Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1947.

[89] P. BERGER, *Secular Theology and the Rejection of the Supernatural*, p. 50-51.

[90] P. BERGER, *Secular Theology and the Rejection of the Supernatural*, p. 54.

This harsh assessment of Tracy's theology by Berger was met with criticisms, with Howland Sanks arguing that "Tracy is a truth-seeker who does not flee complexity, is not satisfied with unnuanced simplicity, and seeks to include as many voices as possible in the conversation that is contemporary theology"[91]; and accusing Berger of "misreading" and "misinterpreting" Tracy's BRO[92] when the former charged Tracy's revisionist theology with reductionism. However, even before Berger, Dulles had raised some concerns about Tracy's proposal for the theologian to transfer allegiance from the church's community to the community of scientific inquiry:

> "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 judgements 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"[93].

It is true that Tracy might have included as many voices as possible in the conversation, and therefore, might have been as pluralist as would have been possibly imagined. He calls for a critical reinterpretation of secularity and Christianity alike. The word "critical" is important in his proposal because, as he says, it implies the willingness to follow the evidence wherever it may lead[94]. When applied to secularity, he dismisses the secularist's rejection of theism and Christianity as being neither coherent nor able to provide a reflective account of our common experience as involving either explicitly or implicitly an affirmation of the final worthwhileness of existence[95]. When applied to Christianity, he perceives the traditional

[91] T. H. SANKS, *David Tracy's Theological Project: An Overview and Some Implications*, in *Theological Studies*, 54, 4 (1993), p. 698-727, p. 699.
[92] Cf., T. Howland SANKS, *David Tracy's Theological Project*, p. 711.
[93] A. DULLES, *Method in Fundamental Theology*, p. 306.
[94] Cf., D. TRACY, BRO, p. 7.
[95] Cf., D. TRACY, BRO, p. 10.

Christian theism in its scholastic form as having failed to be internally coherent enough to provide for such an account. However, when he tried to correlate the two, he tended to have focused more on the demystification of Christianity than of secularity. He ended up with a somewhat strange defense of his usage and application of the word "supernatural", and accused his critics of taking the word out of context[96]. Did Tracy's critics take the word out of context, or did Tracy himself misapply the word?

Actually, one is "forced" to search through his endnote[97] in order to realize that Tracy equates the concept "supernatural" with "fundamentalism" and does not use the word in its strictly medieval sense of a theoretical concept for thematizing the Christian religion. Perhaps this clarification came as an after-thought; but one wonders why Tracy needed to "hide" such qualification in the endnote. Certainly without such a qualification, one would be justified to question Tracy's seeming contempt for supernatural. If indeed he means fundamentalism when he says supernatural, it is not likely that any theologian of the contemporary era would still want to stick to the fundamentalism or literalism of the past century. But why did Tracy settle for the word "supernatural" when he meant "fundamentalism"? It appears that he was trying to "hide" something behind the written words. His call for the demystification both of Christianity and of secularity, and his actual pursuit of this call only on Christianity, could be interpreted as some sort of "insincerity" that apparently looks reductionist.

While not using the word reductionist to qualify him, Dulles believes that the process theology, on which Tracy built his revisionism, depicts God as a particular object alongside of other objects. He believes that such a depiction fails to present God as the ultimate, encompassing ground of all reality. This, in his opinion, amounts to compromising the divinity of God[98]. Dulles, of course, acknowledged that there are problems in classical theism, especially the depiction of God, by some representatives of this school, as indifferent and unrelated to the world. But he still insists that despite the many positive contributions of process theology, he cannot concede that its concept of God should be substituted for that of classical theism.

[96] Cf., Langdon GILKEY, Schubert OGDEN and David TRACY, *Responses to Peter Berger*, in *Theological Studies*, 39, 3 (1978), p. 487-507, p. 504.
[97] Cf. D. TRACY, BRO, endnote nº 40, p. 19.
[98] Cf., A. DULLES, *Method in Fundamental Theology*, p. 312.

It appears that Tracy might have adopted this dipolar concept of God in order to further "de-supernaturalize" God. A God having two poles – absolute and relative – is after not all as "supernatural" as God is thought to be in its traditional concept. But while it might be true that a "de-supernaturalized" concept of God may sit down well among the committee of scientific inquiry, such concept appears to be outside the "theological circle" for those engaged in confessional theology. The contemporary world is still a world where faith-commitment is still on the rise despite the rise of secularism. Therefore, the question of religious pluralism in the contemporary world should not only be an academic exercise; it must be accompanied by faith-commitment. If this is the case, then the concept of God that falls "outside the theological circle" of such faith-commitment may not after all totally provide the "conceptual clarity" that Tracy desired.

Tracy's revisionism therefore tends to leave out a large chunk of people who are still deeply committed and loyal to their church traditions. Although he acknowledges in the preface to the 1996 edition of BRO that his more recent books and articles, while maintaining the fundamental arguments and the essentials of this earlier book, nonetheless continue to "qualify, update, develop, correct, challenge, and, in some cases, contradict various aspects of the book"[99], his revisionist model may have created the false impression that it can provide a full conceptual clarity in the contemporary theological culture of pluralism. Dulles seems not to concur with this impression: "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"[100]. In a pluralistic environment, only a plurality of models, indeed, seems to be the best approach.

[99] D. TRACY, *Blessed Rage for Order*, p. xiii.
[100] A. DULLES, *Method in Fundamental Theology*, p. 313.

CONCLUSION

Tracy's presentation of his revisionist theology in BRO is a key to understanding his entire theology. If he is subsequently known as an advocate of public theology, it is thanks to this foundational work where he uses revisionism as the most effective method to project theology as a public discourse. He sees this method as not only capable of confronting pluralism but also of reinvigorating Christian theology. His aim is to guarantee the continued relevance of theology in the academic world, and of Christianity in the contemporary world. He wanted to appear to be committed to both the modern spirit and the Christian faith. He thinks that "specialization and collaboration" are basic needs in contemporary theological enterprise. But he believes that theological enterprise itself must be critically grounded. It was in his bid to critically ground the truth claims of the dogmatic tradition (which he felt Lonergan merely assumed) that he developed his concept of "revisionism".

However, in pursuing such a critical grounding, he ended up with a radical separation of fundamental theology and dogmatic theology. With this separation, there appears to be a dichotomy between academic theology and confessional theology. Dulles was concerned about this radical separation evident in Tracy when he said: "In my own judgement, 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"[101]. In saying that however, he recognises that he is not thereby 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.

But if, however, fundamental theology must take its starting point from the Christian faith as understood by the church, this is a clear case of confessional theology. And if, as Tracy did, fundamental theology takes its starting point, not from the church but from the community of scientific inquiry, it becomes an all-out academic theology. This then begs the question whether and to what extent the two trends can coexist in the same theology or whether they are mutually exclusive. Tracy attempted to navigate between the two by

[101] A. DULLES, *Method in Fundamental Theology*, p. 314.

trying to argue for the place of theology in the academic world. He laid out a series of revisionist reinterpretations of the basic Christian self-understanding such as theism and Christology. But it appears that in his bid to protect theology as an academic discipline he forgot to protect Christianity as a faith religion. He makes the assumption that once theology is publicly and "scientifically" interpreted, Christianity as a religion is thereby commensurably secured; or that it is thereby guaranteed a flourishing existence. But the reality on ground, especially in the Western "scientific" society appears to suggest otherwise. While it might be true that the survival of theology as an academic discipline depends, to a large extent, on its "rationality", it is not thereby true that the survival of theology as a confessional discipline (in other words, the survival of Christianity as a religion) depends only on its rationality. Once Tracy focused on theological rationality, he apparently forgot all about faith-commitment, and pushed that commitment to the area of systematic theology. He appeared to be more concerned with secular faith than with the traditional Christian faith.

However, Dulles had questioned this apparent concern when he asked the following rhetorical questions:

> "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 argument? 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?"[102]

Although Tracy defends his revisionist theology as transformationist[103], the transformation he seeks often becomes a case where it is much easier for the world to transform the church than for the church to transform the world. And this might always be the case if one's emphasis is disproportionately focused on academic theology, just as the contrary might likely be the case if one's emphasis is disproportionately focused on confessional theology. In the end, the dichotomy between academic theology and confessional theology might persist unless perhaps something fundamental is done.

[102] A. DULLES, *Method in Fundamental Theology*, p. 315-316.

[103] This is a vocabulary that Tracy used as a more appropriate word to qualify his revisionist theology instead of the word "reductionist" as used by Peter Berger. Cf., L. GILKEY, S. OGDEN and D. TRACY, *Responses to Peter Berger*, p. 504.

CHAPTER 6

THE OUTCOME OF TRACY'S REVISIONIST THEOLOGY: THEOLOGY AS A PUBLIC DISCOURSE

INTRODUCTION

David Tracy's proposals in his revisionist theology leaves one to ask a very vital question: who does the theologian after all serve? Karl Barth had earlier argued vehemently that theology is a function of the Church. This implies that theology serves primarily God and the Church. For this very reason, it is the church that determines and fashions theology in such a way that the allegiance of the theologian should unequivocally remain to the church. But as we have seen from the onset of Tracy's revisionism, he rejected such allegiance and instead, proposes that the theologian's loyalty should be primarily to the community of scientific inquiry. He tries to weave together a set of Christian symbols that could be publicly available to any intelligent reader. His image of Christ becomes such that does not admit any cognitive claim concerning Jesus of Nazareth. The "fact" of Jesus for him, is not so much an actualization of a possibility as a re-presentation of a possibility. In this sense, it is the *works* of Jesus rather than his *person* which he considers important. The story of Jesus is reduced to a supreme fictional re-presentative fact. He believes that such portrayal of the Jesus story is not only important but also absolutely necessary in our culture of pluralism. In this way, such story would become publicly available to any intelligent reader to access. In order therefore that the theologian of the contemporary realm fulfils her/his vocation, such theology must acquire public character.

Tracy consequently pursed the question of publicness in theology as the logical outcome of his revisionist theology. He sees theology as a public discourse. Of course theology in a way has always been a discourse that has been carried out publicly and not esoterically. But the nuances and implications of Tracy's notion of publicness as regards theological discourse is what makes his proposals unique. In order therefore to understand theology as a public discourse in Tracy's thought, we need to explore his perception of what 'public' entails.

1. THE THREE PUBLICS OF THEOLOGY

In a pluralist culture, Tracy forecloses two options for every religious tradition: neither should they each dissolve into some lowest common denominator, nor should they withdraw into something private. He contends that in order to genuinely affirm pluralism, one must not only affirm the truth but also provide public criteria for such affirmation. Hence for him, by the very nature of the kind of fundamental existential question that theology asks, and because of the nature of the reality of God upon which it reflects, theology must develop public, not private, criteria and discourse[1]. He listed three publics which theology must address namely, the wider society, the academy and the church. He takes these three publics as the social reality of the theologian. And as a matter of fact, he not only views all theology as public discourse, but equally all theologians as somehow engaged in public theology, addressing all three publics. While conceding that there could be, and indeed are, personal commitments of any particular theologian to any of the three publics, he assumes that any and each theologian addresses (at least implicitly) all three following publics:

The Public of the Wider Society: Tracy's wider society is subdivided into three realms – the technoeconomic realm (which he says makes use of instrumental rationality to determine rational means for a determined end), the political realm, and the realm of culture expressed in art and religion. His submission is that if theology must adequately address the wider society in any or all of its three realms, it must do so in a manner that is publicly available to all. He warns about the present danger of privatization of religion occasioned by marginalization of art. For him, when religion is privatized, then no one feels the urge to study it because everybody would assume that it is "a private consumer" that is not meant for everybody. But he insists that as a classic, religion should always be public, never private.

The Public of the Academy: Tracy uses the word "academy" as a generic word to describe the social locus where the scholarly study of theology most often occurs. In this public, what is at stake is the establishment of what should constitute the scientific character of

[1] Cf., David TRACY, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*, New York, Crossroad, 1981, p. ix (further reference to this book will be done in its abbreviated form of AI).

theology using logical and objective arguments just like in any other scientific study. Tracy acknowledges the difficulties, over the years, of establishing theology's place in the academy. But he neither wants to subscribe to the idea of confining theology exclusively to the church nor of using nonnormative stance of scholarly study of religions as a way out for theology. He rather uses Stephen Toulmin's analysis of what constitutes a discipline to argue that theology clearly belongs as an academic discipline in the modern university. Toulmin's distinction between three kinds of rational enterprises in terms of their disciplinary status namely, "compact" disciplines, "diffuse" disciplines and "would-be" disciplines, became for Tracy, a credible argument to place the theological disciplinary status in the realm of "would-be" or "diffuse" disciplines, and thus establish its place in the academy without having to limit it to the church or destroy its normativity. He thinks that the "would-be" or "diffuse" disciplines are the types of disciplines found in the so-called "soft disciplines" or "humanities" as distinct from the "compact" discipline found in the "hard" sciences. He gave two characteristics of the "diffuse" and "would-be" disciplines namely, their lack of a clear sense of disciplinary direction resulting in a host of unresolved problems, and, their lack of adequate professional organization for the discussion of new results.

Aside psychology, sociology, anthropology and religious studies which he places under this category, he believes that it is in its diffuse disciplinary status that criteria and paradigms are set for understanding of theology. He thinks that Bernard Lonergan's development of a theological method which understands theology as a collaborative, field-encompassing enterprise constituted by eight functional specialities, has opened the way to truly make theology a public discourse. This is why he believes that as long as every theologian is engaged in making claims to meaning and truth, the theologian in question should render those claims explicit by rendering disciplinary criteria as explicit as possible. Because of its preoccupation with meaning and truth, he asserts that "theology must take the route of 'publicness'" because, if this is done otherwise "theology will soon forfeit its right to serious academic attention, and thereby betray its own heritage"[2]. Asking the question of truth of religious claim is not, according to him, a luxury for theology. To this end, he concludes therefore that all theologians (whether they accept it

[2] D. TRACY, AI, p. 20.

or not) are actually involved in publicness, and that this second public (the public of the academy) only serves to render this intrinsic drive more explicit.

The Public of the Church: For Tracy, what distinguishes the theologian from other intellectuals, is this compulsive urge to speak not only to the other two publics but more importantly to the public of the church. Here, he not only views the church as a theological reality where he concedes that in some meaningful sense all Christian theology might be termed church theology on inner-theological terms, but equally as a sociological phenomenon. In its sociological function, he defines the church in terms of its mediating function between individuals and society as a whole. It is on this note that he thinks that the church has two components – communal and institutional, exercising both primary and secondary functions in the process of socialization and formation of personal identity. This church is therefore one of the publics the theologian is committed to; and must relate this commitment and responsibilities to the wider society and to the academy. The church, in his views, should not function as the sole reference group for theology since both the wider society and the academy are equally reference groups for the theologian in various degrees of explicitness. Therefore, he thinks that a strict theological understanding of the church is neither desirable nor recommendable since the sociological reality of the church is equally needed in order to fully grasp that phenomenon called the church. He proposes the model of correlation as the most adequate to theologically account for the relationships between church as a theological as well as a sociological reality: "The theologian should in principle use a correlation model for relating sociological and theological understandings of the reality of the church in the same way one uses a correlation model for the more familiar relationship between philosophy and theology"[3]. In such correlation strategy, he advises that it is important to note not only the particular denominational and/or academic setting of the theologian, but also the particular kind of society that the theologian is addressing.

[3] D. TRACY, AI, p. 25.

2. TRACY'S IDEAL THEOLOGIAN

With the analyses of the three publics that theology addresses, Tracy painted a picture of an ideal theologian as not only a member of all the three publics (a citizen of the society, an intellectual in the academy, and a believer in the church), but also as someone who must be a sort of a jack-of-all-trades and master of all. He calls this the "social reality" of the theologian which compels her to become "an intellectual related to three publics, socialized in each, internalizing their sometimes divergent plausibility structures, in a symbiosis often so personal, complex and sometimes unconscious that conflicts on particular issues must be taken singly or 'retail', not globally or wholesale"[4]. Because of this social reality, he insists that explicitness is not a choice but an absolute necessity for any theologian if the person must strive to do justice to the claims and counter-claims of each of these three publics using criteria of adequacy. This is because complexity characterizes this social reality when the theologian strives to participate in the different conversations of the three publics and being responsible to each and every one of them. Although he says the interpretation of a religious tradition, and, the interpretation of a religious dimension of the contemporary situation are the two constants found in each and every one of these publics, however, when it comes to what constitutes a public claim to truth in theology, he acknowledges that they appear to diverge. But despite the "ambiguity" which he accepts is likely to be noticed when a single self in the theologian tries to relate to three distinct publics, he insists that the world remains an ambiguous reality which Christian faith must recognize by coming to terms with the publics of society and academy with all their ambiguities even while not losing sight of the fact that the church is also a real public for all Christian theology.

Tracy based his insistence on the publicness of all theology on the universalistic claim about God by all three monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. These three religions conceive God in universalistic terms – God is either universal in actuality or sheer delusion. It is precisely because of this that he maintains that for the faith in this God to be taken serious, any discourse about it must be universal and public. He believes that it is with the understanding of this God that every other theological discourse can subsequently be determined. When Tracy talks about public discourse, he means a

[4] D. TRACY, AI, p. 26.

"discourse available *(in principle)* to all persons and explicated by appeals to one's experience, intelligence, rationality and responsibility, and formulated in arguments where claims are stated with appropriate warrants, backings and rebuttal procedures"[5]. This discourse is characterized by cognitive disclosure and personal, communal and historical transformation. It discloses meanings and truths that transforms the individuals and the communities.

Because of the ambiguity in Tracy's three publics of society, academy and the church, he proposes three distinct but related sub-disciplines in theology to deal principally, but not exhaustively, with those three publics respectively. He understands *Fundamental* theology as relating primarily to the public of the academy, providing arguments that all reasonable persons (irrespective of the person's belief) can access. Here he doesn't see beliefs as serving as either warrants or backings in arguments. For *Systematic* theology, he views it as relating primarily to the public represented in the church. The *modus operandi* here, according to him, is the re-presentation and the reinterpretation of what is assumed to be the ever-present disclosive and transformative power of the particular religious tradition to which the theologian belongs. Tracy sees the expression "confessional theology", "dogmatic theology", and "constructive theology" as meaning one and the same thing with what he labelled "systematic theology". But he expresses his preference for the latter as being less history-laden[6]. For the *Practical* theology, he assumes that it is related to the public of the society, and that it views praxis rather than theories and theoretical arguments as the proper criterion for the meaning and truth of theology.

But in spite of these distinctions between fundamental, systematic and practical theologies, Tracy is of the view that the theocentric character of every genuine theology makes it imperative that every theologian makes a claim to truth which must demand publicness and universality. In other words, he sees these three branches of theology as having genuine public characters even when he proposes different warrants or backings for the publicly defended claims to truth in these branches of theology. He insists, for instances, that in fundamental theology "personal faith or beliefs may not serve as warrants or support for publicly defended claims to truth" but that

[5] D. TRACY, AI, p. 57.
[6] Cf., D. TRACY, AI, endnote to Chapter Two nº 58, p. 90.

"instead, some form of philosophical argument (usually either implicitly or explicitly metaphysical) will serve as the major warrant and support for all such claims"[7]. But in systematic theology, he sees a fidelity to and involvement in a classical religious tradition (in other words, faith and belief in) as capable of functioning as an appropriate theological stance[8]. This, however, immediately raises the question of radical distinction between fundamental and systematic (dogmatic) theology that has earlier been alluded to in the previous chapter.

If (as Tracy has earlier insisted in BRO) the methods he proposes for fundamental theology can also apply in systematic theology, why should warrants for publicly defended truths in both cases differ radically? Even on purely philosophical ground, can Christian belief not be warranted? We have earlier in the previous chapter cited some philosophers of religion who argue for the epistemic justification of Christian beliefs as rational and as warranted. Alvin Plantinga for instance, argues that there is no viable *de jure* objection to Christian belief in terms of various rationalities ranging from Aristotelian rationality to William Alston's practical rationality[9]; and Richard Swinburne insists that 'belief-that so-and-so' (or propositional belief) and 'acting on the assumption that (or acting as if) so-and-so' characteristic of Christian faith are all rational in their own and therefore epistemically justified[10]. The question therefore is: how does personal faith or belief serve as warrant for publicly defended claim to truth in one sub-discipline of theology but does not serve as such in the other sub-discipline? Our contention will be that as long as there is this radical distinction between what he calls systematic theology on one hand, and fundamental theology on the other hand, it will be very difficult to sustain the argument of Christian faith as warranted belief. And as long as this dichotomy persists, it will equally be difficult for academic and confessional theologies to coexist in order to tackle the question of pluralism that requires their collaborative enterprise.

[7] D. TRACY, AI, p. 64. Cf. also, David TRACY, *The Context: The Public Character of Theological Language*, in David TRACY and John B. COBB, Jr., *Talking About God: Doing Theology in the Context of Modern Pluralism*, New York, The Seabury Press, 1983, p. 9.
[8] D. TRACY, AI, p. 68.
[9] Cf., A. PLANTINGA, *Warranted Christian Belief*.
[10] Cf., R. SWINBURNE, *Faith and Reason*.

3. SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY AS A PUBLIC DISCOURSE

When Tracy says "systematic theology" what he generally means is "dogmatic theology". It is in this sense that he creates a radical distinction between fundamental theology and systematic theology, and sees the former as having more freedom of interpretation than the later. But at the same time, he maintains that both of them must be pursed as public discourses. He believes that unlike the fundamental theologian, the systematic theologian does not just deal with the question of God only, but must in fact tackle the relationship between that God and the church. Because of this he thinks that the theologian in the systematic sub-discipline must be accountable to that church's tradition. This is why he concedes that faith and belief play as warrants in the systematic theologian's work while using that church's tradition as a theological source. For him, the systematic theologian deals directly with the classics of that church through a constant reinterpretation of those classics. It is because the hermeneutical task of systematic theology deals directly with the church's tradition that he thinks that while faith is justified in fundamental theology, faith is assumed in systematic theology. But he does not expect the "assumed" faith to become mere "fundamentals" to be endlessly repeated. He reasons that being faithful to one's tradition does not mean merely repeating the *tradita* of that tradition but that rather it means critically translating its *traditio*[11]. For this reason, he maintains that such a critical translation can only occur in the context of real conversation where the question or the subject matter rather than one's subjective image of oneself assumes primacy. In other words, it is the subject matter rather than the subject that determines the questioning in a real conversation. In a real conversation, there is, so to say, a joint reflection upon the subject matter by the conversation partners. To this end, Tracy believes that understanding occurs or happens not as a personal achievement but as a result of the back-and-forth movement of the conversation itself. He is convinced that in systematic theology, theological understanding occurs when the theologian strives to engage in conversation through the interpretation of the texts of the tradition for the contemporary situation in a publicly defined manner.

[11] Cf., D. TRACY, AI, p. 100.

However, to really understand Tracy's insistence that systematic theology must become a public discourse, one has to look into his idea of classics. Systematic theology does not become public because it merely interprets. What makes systematic theology public, in Tracy's view, is what it interprets namely the Christian classics. One can therefore say that it is the "classic nature" of the Christian text it interprets rather than the nature of systematic theology itself that gives the later its public status. Let us therefore examine what, in Tracy's opinion, it is in a classic that renders it public.

3.1. The Notion of Classics

The notion of classics is very central to Tracy's theological hermeneutics and methodology, and, very crucial to his proposal for a public systematic theology. The subject matter of Tracy's systematic theology is "the classics" which he sees as having the same normative status as systematic theology itself. It is this classic which he maintains that the theologian must interpret in a "non-authoritarian" and "nonclassicist" manner. But his general notion of classic is an important key to unravelling his case for publicness in systematic theology.

To begin with, Tracy thinks that for a text to be qualified as a "classic", such a text must have "excess of meaning" demanding constant interpretation and bearing a certain kind of timelessness. The emphasis here is on the "excess". The meaning "hidden" within a classic must be "excess" in the sense that one is not just limited to what it means here and now to this particular generation interpreting it, but that one must 'tear' it apart to reveal other 'hidden' meanings that are not immediately available here and now. In other words, there is a timelessness that is at play in any work of classic. This timelessness must be of the nature that engages not only the timelessness of the past, but more importantly, a permanent timelessness that engages the present readers. He puts it this way: "[e]very classic lives as a classic only if it finds readers willing to be provoked by its claim to attention"[12]. What this means therefore is that the understanding of a classic is not limited to its understanding in the past, but must open up to a new understanding arising from new questions that the subject matter is asking in the current historical situation. But such new questions can and do lead to a point where it

[12] Cf., D. TRACY, AI, p. 102.

is discovered that some other thing, other than what the text used to be, has indeed become the case. In fact Tracy endorses Dorothy Van Ghent's opinion that in encountering a classic, one is compelled to believe "that something else might be the case". It is on this conviction that he sees classics as "those texts that bear an excess and permanence of meaning, yet always resist definitive interpretation"[13]. In other words, classics are always on the move, revealing new meanings and new significations.

If this is the nature of classics, then he says they are not to be understood by repeating them but rather by interpreting them. It is only in interpreting them that one can really "repeat" them. For Tracy, what makes a classic "classic" is the interest it generates in readers willing to engage with it by constantly interpreting it anew. When a classic of a tradition reaches a "definitive" interpretation, it signifies that such purported classic is no longer a classic but has been reduced to a static monument that is only good for the museum. This is why he believes that a failure to constantly interpret the classic of a tradition amounts to a consignment of such tradition to the dustbin of history. He claims that this has been the bane of what he calls "the authoritarian theologies of mere repetition and reconstruction". But he describes as "self-deception" the false confidence in such "theologies" which purport that their present horizon is so clear and distinct, and therefore needs no further interpretation. He believes that in the end, such theologies end up as mere repetitions in the manuals that fail to address the present situation. But at the same time, he maintains that our contemporary mode of understanding rejects such method. For this reason, he views all contemporary systematic theology as "fundamentally hermeneutical"[14]. It is as interpreters, rather than as people that merely repeat traditions, that he recognizes contemporary systematic theologians as performing public functions. But he thinks that a genuinely hermeneutical task can only be achieved when the subject matter becomes a question for the interpreter. In other words, it is not just the tradition that is interpreted; the subject matter of the classical texts such as events, images, symbols and persons in the tradition must equally interpret the interpreter in terms of becoming questions for him/her so that real understanding of the text can occur.

[13] David TRACY, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope*, London, SCM Press, 1987, p. 12.
[14] D. TRACY, AI, p. 104.

However, Tracy insists that a text must first of all qualify as a "classic" before its interpretation can lay claim to performing a public function. He concedes that classics exit in every culture. But he maintains that not every text is a classic. To qualify as a classic, a text or certain expressions of the human spirit must have some kind of normative status: "What we mean in naming certain texts, events, images, rituals, symbols and persons 'classics' is that here we recognize nothing less than the disclosure of a reality we cannot but name truth"[15]. His insistence that any classic must disclose a reality that is named truth is to foreclose any subjectivist approach to a text or any expression of the human spirit as classic. It is precisely because of this disclosure of truth that Tracy maintains that such disclosure must be a public and never a private one. For him, the only thing that counts as truth in the public realm is this: "the methodically controlled results of the technical realm in all its forms. The rest is taste, or emotion, or 'art'"[16]. This means that the truth that is disclosed in public realm is open to anyone and everyone willing to engage with it. It is on this note that he says that a classic must be public. But being public entails also being open to pluralistic interpretations: "Every classic contains its own plurality and encourages a pluralism of readings"[17]. However, there has to be objective validity for this plurality of readings. And to determine this objective validity, Tracy had recourse to Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutical theory.

It was Ricoeur who, while encouraging a plurality of reading a text, however cautions that "if it is true that there is always more than one way of construing a text, it is not true that all interpretations are equal"[18]. This was the reason he developed his dialectic of explanation and understanding. According to this dialectic, there is a move from understanding to explaining and then a move from explanation to comprehension. In the first movement, understanding will have a

[15] D. TRACY, AI, p. 108.
[16] D. TRACY, AI, p. 109. Tracy however, uses Gadamer's phenomenon of a "game" to explain that 'art' can become a publicly-acclaimed 'classic' (and not just a private taste) when it is approached as one approaches a 'game' where all self-consciousness to control every move is 'lost'. With this 'loss' of control of oneself, one allows oneself to be played by the game. When there is thus this loss of subjectivity in approach to a work of art, it becomes a classic. This is the sense in which, according to him, the experience of art becomes not private or peculiar but rather public and normative. He concludes by saying: "Whenever we actually experience even one classic work of art we are liberated from privateness into the genuine publicness of a disclosure of truth" (p. 115).
[17] D. TRACY, AI, p. 113.
[18] Paul RICOEUR, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*, Texas, TCU Press, 1976, p. 79.

naïve grasping of the meaning of the text as a whole. He refers to this as understanding taking the form of a guess[19]. In the second stage, there will be a "sophisticated mode of understanding"; and this is accompanied by explanatory procedures. At the end therefore, what began as a guess would have satisfied the concept of appropriation. Ricoeur says that this passage from understanding as guessing and explanation as validation ultimately leads to comprehension.

It was this interpretation theory of Ricoeur that Tracy applied in his notion of classics. He borrowed this notion of 'understanding-explanation-understanding' as a somewhat measure of validity wherein understanding is seen as "enveloping" the entire process of interpretation; and in turn, explanation "develops" the initial understanding and illuminates the final understanding of appropriation[20]. There is therefore a dialectical process at work in the project of interpretation. In this dialectics, Tracy sees what is more important as the response (as in original experience) of the classic by the reader rather than the production of the classic itself. He thinks that focusing attention on the production of the classic implies making the author behind the work the subject matter. But as he insists, it is the work rather than the artist that must receive the attention of the interpreter. Artists, in his opinion, are only different from the rest of the people by their degree of intensification. They are not different in kind; they are not different by a striking originality in the sense of novelty. They are only different because they are willing to undergo the journey of intensification to the level where fundamental question is experienced as some kind of "gift" that "happens". When such intensification occurs, Tracy says an artist is born. He/she does not have a pre-knowledge of where the journey takes. He/she risks alienation from the original experience or pre-knowledge of the subject-matter through a process of intensification that leads to imagination and distanciation. But it is precisely this willingness to risk alienation that makes the ensuing product a classic. This intensification is so sustained that the meaning that comes out of it (in other words, the work produced as a result of it, known here as 'classic') becomes sharable and public.

Classics therefore cannot, in this reading, be privatized; they must rather be freed to become educators in realities that are not only

[19] Cf., P. RICOEUR, *Interpretation Theory*, p. 74-75.
[20] Cf., D. TRACY, AI, p. 118.

true but also public. In interpreting classics, this process of distanciation in the form of "explanation" is also required. The effect of alienation experienced in the production of the work of classic is also experienced in its interpretation. The interpreter does not have a pre-knowledge of where the interpretation is leading. But he/she must risk wandering back and forth in a conversation manner where the subject-matter and not the subject, determines the question. In such manner, the result of inquiry made is open to public to read and understand in publicly defended criteria of relative adequacy.

3.2. The Systematic Theologian as Interpreter of Religious Classics

Tracy believes that the principal task of the systematic theologian is a hermeneutical one; and he situates this task under the general notion of classic and its interpretation. The systematic theologian, for him, is simply the interpreter of religious classics. Although he distinguishes a religious classic from other classics by saying that unlike the latter who speak of particular area of human existence, the former speaks of the "whole" of reality by the power of the whole[21]; nevertheless, he insists that the interpretation of such religious classics follows exactly the same "rules" applicable in the interpretation of any other classic: first of all, there has to be a certain kind of pre-understanding of the fundamental questions of religion. This is because he is convinced that a "theologian" cannot claim to interpret the text of a religion which he/she has absolutely no pre-understanding and personal opinions about. The second stage after this pre-understanding is to experience some kind of exposure to the claims of these religious classics. This experience will lead the theologian, in the third stage, to initiate some movement of critical dialogue with the subject matter.

The dialogue and conversation that Tracy envisions here is an enlarged one where all the major hermeneutics (both of retrieval and suspicion) and all the major methods of explanation are included. He points out that the publicness of systematic theology lies in its performance of this hermeneutical task of interpreting the religious classics:

> "Insofar as the systematic theologian performs that hermeneutical task well, insofar as these religious classics are classics and this

[21] Cf., D. TRACY, AI, p. 163.

> tradition is a classical tradition, the theologian, like all interpreters, contributes to the common good, to the realm of authentic publicness"[22].

He maintains that the theologian's interpretation of the religious classics follows the common activity of interpretation in human experience where a phenomenon that touches on a limit experience provokes interpretation. Such limit experience (as we have already mentioned) involves a moment of intensification and disclosure. The "ordinary" becomes "mysterious" needing further interpretative understanding. This, in fact, according to Tracy, is what makes all theology a public discourse.

It is true that the public that systematic theology principally addresses is a particular public of the church; yet, Tracy believes that some sort of provision of public evidence and argument for "personal belief" is still required if the work must appeal to any intelligent reader to apprehend. He is aware that this in itself raises important dilemmas in the systematic theologian's task of making the interpretations of Christian classics public, and quickly poses the dilemma himself before attempting to resolve them. Firstly, not all readers of systematic theology are Christians. How does the non-Christian reader recognize the work as public? If the work is not recognized as public, what will one make of the inner-Christian claim that the truth about God and human beings is manifested by God in Jesus Christ? Is Christianity no more than a private preference or taste? Yet, to allow Christianity to be decided by public argument poses another dilemma – where then is the gift of God that Christianity claims in its classics? Is Christianity no longer a gift but instead a set of conclusions that are arrived at through logical arguments?

To provide solution to these dilemmas, Tracy says that, first of all, one needs to recognize that the religious classics that the theologian interprets are in themselves and as such public. Remember his insistence on the normative status of any classic (be it religious or secular classic). If at all there is anything as 'religious classic', such classic must therefore *ab initio* be public to qualify as a classic. The disclosure that such classic makes is not limited to any particular religion or audience (even when that classic is radically particular in

[22] D. TRACY, AI, p. 131.

origin and expression) but must in fact, cut across all peoples. Secondly, he points out that even the work of the interpreter (in this case, the systematic theologian interpreting the religious classic) can in itself attain the status of a classic, if there is a classic interpretation of a particular classic religious tradition as, for example, Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics* and Karl Rahner's *Theological Investigations*. Tracy claims that these works have moved beyond the Swiss-Reformed and the German Catholic traditions respectively, to transform a wider public outside their particular originating traditions, and thus are now accorded a public status.

These are examples of how he thinks systematic theological works can become "public" in the true sense of the word even when such works were originally addressed to a particular public of the tradition that the writer belonged to. He thinks that these and similar systematic theological classics are characterized by their "intensification of distanciation" that provoke, confront, challenge, and transform our present horizon.

If Tracy's analysis and assumptions are correct, then it appears that Karl Adam summarized the level of provocation of a real work of classic when he described Karl Barth's second edition of *Der Römerbrief* as falling like a bomb on the playground of theologians[23]. Something unfamiliar and provocative must have happened in that work to have been likened to a bomb. That 'something', might be what Tracy has been describing as "intensification of particularity" which he believes, yields an authentic public discourse:

> "Any person's intensification of particularity via a struggle with the fundamental questions of existence in a particular tradition, if that struggle is somehow united to the logos of appropriate expression, will yield a form of authentically sharable, public discourse. That discourse will exert its claims as a candidate for classic status waiting to complement, confront or transform all our more usual candidates for publicness. That discourse, when focussed on the religious classics, will be named systematic theology"[24].

Systematic theology therefore, in the judgement of Tracy, cannot but be a public discourse because, firstly, it interprets a religious classic; and secondly, the author's intensification of particularity provokes, jars, and disorients as to challenge the present

[23] Cf., Donald K. MCKIM (ed.), *How Karl Barth Changed My Mind*, Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans, 1986, p. ix, n.1.
[24] D. TRACY, AI, p. 134.

horizon towards transformation. In this way, the work itself becomes a public discourse and even a candidate for a classic status.

3.3. Interpreting the Religious Classic

As with every classic, Tracy contends that religious classic has two notes – permanence and excess of meaning. Like other classics it also demands constant interpretation. This constant interpretation is not without risks especially as the intensification process makes it imperative to engage in a back-and-forth movement of disclosure and concealment of a truth. In the case of the religious classic, the risk is even more risky because of the ambiguity of the phenomenon of religion. Because religion has no one single definition for its essence, it is difficult to evolve one single meaning of what the phenomenon of religion is. As we earlier noted in chapter one of this work, most of these definitions of religion have been Western-oriented, thereby neglecting a substantial chunk of what "religion" entails to non-Westerners. Even in a strictly Western conception of it, "religions" have been infested with lots of abuses in history – a fact that prompted Schleiermacher to write speeches to the cultured despisers of religion, and Barth to declare that religion is unbelief.

To interpret a religious classic therefore, one must contend with the risk of entering into the history of such religion with all the not-too-nice-memories of its past and present. This is why Tracy considers that if one is to hope for any degree of relative adequacy in matters concerning religion, one must approach religion from a multidisciplinary and collaborative perspective. He takes the systematic theologian as "the finite, historical, risk-taking interpreter of the religious classics of a classical tradition"[25], who must enter her job with a pre-knowledge and pre-understanding of what religion is. In entering with such pre-knowledge, the person's task becomes how to find relative adequacy in the various interpretations that are at one's disposal. He thinks that this relative adequacy demands some kind of appropriate phenomenological and hermeneutical approach. Because religious classic must involve a claim to meaning and truth as one event of disclosure and concealment of reality, Tracy thinks it must involve both manifestation and proclamation in order to scale through the test of relative adequacy. He identifies "reality" which religious

[25] D. TRACY, AI, p. 163.

classics disclose and conceal as a "gracious mystery", or as revelation or self-manifestation of God (in Christian parlance). It is this "gift" of God's self-manifestation that the systematic theologian interprets through the intensification process. Such interpretations demands, in Tracy's insistence, conversation of the religions.

Tracy has suddenly become conscious that there is indeed a limit to his "limit-language" which he made the core of his revisionist fundamental theology. He seems to have realized that systematic theology cannot fruitfully progress with such limit-language. Because he believes that the expression of religious classic is experienced as an event or a happening that is not personally achievable, he thinks that the limit-to experiences of the human conditions and/or the metaphysical reflections upon them cannot replicate the kind of revelation that the religious classic discloses and conceals. This is the reason he decided to take up the language of manifestation and proclamation in systematic theology.

However, he still tries to bring them together through another channel by taking the fundamental theology's metaphysical reflection as providing critical warrant for claims to truth of religion while systematic theology's fidelity to truth of interpretation is taken as providing sufficient (even if it is relative sufficiency[26]) warrant for the concrete universal manifested in the concrete religious classic. As he puts it, "Fundamental theology warrants the claims to truth of the religious dimension to existence on ordinary public grounds; [while] systematic theology as interpretation warrants the claim to truth of *a concrete religion* on those kinds of authentically public grounds appropriate to the kind of disclosive publicness expressed in all classics"[27].

It can be said therefore, that one of the major efforts in AI is an attempt to bridge the gap between the three subdisciplines of theology through a process of correlation[28]. Here, he specifically tries to bring

[26] Tracy insists that the abstract necessity of fundamental theology not only needs the "disclosure" of systematic theology but also the concreteness of practical theology's praxis emphasis upon transformation to guarantee a concretely sufficient warrant. cf., D. TRACY, AI, endnote to chapter 5 nº 16, p. 220.

[27] D. TRACY, AI, p. 198.

[28] Matthew Lamb has described Tracy's effort as "attempting to establish mutually critical correlations between the subdisciplines of fundamental, systematic, and practical theologies". He notices that Tracy's change of nomenclature (in referring to these three) from "disciplines" in BRO to "subdisciplnes" in AI suggests an intensification of the inner mutually critical correlations among the three. Cf., Matthew LAMB, *David Tracy*, in Dean G. PEERMAN and Martin MARTY (ed.), *A Handbook of Christian Theologians* (enlarged edition), Nashville, Abingdon, 1985, p. 677-690.

fundamental and systematic theologies closer by recourse to similar strategies he believes are evident in both. According to him, both use the same strategies inherent in all other classics namely the strategies of intensification of particularity and intensification of distanciation in expression. But as religious classic, the intensification process is itself abandoned into "a letting go of one's own efforts at intensity"[29] because its subject matter namely, manifestation of the whole by the power of the whole, is more intense and complex. Because of the intensity of the subject matter, its disclosure is simply given, recognized and accepted. One simply finds oneself participating or belonging to the disclosure of that whole. Therefore he thinks that the general limit-language of fundamental theology must give way to a particular language of manifestation and proclamation.

For Tracy, the dialectical languages of manifestation and proclamation must be present in the interpretation of religious classics if one is to avoid what he calls the "caricatures of authentic religion" such as fundamentalism, authoritarianism, fanaticism, hardened ideology, etc. He believes that in the religious expression named "manifestation", a "radical sense of participation" predominates; while in the expression termed "proclamation", a "sense of radical nonparticipation" dominates. What Tracy termed 'manifestation' and 'proclamation' roughly equates what in Christian theological parlance is known as 'sacrament' and 'word' respectively. The former is distinctive of the Catholic and Orthodox Christianity on the one hand, and the latter characterizes Protestant Christianity, on the other hand. The former tends to emphasize the "mystical-priestly-metaphysical-aesthetic" side of religion; the latter emphasizes the "prophetic-ethical-historical" aspect of religion. Tracy's argument is that the two aspects should not be diametrically opposed to each other. In fact, he believes that each needs the other in the understanding of the complexity inherent in Christian self-understanding. According to him, the prelinguistic (manifestation) and the linguistic (proclamation) expressions of religion should not oppose but rather should complement each other.

Relying heavily on Mircea Eliade's works on religion, Tracy tries to counter-balance the heavy reliance of Western religions (Christianity, Judaism and Islam) on proclamation with the Eastern religions' emphases on manifestation. He believes that the

[29] D. TRACY, AI, p. 201.

"nonlinguistic manifestations of the power of the sacred" in the Eastern religions such as the sacred rituals, the symbols, the festivals, the myths, etc., should not be dismissed as mere "primitive" or "mysterious" because manifestation is, according to him, a realm which "choses any ordinary reality – this rock, this tree, this city, this mountain, this rite – as the medium for the saturated power of the sacred – the 'centre of the world'"[30]. But at the same time, he is of the opinion that this realm of manifestation should not obscure the religious expressions where the power of the word of proclamation from God occurs as the paradigmatic disclosure of religious reality.

He thinks that, when the two (manifestation and proclamation) are put in their proper perspective, one would notice that there will be a reformation and transformation of the church in such a way that the relationship between world and word is not broken. Tracy still wants to proclaim a secular Christianity where the church and the world are not in opposition but embrace each other. He thinks that it is only when this is achieved that one can convincingly emphasize the Christian faith that "Jesus Christ is both the decisive word and the decisive manifestation of God and ourselves"; that one can see the sacrament as "nothing other than a decisive representation of both the event of proclaimed history and the manifestation of the sacred cosmos"[31]. In a word, he believes that it is only then that one can begin to attempt a genuine Christian theology of ecology that roots history in nature. This seems, to him, the only way for Christians to really recognize the reality of Jesus Christ as the Christian classic not only as the re-presentation of word but also as the manifestation of our God and our humanity.

In summary, for him, a genuine religious classic must embrace the two classical forms of religious expression namely, manifestation and proclamation; so that, as he says, the secular will emerge, "not as the realm of nonreligion but the realm where the power of the word must be constantly expressed in new action for justice and radical neighbour-love, the realm of faithful historical religious meaning"[32]. In other words, the distance between secular faith and Christian faith would have been bridged.

[30] D. TRACY, AI, p. 206.
[31] D. TRACY, AI, p. 215 & 216.
[32] D. TRACY, AI, p. 211.

4. THE CHRISTIAN CLASSIC: THE EVENT AND PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST

4.1. How to Interpret the Christian Classic in a Publicly-defended Manner

The "event and person of Jesus Christ" makes the Christian classic distinctively Christian. But Tracy insists that the interpretation of this classic must follow the part to publicness that guarantees a faith-response to the claim that this event not only happened but happens even now. For this reason, he thinks that this time, the church has to play a role. One must demonstrate fidelity to the church's classic expressions of this event. But at the same time, he believes that the recognition that these classic expressions are always in need of constant reformation through new interpretations is a key part of the theologian's task. In fact, he thinks that a theologian should have proved her fidelity to the church's tradition through what he calls "both participatory and critical new interpretations of the tradition"[33], which must sometimes also include some proposed correctives of the tradition itself. To this effect, he recommends the applications of three methods in interpreting this event namely, the historical-critical, the literary-critical, and the social-scientific methods, in order to determine the appropriateness and intelligibility of one's interpretation. He believes that these three methods are "good public means" which, when taken together, are able to provide a more adequate interpretation of the tradition as well as serve to correct the present tradition's self-understanding.

Although he concedes that the Scripture remains normative for Christian self-understanding, nonetheless he considers it as only but a relatively adequate expression of the Christ event itself. As such, it remains open to new experiences like new questions and more adequate responses, so as to take into consideration the contemporary generations who view things differently. He reminds us that, unlike Islam, Christianity is not strictly a religion of the book, even if the event and person of Jesus Christ that represent the Christian classic is normatively codified in a book called the Scripture. Because this event is "an event that happened, happens and will happen"[34], he believes

[33] D. TRACY, AI, p. 237.
[34] D. TRACY, AI, p. 249. Cf. also the endnote nº 6, p. 287-289 for Tracy's brief explanation of the difference between Christianity's idea of the "event" as the event of God in covenant with

that interpretation plays a crucial role. But in interpreting, he counsels that efforts should be made to harness rather than discard the diversity of genres found not only in the New Testament itself, but also in various interpretations that have been witnessed over the centuries. He contends that an affirmation of the reality of diversity in both the NT and the entire Christian tradition is the only way to harness the value of pluralism. He believes strongly that the harnessing of the value of pluralism is the only way that can guarantee any relative adequacy to any theological enterprise, since it takes seriously one's responsibility to all reality. He believes that not to take these "others" seriously amounts to not taking one's private self seriously.

He proposes a schema of harnessing the diversity whereby those classic expressions of the New Testament (the genres such as the proclamation, manifestation, symbols, narratives, critical methods of interpretations, etc.) will be "corrected" by the "apocalyptic" and the "doctrines" of the early church. He believes that 'apocalyptic' challenges any purely private understanding of the Christian event by bringing out the genuinely public, political, and historical character of all Christian self-understanding such as the privileged status of the poor and the oppressed, or the reality of the new world of the future breaking and confronting the present. He also believes that "doctrines" perform a corrective rather than a constitutive role in the New Testament because, "the doctrines remind us that every *act* of proclamation involves a content that can be explicated to mediate that event, that every *fides qua* does involve a *fides quae*"[35]. In other words, the New Testament symbols need the clarifying thought of the doctrines.

Tracy also points to other symbols such as those of the cross, resurrection and incarnation as well as the reflective thoughts in the theologies of Paul and John, as evidence of the diversity and pluralism in the New Testament which needs to be harnessed in order to be true to the New Testament theology. He thinks for example that the "tensive dialectical theology" of Paul and the "meditative thinking" of John can be distinguished but should never be separated. As he puts it, in Paul's proclamatory theology of the Crucified and Risen One, there is a dialectical juxtaposition of cross-resurrection ("we preach Jesus Christ and him crucified"); but in John's theology of the Logos, we

the people of Israel and in Jesus Christ, and the Islamic idea of the "event" as the book – the Quran, hence, its recital becomes the revelation and any interpretation is considered secondary.

[35] D. TRACY, AI, p. 268.

notice the transformative manifestation of the cross as exaltation-glorification ("and we have seen his glory")[36]. Therefore, he thinks that harnessing the riches of diversity in the New Testament is the proper way for systematic theology in a pluralistic world of today, even when he insists that the theologian must remain faithful to the particular journey of intensification that is properly one's own, as well as open to the corrective of others.

In summary, Tracy believes that any interpretation of the Christian classic that can be publicly defended must follow the path of pluralism. It is only in the context of harnessing the diversity of the NT that the Christ event can become more present.

4.2. The Theologian and the "Situation"

Tracy's "critical correlation" paradigm entails that the systematic theologian not only interprets the event of Jesus Christ, but must equally interpret the situation and dialectically correlate both in a revisionist manner. His is convinced that the idea that "every theology lives in its own situation" is not only true in the days of the "masters of suspicion" but also true in our own pluralistic age. But what is the contemporary "situation"? Tracy thinks that "our situation" is much more complicated today than in the past because it poses no one dominant question. There is a conflictual pluralism on what worthwhile fundamental questions to be asked; and the inability to ask those questions, in his opinion, becomes the bane of our time. Nonetheless, he presumes that theologians, as intellectuals, live culturally in a post-Christian and post-modern intellectual situation[37];

[36] Cf., D. TRACY, AI, p. 283.

[37] Cf., D. TRACY, AI, p. 342. However, this appears to be a presumptuous presumption if we are to apply Tracy's principle of pluralism that has been the bedrock of his entire theological enterprise to bear with the rest of theology "from the margin", that is, outside the Euro-American cultural settings. While it is absolutely true that Europe and North America are living in a post-Christian and post-modern situation, the same cannot be said of Latin America, Asia and especially Africa. If anything, the reverse is even more likely to be the case. Christianity in Africa is emerging and "modernity" (in the mould fashioned by the Euro-American standard) is still vehemently being resisted despite the unprecedented pressure being mounted by the West with all the threats of sanctions and cutting of the so-called "aids" being used as a bait to force Africa to violently change their ways of life and their understanding of Christianity rather than allowing them to naturally evolve this understanding. More often than not, Western theologians make sweeping claims without actually taking into consideration the "voices from the margin". They take for granted that the West can accurately and effectively speak for the rest of the world. Tracy however, appears to have realized this shortcoming later in this book, and especially in his latter books, when he started laying serious emphases on the "other" as an important conversation partner. For a collection of non-Western interpretations of the Bible, cf., R. S.

a situation marked by "overload" of both information and questions to be asked; and that because of this, it is therefore very difficult to discern the situational analyses in the contemporary world. He concluded that because there is no single fundamental question that is asked but many, there is consequently no one central interpretation of the situation around which all other interpretation must focus.

In the Euro-American world on which he focused, he thinks for instance, that there is ambiguity in the cultural interpretations of the so-called "masters of suspicion". Beyond their critique of culture, he believes that these 'masters of suspicion' could serve as 'postmodern prophets', pointing to the reality of the "uncanny" – the experience of the uncanny awaits us everywhere in the situation[38]. Gone are the days, he says, when people repeated with 'dogmatic secularist self-assurance' the Marxian description of religion as the 'opium of the people'. Instead he recommends that we need to move beyond their purely instrumental and technical mode of reasoning and open up to a wider horizon where we can discover something "beyond the normal" through the process of intensification of the particular. He believes that in order to be finally free of illusions, we must fight against all temptations to canniness by keeping alive the sense of the uncanny namely, the postreligious, religious sense of our situation. He views a description of our common human experience devoid of the uncanny as an incomplete one. Because of this, he suggests that therefore, the onus lies with the systematician to constantly bring to the consciousness of the postreligious world of the academy that such one-sided description of the situation leads to the same dogmatism as the fundamentalist's description of the situation in terms only of the uncanny devoid of any canniness. In other words, there has to be a pluralistic interpretation of the situation as well.

This pluralistic interpretation of the situation calls also for a pluralistic theological response. Tracy suggested three principal responses namely, manifestation, proclamation and action. But whatever the response, it must, in his views, involve a sense of the uncanny. This sense of the uncanny is important as it discloses on the one hand the religious dimension to the situation, and on the other hand, the explicitly religious in the Christ event mediated through the

SUGIRTHARAJAH (ed.), *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World* (Revised and Expanded Third Edition), Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Book, (1991) 2006. The phrase "voices from the margin" which we shall constantly be employing in this work is actually borrowed from the title of this book.

[38] D. TRACY, AI, p. 357.

tradition in manifestation, proclamation and action. He thinks that it is only after such recognition of the uncanny that one can begin the risky task of critical reinterpretation through a personal journey of intensification.

Tracy went on to explain how, in what he calls manifestation, theologians can either follow the mediation of religious reality via philosophical reflection, or through focusing on the ordinary in order to reveal the extraordinary. In the same way, the theological response called proclamation has also different routes to achieve one common objective, namely, the primacy of the word of God in theological discourse. But by and large, a remarkable effort to bring in some voices from the margin is noticed in his treatment of the third response named action. Here he emphasizes the insistence of many contemporary theologians that we must move from manifestation and proclamation to history and praxis. This emphasis on history and praxis, for him, is the main characteristic both of political and liberation theologies. The logic for this emphasis is succinctly stated thus: "We are primarily neither hearers of the word nor seers of a manifestation. But because we have seen and have heard, we are freed to become doers of the word in history"[39]. Despite their different routes, all the "action" theologies recognize the primacy of praxis in the Church's evangelical and theological enterprise.

It is precisely on this basis that Tracy thinks that, in spite of their different accents, both political and liberation theologies help to purge theology of all privatization which, he sees as fatal not only to theology but also to the proclamation and manifestation of the event of Jesus Christ that empowers theology[40]. He is even willing to accord liberation theology the status of classic. He now believes that the theologies of liberation represent a classic event in search of a classic text; but that given the nature of realities and contradictions that are found in both our situation and tradition, and which liberation theologies seek to address, the classics disclosed in liberation theologies may never end in any text: "The classic of liberation theologies is the classic not of a text but of an event: the event of a liberating praxis wherein the actions of whole peoples whose disclosive, ignored, forgotten, despised story is at last being narrated

[39] D. TRACY, AI, p. 390.
[40] Cf., D. TRACY, AI, p. 393.

and heard in ways which may yet transform us all"[41]. Tracy is now acknowledging that those other voices from the margin, even though not codified in a text like the Western traditional voices, can still impact positively on the rest of humanity. It is left to be seen, however, how far he will go with this acknowledgment without insisting that they conform to his pre-conceived idea of reason.

Tracy's insistence on pluralistic theological responses to the equally pluralistic situation is to underscore the fact that the task of the systematic theologian is a hermeneutical one. In its interpretation, theology uses principally analogical and dialectical languages in search of a relative adequacy, since, according to him, all classic systematic theologies "are de jure inadequate, de facto relatively

[41] D. TRACY, AI, p. 398. This represents a significant change of attitude on the part of Tracy towards liberation theology; and it suggests a widening of horizon and an attempt to "listen" to other voices from the margin. The final chapter of Tracy's *Blessed Rage for Order* was devoted to practical theology where he asserted that the task of the practical theologian is "to project the *future* possibilities of meaning and truth on the basis of present constructive and past historical theological resources", thus making practical theology dependent on both historical and systematic theologies whereas the latter two do not depend on the earlier. He seemed not to have been impressed by the claim of many contemporary theologians that praxis is an inner moment of systematic theology itself. He came down heavily on the liberation theologians' 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'. But his more fundamental objection 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.
As his theological thought continues to grow however, we notice that Tracy is now beginning to come out of his "Euro-North-American theological enclave" to try to make sense of what others are saying. He is to continue to deepen this understanding of the others' theological preoccupation in his subsequent books. In his more recent book that appeared under the *Concilium Series*, he actually talked about "The Changed Situation in Theory and Praxis" under his treatment of "Cosmology and Christian Hope". Cf., David TRACY, *On Naming the Present: Reflections on God, Hermeneutics, and Church* (Concilium Series), New York, Orbis Books, and London, SCM Press, 1994, p. 73-81. Here, he was more sympathetic to liberation theology, linking it not just to the liberation of humankind but to the liberation of the cosmos as a whole; and crediting it, alongside political theology, with a successful "deprivatizing" of theology. He insists that contemporary theology must avoid both confrontational (warfare) model as well as concordist model in favour of a "mutually critical correlations" (in both theory and praxis) between interpretations of our contemporary situation and interpretations of the Christian tradition". This will imply working out "political and liberation theologies faithful to the demands of both theory and praxis in our grave historical situation". A theology that is faithful to these demands cannot afford to ignore cosmological concerns. In other words, the doctrine of redemption (as related to liberation and emancipation) must go hand in hand with the doctrine of creation. He insists that the destiny of the world (including that of human beings) is "inextricably bound up" with the destiny of the cosmos. In fact, he labels the cosmological concern as "the new *status quaestionis*" in contemporary theology. And this cosmological theology must dialogue with political and liberation theologies especially in the area of having a joint reflection on the category of hope which is central to Christian theology of history. Christianity construes all reality from the perspective of Jesus Christ. But the incarnation must be interpreted in the light of the ministry, cross, and resurrection, which brings out the always/already/not-yet realities, respectively, of Jesus Christ.

adequate accounts of the fuller range of the entire symbol system from the dominating perspective of a singular stance of personal response"[42]. While their respective emphases are different, he believes that analogical and dialectical languages continue to function as the classic theological languages par excellence. It was with his explanation of what he meant by Analogical Imagination that Tracy clarified his intent in the entire revisionist systematic theological outline.

5. THE PROCESS OF CORRELATION

Tracy has always maintained that a more difficult theological task is not necessarily the isolated interpretations of the two sources of theology but rather that of critically correlating them. Having proposed how to interpret both the Christian "fact" and the situation, he proceeded to outline how those interpretations can come together in a truly critically-correlated fashion. To do this, he invented what he calls "the analogical imagination". What follows is Tracy's explanation of how this analogical imagination works.

5.1. The Analogical Imagination

Tracy began by defining the first of these two classic theological languages – the language of analogy. According to him, "analogy is a language of ordered relationships articulating similarity-in-difference"[43]. Analogy, as he understands it, is principally operative in an atmosphere of participation where it seeks to achieve some sort of order or some harmony among different analogues so as to constitute the whole of reality. He says that it seeks to establish the analogous relationships among various realities such as self, others, world, God. And it does so by clarifying the relationship of each to the primary analogue chosen for interpreting reality. On what concerns systematic theology, he affirms that the primary analogue for interpreting the whole of reality is the event of Jesus Christ. It is this event that will provide the major clue to the similarities-in difference that these other realities such as God, self, others and world seek to explain. Instead therefore of focusing on the "mysterious" (or, to use

[42] D. TRACY, AI, p. 407.
[43] D. TRACY, AI, p. 408.

his words, 'radical mystery' of) self-manifestation of God in Jesus Christ, he thinks that an analogical imagination seeking relative adequacy requires that one shifts attention to the primary analogue (a more particular focal meaning of the event) – the incarnation. He believes that even though this shift does not exhaustively explain the whole concept of God's self-manifestation (there is no claim to full adequacy), nonetheless, he thinks that at least, it is a relatively adequate explanation. He believes that a particular focal meaning of the Christ event like the incarnation will alert the theologian to the need for negations in interpretation of each reality like God, self and world. These negations, for him, are negations to any claim to full adequacy in terms of interpretation of these realities. They are negations that assure that the similarities remain what it is – similarities-in-difference, and not a univocal uniformity. It aims at articulating harmony of meaning in the event of God's self-manifestation.

But Tracy's 'ordered relationships' have telling implications: "the major explicitly analogical traditions in theology have correctly insisted that in the theological use of analogies, the dissimilarities between God and world are as great as the similarities; the *via eminentiae* is possible only on condition of its constant fidelity to the *via negationis*"[44]. Whatever he means by being "as great as"; but if he means by it that the similarities cancel out the dissimilarities, then this could imply equality; in which case, God is identified with the world. While this conclusion appears to be consistent with Tracy's process theological leaning, it may not be consistent with his definition of analogical imagination as similarity-in-difference. Where there is dissimilarity or difference, the dissimilarity need not be as great as the similarity otherwise we shall be talking of sameness or equality.

However, Tracy says that the language of analogy is the preferred language among theologians that focus their theologies on manifestation, drawing their inspiration from the Aristotelian praise of the power of analogical imagination with his famous dictum: "to spot the similar in the dissimilar is the mark of poetic genius". These theologians (like Thomas Aquinas, Rahner, Schleiermacher) begin, according to him, with the articulation of one theological focal meaning such as incarnation; then they apply some principles of philosophical reflection in order to develop a proper systematic theology that can articulate the similarities-in-difference among God-

[44] D. TRACY, AI, p. 409.

self-world using some ordering principles; but at the same time being always guided by the original theological and religious focal meaning. In this way, he thinks that the symbol will give rise to thought, but thought will return, in a reflective manner, to the symbol expressing the event. However, he recommends that analogical theologies must never lose the sense for the negative, that is, the dialectical sense within analogy itself. In other words, in every "yes" of an analogical theological language, there is equally a "no" lurking at the background.

It is this background "no" that forms the focal point of dialectical theological language. Dialectics, in Tracy's understanding, is the preferred language of those theologians and theologies focusing on proclamation, with emphasis on, "the necessity of radical theological negations to constitute all Christian theological language"[45]. He sees this negation as having been epitomized in Kierkegaard's 'infinite qualitative distinction' between God and the world that inspired theologians in this "word" tradition to declare that all nondialectical language is incapable of expressing Christian faith since only God can speak nondialectically. Therefore, the famous Barthian expression, "Let God be God", became a point of contact among theologians in this domain, who insist that all human effort to save herself, and all purported human progress without God, must be negated. They hold also that there is more of discontinuity than continuity between Christianity and culture. Moreover, Tracy says that it is not only the 'theologians of the word' that use the negative dialectics. He believes that Political and Liberation theologians also tend to negate all theological language that do not transform into concrete liberating praxis. Yet, in spite of their sometimes extreme use of negation, there is always a "yes" in every dialectical "no". As Tracy rightly observed, "In the *Dogmatics* of Karl Barth, negative dialectics endures but does not prevail. To prevail is the role of the radical yes, the triumph of grace, which dialectical-analogical theological language focussed on the event of Jesus Christ expresses over and over again"[46]. In other words, Tracy is arguing that Barth, as well as

[45] D. TRACY, AI, p. 415.

[46] D. TRACY, AI, p. 417. This is the point often neglected by McCormack in his criticism of Balthasar's thesis of Barth's 'turn from dialectics to analogy' starting from the Anselm book. Chalamet, while arguing that there was no such turn, however, agreed that there was a movement from a 'critical dialectics' to a 'theological dialectics' (cf. chapter 3 of this work). The issue though is: what does a theological dialectics in Barth entail? For Tracy, it entails a reformulation

other 'theologians of the word' took separate journeys to a theological language that can finally be said to be both dialectical and analogical.

This is exactly what Tracy proposes as an analogical imagination: analogy and dialectics must come together in any systematic theology seeking criteria of relative adequacy. He says that without this collaboration between analogy and dialectics, between yes and no, all analogical concepts will collapse into the false harmony (univocity) on the one hand, and on the other hand, all theological negative dialectics will disintegrate into the "chaos of pure equivocity". This underlines the inadequacy and the insufficiency of all theological proposals. Because of this insufficiency, Tracy proposes that theologies that focus upon manifestation will forge negations of any claims to control on that knowledge; whereas theologies that focus upon proclamation will intensify the Christian sense that the gracious God can never be taken for granted[47]. This method, in his view, is the only sure guarantee of an ordered relationship between God, self and the world. And this is what he means by Christian analogical imagination.

This ordered relationship is such that the world and the self are related as "coexistents"; and both are related to God. And he thinks that this type of ordered relationship makes every Christian systematic theology to be also anthropology, and every Christian anthropology theology. With this, he maintains that the Christian doctrines of God and the human rise and fall together[48]. Tracy's statement here is a reaffirmation of his panentheistic views held in BRO. He still maintains here that an ordered relationship between God, world and self is such that God, as Love, affects all and is affected by all[49].

of a new theological language of analogy – his 'analogy of grace' language. But it appears that this language, while remaining dialectical in the sense of its resounding 'no', has within it a lurking 'yes'. In other words, even if this "new" theological language cannot out-rightly be labelled "analogy", it is something much different from the earlier purely negative dialectical language of Barth. Therefore, when McCormack talks about "critically realistic dialectics" of Barth, it will be difficult to defend such position if by "critical" he means "purely philosophical".

[47] Cf., D. TRACY, AI, p. 431.

[48] Cf., D. TRACY, AI, p. 435.

[49] Whereas in certain cases one can agree that God is affected by creation, to inextricably link the doctrines of God and human in such a way that they rise and fall together appears to be a distortion in the idea of God. It is true that the "infinite qualitative difference" and the "Wholly Other" doctrines of the early Barth are no longer fashionable, but a reduction of the destiny of God to that of humans makes God "Wholly Us" and therefore what we are doing is no longer theology but pure anthropology. Tracy's statement here would even contradict his later emphasis on apophatic theology where he would describe God in the apocalyptic hidden manner. His own preferred description of God as "Other" negates his linking of God's destiny with that of the humans in an irretrievable and irrevocable manner with which he did it here.

In conclusion, Tracy's 'analogical imagination' is arguing that "the major aim of all systematic theology is to formulate a theological understanding of the originating religious event into a theological focal meaning"[50] so as to release the Christian to the "self-transcendence of genuine other-regard". This means a self-exposure to the other. He thinks that this is the only sure guarantee for the possibility of authentic conversation. In other words, for there to be authentic conversation, there must be analogical imagination. It is only through such analogical imagination that he thinks we can listen to each other. For sure, he maintains that the confrontations, conflicts and arguments will persist. But this time, they will be viewed as "necessary dialectical moment in every serious analogical conversation"[51]. For him, in a true analogical imagination, there must be room for further negations of the present achievements. He believes strongly that it is this constant negation that is needed for genuine analogy especially in our radically pluralistic world where the dissimilarities are as important as the similarities-in-difference. He holds that we can only understand each other through analogy to our own experience or not at all. And for him, this is the only way genuine conversation can go on in a pluralistic culture.

While acknowledging that there is pluralism both within Christianity itself, and among religious traditions and the analysis of the situation, he however cautions that entering into a genuine conversation does not entail abandoning the classic particular genius of any tradition. On the contrary, he recommends that each should undergo a journey of intensification into its particularity; but that it has to be done by manifesting a willingness to expose oneself to the 'other'. Such is the collaborative enterprise which he believes can prevent theology from being privatized.

With this collaborative enterprise, he proposes that Christian theology must begin to realize that it can no longer confine its attention to Christianity alone. It should not, according to him, confine itself to the prototypes where it first interprets Christianity and then, at the end of its interpretation, tries to notice or rapidly interpret other religions using the principles of Christian self-understanding. He rather insists that it should enter into conversation with the other religions and their classics right from the beginning, not at the end of a

[50] D. TRACY, AI, p. 421.
[51] D. TRACY, AI, p. 447.

Christian systematics. Or, as he expresses it elsewhere, "the fact of religious pluralism should enter all theological assessment and self-analysis in any tradition at the very beginning of its task"[52]. Theology, according to him, enters into this conversation using the tools of analogical imagination so that the autonomy of each particularity is respected. He claims that this conversation guided by analogical imagination, is the only method that makes possible the search for real similarities-in-difference and genuine dissimilarities in such a way as to eliminate both "indifferentism" and what he calls the 'repressive tolerance of a lazy pluralism'[53]. Analogies, he insists, do not cancel real differences but only clarifies them, so that genuine conversation between the different traditions can occur. He believes that in order to reach the concreteness of the whole, one must go through the route of the concreteness of each particularity. When this route is followed, one is surprised to realize that one arrives where one began; but one arrives equipped with better knowledge of the place for the first time, thanks to the power of conversation. He maintains that in real conversation where the conversation partners allow the subject matter (that is, the fundamental questions and the classical responses in our traditions) to take over, there is likelihood that both will be changed. But it does not matter for him whether the theologian employs explicitly analogical language or not. As long as there is emergence of an analogical imagination, he is convinced that the thinker is on the route to rediscovery not only of himself/herself, but also of the other.

5.2. The Role of Conversation in Tracy's Analogical Imagination

Tracy acknowledged series of difficulties facing the prospective interpreter of the Christian classic. The plurality of interpretations of the same text or event over the years makes it impossible to have a definitive interpretation. But, as we have earlier seen, what makes a text, a symbol, or an event, a classic one is precisely its ability to resist a definitive interpretation. Using the example of the French Revolution[54], Tracy demonstrates how difficult it is to interpret a classic event or text. Because the French Revolution means so many things to so many different people at so many different epochs, there

[52] David TRACY, *Comparative Theology*, in Mircea ELIADE (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Religion* vol. 14, New York, Macmillan, 1987, p. 446-455, p. 446.
[53] Cf., D. TRACY, AI, p. 449.
[54] Cf., D. TRACY, *Plurality and Ambiguity*, p. 1-27.

have been varied and often conflicting interpretations of the same classic event that one might legitimately begin to wonder what after all the revolution means.

If one encounters these difficulties in interpreting a "simple" classic event such as the French Revolution, then Tracy says one would expect even more difficulty in interpreting religion which he has described as "the most pluralistic, ambiguous, and important reality of all"[55]. He believes that as written texts, religious classics provide both stability and instability – stability for literate cultures, and instability when intellectual and moral crisis occurs[56]. This combination thus renders their interpretation even more complex. One would even expect greater complexity in trying to interpret religions with only oral traditions. And because every classic carries with it its own history of reception – a history that is more often than not conflictual – one cannot expect to have a "pure" classic text; it has already been "contaminated" along its historical path. Because of this, he warns against this temptation to "domesticate" the classic by waving it aside as something that has already been known, or something similar to what one already encountered. He maintains that one must never become passive recipient of classic while insisting that this passivity in reception is evitable only through the recognition of the otherness of the classic: "To understand these texts at all is inevitably to understand them differently from how their original authors or their first audiences understood them"[57]. This means that the interaction between the text and the interpreter is such that the latter is willing to follow the questioning to anywhere it leads (even away from; especially away from, his/her preunderstanding of the text prior to engagement with it). This is what he calls "conversation" which he likened to a kind of game, and, which he insists is not a confrontation, nor a debate, not even an exam, but rather, questioning itself, a willingness to follow the question wherever it may go, a dialogue[58].

For Tracy therefore, conversation involves interaction between two or more individuals who allow each to ask questions rather than insisting that one's own question only be allowed. In this regard, he

[55] Cf., D. TRACY, *Plurality and Ambiguity*, Preface. p. x.
[56] Cf., D. TRACY, *Plurality and Ambiguity*, p. 11.
[57] D. TRACY, *Plurality and Ambiguity*, p. 16.
[58] D. TRACY, *Plurality and Ambiguity*, P. 18.

lists certain rules involved in a good conversation which he says are variations of Lonergan's transcendental imperatives already cited earlier. Tracy's conversation rules are as follows:

> "Say only what you mean; say it as accurately as you can; listen to and respect what the other says, however different or other; be willing to correct or defend your opinions if challenged by the conversation partner; be willing to argue if necessary, to confront if demanded, to endure necessary conflict, to change your mind if the evidence suggests it"[59].

He insists that these rules apply not only when conversing with one another but also when conversing with texts. But he warns that the text and the author are not interchangeable. As a matter of fact, he says that once a text is written, that text is on its own and, the author has become one more reader. Hence, to decipher the meaning, one should question the text rather than the author's biography. This interaction with classic, for him, means conversation with difference and otherness by allowing the questions of the text to take over. For Tracy, therefore, another name for 'analogical imagination' is 'conversation'; and conversation is a realization of otherness and difference in a classic rather than sameness or similarity. If there must be similarity, he says it has to be similarity-in-difference. He believes that interpretation on the model of conversation gives primacy to the notion of truth as manifestation which he calls a "forgotten notion of truth"[60]. However, he is bent on bringing this "forgotten notion of truth" back to the fore; having been convinced that real dialogue can only occur when there is manifestation; just as manifestation itself can only manifest when there is genuine conversation. In other words, the intrinsic interaction between the object's disclosure and concealment and the subject's recognition is the hallmark of manifestation and thus of conversation. Tracy takes this notion of truth as manifestation so seriously that he even alleges that it alone suffices. In fact, for him, truth, in its primordial sense, is manifestation.

But one should not however loose the sense of what Richard Bernstein calls "dangers and abuses (even theologically)" of the notion of truth as manifestation[61]. He argues that one must always ask whether what is manifested is a true or false manifestation. He thinks

[59] D. TRACY, *Plurality and Ambiguity*, p. 19.
[60] Cf., D. TRACY, *Plurality and Ambiguity*, p. 28.
[61] Cf., Richard J. BERNSTEIN, *Radical Plurality, Fearful Ambiguity, and Engaged Hope* (A Review Article of Tracy's Plurality and Ambiguity), in *The Journal of Religion*, 69, 1 (1989), p. 85-91, p. 89.

that Tracy did not fully confront the "hard question" of what the source of authority or the legitimacy of truth as manifestation is. He believes that Tracy failed for instance to indicate whether the "source" is to be found in the manifestation, or in the disclosure/concealment, or in the communal critical practices of validating the claims to truth. He sees this lack of clarification on the part of Tracy as "consequential" and concludes that "to claim, as Tracy does, that there is 'truth' to both sides is not to indicate how this opposition can be reconciled"; and he warns that "there is a danger of simply glossing over a conflictual either/or by asserting a formulaic both/and"[62].

However, while acknowledging that other models of truth such as truth as correspondence and truth as coherence are important especially when the demands for argument take over, nonetheless, Tracy insists that the primary importance of manifestation should never be lost[63]. The classical claims to truth should not, in his opinion, be replaced with the modern claims to validity – a tendency he notices that has become current in modern and contemporary arguments where method, theory and explanation are used as the sole determinant for validity, and thus for truth. He is not discarding the use of method, theory and explanation; he is rather of the view that in as much as they aid every conversation, these cannot and should not replace the conversation itself.

5.3. Factors that Interrupt Conversation

Although Tracy maintains that conversation is imperative in any effort to interpret the Christian text and correlate it to the situation, he nonetheless acknowledges that there are certain factors that interrupt such desired conversation such as the post-modern linguistic turn that interrupts both traditional conversation and argument, and, the radical ambiguity found in the question of history.

In spite of being a proponent of pluralism himself, Tracy sees the deconstructionists' understanding of texts in terms of "deconstructed" and "defragmented" as radical plurality at its peak; and argues that such understanding of texts stops rather than enhances conversation. He rather proposes the study of language as discourse; arguing that, "to study language as discourse is to discover plurality. It

[62] R. BERNSTEIN, *Radical Plurality, Fearful Ambiguity, and Engaged Hope*, p. 89.
[63] Cf., D. TRACY, *Plurality and Ambiguity*, p. 29.

is also to rediscover the contingency and ambiguity of history and society"[64]. He is convinced that this discourse approach to language studies takes into consideration the "otherness" and the "difference" while at the same time guards against the arbitrary incorporation of everything in the name of pluralism.

On the ambiguity found in the question of history, Tracy is of the opinion that the interpretation of history must include not only its contingency but also its interruption. He cautions that in conversation with the classic, one must not be tempted to sweep some of these interruptions under the carpet, qualifying it as a bad and dishonest way of interpreting history and classics. Instead of avoiding them, he recommends that we must face the interruptions and otherness in our histories. It is not enough, he insists, to retrieve only the good, the true, the beautiful, and the holy present in our history; a more adequate way to interpret history is to face especially the interruptions of radical evil in our history such as the Holocaust in the Western culture[65]. He sees this confrontation with the interruptions of radical evil as the only way through which Christian theology can return to concrete history. In fact, he says that a relative adequate interpretation of history means, among other things, that "we should, above all, learn to listen to the narratives of others, especially those 'others' who have had to suffer our otherness imposed upon their interpretations of their own history and classics"[66]. He maintains that listening to the narratives of others will reveal that "something is fundamentally and

[64] D. TRACY, *Plurality and Ambiguity*, p. 65.

[65] Part of the reasons (if not the main reason) why Tracy finally changed his earlier negative views about liberation theologies is that he was gradually persuaded to come to believe that, alongside political and feminist theologies, it (liberation theology) provides exception to the reluctance of most Christian theologies to return to real, concrete history. While he sees other theologies as only giving the sense of historical consciousness, he eulogizes what he sees as the "single-minded and constant refrain" in the political, feminist, and liberation theologies namely: "Christian theology must move past both liberal historical consciousness and neo-orthodox hermeneutical historicity and move again – as theology – into the concrete history of suffering and oppression". This is why he believes (from the insights he got from these theologies) that, "the central theological question today is not the question of the non-believer but the question of the non-person – those forgotten ones, living and dead, whose struggle and memory is our history". Christian theology, in his estimation, is so intrinsically linked with the interruption of the Holocaust that the theological fact is clear: "Christian theology cannot fully return to history until it faces the Holocaust". For the detailed implications of the Holocaust for all Christian theology, cf., Elisabeth Schüssler FIORENZA and David TRACY, *The Holocaust as Interruption and the Christian Return into History* in Elisabeth Schüssler FIORENZA and David TRACY (ed.), *The Holocaust as Interruption* (Concilium), Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 1984, p. 83-86. For other reflections (both Jewish and Christian) as well as some biblical studies, on the Holocaust, cf., the rest of the articles in this volume.

[66] D. TRACY, *Plurality and Ambiguity*, p. 72.

systematically awry in our history and society"[67]. This will then motivate people to come to the conversation table.

5.4. The Role of Religion

What will be the role of religion in confronting the interruptions of radical evils in our history? Tracy answers by stating that the task of religion in all this is to remind the modern mind who can risk interpreting the religious classic that all is not well with our modern rational consciousness. He therefore notes that we must not only use the hermeneutics of retrieval in all our interpretations, but also the hermeneutics of suspicion. This, in his estimation, seems to be the only way we can reframe our mind-set about the "other" whose history we have systemically distorted. And hopefully, through conversation, we can begin to hear their voices in their otherness, and also hear the otherness within our own discourse and within ourselves. One day, maybe, our conversation might lead to emancipatory action.

Tracy accepts that postmodernity is characterized by plurality and ambiguity; but he thinks that religion is capable of providing resistance and hope in this postmodern situation. He sees the religions as exercises in resistance. But this resistance is not just a one-way challenging of the situation. For Tracy, in interpreting the classics of religions, we also challenge those classics through the application of hermeneutic of critique, retrieval, and suspicion. In this way, the method of application of the "mutually critical correlation" between the Christian text and the situation, which has been the bedrock of his revisionist theology, shall have been achieved. He thinks that the way out of the plurality and ambiguity of postmodernity is not to bypass religion because of its bad history, but rather to go through it. But first, religion must itself acknowledge those interruptions of radical evil in its history through the application of the various hermeneutical interpretations. Once freed from its own illusions, religion can consequently help to free the postmodern subject from its own self-centredness. It does so by directing the subject to the Ultimate Reality. In this way the self can learn anew how to relate with the other.

There is a symbiotic type of cooperation here between postmodernity and religion. Both help each other. Postmodernity provides the critical hermeneutics and religion in turn provides the

[67] D. TRACY, *Plurality and Ambiguity*, p. 73.

"otherness" which postmodernity seems to overlook. In this Tracean intercourse, interpretation of religious classics is not confided to believers alone. He insists that if they are to remain classics as such, the religious classics must be trusted to evoke a wider range of responses. If they must remain both classic and religious, then they must be intelligible to all. Under this 'public' nature of religious classics, Tracy does not subscribe to the popular belief among theologians that without "faith" and "belief" one cannot be a theologian. He sees this argument as "unpersuasive hermeneutically as it does theologically" because faith is properly understood as gift, while theology is a task. In the same manner, he also sees the analogous notion that belief and faith disallow critical theology and scholarship as equally unpersuasive[68].

Because of this wider scholarship of interpreters of religion, one would almost be certain that anything short of plurality of methods of interpretation will lead to reductionism understood as totalization: only this or that method can interpret what religion is, and any other method different from this must be alien and therefore untrue. He does not deny the fact of plurality of religious claim and the conflictual nature of various interpretations. But he is convinced that the solution to these conflicts of interpretation lies in responsible conversation using the analogical imagination.

With Tracy's engagement with the question of plurality and ambiguity, one can notice an intensification of his own thought as he becomes more and more conscious of the presence of the "other". In the words of Gaspar Martinez, "Tracy's attempt in *Plurality and Ambiguity* is to show publicly that conversation with the religious classics, heeding their claims and risking their interpretation, is an important route to rescue the postmodern self"[69]. This rescue, as Tracy has always suggested, can only happen when there is "cooperation" between postmodernity and theology so that both the secular faith and the basic meaning of Christian faith can be critically and meaningfully articulated.

[68] Cf., D. TRACY, *Plurality and Ambiguity*, endnote to chapter 5 nº 49, p. 140.
[69] Gaspar MARTINEZ, *Confronting the Mystery of God: Political, Liberation, and Public Theologies*, New York & London, Continuum, 2001, p. 210.

6. CONVERSING WITH THE "OTHER" IN AN ANALOGICAL IMAGINATION FASHION: TRACY'S RECIPE FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

It is not strange to regard every other tradition outside one's tradition as "other". The issue is, whether that "other" is taken as a real or a mere projected other. Whereas the "normal" tendency is to treat the other as a projected other (usually in superiority-complex fashion where one's religion or culture is taken as superior to the extent that all others are perceived as either non-existent or, at best, exists only as stepping-stones to one's proper religion/culture), Tracy's proposed tool for interreligious dialogue capable of not only hearing but also of responding to another is to approach this "other" in a dialogical relationship to a real, not a projected other[70]. He maintains that the bane of Christian dialogue with the people of other faith has been the Christian temptation to project a Christian consciousness upon the other. This, according to him, is noticeable especially in the Christian attitude to the so-called "pagan" and also, to the Jew, where these two are taken as the projected other of the Christian self-understanding. But he argues however, that if Christianity never pretended, in its encounter with Buddhism, to be encountering a projected other (obviously because of the "strange" radical otherness of Buddhism) but rather a great other tradition with completely different vision of ultimate reality, this should serve as a reminder that any other "other" should be approached as a real other and not as a projected other.

For him, a projected other strictly speaking, is not "other" at all. He defined projected other as "an unreal 'other' projected upon some real other by the ego's needs or desires to define itself"[71]. The 'other' can only be heard and seen when it is approached not from the perspective of a simple self-projection but from the perspective of genuine otherness. Tracy himself claims that, thanks to his encounter with Buddhist tradition (an encounter that has forced him to rethink theologically the more radically apophatic mystics of the tradition, especially Meister Eckhart) he has come to believe strongly that "there

[70] Cf., David TRACY, *Dialogue with the Other: The Inter-Religious Dialogue* (Louvain Theological & Pastoral Monographs 1), Louvain, Peeters Press/ Eerdmans, 1990, p. 4.
[71] David TRACY, *Western Hermeneutics and Interreligious Dialogue*, in Catherine CORNILLE and Christopher CONWAY (ed.), *Interreligious Hermeneutics* (Interreligious Dialogue Series 2), Eugene, Oregon, Cascade Books, 2010, p. 1-43, p. 3.

are now many 'others' who do theology in ways very different, even conflictually other, from my own white, male, middle class, and academic reflections on a hermeneutics of dialogue and a praxis of solidarity"[72]. He admits that he has been very much occupied with theory of hermeneutics and correlational method for theology; but that these new voices, which he described as "mystical-prophetic" are more concerned, not with his (Tracy's) own preoccupation but rather, with something that he has so-often neglected – the recovery of spirituality within theology. Whereas he continues to maintain that the primordial religious dialectic of "manifestation" and "proclamation" is at the heart of Christianity, he has however now come to understand that the two are best construed theologically as mystical-prophetic.

This, certainly, is a shift from the Eurocentric theology with which he started. He has come to believe that these "voices from the margin" represent "the most creative voices and thinkers in theology today"; and describes them as "the theologies of an energizing world Christianity, the 'two-thirds' worlds of Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Oceania…". This shift from Eurocentric theology is what he named not just a pluralistic, but a polycentric, theology; and he insists that ignoring this central fact of polycentrism in our new theological situation is an impoverishment of theology[73]. Those voices, according to him, can no longer remain at the margins because the purported centre can no longer hold. If there is difficulty in naming the present because we live in an age that cannot name itself[74], he believes that at least one thing is clear: if we must use the term "postmodernity" to describe the present, then we are making one fundamental distinction between it (postmodernity) and modernity namely, the modern turn to the subject that was centred around the autonomous is now being replaced by a turn to those others from the margin that have been neglected for long. The autonomous self has to be replaced by the radical other.

While acknowledging that this Western hermeneutics of focusing on the other as a panacea for a genuine dialogue involves a willingness to put oneself and one's tradition(s), or the fragments of a tradition, at risk, he nonetheless believes the focus is worth the risk as it enables one to enter into a dialogue with one's critical consciousness vigilant and with a knowledge and respect for one's

[72] D. TRACY, *Dialogue with the Other*, p. 6.
[73] D. TRACY, *On Naming the Present*, p. ix – xi.
[74] D. TRACY, *On Naming the Present*, p. 3.

own tradition[75]. This postmodern emphasis on the 'other' seems to reverse the modern tendency where the autonomous self, tended to give meaning to the other. One can say that here, it is actually the radical other that gives meaning to the autonomous self.

But this "de-centering" of the subject is not without certain problems. Bernstein identified in it a "pressure point" in that when postmodernity does away with the autonomous ego, it claims to transform but not erase the subject. He believes that "Tracy's project of resistance and hope would not make any sense unless there was a subject who could resist and hope"[76]. This made him to ask rhetorically what precisely the postmodern *subject* is. He doesn't believe that it is enough to tell us that the subject has been transformed but not erased as Tracy did. He wants to understand how one can speak of the subject after taking account of postmodern critique of this subject. Tracy, in his opinion, is not forthcoming on this issue. And he qualifies this lack as an "unfortunate characteristic" of Tracy's "sensitive attempt to do justice to sharp oppositions". He is not amused that "just at the point where we look for further argumentation, explication, and probing Tracy reassures us that we can do justice to both sides of what *appears* to be an irreconcilable opposition – without quite showing us how this is to be done"[77].

Although Bernstein's observations appear legitimate, it has to be pointed out that Tracy's interest is not on the nature of the postmodern 'subject' but rather on the postmodern emphasis on the 'other'. His new-found interest in Mircea Eliade's works has led him to believe with Eliade that it is only through the other that one can discover oneself. The implication then is that a poor knowledge of the other translates to a poor understanding of the self. However, whether a self that does not know itself can actually know the other is a different question altogether that is not intended to be tackled here[78].

[75] Cf., D. TRACY, *Western Hermeneutics and Interreligious Dialogue*, p. 4.
[76] R. BERNSTEIN, *Radical Plurality, Fearful Ambiguity, and Engaged Hope*, p. 89.
[77] R. BERNSTEIN, *Radical Plurality, Fearful Ambiguity, and Engaged Hope*, p. 89-90.
[78] While it is essential to acknowledge the importance of knowing the other in interreligious encounter, one has to worry that an "obsessed" focus on the other might actually prove injurious to self, in the sense that one might end up mistaking the pre-conceived idea of one's own tradition as "understood" by the other tradition, as the real self-understanding of oneself. If, for instance, in order to understand the Christian idea of the Trinity, one has to turn to the Islamic prejudiced understanding of it, one would end up "doing away" with the Trinitarian theology as polytheism. It is therefore important to note that proper self-knowledge has to take place *before* one attempts to know the other. In such a way, even when (as a result of the encounter) there

But Tracy's shift in emphasis is to signal that others have to be taken seriously in order to achieve a relative adequacy in theology. He is even willing to predict 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"[79].

Tracy's shift of emphasis from Eurocentrism to polycentrism stems from his acquisition of additional dialoguing partners notably Eliade, William James, Meister Eckhart, Kenneth Burke, and Jacques Lacan. His analysis of Burke's *The Rhetoric of Religion*[80] helped him to come to the conclusion that the two familiar religious rhetoric – the prophetic and the mystical – is rhetoric of the 'Other'. The Prophet hears and speaks words that are not his/her own but rather the words of the "Other". He therefore decided to revisit William James whom he considers as representing the most modern example of a writer with great interest in pluralism and how it affects all our reflections on both our traditions and how other traditions impacts on ourselves. In fact, he describes him (James) as "the classic early modern student of religious pluralism"[81]. James' stock-in-trade was his rejection of any totalizing system and his refusal to believe that the world, as plural as it is, could ever be reduced to only one monistic formula. Tracy admires this, but was quick to point out one big excess in him: "James was more generous with others than with himself and precisely this generosity of spirit and vision led to occasional confusion and even internal contradictions in his thought and practice"[82]. He describes James' "characteristic virtue of generosity to the opinions of others" as occasionally becoming "a vice". But he thinks that the more common vice of refusing to hear any voice other than one's own should be more concerning than James' "vice".

Without going into the glaring self-contradiction in Tracy's criticism of James however[83], we have to note that his interest in

presents a need for correcting one's pre-understanding of oneself, one would have been very clear about what one is correcting.

[79] D. TRACY, *Dialogue with the Other*, p. xi.

[80] Cf., Kenneth BURKE, *The Rhetoric of Religion*, Berkeley, The University of California Press, 1970.

[81] D. TRACY, *Dialogue with the Other*, p. 38.

[82] D. TRACY, *Dialogue with the Other*, p. 29.

[83] Tracy may not himself realize it (and surely would not believe it), but it appears that this criticism of James is more or less a self-criticism. One can easily substitute the name "James" with "Tracy" and the sentence will perfectly fit into a description of Tracy himself. From the advent of his revisionist theology, Tracy seems to have taken more interest in the "other" than in himself (that is, his own tradition). Where he is willing to give the "other" the benefit of the doubt, he hardly extends such benefit to himself. One therefore wonders whether the "other" can be seen and heard only by dismantling (and thereby by destroying) oneself.

James is not so much to pursue the line of the latter's' generosity with others at the expense of himself, as to argue that James' analysis was characterized by his (Tracy's) strategy of similarities-in-difference that he earlier called "analogical imagination". He believes that differences need not become dialectical oppositions but rather should become analogies in the form of similarities-in-difference; arguing that it is only this strategy that can guarantee unity-in-diversity without degenerating to monism. This is why, despite his huge indebtedness to the Gadamerian hermeneutical model of conversation which proposes that the event of understanding happens only through dialogue when the dialoguing partners are taken over by the question of the dialogue through the logic of questioning, he is unwilling to follow Gadamer's notion of a necessary drive in dialogue to an achievement of "mutual understanding" and a "fusion of horizon"[84]. For Tracy, what is important in dialogue is neither the unity of meaning, nor mutual understanding, nor fusion of horizon. What is important is that dialogue happens.

Dialogue, according to him, need not reach full fusion of horizon or mutual understanding in order to be a successful dialogue. A more pertinent interest is that dialogue did and do occur in a to-and-fro movement of questioning capable of making one risk one's present understanding when one exposes oneself to the other as other. For this reason, he views dialogue as "the attempt to understand some other, some subject matter, by allowing the event of understanding to emerge as a 'blow' to one's earlier self-understanding as well as one's initial understanding of the other person or text"[85].

In spite of the severe limitations of William James, especially vis-a vis the new developments and new interests in religious studies, and the challenges posed by the linguistic turn to his (James') relatively sanguine contentment with the categories "experience" and "religious experience"[86], Tracy still believes that James' criteria might still be reformulated for the present concern for some generic criteria for serious inter-religious dialogue. He thinks that James' category of "immediate luminousness" can be usefully shifted to the basic hermeneutical category of "suggestive possibility" where hermeneutics shows how dialogue remains central in recognizing the

[84] Cf., D. TRACY, *Western Hermeneutics and Interreligious Dialogue*, p. 8.
[85] D. TRACY, *Western Hermeneutics and Interreligious Dialogue*, p. 9.
[86] For these limitations, cf., D. TRACY, *Dialogue with the Other*, p. 38-47.

"possibilities" that any serious conversation with the "other" and the "different" can yield[87]. Those possibilities become "live options" because, as he says, "to recognize the other *as* other, the different *as* different is also to acknowledge that other world of meaning as, in some manner, a possible option for myself"[88].

It is true that Tracy insists that "to understand at all is to understand differently" that is, "to understand for and within genuine dialogue allowing real manifestations of the other's truth and thereby mutual transformation"[89], he is aware of the many difficulties of dialoguing with the "other". The double-headed difficulties are, on the one hand, when the "other" is so radically different that it becomes almost impossible to begin a dialogue or to continue with it once begun, and on the other hand, when the "other" is so apparently similar that it becomes difficult to separate it from oneself. Because of these inherent difficulties, he is of the opinion that only when one takes conversation as a game within the general phenomenon of a "game" can one overcome these difficulties. In a game, a genuine player (and thus a genius of the game) does not seek self-consciousness but rather releases the self-consciousness into the to-and-fro movement which constitutes the game. In the end, a real player does not play the game; it is rather the game that plays the player. It is this experience of game that becomes a key to model of hermeneutics as conversation where conversation (as distinguished from gossip, confrontation and debate) becomes the ability to be caught up in the to-and-fro movement of the logic of question and response with the other.

In conclusion, Tracy's proposal for interreligious hermeneutics takes three steps: First, for real dialogue to occur, one must be ready to risk encountering the other through series of questioning that can eventually lead to new and transformative understanding. Secondly, there can be interruptions and disruptions in dialogue; and when this occurs, one is expected to stop and apply a hermeneutics of suspicion to uncover not only conscious errors but, more importantly, the unconscious systemic distortions. Thirdly, there are limits beyond which dialogue cannot go. When it reaches this limit, the dialogue partners begin to experience the Impossible, the Impassable, the Infinite, the Incomprehensible, etc. This is the point where the

[87] Cf., D. TRACY, *Dialogue with the Other*, p. 40-42.
[88] D. TRACY, *Dialogue with the Other*, p. 41 (emphases are his).
[89] D. TRACY, *Dialogue with the Other*, p. 44.

dialoguing partners find themselves "beyond dialogue"[90]. And this is the point where one witnesses the "strange" return of God in contemporary, postmodern theology in spite of the difficulty of modernity on the question of God and the suspicion of postmodernity of almost all traditional and modern arguments on the existence and nature of God[91].

7. TRACY'S REVISIONIST CORRELATIONAL PUBLIC THEOLOGY AND THE CHURCH AS A FAITH COMMUNITY

7.1. The Question of Faith

In outlining his revisionist method of correlation, Tracy is led to make a strong case for public theology so as to guarantee the continued relevance of theology in the scientific world of the university. To make theology "public" basically means to make it not only available but accessible to any intelligent scientific reader. Availability and accessibility are in themselves not negative attributes of a scientific subject. If anything, they are the positive and cherished qualities of a good scientific work. Theology, in any case, has never been a "hidden" and an "obscure" subject, but has always been available and accessible. The issue therefore is not the fear that theology is made available and accessible; the issue is the implications of Tracy's notion of availability and accessibility to faith. Although, as an academic theologian, Tracy has insisted over and over again that faith and belief are not necessarily needed for theology to be done with credibility, confessional theology understands theology not just as a scientific subject, but to a certain extent, as a statement of faith.

While it is true that theology (even the so-called confessional theology) cannot, and should not, be reduced to mere catechism, it is also true that certain basic catechetical assumption is needed for any theology to even take off at all. Such basic assumptions cannot be dissected on the laboratory table of science. But Tracy's call for publicness in theology, and the manner in which he suggested that it should be pursed, seem to imply reducing theology exclusively to the rigours of scientific investigations as are applied in other sciences. If

[90] Cf., D. TRACY, *Western Hermeneutics and Interreligious Dialogue*, p.1-43.
[91] Cf., David. TRACY, *On Naming the Present: Reflections on God, Hermeneutics, and Church* (Concilium Series), New York, Orbis Books, and London, SCM Press, 1994. See particularly, chapter 3, with the title, "The Return of God in Contemporary Theology", p. 36-46.

this interpretation is correct, then one of the implications of this is that theology can be done without any recourse to faith or personal belief. While this conclusion might be consistent with Tracy's own proposals for fundamental theology, it appears to suggest a radical separation between theology as a discipline and Christianity as a religion. Certainly, the two are not one and the same thing. But even in the area of fundamental theology, one cannot institute such a diastasis between Christian theology and Christian religion.

If Tracy opted to understand the Christian texts or Christian facts (as he sometimes prefers to call it) as "classics", it is an understanding that has been praised as being "postmodern in its cultural particularity but universal in its richness of meaning and its resonance beyond its originating context"[92]; it is an understanding that renders the Christian texts thoroughly public; but it appears not to be an understanding that guarantees faith and personal belief, especially when he decided to pursue only the sociological concept of the church at the expense of its theological concept. This is a further confirmation that for him, Christian theology should be radically separated from Christian religion.

His unwillingness to pursue a deeper theological understanding of the church might have made him sound foundationalist in his theology. It is true that, in principle, he rejects philosophical foundationalism in theology, arguing that those who attack his correlational theology do so on the basis of their attempt to diminish the role of fundamental theology in the wider task of theology, and insisting that "to reject fundamental theology as a basic theological discipline is the logical implication of all anticorrelational moves"[93]. However, his unwillingness to properly integrate the ingredients of dogmatic theology into the main corpus of his work (even while writing on systematic theology) betrays his interest in 'foundationalist' approach to theology – a good theology must be founded on transcendental-metaphysical, phenomenological, existential, and hermeneutical supports in order to be scientifically meaningful. Hardly did he think of any "theological" foundation for theology. In its particular Tracean presentation, theology seems to have been taken away from the church and surrendered to the "public", especially the community of scientific inquiry. This sounds

[92] Kristin E. HEYER, *How does Theology go Public? Rethinking the Debate between David Tracy and George Lindbeck*, in *Political Theology*, 5, 3 (2004), p. 307-327, p. 312.
[93] David TRACY, *The Uneasy Alliance Reconceived: Catholic Theological Method, Modernity, and Postmodernity*, in *Theological Studies*, 50, 3 (1989), p. 548-570, p. 558-559.

as if Tracy views the church as an "obstruction" on the way of theology and decided to remove that obstruction so that theology can really move forward. But such a theology can hardly serve the interest of the church as a faith community.

7.2. The Question of the Internal Logic of the Church

Tracy's revisionism is more interested in the common logic of the community of scientific inquiry than in the internal logic of the church. Because he believes that the theologian's loyalty should be to this scientific community, he appeared less concerned about the inner workings of the church. If however, the self-styled "postliberals" were swift in offering an alternative to his revisionist public model, especially with regards to the definition of religious doctrines, it is precisely because the latter view theology as primarily serving the church. George Lindbeck – perhaps the most vocal advocate (after Karl Barth) of theology as principally serving the Church – offered to fashion an alternative theological model that has now sparked a heated argument between what has become known as the Yale school and the Chicago School.

In his now well-known manifesto[94], Lindbeck faulted all the standard theological approaches to the question of doctrines as unhelpful, and proposed a postliberal way which he considers more adequate. He rejected the "cognitivist propositionalist" model on the ground that its emphasis on the doctrines functioning as informative propositions or truth tends to do so in an exclusivist sense. The "experiential-expressive" model was rejected because he believes that its interpretation of doctrines as "noninformative and nondiscursive symbols of inner feelings, attitudes, or existential orientations" tends to bring dichotomy between "religiously significant meanings" and "doctrines". He sees in this model a contradiction where there could be alteration in doctrine without change of meaning and vice versa. He also rejected what he calls a hybrid of these two models, before proposing a model which he calls "cultural linguistic", and which he says, is primarily concerned with the function of doctrines. For him, the most prominent function of church doctrines is their use, "not as expressive symbols or as truth claims, but as communally

[94] George A. LINDBECK, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, Philadelphia, The Westminster Press, 1984.

authoritative rules of discourse, attitude, and action"[95]. The church doctrines in this model function as "regulative" or as "rules" of grammar and, are culturally and linguistically conditioned to convey order in Christian communities. Since for him, doctrines function only as grammar[96], it is only this functional claim of doctrines that should be emphasized; their ontological claim should at best go to the periphery. With this, he hoped to do away with all philosophical mooring for theology and propagate a theology that is firmly rooted in the Scripture.

For Lindbeck therefore, because theology primarily serves the church, foundationalism as an approach is not only absurd but also misguided. Rather than seeking "foundations" for Christian faith or trying to translate it into languages that are intelligible to the contemporary critical thinking, he contends that theologians should busy themselves with explaining the Christian religious language to people who are willing to be "initiated" into this particular "cultural" way of life. For him, this "postliberal" method resembles the ancient catechesis more than the modern translation. One can describe it as a "take it or leave it" method: "instead of redescribing the faith in new concepts, it seeks to teach the language and practices of the religion to potential adherents"[97]. This is what he calls the "intratextual" as against the "extratextual" method of biblical interpretation: "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"[98]. Where Tracy therefore, sees a revision (by way of a reinterpretation) of Christianity in order to be meaningful for the contemporary minds, Lindbeck sees as more appropriate, a reversing of the order: "It need not be the religion that is primarily reinterpreted as world views change, but rather the reverse: changing world views may be reinterpreted by one and same religion"[99]. In this way, the role of the church in theology, which Tracy sees as somehow

[95] G. LINDBECK, *The Nature of Doctrine*, p. 18.
[96] Cf., G. LINDBECK, *The Nature of Doctrine*, p. 80-84.
[97] G. LINDBECK, *The Nature of Doctrine*, p. 132.
[98] G. LINDBECK, *The Nature of Doctrine*, p. 118. One should however, immediately wonder why Lindbeck would so easily be confident about the text absorbing the world but not the world absorbing the text. To substitute extratextual method with intratextual method appears to be a mere reversing of the same one-way movement. Lindbeck does not therefore seem to have solved a problem by merely reversing the "absorbing" direction between the world and the text.
[99] G. LINDBECK, *The Nature of Doctrine*, p. 82.

a stumbling block in postmodern thought, is rather taken by Lindbeck as a stepping stone.

Although Lindbeck's criticism of Tracy stems from his categorizing the latter's revisionist theology under the theological model which he labelled "experiential-expressive", Tracy would acknowledge the "genuine gains" of what he calls the "new anticorrelational theologies" (as against his own 'correlational' theology) such as Lindbeck's "cultural-linguistic" model. He would acknowledge the gains of these theologies such as "the greater use in theology of anthropology and literal criticism" and "the insistence on the need to pay closer intratextual attention to the biblical narratives for Christian self-identity"[100]. But he was quick to distance his alternative model from the "experiential-expressive" model which Lindbeck's "cultural-linguistic" model attacks. Tracy describes his own model rather as a "hermeneutical-political" model, and labels Lindbeck's position as "a methodologically sophisticated version of Barthian confessionalism"[101]. In spite of these denials however, Tracy has been, rightly or wrongly, fitted into the prism of Lindbeck, and a contrasting division has now been made between Tracy and his revisionists' School on the one hand, and Lindbeck and his postliberal School on the other hand.

Attempts have even been made at "reconciling" the two "warring" Schools by providing a level-playing ground where each can come and present their points as clear as possible without recourse to fighting. In his "unapologetic" model[102], William Placher believes he has found a model capable of not only reconciling the warring parties but more importantly, capable of providing an avenue where each religious group can fruitfully speak of the distinctiveness of their convictions without necessarily passing through the arduous task of trying to "demonstrate" the "truth" of such conviction to others. He believes that as long as theologians continue to do their theologies in an apologetic manner, such conflicts and confrontations are bound to persist. But he sees a better way of theologizing namely, unapologetically through conversation, as capable of surmounting these conflicts. He feels that if the revisionists and the postliberals had

[100] Cf., D. TRACY, *The Uneasy Alliance Reconceived*, p. 557.
[101] Cf., David TRACY, *Lindbeck's New Program for Theology*, in *Thomist*, 49 (1985), p. 464-468.
[102] Cf., William C. PLACHER, *Unapologetic Theology: A Christian Voice in a Pluralistic Conversation*, Louisville, Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989.

embraced this unapologetic model, they would have spared themselves of this rancour. He senses that both are right in certain aspects of their claims. But he claims that they could find common ground in this new pluralistic model of conversation done in an unapologetic fashion, that is, devoid of the dictatorial conceptions of apologetics. He describes the revisionists as those who "think it particularly important to correlate Christian beliefs with concerns and experiences that all people share and to stand ready to defend Christian convictions according to 'publicly acceptable' criteria of truth"[103]. On the other hand, he thinks that postliberals differ from revisionists because of the former's emphases on "describing the internal logic of Christian faith", and caring less about "criteria acceptable to all rational persons" with which revisionists obsess themselves. He thinks that the postliberals even "doubt" the existence of any such criteria[104]. He understands the revisionists as those who view the postliberals as being scared of the challenges of postmodernity especially that of religious pluralism. On the other hands, he regards the postliberals as those who take the revisionists as people who are afraid of Christian distinctiveness by allowing the contemporary culture to dictate for Christian theology. It was based on these impressions that he proposed his so-called "common ground" through his "unapologetic" model.

Although it is not clear whether Placher wanted to use his "unapologetic" model to act as just an arbiter between revisionism and postliberalism, or whether he seriously wanted to propose a theology that will impact positively on Christian faith, nonetheless, its purported "common ground" has not been commonly accepted. While acknowledging the "spirit of generosity" with which Placher portrayed the revisionist camp, Charles Allen[105] still accuses him of misinterpreting revisionism as being *primarily* (and even in some cases *exclusively*) preoccupied with translating Christian convictions into supposedly generic terms in order to assess their adequacy. He reminds Placher that the correlation that revisionists insist upon is always a *two-way* or "dipolar process[106] and never a one-way process. Heyer, however, asserted that there shouldn't be any sort of reductionism as a way of "solving" the problems between revisionism

[103] W. PLACHER, *Unapologetic Theology*, p. 17-18.
[104] Cf., W. PLACHER, *Unapologetic Theology*, 18.
[105] Charles W. ALLEN, *Between Revisionists and Postliberals: A Review Article*, in *Encounter*, 51, 4 (1990), p. 389-402.
[106] Cf., C. ALLEN, *Between Revisionists and Postliberals*, p. 395-396.

and postliberalism. She rather sees some complimentary insights in them. While pointing out the differences between Tracy and Lindbeck in both men's understanding of "public", she clarifies that "the most responsible public theology entails neither retreat to entirely closed intratextual communities, nor reversion to foundationalism"[107]. It is good, she reasons, to "describe" Christianity in the manner that Lindbeck did with his 'interpretative rules that are less likely to conform the gospel to preconceived metaphysical categories or subjective experiences', but, in order to adequately "explain" Christianity and its form, she thinks Tracy's correlation seems a surer route to success.

In spite of the polemical debate between these two "schools", it has to be pointed out that it was literally to safeguard the distinctive identity of theology that postliberal theology sprang up to counter revisionist public theology. The former felt that the latter did not take the question of the church as a community of faith and its internal logic into serious consideration, but was rather more interested in the "common" logic of the scientific community. In their judgement, this tendency appears to erode the distinctiveness of theology.

George Hunsinger has however tried to sever the popular association of postliberal theology with the so-called "Yale School" in order to redirect postliberalism to what he considers its proper origin. He wrote:

> "If postliberal theology depends on the existence of something called the 'Yale School', then postliberal theology is in trouble. It is in trouble, because the so-called Yale School enjoys little basis in reality, being largely the invention of theological journalism. At best it represents a loose coalition of interests, united more by what it opposes or envisions than by any common theological program"[108].

The two principal characters that 'gave birth' to the so-called Yale School apparently were Hans Frei and George Lindbeck. Hunsinger obviously made no attempt at disguising his preference for Frei over Lindbeck because, according to him, a no negligible difference exists between the two namely, whereas Frei was oriented

[107] K. HEYER, *How does Theology go Public*? p. 324-325.
[108] George HUNSINGER, *Postliberal Theology*, in Kevin J. VANHOOZER (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 42-57, p. 42.

toward Barth[109], Lindbeck was oriented toward Aquinas and Luther. He criticizes Lindbeck's pragmatism that made truth depend strongly on use while sanctioning Frei's "moderate propositionalism" which he considers "less pragmatist". Frei, according to him, did not think (as did Lindbeck) that doctrines were merely regulative as opposed to being also constitutive. Because of this he labelled Frei as standing for "generous orthodoxy" while Lindbeck stood for "orthodox generosity". Consequently he sees Frei as standing more directly as a "postliberal" whereas Lindbeck is qualified as more of "neoliberal". He backed up this claim of Lindbeck being more neoliberal than postliberal by suggesting that the latter's "cultural-linguistic" theory can be seen as three theories in one: a theory of religion which is cultural; a theory of doctrine which is regulative; and a theory of truth which is pragmatist. He noted that whereas the cultural-linguistic's theory of religion is possibly postliberal, the other two theories component (theories of doctrine and truth) are more properly neoliberal.

He then offered a "sympathetic reworking" of Lindbeck's typology in order "to direct it more plausibly along postliberal lines"[110]. He thinks that such a reworking of typology would present truth in postliberalism as determined by critical realism, doctrine as determined by the primacy of God, and religion as determined by christocentrism. On this last note he wrote:

> "The hallmark of a properly postliberal approach to religion is that it speaks on the basis of explicit religious commitment. In line with its

[109] George Hunsinger himself is one the leading Barthian scholars that has, alongside Bruce McCormack, popularized the study of Karl Barth especially in the Anglo-Saxon world. In my unpublished Master's Thesis, I did an in-depth study of the two scholars' contributions to Karl Barth's Christology. Even though both men followed different methodological approaches to the study of Barth (Hunsinger preferred to approach Barth's study from the perspective of what I labelled "traditionalists' approach", while McCormack favoured the study of Barth from a "revisionist's perspective"), the debate between their two "schools" helped in no small measure to situate Barth's study into the mainstream of theological discussion in the Anglo-Saxon world. For further reading about their synchronic and diachronic approaches respectively; and for the "McCormack-Hunsinger debate", cf., Osmond ANIKE, *Karl Barth's Christology: The Contributions of the Anglo-Saxon Scholars Towards its Re-Discovery*, Unpublished Master's Degree thesis submitted to, and defended in, the Faculty of Theology, *Université catholique de Louvain*, Louvain-la-Neuve, June, 2011.

[110] This revised typology is extensively exposed in another work, cf., George HUNSINGER, *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2000. Cf. specifically Part II Chap. 9 titled *Beyond Literalism and Expressivism: Karl Barth's Hermeneutical Realism*, p. 210-225 for a discussion on this revised typology. Whereas our immediate interest is not to explore this revised typology, it is good to note that Hunsinger's intention is to make Barth, rather than Lindbeck, the most appropriate postliberal theologian around whom discussions on postliberalism should turn.

> non-foundationalist leanings in epistemology, it sees modern attempts to speak on the basis of neutrality as illusory; because neutrality is finally a non-neutral commitment, and what is worse, one that typically leads to distortions in its interpretations of religion"[111].

This comment by Hunsinger is of paramount importance in our analysis of Tracy's public theology vis-à-vis the church as a community of faith. If explicit religious commitment is of little or no consequence in a revisionist public theology, the issue becomes how to interpret one's religion without distortions – an issue that Hunsinger is talking about here. Even professional philosophers who write as Christians think that such commitment is imperative for a scholar who wants to maintain her Christian identity. While dismissing all recourse to "foundationalism" as constituting justification theory, and while even maintaining that the Bible does not also provide us with a foundation for theorizing, Nicholas Wolterstorff had recourse to what he called "authentic Christian commitment" in theory weighing and asserted: "The Christian scholar ought to allow the belief-content of his authentic Christian commitment to function as control within his devising and weighing of theories"[112]. He thinks that it is only when this is done that one can indeed claim to be fully serious both as scholar and as Christian. This is another way of arguing that one can be, at the same time, authentically Christian and an authentic scholar. There is no room for neutrality especially in matters concerning theological discourse. If one, in a bid to maintain "neutrality" avoids any explicit commitment, and consequently risks some distortions in one's interpretations of one's religion, then such a strategy of doing theology in the context of pluralism becomes problematic. Can one really engage with other religions without being explicitly committed to one's religion?

7.3. The Question of Plurality of Cultural Publics within the Same Universal Church

Stephen Webb wondered whether Tracy's correlational public theology allows for theoretical certainty or whether it is merely meant to aid conversation. He thinks that if one is not standing on a

[111] G. HUNSINGER, *Postliberal Theology*, p. 53.
[112] Nicholas WOLTERSTORFF, *Reason within the Bounds of Religion* (second edition), Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans, (1976), 1984, p. 76.

theoretically certain ground from where one can advance one's position but only uses theological reason rhetorically, then conversation such as Tracy's correlation becomes rhetorical and not ontological[113]. However, in his defence of "modern truths", Tracy pointed out (among other 'theological truth of modernity' which he believes needs to be defended) specifically "the reality of reason as communication" and not just its "purely technical notion"[114]. That is why he sees the public realm as "the last true hope of reason in its modern and classical Western form". He believes that reason as communication can only manifest itself through conversation.

Yet, whereas conversation is imperative in any theological discourse, his definition of a public realm appears to neglect the various cultural publics of the entire world of Christianity who may not share the logic of his Western public. Timoteo Gener sees in Tracy's public theology "a flattening or homogenizing of Christian specificity in public discourse" and was intrigued that, "in spite of his strong awareness of plurality and ambiguity, Tracy still looks to shared rationality as the solution to the extravagance of pluralism". He therefore warns that "in a way, Tracy's appeal to publicness can lead to unilateral movement in conversation, as it tends to deflect any effective cultural critique that might be made by Christian faith and theology"[115]. This is especially true because, even though he later tried to take a closer look at some other theological voices from the margin, Tracy's "universal" public generally tries to ground Christianity only in traditions of Western culture.

Understandably therefore, Christine Gudorf took a swipe at Tracy's perceived portrayal of Western European intellectual tradition as normative without taking into consideration that "much of the world, including most Latin Americans, has never experienced the Enlightenment or significant degrees of secularity". Because of this, she dismisses Tracy's pluralistic theology as not inclusive because, as she argues, "Tracy writes of judging and evaluating pluralism, but his perspective on the contemporary situation ignores the majority of the world"[116].

[113] Cf., Stephen H. WEBB, *Re-figuring Theology: The Rhetoric of Karl Barth*, New York, State University of New York Press, 1991, p. 176.
[114] David TRACY, *Literary Theory and Return of the Forms for Naming and Thinking God in Theology*, in *Journal of Religion*, 74, 3 (1994), p. 302-319, p. 304.
[115] Timoteo D. GENER, *With/Beyond Tracy: Re-visioning Public Theology*, in *Evangelical Review of Theology*, 33, 2 (2009), p. 118-138, p. 130, 131 & 132.
[116] Christine GUDORF, *Liberation Theology's use of Scripture: A Response to First World Critics*, in *Interpretation* (1987), p. 13.

To avoid these perceived pitfalls in Tracy's Western-laden public theology, Gener offered to move with and beyond Tracy by situating public theology not within fundamental theology but rather rethinking public theology as a theology of American culture viewed transformationally[117]. He feels that by aligning his theological method with Niebuhr's "Christ and culture" model, especially in his affirmation of its transformational stance, Tracy was in effect venturing into a theology of culture, even though he did not explicitly link public theology with theology of culture. When thus viewed transformationally, theology of public culture becomes "a moment within missiology" whose interpretative framework is now determined by "a transformational theological base: God as creator, reconciler and redeemer of all things", and no longer on criteria determined by a secular interpretive context[118]. But he cautions that this transformational theological base should not be construed as a one-way movement where Christian faith influences modern themes, but rather should be conceived as a relationship of reciprocity.

On this however, Gener is hardly proposing anything ground-breaking. Tracy has always insisted that his method of correlation is a dipolar process and never a one-way movement. Although Gener had earlier rightly noticed that the structural polarity in Tracy's method of correlation leads to a hermeneutical imbalance, tilting toward human experience[119] – a fact that was observed by Werner Jeanrond more than a decade and half earlier when he (Jeanrond) wrote that "a correlational theology always runs the risk of losing itself on one side of the correlation"[120] – it is difficult to see how Gener's "relationship of reciprocity" proposal will escape the same criticism levelled against Tracy's correlation. What might be a contribution of Gener is his suggestion that public theology as a theology of culture viewed transformationally should affirm "not a singular, monologic public theology but rather (potentially, at least) a variety of transformational public theologies as well theology of various publics"[121]. This affirmation indeed, appears to be the only means of taking into

[117] T. D. GENER, *With/Beyond Tracy*, p. 133.
[118] Cf., T. GENER, *With/Beyond Tracy*, p. 133-134.
[119] T. GENER, *With/Beyond Tracy*, p. 129.
[120] Werner JEANROND, *The Problem of the Starting-Point of Theological Thinking*, in John WEBSTER (ed.), *The Possibilities of Theology: Studies in the Theology of Eberhard Jüngel in his Sixtieth Year*, Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 1994, p. 70- 89, p. 88.
[121] T. GENER, *With/Beyond Tracy*, p. 135.

consideration those other neglected cultures whose 'public' technically falls outside Tracy's preconceived notion of the universal public of the Western culture.

Still, when Tracy insists that public realm is dependent upon a shared concept of reason, he appears to suggest that all publics are fashioned with the same world view. In an essay he contributed to a book dedicated to a conference on Habermas, he wrote:

> "A public realm, by definition, is dependent on a shared concept of reason… A public realm is that shared rational space where all participants, whatever their other particular differences, can meet to discuss any claim that is rationally redeemable. Any strictly relativist reading of the nature of reason cannot inform a public realm as public"[122].

Although he praises the Liberation theologies for developing "new theological resources", he still chided them for being "relatively unconcerned with the debates on rationality" – a concern which he deems very crucial for any theory to be accepted in the public sphere[123]. However, this raises a number of questions which have been succinctly asked by Owen Thomas: "Why is the public realm now dependent by definition on a shared concept of reason? What definition of the public realm does this apply? Whose concept of reason is being employed? Who decides what it means to be 'rationally redeemable'"?[124] Thomas' argument is that, based on Tracy's earlier work on *Plurality and Ambiguity* where he made conversation the theme of the work and portrays it as 'a model of all interpretation', there shouldn't be any limitations on the possibility of this conversation in terms of a 'shared concept of reason' on which a public realm 'by definition' is dependent. He wonders why liberation theologians for instance, must adopt a concept of reason that is recognizable to traditional theologians before conversation can begin; and points out that such conversation has been, in fact, going on for some time without such an explicit agreement[125].

John Maraldo also seems to be in agreement when he called for an alternative notion of understanding in interreligious

[122] David TRACY, *Theology, Critical Social Theory and the Public Realm*, in Don S. BROWNING and Francis FIORENZA (ed.), *Habermas, Modernity, and Public Theology*, New York, Crossroad/Continuum, 1992, p. 19-42, p. 19.
[123] D. TRACY, *Theology, Critical Social Theory and the Public Realm*, p. 25.
[124] Owen C. THOMAS, *Public Theology and Counter-Public Spheres*, in *The Harvard Theological Review*, 85, 4 (1992), p. 453-466, p. 463
[125] Cf., O. THOMAS, *Public Theology and Counter-Public Spheres*, p. 464.

hermeneutics[126]. He is worried that the prospects for an interreligious hermeneutics seem bleak because its possibilities seem bounded by certain assumptions that restrict its main aim of mutual understanding among religions. He says:

> "…when religion is confined to the aspects of traditions that are globally represented, when the interaction between them is restricted to linguistic understanding, and when hermeneutics is supposed to guide this understanding of language as it becomes focused in texts, then a lot is left out. There are notable aspects of religion that have nothing to do with texts and little to do with language, and there are religious interactions between people who do not represent world religions or their various sects. If reflection on possible mutual understanding between identifiably different religions is the aim of interreligious hermeneutics, then an alternative sense of understanding is called for"[127].

Although we are not immediately concerned here with exploring that alternative which Maraldo prescribed such as what he calls "intermonistic dialogue", the point is that plurality of cultural publics does not call for such "shared concept of reason" as envisioned by Tracy. As a matter of fact, Tracy should not assume that what is logical in his own interpretative framework is universally accepted as such everywhere. Criticizing Tracy's hermeneutical over-assumptions in relation to his suggestion that the universally identifiable 'fundamental questions' arising from the so-called 'common human experience' must be logically called religious, Stephen Stell points out that, "what is 'logical' within Tracy's religious interpretive system may… be rationally rejected within other theoretical frameworks"[128]. It is true that Stell made this observation in connection with his attempt to discern the "underlying sameness" of Tracy's and Lindbeck's theological hermeneutics with a view to integrating the two, the remark can be appropriately applied to our present area of concern with regards to the plurality of cultural publics

[126] John C. MARALDO, *A Call for an Alternative Notion of Understanding in Interreligious Hermeneutics*, in Catherine CORNILLE and Christopher CONWAY (ed.), *Interreligious Hermeneutics*, (Interreligious Dialogue Series 2), Eugene, Oregon, Cascade Books, 2010, p. 89-115.

[127] J. MARALDO, *A Call for an Alternative Notion of Understanding in Interreligious Hermeneutics*, p. 89.

[128] Stephen L. STELL, *Hermeneutics in Theology and the Theology of Hermeneutics: Beyond Lindbeck and Tracy*, in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 61, 4 (1993), p. 679-703, p. 686.

within the same universal church. If Tracy's public is taken to its logical limit, then no public should be excluded and no 'concept of reason' can in actual fact be 'shared' as Tracy envisaged.

In fact, this was the very reason why, Thomas said that, "Tracy seems to have a fixation on an honorific sense of publicness and a pejorative sense of privateness"[129]; and then offered to make an alternative proposal to Tracy's public to include counter-public spheres of theological reflections that have been emerging especially from the group of people that Tracy has frequently referred to as 'Others', but which we have preferred to designate as "voices from the margin". With his envisaged counter-public sphere, he foresees public theology taking on a quite different meaning: "It will not mean an agreement on a concept of reason or on specific criteria of argument and evidence. It will mean both a commitment to accept one another as equal partners in conversation and a commitment to continuing the conversation"[130]. He concedes however that such a conversation "will be so unusual in Christian history that the resulting agreements and disagreements are quite unpredictable". But he believes that this will be a way of making theology a truly public discourse.

But, will making theology a truly public discourse in the manner presented by Thomas be the solution to contemporary theological crisis? Webb has captured the real crisis that pluralism brings with it in our current postmodern theological enterprise:

> "Today, in fact, the existence of really 'other' others constitutes a new crisis for theology: we live in an age of pluralism and suspicion in which no knowledge is certain and yet many truth claims abound in a sea of conflicting currents. Pluralism – the conflict of ideologies, epistemologies, and theologies – makes us essentially unsure of ourselves, and yet we must listen to the many voices that are demanding to be heard. Pluralism as both fact and problem forces us to respond to radical otherness, not only the No-God of Barth's early theology but also the Not-I's of the many conflicting realities in which we find ourselves. As a fact of our common existence pluralism is both a challenge and a promise: the challenge lies in efforts to define and address a situation that is fragmented, constantly changing, seemingly chaotic and out of control; the promise resides in the new hope that new voices can come to be

[129] O. THOMAS, *Public Theology and Counter-Public Spheres*, p. 458.
[130] O. THOMAS, *Public Theology and Counter-Public Spheres*, p. 466.

> heard above the clamor of competing claims and defeating confusions"[131].

Anchoring theological rationality solely on the so-called "public realm" which, by definition, must be dependent on "shared concept of reason" appears therefore, problematic. This is because of the plurality of publics with conflicting claims to rationality. As the 'publics' keep on enlarging by the inclusion of several 'counter-publics' with different mind-sets and different modes of reasoning aside Tracy's mostly Euro-American public, will there be commensurate enlargement of 'public criteria'? Or, will the others' public criteria be excluded because they fall outside Tracy's public? This is exactly the dilemma in Tracy's public theology. The existence of diversity of cultural publics within the same universal church each with conflicting public criteria, makes it difficult to single out one particular "shared concept of reason" on which a public realm by definition is dependent.

[131] S. H. WEBB, *Re-Figuring Theology*, p. 174-175.

CONCLUSION

Many of the proposals in Tracy's revisionist public theology are plausible. Thanks to Tracy, theology is better situated in the world of academy as a serious academic discipline. Although still very much contentious, theology is now laying claim to the type of rationality that is operative in other sciences, thanks to Tracy's proposal for "shared concept of reason". He has opened the way to diverse and diversified manner of doing theology with his call to approach the other as a real and not just as a projected other. His engagement with the typically American cultural approach to life has made his theology particularly appealing to his American audience to whom "public realm" is the only realm worthy of paying any serious attention; and the realm they feel most comfortable engaging with. Despite serious objections to certain nuances of his revisionist theology, particularly from his protestant colleagues, none appears however, to have discredited his bold attempt to bring Christian theology to the American public sphere where everybody and anybody is free to engage with it freely and unencumbered by any ecclesiastical restrictions. A culture that is as pluralistic as America right from the very first day of its establishment, could not have asked for more than a pluralistic way of engaging with Christian theology. Tracy generously gave that out, and, even more than they could have asked for. But this "generosity" appeared to have come at a great price.

In order to be generous to the American culture, Tracy seems to have been prepared to sacrifice the particularity of Christian faith. As we have just seen, it looks as if he was ready to sacrifice the theological understanding of the church at the altar of its purely sociological understanding. This apparently appears to have been a clever way of "rationally" placing the church as one of the three "publics" which he argues that theology has to address. Whereas nobody doubts that theology has to address these three "publics", a situation where theology is entirely thrown into the so-called public arena, so that it is the public criteria rather than the church's internal criteria that determine what it should be, does not even make theology a serious academic discipline.

A more theological engagement with the church would have revealed that the church is not a species within a genus of public in which there are placed side by side such publics as the academy and the wider society. It is a public, yes; but it has its own genus found in the other religions of the world. If theology is and should be found in

the academy, it has to be noted that it is there not as an independent and an autonomous subject as Tracy would want us to believe. Theology is in the academy as still a discipline somehow linked to the church. If this link is broken, then there is every reason to believe that even the word 'theology' might very soon disappear completely.

However, if the link is to be maintained, then the so-called coherent way of articulating Christian self-understanding has to be consistent with the basic Christian belief. If, for instance, Christ is not accorded any cognitive reality as Tracy's revisionism shows; if such "privilege" is reserved to God alone; if Christ is only a "supreme fiction" and a "re-presentative fact"; in fact, if Christ is no longer God in the Christian traditional understanding of it as the second person of the Trinity, then one wonders whether such "articulated" theology can still be described as 'Christian theology'.

It is understandable that Tracy is primarily a fundamental theologian and tries not to allow dogmatic or confessional theology to interfere in his fundamental work even when he claimed to have written a volume on systematic theology. But such a radical distinction between fundamental and dogmatic theologies will undermine any systematic theological work, especially when it concerns the question of the culture of pluralism. To systematically engage with contemporary pluralism, it is evident that publicness in theology is absolutely important. But to reduce Christian theology to public criteria alone without serious reference to the church as a faith community has been the goal of secularity which must not be allowed to materialize. Unfortunately (especially in the Western world where Christianity appears to be on a steady decline), this tendency of "secularizing" Christianity is on the rise. But nature abhors vacuum. The grounds that Christianity has been losing are rapidly being taken over not just by Islam but by *radical* Islam; and Europe and America are on the edge.

One can understand that because theology appears to be an "endangered species" especially in the Western academy, theologians, in order not to be thrown out into the labour market, are trying to revive it through the process of correlation and other publicly-accepted criteria of rationality. However, even if the role of the church in theological discourse has waned, theology must still maintain some degree of particularity if it hopes to remain Christian theology. The acknowledgment of pluralism as an important characteristic of postmodernity should be a characteristic of contemporary theology.

But at the same time, even in the midst of this contemporary pluralism, there must be a distinctive characteristic both of Christianity and of Christian theology. But, how can one give Christian theology a distinctive and particularist identity linked to the church as a faith community and still not remove the tag of rationality from it? In other words, how can confessional theology still operate in the academy as a “scientific” subject?

PART IV

WITH/BEYOND BARTH AND TRACY: CAN SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY BECOME PUBLIC DISCOURSE AND STILL REMAIN A FUNCTION OF THE CHURCH?

INTRODUCTION

The expression "with/beyond" is borrowed from Matthias Gockel's article expressing the importance, today, of moving beyond Barth's manner of doing theology while at the same time not discarding it totally[1]. However, its usage here should not be understood as a synthesis of Barth's and Tracy's theologies. While one can justifiably make such an audacious attempt at synthesizing, or even at reconciling, two different theological approaches, our main interest in this part is not aimed at any such synthesis or reconciliation. Although we shall bring out the similarities and differences in Barth's and Tracy's theological approaches, our primary concern is not to synthesize them but to argue that, if pursued in their different directions, it might be difficult for confessional theology and academic theology to coexist. But if certain reconsiderations are taken, systematic theology could still develop public character without losing its intrinsic link to the community of faith.

[1] Cf., Mathias GOCKEL, *Theology After Barth – The Dogmatic Challenge*, in G. THOMAS, R. H. R. BROUWER, B. MCCORMACK (ed.), *Dogmatics After Barth*, p. 109-122, p. 109.

CHAPTER 7

KARL BARTH AND DAVID TRACY IN A SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGICAL DIALOGUE

INTRODUCTION

Karl Barth and David Tracy apparently appear to be moving in reverse directions. Barth began his theological enquiry with apprehension that non-theological disciplines were eroding the distinctiveness of theology. He therefore took upon himself the task of retrieving the purity of theology and hoped thereby to rescue it from collapsing. Tracy, on the other hand, took off his journey with a presupposition that theology was collapsing already – no thanks to the pariah status it has acquired as a result of its perceived self-isolation from the committee of scientific enquiry – and therefore, needed to be revised in order to be brought up to date with the acceptable scientific mode of enquiry. With these different primary concerns, it is obvious that Barth wanted to fortify the strength of confessional theology, while Tracy wanted to make theology a truly academic discipline. A cursory look at this seeming disparity therefore suggests a parallel line that may never meet.

Without however pretending to reconcile the two theological positions, our aim in this chapter is to argue that in spite of their noticeable divergent starting points, there are actually similarities-in-differences between Barth and Tracy; a fact that makes a dialogue between them possible. This similarity can also enable us to move with and beyond them in a systematic theological approach to the contemporary culture of pluralism. It has become necessary that when discussing the question pluralism, one should take into account not only Barth's emphasis on dogmatic theology, but also Tracy's emphasis on fundamental theology of correlation. While dogmatic theology done with Barth's emphases is aimed at guaranteeing theology's distinctiveness, Tracy's method of correlation is aimed at opening up theology to a meaningful dialogue not only with other rationalities, but also with other religions; as well as take into account the cultural situations that normally affect theological researches.

It is on this note that we are strongly convinced that, though Barth and Tracy appear to be moving in opposite direction, their theologies are not actually in opposition to one another; at least not

when it concerns the question of pluralism. Based therefore on this perceived "non-opposition", we shall attempt to understand whether and how confessional theology and academic theology can indeed "correlate" to tackle the culture of pluralism.

1. Similarities-in-Differences

Our notion of similarities-in-differences is taken from Tracy's concept of it in his analysis of the analogical imagination where he defined analogy as a language of ordered relationships articulating similarity-in-difference. In borrowing this concept however, we are not thereby trying to reduce Barth's dialectical language to the language of analogy. In fact, we are not concerned here about analysing the theological languages of both theologians; we are rather trying to identify what is similar in their theological concerns and journeys even while leaving their differences to persist. While it is true that Barth operated primarily (but not exclusively) with a dialectical language, and while it is equally true that Tracy operated principally (but not exclusively) with the language of analogy, fixating on the analyses of these theological languages would derail our main objective here. Suffice it to say that, in this regard, we agree with Tracy that the theological language a theologian uses does not matter as long as it is used in the context of analogical imagination. It is in this context of articulating similarities-in differences that this section of our work should be understood.

1.1. Similarities in Theological Concerns

If there is anything incontestably similar between Karl Barth and David Tracy, it is their respective passion for the survival of theology. While some authors could be labelled as "accidental theologians" based on the fact that they started with other disciplines and "accidentally" ventured into theology, neither Barth nor Tracy can be identified with such sobriquet. On the contrary, genuine passion for theology runs through their veins right from the onset. Though they belong to different epochs, both are concerned with how to do theology properly in their respective epochs.

Karl Barth's modest self-introduction to his American audience is revealing of this deep concern. He denied being the "prophet", nor the "monumental patriarch", nor the "giant of theology" – some of the expressions with which he was being described at that time. He rather described himself as "a normal human being"; and, if at all he is

distinguished from other human beings, it is for the simple reason that he has devoted all his days to "a very special emphasis" namely, "the question of proper theology". He even expressed how happy he would be if only others could as well devote themselves to this important question again and again. He went ahead to propose that the *Church Dogmatics* be not understood as "the conclusion" but rather as "the initiation of a new exchange of views about the question of proper theology"[1]. It was precisely this concern for proper theology that drove him to shout the famous angry "No!" to Emile Brunner when he felt that the latter wasn't actually addressing what he was convinced was "proper theology" but was rather "diluting" such theology with "a-theological" concerns. If the correspondences between these two "friends" eventually ended in an impasse with Brunner responding to Barth's "Nein!" by accusing him (Barth) of unleashing "theological terror" on the world of Christianity, it was because both men had divergent, if irreconcilable, views of what should constitute a "proper" theology. Barth was unflinching in his belief that the proper object of theology (and thus a proper theology) is God in his revelation, Brunner, while not contesting that proper theology must speak about God, insisted that for such theology to be really proper, it must also speak decisively about the believing subject. Whether one agrees with Barth's position or not, there is no denying that his primary concern was with the question of proper theology – a concern that he was so passionate about that nothing else was seen as relevant in theology except it.

David Tracy, on his part, was concerned *ab initio* that the present crisis of theological self-understanding, if not urgently and adequately addressed, could greatly undermine theology. He placed such crisis squarely on the inability or the unwillingness of theology to adequately address the present situation in theology namely, pluralism. He is convinced that until pluralism as a theological paradigm is adequately addressed, there will continue to be "crisis of belief" or "crisis of cognitive claims". And as long as these crises persist, he thinks theology cannot be done with integrity in today's world. It was therefore to preserve the integrity of theology that he came to the conclusion that Christian self-understanding needed to be critically reinterpreted in order to be brought up to date with the contemporary method of scientific enquiry. In this way, he hopped to

[1] Cf., the 'Foreword to the American edition' of, K. BARTH, *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction*, p. x-xii.

bridge the gap between secular faith and Christian faith, and by so doing, Christianity and Christian theology in particular would have regained their relevance in our sophisticated contemporary world order. To achieve this desired relevance, he contends that theology cannot remain in its confessional and private realm but must in fact be thrown wide open as a public discourse. Unlike Barth, he does not see this approach as a "watering down" of theology but rather as bringing theology up to date. He believes that a theology that is not up to date in this manner, cannot really tackle the existential problems of the contemporary society. Such a theology would not thereby qualify as a "proper" theology.

Decades passed between Barth and Tracy; but the concerns of each in his own epoch were similar namely, how to salvage theology from disappearing. In the immediate post-Enlightenment critique of religion and theology, Barth was alarmed that the theological responses of his colleagues were somewhat compromising. He believed that they had allowed other sciences to dictate the pace by reducing theology to the methodologies of these other sciences. He therefore made a vow to retrieve theology from the shackles of secular sciences and give it its own distinctive identity. In this way, theology could properly serve the church. Tracy, on his own part, believed that in their efforts to tackle the problem of secularism, his colleagues were going *around* instead of going *through* the issue. Such an approach for him was like confronting a tiger by pulling it gently at the tail. It has disastrous consequences. A confrontation with the tiger has to be head-on if one stands a chance of not only surviving but also of killing the tiger. He therefore thinks that theology has to jump into the public arena and stake its claim there. In the end however, one may not agree 100% with Tracy's tactical approach, but one cannot also deny that his interest and passion has been on how best to preserve the integrity of theology.

1.2. Cultural Differences

Barth and Tracy belong to the same Western world. But the cultural differences that fashioned their respective theologies were enormous, even if not engulfing. To properly understand their respective theologies and the themes they addressed, it is pertinent to highlight some of these cultural differences in order to better understand why they were vehement in their insistence about certain issues pertaining to their respective theologies.

1.2.1. The Dominant Enlightenment Culture of European Society

Barth lived at the threshold of the twentieth-century in a typical European cultural and intellectual setting. The earlier centuries of seventeenth and (especially) the eighteenth century Enlightenment provided necessary and sufficient ingredients for the Western intellectual world to become infatuated with science and its general intellectual policy. As a result, every form of tradition, as well as the "normal" metaphysical mode of understanding and interpretation, was viewed with suspicion because they failed to fit into the spectrum of what science has provided. An archetypical break-through in scientific "critique of appearances" was recorded by the Copernican astronomy and quickly spread not only into every other human aspect of life but, its "critique of tradition" affected the very heart of humanity itself[2]. Of course, the theological implication of this critique of tradition is evident: the traditional teachings of the church are no longer a sure guarantee of authenticity. Authenticity has to do with provability and no longer with the authority of the magisterium of the church. A new concept of learning thus emerged where philosophy was no longer regarded as the *ancilla theologiae* (handmaid of theology) but, like all other learning, was being based on experiential observations and other rational principles. This means that human reason was being accorded the right for autonomous and independent pursuit without recourse to the so-called *ens supremum*. God, on this reading, could therefore not be considered as the highest or primary reality. But the idea of God persisted through the concept of natural religion; and with it, the increasing culture of secularization.

Though in itself and as such, secularization does not imply outright rejection of religion or Christianity, there are however, fundamental alterations in Christian theology which secularization occasioned. Bengt Hägglund identified four of these basic alterations which characterized the theology of the Enlightenment. They can be summarized as follows: (a) theology came to be more or less dependent on philosophy and rational thought; (b) theology developed a tendency to moralize so much so that morality rather than religion became a more immediate concern to the modern, rational view of life; (c) because imbedded in human reason, religion developed an individualistic conception whereby it became an individual, private

[2] Cf., E. BRAATEN and R. W. JENSON, *A Map of Twentieth-Century Theology*, p. 2.

matter whose certainty is based on a person's own experience; (d) theology tended to "humanize" Christianity in order to accommodate it to an anthropocentric frame[3].

Needless to say that the effects of all this on the Christian idea of revelation were devastating, to say the least. Theology of revelation was gradually replaced with natural theology. Anything that pretended to come from revelation which was not also available to secular rational justification, was discarded as not worthy of consideration. In other words, emphasis was shifted from the "revealed-ness" of Christianity to the "reasonableness" of Christianity[4]. This "latitudinarianism" (as it is called in English theology in the age of Enlightenment) is distinguished from deism by the fact that, unlike the latter, it did not seek to replace traditional Christianity with natural religion, but rather sought to justify faith using purely rational support. In this regard, it upheld moral aspect of life over and above the religious. It was, in fact, this emphasis on the moralistic aspect of religion that gave birth to rationalism whose greatest representative, Immanuel Kant, perfected by making this moralistic religion of reason the only necessary religion[5]. Rationalism thus stood as perfect contrast to supernaturalism which insisted on the necessity of revelation and the infallible authority of the Scripture.

It was not until the mediating efforts of Schleiermacher that the dividing tendencies of rationalism and supernaturalism was thought to have been brought to an end (at least not until Barth re-visited Schleiermacher). Schleiermacher's re-definition of religion refused to conceive of it in terms of morality or metaphysics but rather sees it as something that is manifested in one's personal life of the soul. That "something" is an independent manifestation that cannot be reduced to a collection of dogmas or doctrines; it is not also to be found in metaphysics; it is rather located in the "feeling of absolute dependence". This is a self-consciousness of 'man' who, when 'he' senses that he is absolutely dependent on the infinite being, religion thereby occurs. Among the many "sins" of Schleiermacher, for which Barth never forgave him, was his abolition of all dualism through the identification of God with the world. But even before Barth, Hegel

[3] For a detailed analysis of the effects of the Enlightenment on Christian theology, cf. especially chapter 32 in Bengt HÄGGLUND, *History of Theology*, trans. Gene J. LUND, St. Louis, Missouri, Concordia Publishing House, 1968.
[4] Cf., John LOCKE, *The Reasonableness of Christianity as Delivered in the Scriptures* (1695), edited by John C. HIGGINS-BIDDLE, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1999.
[5] Cf., Immanuel KANT, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone* (1793), trans. Theodore M. GREENE and Hoyt H. HUDSON, New York, Harper Torch-book, 1960.

had already descended heavily on Schleiermacher with his brand of speculative theology. Hegel made 'thought' rather than Schleiermacher's 'feeling' the highest expression of consciousness. In fact, for him, feeling is actually the lowest form; it is only thought that distinguishes human beings from the other animals. It is this thought or concept that gives rise to reality. To find Truth, one must have to recourse to the system that provides expression to the thoughts. When these thoughts are contemplated, they become conscious of themselves; they become the spirit (*Der Geist*) which is the only reality (as far as he was concerned). In fact, the Spirit, for Hegel, is the absolute.

If there was identification of God with the world in Schleiermacher, there was a harmony between philosophy and religion in Hegel, as both (philosophy and religion) were thought to have the same object namely, the absolute. Christianity for him was nothing but the absolute religion, so much so that revelation and the absolute spirit were placed on the same level. The "mediating" theologies carried out by both Schleiermacher and Hegel as well as other concerned theologians and Christians of that period held sway for decades. But it soon became clear that such "mediation" was not what was needed for the survival of Christianity and Christian theology. For one, they did not actually solve the Christological problem especially that of the two-nature Christology. If Gottfried Thomasius sought to provide a solution through his *kenoticism*, it was still not a resolved issue, and was carried over well into the nineteenth and twentieth-century theologies.

With the formal "birth" of liberal Protestantism, Albrecht Ritschl developed an idea of "revelation" as nothing but positive religion which he regarded as a historical fact. As such, he held that it is only in a figurative sense that Christ can be called God. His disciple, Harnack, perfected the anchoring of Christianity as, above all, a historical phenomenon, with his "original message" theology. The "History of Religions School" did challenge this theology by arguing that a thorough investigation of the early Christianity through the application of historical method does not lead to a "universal" religion but to a series of assumptions that must be somewhat alien to the modern minds. Such "original message" cannot be applied to the modern times because it belonged to an apocalyptic background completely foreign to the modern people (Albert Schweitzer). At best, Christianity can only be understood not as the absolute religion but rather as the historically highest form of the religion of personality development (Ernst Troeltsch).

However, whether or not this "history of religions school" was to last for long as a "school" is immaterial. What is significant is that its methodology of historicity in theology was to last very long. In fact, at the turn of the twentieth-century, the whole contemporary theology was anchored on Christianity moored in human experience – a tradition that was developed since Schleiermacher. And this was the dominant culture that Barth's theology sought to challenge.

1.2.2. Barth's Dialectical Theology as a Rebellion against the Dominant Culture

The events before and after the First World War were to cast a serious doubt on the theological culture of Europe. Liberalism failed the litmus test; and it soon became clear to Barth that the "juicy" kingdom of perfectness envisaged by liberalism could not be attained by human liberality. It was this crisis in theological culture of Europe that Karl Barth set to address, particularly as his personal pastoral experiences convinced him more than ever that, to be really useful theologically, the Bible has to be studied differently than just as a mere historical book. There is indeed something about the kingdom of God in the Bible, says Barth; but it is not, and cannot be, what the liberals took it to be namely, a source of activism or a religious quest. He rather discovered in the Bible a "strange new world" that has nothing to do with the type constructed by the European society. In this "world" of the Bible, it is not so-much our religious quest for God as God's grasp on us that matters. In fact, the kingdom of God that is found in the Bible cannot be brought about by human experience; rather, it can only be brought about by God himself. Barth announced his entrée into theology with that famous *Der Römerbrief* – a brand of theology which, alongside other interlocutors, was labelled "dialectical" – one would say a rebellious theology that sought to rebel against the then dominant liberal theology.

Barth sought, through the theology of *Romans*, to re-enact Socratic equivalent in the area of theology. He leads his readers to challenge what they held as faith in Christian religion and to discover what faith actually means in the Christian gospel. In this sense, rather than teaching any system, the book's intent was to destroy all systems. His "discovery" of Kierkegaard's "infinite qualitative difference" between time and eternity was all he needed to reverse Schleiermacher's supposed notion of religion as an attempt to bridge the separation between time and eternity, world and God. While supporting such a gap, he insists that it cannot be bridged from this

side of the spectrum but rather from the side of God. Therefore religion which had hitherto played this "stop-gap" was taken by Barth as rather "faithlessness". It is therefore understandable that he was battling with the notion of religion in general and Christianity in particular. He had to rebel against the established notion of religion and pointed out that, like Schleiermacher, those who despised religion did not know what it was; and unlike Schleiermacher, even what was eventually put forward as religion was still not what it purports to be namely, a way to God, but rather nothing but godlessness.

His total disenchantment with liberalism was to witness its climax during the World War I as he watched helplessly the so-called German liberal culture enthusiastically supporting the war in the name of blind nationalism. If such unacceptable nationalism could at all be condoned among non-theologians, it was simply unpardonable for great theologians who should know better. Barth had simply had enough: "In despair over what this indicated about the signs of the time I suddenly realized that I could not any longer follow either their ethics and dogmatics or their understanding of the Bible and history. For me at least, 19th-century theology no longer held any future"[6]. He even entered into personal crisis, as he could no longer figure out what he was there in the parish to achieve. But one thing was becoming increasingly clear: whatever it was that he was there to achieve, it did not include bringing about the utopian kingdom of God as preached by liberal theology. Sure enough, the Bible had to be read in a completely different way in order to really enter this "new world" of the Bible that is strange enough.

His rebellion against liberalism did not end with theological rebellion alone; he knew that he needed to be active politically in order to bring home his message to a wider audience. This was why he decided to become a social democrat, not only to make his voice more globally heard, but also because he was convinced that in the politics of social democracy (unlike in other parties), God, as the Absolute, is taken with all seriousness. With this, he entered into social democracy as a non-Communist Marxist. But he was soon even to discover that in spite of its God-talk, the ideals of social democracy were "…'alien to reality', 'Utopian', 'fantasy', 'outmoded Marxist dogma' …'agitation talk' – that is the repertoire of their polemic against the left"[7]. His

[6] K. BARTH, *Evangelical Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, in *The Humanity of God*, p. 14.
[7] Karl BARTH, *Die Hilfe* 1913, *Die Christliche Welt*, 28 (15 Aug 1914), p. 776, quoted by B. MCCORMACK, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, p. 109.

theological and political writings established him as a serious force to be reckoned with and subsequently, against the established norms, he was called to the chair of theology without a doctorate degree.

It was during this period of teaching profession that he continued his resistance movement, becoming a theological leader of the churchly resistance to Adolf Hitler. Of course he had to pay the price by being expelled from the teaching profession in Germany; but that did not stop him from leading the Barmen Declaration. His struggle against Hitler was clear: theology belongs to the church and cannot surrender its sovereignty to the state. He felt that theology had already given too much concession to the state to the extent that the state was dictating for the church. Such concessions and compromises had falsely led Christians to become completely satisfied with the world and feel at home in it as if there was no hope for a better world to come. This was the general culture of the Swiss-German world against which Barth was fighting.

One can say therefore that it was the Wilhelminian culture in Germany that was seen as "decadent and banal, the vehicle of propaganda and lies"[8] that drove Barth (just as it did the Expressionists) to look for alternative culture or a counter-culture. Rather than joining the triumphalism that the then culture preached, Barth was giving a "sigh" – the *Veni creator spiritus*, which is a strong and passionate longing for the coming kingdom of God. This was evident from the lecture he gave in 1922 in Schulpforta in which he was invited to introduce his theology to a larger group. He chose the theme, 'The Need and Promise of Christian Proclamation' and talked of the Reformation as an ongoing process:

> "Reformation occurs where reflection occurs. If the longing for reformation approaches you today, perhaps as no more than a bitter care, do not think it is supposed to be something different. Utter the words, '*Veni creator spiritus!*' which is for now, according to Romans 8, more hopeful than triumphant, as if one already had it. Once you have this sigh, you have been introduced to 'my theology'"[9].

Whereas the old order constructed an ideal world full of lies and propaganda, Barth sought to project the kingdom of God that has not yet come, but which will come if we make a confession of *hope* and if

[8] B. MCCORMACK, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, p. 33.
[9] Karl BARTH, *The Need and Promise of Christian Proclamation* in *The Word of God and Theology*, p. 128.

we allow God to be God. He was thus battling with two opposing worlds. In fact, McCormack traces in Barth's pre-war writings the collision of these two worlds: one that was passing away, and the other struggling to be born[10]. But Barth could not have remained in the middle of these worlds; he had to make a choice. It was the decisive choice which he made that not only defined him but, in doing so, made him to say "farewell" to the old order and consequently to become an "outsider"[11]. From this "outsider" position, he could not envisage the possibility of making a final peace with the world as it stood. Such a world governed by sinful humanity cannot just accommodate a person with a strong Christian hope. He noted with great disappointment how, in Germany, "love for the Fatherland, delight in war, and Christian faith are brought together in hopeless confusion", and wondered how on earth the editorial team of the ever-cherished *Die Christliche Welt* had allowed the publication "in this decisive hour" to "cease to be *Christian*, but rather simply place itself on the same level with *this* world"[12]. The Christian must have to say a noble 'farewell' and move on in search of that 'world' where there is a radical separation between God and the world; and where it is God rather than human authorities that reign supreme. A culture where God is enlisted on the side of the Germans in such a sinful situation as war was not acceptable to Barth, especially as he believed that the causes of the war laid in sinful actions and attitudes on both sides. For Barth, war can simply never be justified. If God is to be brought into it at all, it is for the sole reason that the war is seen as God's judgment in order to usher in a special time of grace. This was how Barth decided to charter his own theological course in opposition to the established liberal theological direction.

Such a theological course is what McCormack has been describing as "critically realistic dialectical theology" which is marked progressively by process eschatology, consistent eschatology, Christology and, finally, christocentrism[13]. A culture that regarded God as a mere postulate can afford to manipulate the same God for human conveniences. But Barth refuses to follow such culture; instead, he takes God very seriously as a Reality not only independent

[10] B. MCCORMACK, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, p. 35.
[11] For a very detailed account of how Barth was made as an "outsider", c.f., McCormack's *Prologue: The Making of an Outsider* in *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, p. 29-125.
[12] Cf., Karl Barth to Martin Rade, 13 Aug. 1914, cited by B. McCormack, p. 111.
[13] Cf., McCormack's re-periodization of Barth's theological evolution and development from 1909-1936 in *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*.

of the knowing subject but also prior to all human activities. As such, God and the world have to be critically distinguished; and the relationship between the two has to be that of a fundamental diastasis. Barth thus was attempting to think from the point of view of God, and by so-doing, succeeded in reversing the nineteenth-century theological "turn to the subject". He did not want to turn to the subject; he rather turned to the "theological object". He hoped, by so-doing, to help "rescue" God from the hands of humans who have, so to say, domesticated him and allowed only a very tiny space for him.

Barth met a theology in crisis and had to apply a very critical "solution" as the best option in such a crisis situation. This critical solution entailed that human religiosity had to be violently attacked; as he saw in it a veiled means by which people tried to domesticate God. Even when he tried to make exceptions, it did not becloud his conviction that religion in itself and as such is essentially profane and cannot help humanity. The only thing that human beings needed was not religion but the righteousness of God which, according to him, "is not a question, not a riddle, not a problem", but rather, "a fact – the deepest, innermost, surest fact of our lives"[14]. Unfortunately, human beings have learnt a clever way to turn the righteousness of God into human righteousness by way of morals, state, and especially, religion which he saw as the human attempt to be like God.

From this point on, Barth saw himself "fighting" for God in the latter's "war" with humanity. He was so passionate in this war that he made anybody who did not fight on his side his own personal enemy. Whereas he preached neutrality in the World War I because he believed that both sides were on the wrong, he felt that in this "war" between humans and God, there was no room for neutrality: either you are with us or you are against God. It was not a question of both sides being on the wrong. God, surely, cannot be on the side of wrong. He is always right; his righteousness is a fact. It is rather humanity that is on the side of unrighteousness and must have to surrender. To surrender means, acknowledging the Sovereignty and the Lordship of God. It means letting God be God by allowing him come to us instead of striving fruitlessly to go to him.

This was the basis on which Barth's entire theology is based. And he never really departed from this basis even when he tried to tell us how his mind changed. His mind could have changed (and did really change) on certain details; but the "changed" mind was still

[14] K. BARTH, *The Righteousness of God*, in *The Word of God and Theology*, p. 3.

anchored on this need to fight "God's fight". A balanced assessment of Barth's theology has therefore to take this into serious consideration. He was responding to a theological culture that made light of God's revelation by focusing almost exclusively on the ability of human subject to access God's mysterious being on the strength of human reason and ingenuity alone. He rebelled against that culture by proposing a counter-culture where God must be allowed to be God.

1.2.3. The American Experiment

If there is a single word to describe the American socio-cultural, religious and political life, it is the word "experiment" [15]. Of course, the word was not imposed from "outside"; it was the very word that the American founders used to describe what was emerging out of the status quo. George Washington's First Inaugural Address of 1789 referred to the emerging system as "the experiment entrusted to the hands of the American people"; and in his Farewell Address, he justified the system being embraced as "well worth a fair and full experiment"[16]. This experiment was entered into as a result of a plurality of settlements, interests, and conditions among the confederating units that later came together to form first a Confederation in 1777 and, later, a Union under the constitution of 1787. But even while agreeing to choose common rules under a Union, the peculiarities of each unit were not undermined. On what concerns religion, the Bill of Rights of 1791 stated clearly that no church could be established as the church of the Union; instead, the states were free to establish their own churches. This was already a clear departure from England, Spain and France – the three most prominent colonizers of (or "contributors" of people that displaced the Native Americans) North America. This was not an isolated case, but

[15] This section is not aimed at delving into the rather complex history of the U.S. society especially given that this writer is a complete "outsider" with little knowledge of America. The section will therefore only hope to 'scratch the surface' in outlining the intricate web of events that made the U.S what it is with regards to the innate plurality and pluralism found entrenched in the fabric of its society. It is hoped that this will help to better understand why Tracy would want to go the extent he went in defending pluralism and publicness in theology. Our work in this section has been further simplified by Gaspar Martinez, who has masterfully and concisely weaved together this "American Experiment" as it concerns publicness in theology. Cf. Gaspar MARTINEZ, *Confronting the Mystery of God: Political, Liberation, and Public Theologies*, New York and London, Continuum, 2001, p. 152-215. The following two sub-sections of this chapter are greatly indebted to Martinez; and, to a large extent (although not exclusively), they are a recap of Martinez's essential points especially the ones that are of our particular interest.

[16] Cf. George Washington, "*Fist Inaugural Address*" and "*Farewell Address*" in Daniel J. BOORSTIN (ed.), *An American Primer*, New York, Meridian Classic, 1985, p. 193 and 217 respectively.

was in line with the democratic principles adopted by the "new" state to address the conditions of the settlements and the adaptation to the American environment. The plurality and fragmented nature of the American society were of the sort that governance was left to the will of the people. It was the people and not the monarch for instance, who determined how they were to be governed and who would govern them. A system of a triangular division of power was subsequently invented so that the people will have not just a nominal but a decisive and binding voice in governance.

Because the society sprang from an original plurality of interests, beliefs, and cultural mores, the central feature of the new state was its pluralism. This was a sharp contrast with the core traditional uniformity of the European societies that were usually arranged along ethnic, cultural and religious lines. Martinez, while emphasizing that plurality is a constitutive element of the American political system, of its culture, and of its religious life, however sadly notes that this plurality, while creating a culture of pluralism to a great extent, has equally witnessed two grave failures among others namely, the destruction of the Indians and the enslavement of the black people. He calls these events 'contradictions' because "they constitute the gravest examples of the ambiguities and systemic wrongdoings embedded in the American experiment"[17]. They are indeed contradictions because it is difficult to reconcile the nation's grounding of its quest for freedom and democracy on ethical and religious values with a destruction of one race and the enslavement of another race.

It is true that in the American experiment, the Enlightenment values were not discarded but embraced. But unlike the French revolution that sought to dispense with religion by confining it to the private realm with the hope that it will be degraded and ultimately disappear, the American experiment combined the secular values of the Enlightenment with the religious values of Christianity. Thus they combined modernity with tradition and, by so doing, opened the possibility of maintaining religion even in public realm. Religion became a very strong point of reference to justify policies taken even purely on political grounds. The systemic extermination of the Native Americans was justified on their being labelled as lawless "savages" living in the "wilderness" who had to be Christianized and transformed into true members of the new society that had brought

[17] G. MARTINEZ, *Confronting the Mystery of God*, p. 155.

civilization and progress[18]. The enslavement of the black people (whose condition was even worse than that of the Native Americans) was also justified on the basis of religion. It is not any happenstance that Lerone Bennett Jr., while describing the conditions of the slaves as "hell", pointed out that the deepest part of that hell was witnessed in colonies controlled by the British-Protestant Puritans with deep sense of reformation Christianity[19]. The point we are making is that the American experiment was an incorporation of deep sense of Christianity (no matter how negatively used) and that of the liberalism of the Enlightenment. At no point in time did religion disappear or was treated as unimportant in public sphere, even when economic factor was the greatest element in the discrimination against both the African Americans and the Native Americans.

Religion therefore was a very important feature of the American society right from its establishment. Even though most of its founding fathers like Washington, Madison, Franklin, etc., leaned towards religious views that were influenced by Enlightenment (e.g. deism) and thus, advocated for a sort of civil religion (instead of any historically revealed religion) as a sure guarantee of peace and progress of the society, the American society evolved to embrace these very revealed religions, with multiple religions and denominations competing to have a pride of place in the very heart of the society. In Martinez's words, "U.S. society stands out as a combination of a strongly secular process and a not less strongly religious soul. In that sense, it is a challenge to the secularization thesis. U.S. society is a rare case among developed nations with regard to the religiosity of its citizens"[20]. Long before this assessment from Martinez, many of the so-called advocates of secularization theory (according to which it was thought that confrontation with "modernity" would lead to a steady decline in the social importance of religion) had already made a re-think of their theory especially using the American situation as a case in point. Peter Berger, one of its fiercest representatives in the 1960s had to make a U-turn when he confessed: "the assumption we live in a secularised world is false, the world today, with some exceptions is as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so. This means that a whole body of literature by historians and social scientists is essentially mistaken. In

[18] G. MARTINEZ, *Confronting the Mystery of God*, p. 157.
[19] Cf., G. MARTINEZ, *Confronting the Mystery of God*, p. 161.
[20] G. MARTINEZ, *Confronting the Mystery of God*, p. 168.

my early work I contributed to this literature"[21]. But perhaps, more than any other author yet, José Casanova has attempted to recreate a theory of secularization by forcing us to reconsider what we mean by secularization, and whether we aren't better off thinking in terms of 'multiple modernities' where no single rule holds true for every society. In what has become his 'masterpiece'[22], Casanova critiques and reformulates secularization theory in order to understand and defend the public voice of religion so apparent over the last couple of years. It is in the conclusion of this impressive work that he stated his thesis:

> "It is my contention that the rejection by certain religious traditions of the privatized role to which they were being relegated by secularist modernization theories and by liberal political theories, that the role of the Catholic church in processes of democratization, and that the public interventions of religion in the public sphere of modern civil societies can no longer be viewed simply as antimodern religious critiques of modernity"[23].

While he agrees to the idea of secularization as the separation of church and state, he cautions that while its understanding as a decline in the absolute level of religious belief and observance in a given population might have been true in Western Europe, in most of the world on the contrary, religiosity simply has not declined. Therefore, he rejects the claim that modernity must cause religions to lose vitality and popular appeal. Obviously, the American case refutes this claim. It also refutes the claim of privatization of religion according to which religion cannot occupy any public realm without infringing on the rights and constitution of the society. Religion, according to this view, is best confined to a private and invisible space in the souls of individuals. But, Casanova argues that religions both can and should have a public role in the modern world. In fact, he says that, "there can be and… there are public religions in the modern world which do not need to endanger either modern individual freedoms or modern differentiated structures"[24]. For him, modernization does not entail either privatization or deprivatization, but provides a context in which

[21] Peter BERGER, *The Desecularization of the World: A Global Overview*, in Peter BERGER (ed.), *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1999, p. 2.
[22] José CASANOVA, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1994.
[23] J. CASANOVA, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, p. 221.
[24] J. CASANOVA, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, p. 215.

religious institutions can find their own public roles. What makes Casanova's book a compelling reading is that he went beyond the American situation to establish that even in other parts of the world (including Spain, Poland, Brazil and, of course, the U.S.) there are stories of the transformative role of religion in the modern world where a religion becomes both modern and public. Modernity therefore, does not necessarily imply the privatization of religions.

However, in as much as the American case challenges the secularization theory, it is pertinent to note that a correct understanding of the public role of religion and theology in the American society must pay special attention to the significance of "civil religion". The term is so-used as a description that the nation is 'under God'; but at the same time, in the nation itself is found sources of quasi-transcendent values. Civil religion can therefore be described as an admixture of God and nation, and must work hand-in-hand in order to be acceptable to the American society; in order (to use the current familiar expression that has found favour with most liberal-minded people) to be "politically correct". On the one hand, there is the biblical tradition embraced by various Christian denominations, and on the other hand, there is the deistic faith of the Founding Fathers of America. Martinez quoted Sidney E. Mead as having said that, "the United States, in effect, had two religions, or at least two different forms of the same religion, and that the prevailing Protestant ideology represented a syncretistic mingling of the two. The first was the religion of the denominations… The second was the religion of the democratic society and nation"[25]. This picture perfectly fits into the over-all image of the American experiment in which civil religion becomes particularly "made in America", where religion, philosophy and Enlightenment culture mix together to play a public role in the society. But a greater "made in America" is not even the question of the role religion plays in public realm but a more fundamental question of the very existence of the so-called 'public realm' in a society that has been taken over by technical rationality. In such a society where reason has become purely instrumental, the moral-practical reasoning has all but disappeared and public domain has been reduced to a simply technical domain. It becomes therefore the work of academics to recover that public domain and propagate their individual disciplines in a publicly-defended manner. Here lies the root and anchoring of Tracy's public theology.

[25] G. MARTINEZ, *Confronting the Mystery of God*, p. 169.

1.2.4. Tracy's Revisionist Public Theology as a Continuation of the American Experiment

In his review of Tracy's first major book *Blessed Rage for Order* Avery Dulles described it as "an American book" not simply because it was written in America by an American but because, "the author's concerns and outlooks are characteristically American"[26]. On his part, Peter Berger described it as "authentically American in its cultural sensibilities"[27]. Therefore, Tracy's search for public theology and how such a theology can make claims that are shareable by people outside the confines of the church can be said to be a continuation of the American experiment. As an experiment, it is focused more on the methodological procedure in doing theology than in any concrete theology as such. Although 'public theology' is not a unified and streamlined project with central direction (various positions have been identified), Martinez recognized the position held by Tracy as having more positive, although not uncritical, appraisal of the Enlightenment, and clearly favours the engagement of theology in public realm. He noted that, "a central tenet of those favouring this position is the acknowledgement of the importance of particular traditions, while at the same time affirming the possibility of making public claims from tradition, based on publicly shareable arguments and dialogue"[28]. Particularly interesting in Tracy's version of public theology is that he wrote from his Catholic background whose history in the United States has been viewed as having been characterized by attempt both to keep its Catholic identity and to be loyal to the American experiment[29].

Describing such attempt as "Catholic experiment" Martinez noted four major difficulties that made life of the Catholic Church in the United States an experiment. The first was the Protestant character of the nation. While not being a minority, the Catholic Church was faced with difficulty of practicing their faith in a nation with a Protestant character. Therefore, "how to be both a Catholic and a member of a nation with a character forged by those who were fierce enemies back in Europe was a challenge to Catholicism that compelled the Catholic Church to experiment beyond the obvious boundaries of its doctrinal strictures" (p. 172). The second difficulty

[26] A. DULLES, *Method in Fundamental Theology*, p. 304.
[27] P. BERGER, *Secular Theology and the Rejection of the Supernatural*, p. 40.
[28] G. MARTINEZ, *Confronting the Mystery of God*, p. 171.
[29] Cf., David J. O'BRIEN, *Public Catholicism*, New York, Macmillan, 1989, p. 4.

has to do with how to combine the spiritual allegiance to Rome with the civil allegiance to the democratic principles of the American experiment. Being viewed as "papists" and having been rightly or wrongly perceived as people whose loyalty will definitely disregard their Americanness and tilt toward Rome in the eventuality of any conflict between the two, Catholics have had to live their lives trying to justify their Americanness as Catholics especially when it comes to the issue of Catholics seeking elected public offices. The third difficulty has to do with the tension between the democratic character of the American experiment and the hierarchical character of the Catholic Church. A culture that views hierarchical character as a sign of authoritarianism had to equate Catholicism with exactly that; and more so, as dogmatic and antidemocratic, unwilling to accept the publicness and pluralism that characterize the country. The fourth was the tension between the principle of religious freedom enshrined in the American Constitution on the one hand, and the traditional Catholic conviction up till Vatican II that there is no legitimate religious option but Catholicism[30]. Martinez's point here is that it took very long and painstaking experiments before the Catholic Church was perceived as a progressive body in social matters, despite its doctrinal conservatism. The focus of Catholic theologians was therefore to develop theologies that are both religiously relevant with the Catholic tradition and unambiguously American.

It was in keeping with this Catholic experiment that Tracy began his push for a revisionist public theology – a theology that is dialogical and rooted in Catholic tradition, but at the same time, relates to the wider society. Martinez calls Tracy's contribution "original" because he sees in it a beautiful weaving together of the response to the challenges of modernity as well as a retrieval of the best premodern theology. He sees Tracy as seeking to come up with a theological formulation of Christianity that, while being faithful to scripture and tradition, could at the same time make sense to the contemporary mind, as well as claim validity in the public realm[31]. This indeed was the root of Tracy's method of critical correlation. The Catholic experiment within the broader American experiment was the underlying factor that led Tracy to conceive and attempt to develop an inner coherent theology with a capability of embracing the three basic theological sub-disciplines of fundamental, systematic and practical

[30] Cf., G. MARTINEZ, *Confronting the Mystery of God*, p. 172-173.
[31] Cf., G. MARTINEZ, *Confronting the Mystery of God*, p. 176.

theologies respectively. Such "original" enterprise had to equally embrace the interpretative methods and modes of thought of other human disciplines such as science, philosophy and art in order to make sense especially in the American public arena. This is why hermeneutics plays a very critical role in Tracy's theology.

But like it is with every experiment, Tracy's experiment with modernity and its mode of thought had a limit. Very soon he discovered that we have passed the age of modernity and entered into an age that cannot name itself. He uses the word "postmodern" not as a name but as a better understanding of this age that cannot name itself. Modernity's shortcoming was its lack of interest in tradition; and Tracy sees modern theologies and philosophies of religion as equally guilty of this lack of interest: "Modernity's pervasive lack of interest in traditional forms for naming God and thinking God has become an unacknowledged part of the present malaise of modern theologies and philosophies of religion"[32]. He chided modernity's excessive reliance on "decontextualization and denaturalization" of all discourse in naming God as the only form that can pass modern rationality. He argues that such set of abstract propositions arrived at through rational arguments are only sets of "ism" (deism, theism, pantheism, atheism, agnosticism, etc.) that are not very disclosive of the reality of God. He believes that to overcome the shortcomings of modernity, the present moment needed a form of naming, not just God but the whole of reality, which is sufficiently disclosive of reality. His preference for panentheism as a form of naming God stems from his conviction that this form of naming retrieves the traditional symbolic modes of naming God and reality that has disclosive and liberating power.

In summary, we have seen that, unlike Barth, Tracy needed "experiment" to be heard and be taken serious. Coming from an American culture built on experimentation, and from a Catholic denomination needing experimentation in order to establish itself as truly Catholic and truly American, Tracy's theology couldn't have appeared to anyone familiar with his cultural background as a surprise. A theology could not have been variously described as "characteristically American" and "authentically American in its cultural sensibilities" respectively if it did not take the American experiment and the Catholic experiment into serious consideration.

[32] David TRACY, *Literary Theory and Return of the Forms of Naming and Thinking God in Theology*, in *Journal of Religion* 74, 3 (1994), p. 302-319.p. 305.

The American experiment by default is pluralistic, democratic, public, secular as well as religious. For a catholic theology to experiment within this default American experiment entails moving beyond the boundaries of its doctrinal strictures. When Tracy therefore began his revisionist theology by postulating that the loyalty of the theologian is not to the church but to the committee of scientific inquiry, he was only being true to the Catholic experiment which was necessary for him to do in order to be accepted into the mainstream American academic circle. But it was not enough for him to have made the claim; he needed to make it a publicly defended theory for him to complete his integration into the larger stream of the American society.

1.3. Divergence in *terminus a quo*: The Question of Method

From the very day he rebelled against liberal theology, Barth had resisted change in theological method almost with the drop of his blood. Such resistance was openly voiced out in the 1922 lecture he gave in Elgersburg on October 3 and repeated same in Emden on October 11 titled, *The Word of God as the Task of Theology*[33], where he compared the purported change in theological method as amounting to nothing more than just a turning of the sick man in his bed from one side to the other for a little diversion. Because he convinced himself that speaking about God is the only existential need of the people on whose basis the existence of theologians is to be understood, he thinks that the theologian is primarily a preacher of the word of God, even when that theologian is found in the university. Therefore, the "centre" of theology and its starting point should be the freedom of God acting in love toward humanity in Jesus Christ. However, the peculiarity of Barthian Christocentrism is his insistence that knowledge of this Jesus Christ is got only through a "God-awakened faith" and not through any "scientific" historical-critical method of study. Therefore, theology has to begin from explicit faith-commitment of the theologian.

This faith-commitment entails allowing the revelation of God to determine all theological discourse. In other words, for Barth, the object of theology is determinative of the method and not the other

[33] K. BARTH, *The Word of God as the Task of Theology* in *The Word of God and Theology*, p. 171-198.

way round. Theology, in fact, is the confrontation of the church's proclamation with the Word of God. Hence, to a very large extent, he limited theology to a commentary on revelation. And when he talks of dogmatics being "christologically determined", he is not talking of having mere Christocentric character; he is talking about Christology being the starting-point or being presupposed from the onset, and not just a system where, without initial presupposition, Christology is subsequently brought in as an appendage. He berated what he perceived as "arbitrariness" with which theologians attempt to "go past or to go beyond Jesus Christ" in their efforts to conceive or define God. For him, Jesus Christ is the beginning and the end of theology:

> "Theology must begin with Jesus Christ, and not with general principles, however better, or, at any rate, more relevant and illuminating, they may appear to be: as though He were a continuation of the knowledge and Word of God, and not its root and origin, not indeed the very Word of God itself. Theology must also end with Him, and not with supposedly self-evident general conclusions from what is particularly enclosed and disclosed in Him: as though the fruits can be shaken from this tree; as though in the things of God there were anything general which could know and designate in addition to and even independently of this particular"[34].

However, contemporary theology has developed beyond mere commentary on revelation. Human experience has staked its claim as an indispensable source of theology. Barth did not anticipate the "many new truths" that have emerged decades after his death, and which are not only different from his measure of theological truths but seemingly incompatible with them. Although the "truths" of panentheistic concept of God has not had a popular acceptance, its claim to "conceptual clarity" in the face of the emerging shift in cosmological discovery is not in doubt. And while one may have some reservations concerning some of its theistic proposals, one might still use certain insights from them to sustain other theological concerns[35].

[34] K. BARTH, CD II/2, §32, p. 4.

[35] I have used insights from process theology to argue that any proposition for re-imaging God as "disabled" can only be sustained using the panentheistic logical inclusion of all in God. Before this re-imaging of God as "disabled" can make any theological sense however, we have to re-think the normal connotation of the word "fragile". Firstly, there has to be a frangible understanding of fragility devoid of any connotation of inferiority or weakness, or lack, or disadvantaged. Secondly, disability has to be approached as a "limit-condition" that challenges our normal perception of "ability" and "disability" modes respectively. It is as a limit-condition that I suggested that perhaps if it were possible to go back in time and analyse the thinking faculty of the ancient ancestors of humans (like the *Sahelanthropus*, the *Homo habilis*, the *Homo erectus*, and even the ancient *Homo sapiens*) by making them to imagine the current human

Theology, in effect, has evolved (and even to a certain extent, mutated) since Barth, not only in the face of the growing consciousness of pluralism but also in the current emphasis on transversality in the various fields of learning.

Therefore, theology cannot afford to ignore these realities of the twenty-first century mode of learning. Current theological scholars are gradually shifting away from Anselm's manner of theology which Barth described as "a vital key" that guided his own theology, and which he sees as the only one proper to theology. John McCarthy, while describing theology as "the thinking that thinks god", defined it not in the Anselmian dictum of *fides quaerens intellectum* (faith seeking understanding), but rather in a new formula of *intellectus quaerens deum* (thinking seeking god)[36]. With this reversal of Anselm, the real object of theology for McCarthy becomes "human thinking" – something that goes against Barth's theological method. Barth's method sought to think from the standpoint of God. But McCarthy, as well as many contemporary thinkers, seek to focus on human thought and try to analyse how this thought thinks god. The emphasis of this type of method is placed not on knowing but on thinking. Barth's method is more inclined to the knowledge of God, which he insists is only possible through the self-revelation of God. Although McCarthy concedes that "this form of thinking, and thus theology itself, may or may not coincide with our traditional or current theological discipline", he nonetheless maintains that "this is a question for theology for our times". McCarthy's point here is that contemporary scholarship has developed different modes of thought and different manners of doing theology.

anatomy and physical appearance vis-à-vis theirs, they would have labelled us as "disabled". It was on this theoretical presupposition that I argued thus: "If the cosmos is in constant dynamic process of becoming, and if that process includes 'ability' and 'disability' modes of becoming that have characterized human (as well as the entire cosmological) evolutionary journey, and if all is in God in the panentheistic fashion of logical inclusion, then it implies that a 'disability' mode is a possibility in God". I concluded by wondering rhetorically the theological use of the idea of deconstructing the "abled" image of God and reconstructing it with a "disabled" one if "disability" is still understood as fragility with all the negative qualifiers that go with it. Cf., Osmond ANIKE, *Understanding Fragility as Frangibility: A Systematic Theological Approach to Disability in the Context of New Pluralism in Theology*, in Hans AUSLOOS, Henri DERROITTE, and Dominique JACQUEMIN (eds.), *Fragilités, handicaps, capacitation et théologie: De l'importance de penser ces questions en théologie*, (Études de théologie et d'éthique vol.8), Zürich and Münster, LIT Verlang, 2015, p. 115-132.

[36] John MCCARTHY, *Theological Understanding and Thinking God*, (yet to be published paper presented at the International Conference on "*The Genesis of Concepts and the Confrontation of Rationalities*" held at the *Université catholique de Louvain*, Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium, 7th-9th October 2015.

Barth, for instance, insisted on the priority of the being of God over theological language by arguing that the problem of theological language cannot be discussed prior to the question of the being of God; thus insisting that theology presupposes some existence of faith before it could proceed to seek knowledge. But this is exactly what contemporary theologians like McCarthy contest. Whereas Barth sees theology as necessitated by faith, current movement in theology rather sees it as necessitated by thought. In order to better situate theology in contemporary discussion of various rationalities, they don't equate thinking with knowing so that, as McCarthy says, the question of the relationship between theological rationality and the rationalities of contemporary sciences and philosophies is not reducible to epistemological issues.

Barth's theological method is guided by his conception of theology as "a science of faith". Contemporary theology on the other hand is prone to understanding theology no longer as a science of faith but rather as "the science of God" or as "the science of Christianity"[37]. This current understanding seeks to place theology in the public discussion among various rationalities using the language that is intelligible to contemporary thinkers. Unlike Barth, it doesn't offend the sensibility of the current understanding of theology to question the faith. In fact, its stock-in-trade is exactly to question the faith using various critical criteria of questioning.

David Tracy represents a thinker that speaks the contemporary language. It is therefore not surprising that the starting-point of his theology diverged from that of Barth and necessitated a different theological method. If Barth emphasized the need to start with "God-awakened faith", it was because he was principally engaged with the explication of Christian faith to believers. But Tracy was not primarily concerned with Barth's primary concern. His own primary concern was on making theology intelligible especially to non-theologians and non-believers in the academy. He therefore had to adopt the method of revisionist-correlation as a more "rational" procedural approach so that theology can develop public character, the lack of which he sees as more of a bane than a boom for theology. But this correlation presupposes another "source" for theology aside God's revelation. Unlike Barth who started with one source – revelation, Tracy started with two sources – Christian facts and common human experience. He

[37] Cf., for instance Wolfhart PANNENBERG, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*, trans. Francis McDonagh, Philadelphia, Westminster, 1976.

thinks that when these two sources are critically correlated, theology shall have indeed become "postmodern", benefiting both modernity and Christianity alike.

Tracy's method starts with the acknowledgment of pluralism as an existential reality in theology. This pluralism requires different ways of viewing our common humanity and Christianity alike which theologians have to develop and defend. His catholic experiment within the broader American experiment led him to toy with the idea of a common secular faith that would incorporate Christianity and secularity and probably make them two sides of the same coin. He felt that it was such experiment that would guarantee the continued existence and relevance of Christianity in his American secular society. Karl Barth, who was not concerned with pluralism, and therefore not interested in such secular faith, would have found Tracy's proposal ridiculous. Barth's theologian has one and only one commitment – to the God of Jesus Christ through the Church. Tracy's theologian, on the other hand, has dual commitment – one to the God of Jesus Christ, and the other, to the modern experiment. The theologian's commitment to the modern experiment makes any serious commitment to one's faith community inconsequential or outrightly irrelevant. But since there is commitment to the God of Jesus Christ, the concept of this God has to be revised so that it can fit into the modern experiment. If he settled for the panentheistic concept of God, it was all part of his process of fashioning the secular faith that would be intellectually coherent especially to his secular colleagues in the university.

However, Barth's 'wholly other' concept of God is at variance with this panentheism. With the project of letting God be God, Barth didn't need any adequacy to human experience as a criteria for the concept of God that he was advocating for. In fact, his quarrel with Schleiermacher was that the latter equated religion (and therefore God) with human feelings. Tracy would have found more favour with Schleiermacher than Barth did. Moreover, where Tracy talks of "critical correlation" between the sources of theology, Barth thinks of "critical distinction" between God and the world.

Tracy's approach to contemporary Christology also differs from that of Barth. Tracy takes as the centre of Christianity, not a timeless truth, nor a principle, nor even a cause, but rather an event and a person of Jesus of Nazareth to which Christians continue to respond in

different cultural situations[38]. Although Barth's theology also conceives truth always as an event, the rational apprehension of that truth is what he had always contested. But Tracy believes in the enormous power of reason when responding to this truth in different cultural situations. It is on this belief that he aligned with Karl Rahner that Chalcedon is a beginning, not an end[39]. His insistence on the critical correlation of the interpretation of the event of Jesus Christ with the interpretation of the situation in a revisionist manner entails that for him, Chalcedon should not be taken as the 'be-all and end-all' of Christology.

Barth scholars, on the other hand, seem to be hell bent on defending the Chalcedonian character of Barth's Christology as a "proof" that Barth was as "authentic" as possible[40]. Tracy's Christology however, is not willing to be limited to Chalcedon. While he still holds Chalcedon as one of the originating Christologies which is still relevant, his insistence that every theology lives in its own situation means that in our pluralistic age, the interpretation of this same Christ event will be "different" from that of the ages past. One can therefore say that, in Tracy's reading, what gives authenticity to Christology is not necessarily its adherence to Chalcedon but rather its faithfulness to the original apostolic witnesses reconstructed historically, and its adequacy to the contemporary human experience. He believes that the contemporary Christian theologian should not only respond to the Christ event but also to the situation.

The high point of Tracy's systematic theological method is his proposal for the use of the analogical imagination in this search for relative adequacy. While proposing the languages of analogy and dialectics as the two major conceptual languages for theological task of searching for relative adequacy, he however insists that, to truly achieve criteria of relative adequacy in theology, analogy and dialectics must come together in any systematic theology seeking such criteria. Where dialectics places emphasis on the necessity of radical

[38] D. TRACY, AI, p. 317.
[39] Cf., K. RAHNER, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, p. 285-305.
[40] I have analysed how, in the Anglo-Saxon world, two "schools" emerged in an attempt to re-discover Karl Barth's Christology: one position, held by Charles Waldrop, characterized Barth's Christology as Alexandrian, while the other position, defended by George Hunsinger, insisted on its Chalcedonian character. In the end, my study showed that most Anglo-Saxon scholars are agreed that Barth was basically Chalcedonian in his Christology especially when Barth is read not from the position of *Der Römerbrief* but from those of *Church Dogmatics* and the retractions he made in *The Humanity of God*. Cf., O. ANIKE, *Karl Barth's Christology: The Contributions of the Anglo-Saxon Scholars Toward its Re-discovery*.

theological negations to constitute all Christian theological language, analogy emphasizes an ordered relationship articulating similarity-in-difference. By "ordered relationship", Tracy means to argue that in the theological use of analogies, the dissimilarities between God and the world are as great as the similarities. In faithfulness to his process leaning, he did not want to maintain radical separation between God and the world. Although he does not explicitly identify God with the world, he feels that the "otherness" of God can only be comprehensible through analogy to our own human experience.

While the "otherness" of God might be understood through analogy to human experience; and while in every dialectical 'no' of Barth, there is somewhere lurking a 'yes'; given his opposition of God and the world on the one hand, and revelation and religion on the other hand, there was no way Barth would have subscribed to the idea, as Tracy did, that the ordered relationship of analogical imagination is such that makes every Christian systematic theology to be also anthropology and vice versa, such that the Christian doctrines of God and the human rise and fall together. It is true that Barth sees theology as concerned with God as the God of man and with man as God's man[41], such irretrievable linkage of the doctrines of God and man is what he would call "anthropotheology"; whereas what he is describing as 'evangelical theology' is what he qualifies as more of "Theo-anthropology"[42] than the former. Barth's primary theological concern does not permit the linking of the destiny of God and human beings together even when he discards the idea of the "wholly other" concept of God.

1.4. Convergence in *terminus ad quem*: The Question of Universal Truth Claim

It is true that Barth and Tracy diverged in their *terminus a quo*, preferring to use very different theological approaches; but it is significant to note that they tend to converge in their *terminus ad quem* namely, the universal truth claim of theology. The Enlightenment critiques of human knowledge put Christian assumptions into serious jeopardy. Descartes counsels that every other thing should be doubted except ideas that are clear and distinct. For Hume, knowledge should be restricted to sense impressions of the

[41] K. BARTH, *Evangelical Theology*, p. 11-12.
[42] K. BARTH, *Evangelical Theology*, p. 12.

material world. Kant, who was largely influenced by Hume, continued in the latter's direction by positing that there is no thing in itself that was not a creation of the knowing subject. These philosophical postulations greatly affected Christian theology that was built on metaphysical speculations. If indeed human knowledge is incapable of attaining such metaphysical height but is limited only to the physical, how can one talk of knowledge of God in the Christian parlance? Liberal theology offered a way out by entering into a compromise with the Enlightenment. Under the negotiated compromise, theology should cease from focusing on the universal truth claims of its doctrines and instead focus on the private faith of individuals. If at all theology is to speak in the public, it is restricted to speaking about the moral good of the society.

The early Barth bought into this compromise and was seriously engaged in the defence of theological liberalism when the going was still good, and when he was still under the "spell" of his teachers, Harnack and Herrmann. When the spell finally fell off, Barth realised how misleading liberal theology had been. He noticed that instead of speaking about God, such theology was using the name of God in vain. It was using God's name to justify positions that were held on purely secular grounds. It was only from then, and starting from *Der Römerbrief*, that Barth decided that enough was enough as far as that brand of theology was concerned. He became increasingly convinced that the "truth" of Christianity cannot be established purely on the basis of its correspondence to the so-called religious needs of human beings. He felt that religion itself had been so bastardized that any recourse to it in order to establish the truth of Christian proclamation was bound to lead to faithlessness or unbelief. The Revelation of God has therefore to sublimate (or abolish) religion, seen as the human attempt to domesticate God. He insisted that if it was the knowledge of God that we sought, such knowledge can only come from God himself and not through any moral reason or human feeling of absolute dependence, or through any other human religiosity as were erroneously propagated by Protestant Liberalism. God is not an object of human experience. Therefore, any knowledge of him must be provided by him, and by him alone. In this way he tacitly agreed with the Enlightenment that human minds lacked the speculative power capable of reaching the heights of God. But unlike the Enlightenment, he squarely gave God the power to so directly act in human beings that they were capable of achieving just that "impossibility". This God-given knowledge is manifested in the incarnation of Jesus Christ

who became present to human beings not as an abstract *deus otiosus* but as God made flesh.

From this point on, Barth's life project became an attempt to interpret everything in the light of the biblical story of salvation. It is either everything is seen in the light of this salvation story (which he calls the centre, as against the periphery) or forever remains obscure. The life of Jesus Christ becomes for him a universal truth for all reality. The place of human reason in the knowability and communicability or otherwise of this truth is a different thing altogether. But it was never in doubt that for Barth the Christian message represents universal truth claim.

Since Barth, various theologies have emerged purporting to be offshoots of Barthianism. Prominent among these "neo-Barthianism" is the self-styled "postliberal" theology whose programmatic statement was martialled out by George Lindbeck. His *The Nature of Doctrine* came more or less as a reaction against David Tracy's public theology. He felt uncomfortable with Tracy's push for publicness in theology and the need for a shared concept of reason. In his reaction against the perceived "wrong" approaches of dominant theological methods, he positioned his "cultural-linguistic" approach as the best alternative. The high-point of this alternative, which we have earlier examined in the previous chapter, is that he claims that the church doctrines are used not as expressive symbols or as truth claims but rather as rules guiding the community internally. The doctrines, for him, function like the rules of grammar. He therefore did not see any need to emphasize the ontological claims of doctrine but rather restricted himself with their functional claims only. He claims to have done away with foundationalism as an approach to theology through this cultural-linguistic approach to doctrines. He believes that in deemphasizing the ontological claim of doctrines he has saved Christian faith the trouble of trying to translate itself into languages that are intelligible to the contemporary critical thinking and redirected theologians to the task of explaining the Christian religious language to people inside the faith or those willing to be initiated into the faith. Like Barth, he believes strongly that theology should principally serve the church. Therefore, a method of biblical interpretation that serves this principal function of theology is 'intratextual' as against 'extratextual' method. The world should be made to fit into the scriptural framework and not the scripture being coerced to fit into the world. For Lindbeck, there is nothing to correlate between the scripture and the common human experience. He fell short of replicating the Barthian dictum "let God be God, and

the world, world". But his 'intratextuality' is exactly another way of saying that the Christian tradition should not be interpreted in any critically correlational manner with the contemporary situation. He sees the two as mutually exclusive. Lindbeck's mentor and friend in the postliberal way, Hans Frei, was even more direct in creating such dichotomy when he wrote: "The Christ-event is not a symbol for present self-understanding; it is, rather, the life of Jesus of Nazareth"[43].

However, a careful study of the so-called 'postliberal' theology reveals that it might have used the name of Barth unproductively. One thing that Barth was passionate about was his insistence on the universal truth claim of Christian doctrines. But Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic model is neither interested in that truth claim nor even in the meaning of doctrine itself. It is only interested in the function of doctrines. There is therefore something fundamentally different between Lindbeck and Barth. Werner Jeanrond puts it this way:

> "For Barth there could be no doubt that the Christian message represents an eminent truth claim. Yet Lindbeck and Frei are no longer interested in a discussion of the universal truth claim of the Christian faith, but only in the discussion of the function of Christian doctrines within the Christian community itself"[44].

He added that in this regard, Tracy has certainly more in common with Barth than the former two. Let us then briefly outline this commonness in Tracy's *terminus ad quem*.

Tracy's theological method is not all about critical hermeneutics; he demands that any theological proposition must have some degree of intelligibility and credibility by not only being adequate to common human experience but equally appropriate to the Christian texts. This insistence on the criteria of adequacy to experience and the criteria of appropriateness to the Christian facts as prerequisites for credibility is to guarantee the truth claim of any theological proposition. When he defined the enterprise of fundamental theology as philosophical reflection upon the meanings present in our common human experience and the meanings present in the Christian facts, he means to say that, on both philosophical and scriptural ground, any theological proposition must establish its truth claim. The 'criteria of adequacy to experience' seeks to establish the

[43] Hans W. FREI, *Types of Christian Theology*, (edited by George HUNSINGER and William PLACHER), New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1992, p. 67.
[44] W. JEANROND, *The Problem of the Starting-Point of Theological Thinking*, p. 81.

truthfulness of the philosophical reflection involved in the theological enterprise. This truthfulness must be guided by three sets of criteria namely, meaningfulness, meaning, and truth. On the other hand, the 'criteria of appropriateness' seeks to establish the truthfulness of a theological work by seeking to show how the theologian's present categories are appropriate understandings of the Christian understanding of existence. Tracy believes that it is this criterion of appropriateness that distinguishes Christian theology from philosophy. He believes that, unlike the philosopher who is not bound to determine this appropriateness, it is the duty of the theologian to do exactly that. But to do that, he recommends that the method of interpreting the Christian text must be adequate enough.

Whether or not the interpretative works of Paul Ricoeur and Hans-Georg Gadamer on which Tracy built his own interpretation are adequate enough to assuage the thirst of purely confessional theology is immaterial here. What is important for us is that for Tracy, truth claim is of paramount importance in any theological work. And in order for one to really read the scripture "theologically", one has to determine the appropriateness of what one is proposing: "… 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"[45]. Tracy is proposing, in other words, that theology should participate in the general methodological approach that renders every scientific discipline intelligible since it is this methodological approach that establishes the truth claim of these disciplines.

While the postliberals would want us to focus exclusively on the literal sense of the Bible, Tracy prefers to read the Bible while focusing on the history of the Christian tradition. This history takes into consideration the range of disclosures in the forms of literary, written and oral, verbal and non-verbal responses to the event of the New Testament. Because he is convinced that "no classic religious expression… speaks from or to a situational vacuum", he insists that "any Christology in any period must find some way of bringing to expression the event-gift-act-happening character of the event of Jesus

[45] David TRACY, *On Reading the Scriptures Theologically*, in B. MARSHALL (ed.), *Theology and Dialogue: Essays in Conversation with George Lindbeck*, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1990, p.35-68, p. 36.

Christ in a manner appropriate to both the present community's experience of the event and the content and structure of the New Testament witnesses"[46]. One's present response is meant to challenge and refine but not to replace the original New Testament responses. This "non-replacement" is what Tracy means by criteria of appropriateness. His method borrows non-Biblical categories not as a replacement but as a refinement of the original Biblical responses.

Although the postliberals might have continued Barth's emphasis on theological method being intra as against extra-textual, their unwillingness to pursue the truth claim of Christian doctrines makes them far away from Barth. And although Tracy's theological method differs from that of Barth, his insistence on the truth claim of any theological proposition brings him closer to Barth albeit in a different way. Both Barth and Tracy have their own forms of "verification" by way of correcting the present response to the event of the New Testament to ensure its truthfulness. When a theology focuses not on the truthfulness but rather on the function of the present response within a community, such theology is neglecting something very vital. If the Christian doctrines are not established as true but are taken only as functionally regulative within the community, then that universal truth claim of Christianity is compromised.

2. KARL BARTH'S AND DAVID TRACY'S DIFFERENT RESPONSES TO PLURALISM

Both Karl Barth and David Tracy were confronted with pluralism; but they responded to it differently. One followed the route of retrieval while the other followed the route of revision. It is true that every attempt at "retrieval" in theology involves some "revision" and in every revision there are elements of retrieval. However, the differences between Barth's and Tracy's respective versions of retrieval and revision sometimes tended to emphasize one sub-discipline of theology at the expense of the other. It was this tendency that saw Barth relying almost exclusively on dogmatic theology in his effort to safeguard the confessions of the church, and neglected the importance of fundamental theology in every theological discourse. Tracy, on the other hand, so emphasized the indispensability of fundamental theology in his revisionist project of making theology a public discourse and academically acceptable that he almost reduced

[46] D. TRACY, AI, p. 305.

the entire theology to fundamental theology, and made light of the faith-commitment. In the end, there appears to be an irreconcilable difference between systematic theology done with a view to preserving the church's confession and the one done as a purely academic exercise.

2.1. Barth's Theology of Retrieval as Confessional Theology

Because of the historical circumstances surrounding his period of evolution, and the ease with which his colleagues were ready to sacrifice the traditional confessions of the church at the altar of making peace with the ruling class and with the world, Barth took a very drastic step to call attention back to the church's confession. Even as a university professor, he still saw himself as a mouthpiece of the church. Therefore, he strongly emphasized the primacy of the word of God in theological discourse. This word of God has to strictly be the "pure" word of God as found in the Scriptures. He was conversant with plurality of reading and interpreting the Scripture through historical-critical and other scientific methods. But he wanted to redirect attention to the "real history" through God-awakened faith. The Bible does not contain the history of "man" but the history of God; and it is only faith in this God through his self-revelation that can reveal that history.

This faith is mediated through the church. The church therefore is the place for theology. In other words, theology is a function of the church. It is the *Credo* of the church, as he says, that makes the science of theology possible. If this is the case, his logic becomes that any purported "science of faith" that either denies or even questions that faith is neither faithful nor scientific. Unlike Tracy who made light of the community of faith and its present tradition in favour of the scientific community, Barth insists that attitude of trust to the tradition of this faith-community must be the initial goal of theology:

> "Theology would be an utter failure if it should place itself in some elegant eminence where it would be concerned only with God, the world, man, and some other items, perhaps those of historical interest, instead of being theology for the *community*. … Consequently fundamental trust instead of mistrust will be the initial attitude of theology toward the tradition which determines the present-day Church"[47].

[47] K. BARTH, *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction*, pp. 42 § 43.

For Barth, therefore, "scientificity" in theology cannot mean (as Tracy insists) challenging every important cognitive claim of the Christian tradition with the goal of making them intelligible to the community of scientific inquiry; it means only one thing – faithfulness to the objective *Credo* of the church. Although as a scientific subject, theology has to move beyond mere repetition of catechism to serious objective criticism; but Barth insists that it acquires its scientific status through self-criticism and constant revision of God-talk. However, this must be done within the limit of intra-ecclesial criteria, and not through any "alien" standard. In this sense therefore, Barth's theology of retrieval leaned heavily on dogmatic theology.

It is important to note that during the time of Barth, fundamental theology as an independent branch of theology had not yet fully developed the way it has today. Apologetics (or fundamental theology as it was later called) was still regarded as an intrinsic part of the theoretical truths of faith regarding God and his works (*dogmata fidei*); and distinguished from the *dogmata morum* – the practical truths of morality, or the moral theology. But even at that, Barth still saw moral theology or ethics as the doctrine of the command of God, and as therefore an integral part of dogmatics[48]. In other words, Barth operated with much of the original notion of dogmatic theology as multi-encompassing. Within this global concept, he saw dogmatics as part of the confessions of the church. Even his exegesis was approached from the point of view of the church's confession and not from any "scientific" study such as done in the historical-critical method.

It was from this perspective that he viewed the entire theology as a function of the church. From this standpoint, he responded to various pluralities by insisting that, as a function of the church, theology has no right to see itself as an independent subject as other sciences do. It has to know that its intrinsic link to the church forbids it to do anything that puts the church's *Credo* in jeopardy. He therefore chose, as characteristics of his theology, the primacy of the word of God, the church as the place for theological discourse, the social, economic and political context of the society, the public witness to Jesus Christ and ethics. He cared less about the question of theological rationality and its relationship to the contemporary rationality – questions that fundamental theologians occupy themselves with today.

[48] Cf., CD, I/I, p. xvi.

Barth's confessionalism started with his taking the socio-economic context of his day seriously. Freshly graduated as a liberal theologian, he came to realize how inefficient that theology was to the rural, industrial people of his parish. Liberal theology spoke of abstract, utopian and juicy kingdom that contrasted and even contradicted what his parishioners were actually experiencing and living out. The inability of liberal theology to either address their concrete need or to give them that Christian hope that the gospel proclaims, was one of the reasons that made Barth to rethink about the so-called academic theology. And when he experienced final disappointment regarding the conducts of his liberal teachers in 1914, he not only decided to break away from their dogmatics but also from their ethics as well as their understanding of the Bible and history. His later call to the chair of theology in Göttingen with a specific mandate to secure the confessional renewal of the Reformed movement helped him to consolidate his theology as a confessional one. Here he was influenced notably by Calvin's exegetical works.

Even in the university, he wanted to charter a new direction for theology. Theology has to have its own manner of reasoning and its own manner of approach. Although he acknowledged the strengths of the 19th century theology, he also pointed out its numerous weaknesses, among which was that it made confrontation with the contemporary world its *decisive* and *primary* concern[49]. He was alarmed that there was scarcely a theologian who did not also consider himself a professional philosopher, and sought to validate the potential for religion and the Christian faith on purely philosophical ground. However, he insisted that people are not ready to take such lessons from theologians; and asked two vital questions: "Could the Christian message and the Christian faith be a subject for debate while the validity of a general world view was presupposed? Is there any proof that acceptance of a particular world view will make Christianity generally accessible or even possible?"[50] If Christian faith is understood as religion, Barth says one could argue from this general validity. But then it ceases to give the Christian message. As he had always distinguished religion from revelation, he felt that the inability of the 19th century theologians to raise these issues could be interpreted to mean that they were primarily philosophers and secondarily theologians. He accused them of not taking their

[49] Cf., K. BARTH, *Evangelical Theology in the 19th Century*, in *The Humanity of God*, p. 18-19.
[50] K. BARTH, *Evangelical Theology in the 19th Century*, p. 23.

missionary task at a deeper level and asked rhetorically: "Was it possible to win the "gentiles" for the Christian cause by first accepting the "gentile" point of view, in order to commend to them the Christian cause? Could this procedure impress the "gentiles"?[51] This underscores that Barth takes theology as a purely confessional subject even when it is done in the university. A theology that only satiates the academy without renewing the church is not acceptable to him. He would want theology to develop its own distinctive criteria aimed at this renewal and stopped following the general criteria all in the name of correlation.

It is true that he believes that theology does not talk of God alone but of God and man. However, if theology is the doctrine of God and man, then let it be stressed, says Barth, that man's relation to God is based on God's dealings with man and not conversely. This is exactly the meaning of his dialectical theology. Human beings cannot speak about God unless God speaks about himself; in other words, unless God reveals himself. Every human speech about God has to be done in a confessional manner because human rationality is incapable of reaching the interiority of God. The essence of the dialectical theology was summarized in his 1922 Elgersburg lecture: "As theologians, we ought to speak of God. But we are humans and as such cannot speak of God. We ought to do both, to know the 'ought' and the 'not able to', and precisely in this way give God the glory"[52]. So, for Barth, theologians are primarily preachers of the word of God; and they have to do this dialectically in a confessional manner so as to maintain that reasonable distinction between God and humankind. Any human talk about God is a God-given talk, and theologians should give God the glory and not take credit for it.

Because of his insistence on the confessional character of theology, and in view of the errors of the "German Christians", he had to insist that theologians must not equivocate regarding the universal Lordship of Jesus Christ over and above any human authority, especially in political arena. In fact, his Barmen Declaration and its subsequent elaboration in §69 of CD were aimed at asserting the unique Lordship of Jesus Christ which every Christian must confess. He was alarmed that the plurality of voices claiming Lordship was

[51] K. BARTH, *Evangelical Theology in the 19th Century*, p. 23.
[52] K. BARTH, *The Word of God as the Task of Theology*, in *The Word of God and Theology*, p. 177.

beclouding the specificity and the uniqueness of Christian allegiance to God and the church.

Barth was aware that every confession is a human confession with potentials of fallibility. For this reason, he reserved the authentication of these confessions to the church. It was when he became more aware of the church as a theological phenomenon that he changed his dogmatics from "Christian dogmatics" to "Church dogmatics". If theology's task is to speak about God, it is the church that must set the proper criteria for criticizing this God-talk. In this way, some objective validity is reached. However, the entire confessions of the church must submit itself to the Scripture as the indisputable norm by which to measure every theological statement.

Because Barth's starting-point in theology is christocentrism, and his insistence that everything else must be understood in the light of this Christocentric concentration, he approached the rest of his theology from the perspective of confessing Jesus Christ even when he writes on purely civil issues. Nothing must be left unexplained in the light of Jesus Christ. His 1954 essay on the Christian community and the civil community[53], for instance, remains one of his strongest statements (after the Barmen Declaration of 1934) on the relationship between the church and the state. But true to his confessional emphasis, he approached this topic from the perspective of the church's proclamation. He sees the relationship in terms of two concentric circles. At the centre stand Christ and the Kingdom of God. But there are inner and outer circles where are found the church and the state respectively. While not calling for a theocratic state, he sees the "political" task of the church as that of witnessing that the activities of the state are the parables of the Kingdom of God. The church and the state cannot equate one another, but he says that the use of the concept of "community" to describe both of them is to underscore the positive relationship and connection between them.

2.2. Tracy's Revisionism as Academic Theology

Tracy's cultural reality constrained him to experiment with the idea of going beyond the church's doctrinal stricture in order to be heard in the American public. He didn't have the compelling urge as Barth did, to write primarily for the believing church community. He was rather principally concerned with writing for the academy and

[53] Karl BARTH, *Community, State and Church* (edited and introduced by Will Herberg), Garden City, New York, Doubleday, 1960.

making his theology intelligible, first to the community of scientific inquiry, and then to every other intelligent reader regardless of faith affiliation. He didn't make his theology a function of the church. His theology was reasonably driven more by academic concerns than by pastoral concerns. Because of this he was only too eager to switch loyalty from the church to the scientific community in order to meet up with this basic concern. Already from the beginning, he felt that theology was too privatized; that it was not participating in the global intellectual discourse because it insisted on having its private criteria different from the general intellectually scientific criteria. He thought that the best way to tackle pluralism and secularity was to throw theology into the same public arena and from there try to speak to others in the language that they understand.

As a thorough-going academic, what appears to have been guiding Tracy's theology is his quest for novelty rather than any serious religious faith-commitment. In fact, he sees academic theologians as legitimately exempt from such faith-commitments:

> "Academic theologians… may abstract themselves from religious "faith-commitments" for the legitimate purposes of clarifying the arguments of theological discourse so they may be viewed as public arguments in the obvious sense – argued, reasonable positions open to all intelligent, reasonable, and responsible persons"[54].

Although in itself and as such novelty should be a characteristic of good academic work, when one takes the "publish something new or perish" slogan of academic scholars very literally in theological research, the result is bound to be a neglect of that other aspect of theology that has to do with faith and belief. It was under this scenario that Tracy appeared to have cast his theology. First, he started with a total deconstruction of the entire Christian traditional faith. While deconstruction is legitimate in academic research, the problem is the reconstruction. What Tracy reconstructed as "authentic" Christian faith became admixture of Christianity and secularity. He sees the contemporary theologian as having stakes in both secularity and Christianity – a two-pronged stake he sees as the only way to guarantee the survival of Christianity and Christian theology in the midst of contemporary pluralism.

Tracy's revisionism is therefore not written for the church, but for the church and the secular world. Although no theology is

[54] D. TRACY, *The Context: The Public Character of Theological Language*, p. 4.

exclusively written for the church alone (even when that theology is called "Church Dogmatics"), the distinctiveness of Tracy's academic theology in relation to Barth's church theology is that while Tracy wanted to harmonize the church and the world using explicitly conceptual language, Barth wanted to maintain the separation using explicitly dialectical language. Of course the church and the world are not at war with each other in the manner that early Barth portrayed. But academic theology that tends towards secular faith would want to cancel out any faith commitment that cannot be rationally explained in a way that is publicly accepted. The aim of academic theology is not necessarily to deepen the faith of the believing community but rather to revise whatever appears "irrational" to hold in order that others outside the faith-community can apprehend. The emphasis is therefore not on the content of faith per se, but on the rationality of that content of faith.

Tracy's theology, almost exclusively, focused on the rationality of the content of faith. As a fundamental theologian, this is what is expected of him. But was it also expected of him to have approached systematic theology with the same principles of fundamental theology? He rightly claimed that fundamental theology is oriented towards the world of the academy, and uses sophisticated philosophical arguments to establish its truth claims. But having conceded that in systematic theology, personal belief acts as warrant to its claim to truth, it was expected that he pursued this line of argument. But instead, he appeared to have regressed back to the principles of fundamental theology. His objective was to argue that even systematic theology can be pursued as a public discourse. But can it?

The manner in which Tracy limited his concept of systematic theology to only dogmatic or confessional theology, and the arguments he puts forward for a subject to be labelled a public discourse, presents a huge challenge to the argument that systematic theology is and should be a public discourse. He says that "Christian theological discourse serves an authentically public function when it renders explicit the public character of the meaning and truth embedded in the Christian classical texts, events, images, rituals, symbols and persons"[55]. He then invented the notion of "classics" to argue that when systematic theology interprets the Christian classics, it is engaging in public theology because, first, the text, as classic, is

[55] D. TRACY, AI, p. 55.

public by default; secondly, when the interpreter engages in intensification of particularity, what emerges must be publicly shareable. The problem is that confessional theologies do not search in the Bible for a "classic" event or a "classic" person that are considered classic because they are publicly shareable. By the way, the notion of classic is associated more with arts than with religion. In arts, what makes a classic is its popularity despite age, or its appeal to wider audience, or its ability to withstand the test of time. Although the notion of classic could be introduced into religious realm, when it is done, one is no longer within the realm of dogmatic theology but has gone back to the realm of fundamental theology. If therefore, Tracy's notion of systematic theology is restricted only to dogmatic or confessional theology, as he claims, it will rather be difficult to sustain his argument for publicness of systematic theology using this notion of classic. From the perspective of fundamental theology, it might be justified to approach the Bible from the point of view of classic. But confessional theology does not consider the Bible as "classic" as such, in the manner of literary classic, but rather as the word of God that says something to the believer.

It is true that Tracy's overall intention is to revise the entire Christian self-understanding in such a way that theology, without ceasing to underscore its particular Christian connotation, can still become a public discourse. However, his over-reliance on fundamental theological principles for every aspect of theology rendered his theology thoroughly academic, and reduced the church's role in theological discourse almost to redundancy. From his perspective, academic theology appears at odds with confessional theology. Hence, it will be difficult to argue for theology's public character if theology is also seen as a function of the church. But perhaps, from another perspective, there could be a possibility.

2.3. The Notion of Systematic Theology Reconsidered

Tracy's idea of systematic theology as exclusively dogmatic or confessional theology needs to be reconsidered if one hopes to move beyond the impasse between academic theology and confessional theology especially with regards to the question of the culture of pluralism. It should also be reconsidered in order to break Barth's restriction of theology to the function of the church and thereby blocking the possibility of its public character.

Éric Gaziaux has presented a somewhat "working canon" for theological research and teaching[56]. His article captures a common viewpoint of many in the contemporary theological faculty. It emphasizes the three levels of criticism, systematic and growth that gives theology its scientific character. According to him, for theology to remain rationally relevant and plausible in the universities, it has to protect its unity through the hermeneutical method. But he also points out that this hermeneutical method characteristic of theology is a work in three great axes of theology, namely, the positive axis (history and exegesis), reflective axis (fundamental and systematic), and practical axis (ethics and pastoral), which must work together to make theological research fruitful[57]. If one takes these axes into consideration, then fundamental theology and dogmatic theology belong to the same reflective axis. One could therefore add to the "rational relevance" proposal of Gaziaux above by stating that, for theology to remain functionally relevant to the worshiping community, it must not neglect the importance of dogmatic theology in any fundamental critical task. To bring the rational relevance and the functional relevance of theology together, it appears then that perhaps it is only as part of a common reflective axis of theology in its hermeneutical method that one can coherently argue that systematic theology can develop public character without ceasing to be a function of the church.

When dealing with the culture of pluralism (religious, cultural, theological) no one sub-discipline appears to be sufficient on its own to give an adequate theological treatment. Fundamental theology might give conceptual clarity; but if one is dialoguing with other faiths, one cannot remain neutral but must approach the dialoguing table with serious faith-commitment. If the larger counter-publics within the same global Christendom are taken into consideration, one must also consider their particular manner of apprehending reality. It is true that every theology is somewhat contextual; but contextuality in theology sometimes runs the risk of alienating a great number of people who might not be able to make any serious meaning out of an alien context. But what appears to remain constant, no matter the context, is the confession of the church. Tracy himself acknowledged

[56] Éric GAZIAUX, *Une recherche et un enseignement en théologie : pourquoi?*, in *Revue théologique de Louvain*, 38, 2007, p. 29-40. This article actually is the fruit of a joint reflection by the entire full-time professors in the Faculty of Theology, Université catholique de Louvain (Louvain-la Neuve).

[57] Cf., É. GAZIAUX, *Une recherche et un enseignement en théologie*, p. 32-33.

the need not to remain closed in a one's particular context when he said:

> "I, as a North American theologian located principally in the secular academy, have been greatly aided by *Concilium* theology and its strong, often stern reminder that serious Christian theology must break out from both its academic and its First-World confinements to learn new ways to hear and be in genuine conversation with the most creative voices and thinkers in theology today – the theologies of an energizing world Christianity, the 'two-thirds' worlds of Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Oceania, as well as the theological voices now powerfully speaking from Eastern and Central Europe since the end of the Cold War"[58].

Since new frontiers of Christianity have opened up, and some old frontiers are fast shrinking[59], it is important to understand that many of these new frontiers have different mind-sets and different modes of being in the world which significantly impact on their understanding and appropriation of Christianity. According to a projection made by the Pew Research Centre, for instance, Nigeria is projected to have the third-largest Christian population in the world by 2050, after the United States and Brazil[60]. If this projection is anything to go by, and given that in Nigeria, as in many of these other new frontiers, being and belonging go hand in hand; one has to understand that, it is unimaginable to engage even in fundamental theology from a complete uncommitted position. Therefore, academic theology comes with some sort of faith-commitment, and consequently with some sort of confession.

At the same time however, to avoid a return to fundamentalism, every confession must carry with it a thoroughly

[58] D. TRACY, *On Naming the Present*, p. ix.

[59] For instance, according to the projection published by the *Pew Research Centre* in *The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050*, of April 2, 2015, the sub-Saharan Africa's Christian population is expected to double, from 517 million in 2010 to 1.1 billion in 2050. It also stated that the share of the world's Christians living in sub-Saharan Africa will rise from 24% in 2010 to 38% in 2050. Translated statistically, four out of every 10 Christians in the world will live in sub-Saharan Africa. By contrast, In the United States, Christians will decline from more than three-quarters of the population in 2010 to two-thirds in 2050. This scenario is similar in Europe. Europe's Christian population is expected to shrink by about 100 million people in the coming decades, dropping from 553 million to 454 million. While Christians will remain the largest religious group in Europe, they are projected to drop from three-quarters of the population to less than two-thirds. By 2050, nearly a quarter of Europeans (23%) are expected to have no religious affiliation, and Muslims will make up about 10% of the region's population, up from 5.9% in 2010.
cf., http://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/.

[60] Cf., *The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050*, in http://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/

thought-out critical appraisal. It is in this way that dogmatic theology and fundamental theology can collaborate to make systematic theology a public discourse without undermining the role of the church in such discourse. When theologians are no longer motivated by the academic urge to 'publish something new or perish', but rather by the urge to preserve the church's confessions through rational justifications, the hiatus between academic theology and confessional theology shall have been closed. This idea can be applied to Barth's retrieval and Tracy's revisionism respectively to argue that in culture of pluralism, both theologies are required to present a Christian approach in a more balanced and satisfactory manner.

3. A New Look At Barth's and Tracy's Theologies for the Purposes of Confronting the Culture of Pluralism

3.1. Barth's Theology of Retrieval

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries' culture that was very critical of Christian religion, and the subsequent perceived inadequate responses from the mainstream theology to that culture, was what fundamentally gave rise to Barth's theology of retrieval. Like other theologians of that era who felt uncomfortable with the reigning theological response to the Enlightenment culture, Barth felt that through such response, theology actually distanced itself from its object and legacies of the past. He, along with other like-minded theologians, therefore, decided to rediscover (and therefore, to retrieve) the classical theologies such as the Trinitarian, Incarnational, and Soteriological aspects of that mainstream theology. But to accomplish this retrieval task, he insisted that theology must focus on its proper norm and stopped relying on what he regarded as external criteria and methods similar to the ones employed in social sciences. He was convinced that theology, when focused on its own subject matter, can still be called, or can call itself, a "science", but without however accepting the obligation of submitting to standards considered valid for other sciences. He thinks that when it tries to disregard its subject matter in order to focus on the standards valid for those other sciences, theology would have lost its credibility. He held that the only way out for theology is to retrieve its own proper *Sache*.

Barth subsequently devoted his entire theological life just trying to achieve this task of theological retrieval. First, he discovered that his own theological base – liberal theology – was standing on a shaky ground "theologically". He was convinced that such theology had lost

sight of God's otherness and transcendence, and instead tended to focus on what he later described as "cultural theology" – a theology that he accused of being guilty of identifying the kingdom of God with the advance of civilization. Then he set out on a mission to re-establish theology on the basis of the Word of God. By "Word of God", he meant an "undiluted" and "unfiltered" Word of God as found in the Scripture. His disgruntlement with Protestant Liberalism was this conviction that the purported "Word of God" circulated within its theology had already passed through the prism of modern culture with its alien criteria, and therefore no longer "pure". Barth was worried not because theology was engaged with modern cultural consciousness, but because liberal theology was identifying Christianity with the development of that consciousness. He believes that by such identification, theology tended to lose sight of its own distinctive task and criteria. However, this concern was the beginning, not the end of Barth's theological enquiry. He hoped to establish a firm theological grounding for theology before he began the task of engaging theology with culture. He felt that it had to become absolutely clear that there is an 'infinite qualitative distinction' between God and the world before one attempted to relate the two. Lack of that distinction, in his opinion, was what led liberal theology to derail in its theological path and succumbed to the pressure of the modern Enlightenment culture.

It was not therefore surprising that Barth began his theological enquiry, not with the method of correlation but, rather, with the dogmatic method; and with a confidence that, on its own proper ground, dogmatics can develop scientific character. But, in changing his original dogmatic work (which he later abandoned) from "Christian" to "Church" dogmatics, he underscores his deep-seated belief that although it can and has to develop scientific character, dogmatics is not a "free" science but is rather bound to the sphere of the church. For him, it is in this sphere of the church alone that dogmatics is possible and meaningful. He foreclosed any form of external support or foundation for theology such as in philosophical existentialism. Theology, as he understood it, should stand on its own, needing no support. On this understanding of it, theology is for the church, and for her alone:

> "…theology cannot be carried on in the private lighthouses of some sort of merely personal discoveries and opinions. It can be carried on only in the Church – it can be put to work in all its elements only in the context of the questioning and answering of the Christian

> community and in the rigorous service of its commission to all men"[61].

He made no equivocation that his dogmatics is written not for any community of theological endeavour but for the church community. And he acknowledged that even within the church, not all theology is to be accepted. In fact, there are some he qualifies as "non-theology", labelling them as heretical, and recommending that they be resolutely denied. He labels his own form of theology as "Evangelical theology" and sees it as the only form that merits to be affirmed. For Barth therefore, theology *simplicite* is "evangelical theology"[62], and it is a function of the church. By saying that dogmatics is not a free science he means to say that it should not be done with the publicly acclaimed criteria of scientificity which thereby renders theology an all-comers' affair. Theology, for him therefore, is a special course for a special set of people. If he began the first volume of his *Church Dogmatics* with the doctrine of the Word of God, he was only being true to his belief that he had a specific audience in mind. And in this belief, a theologian for Barth is fundamentally a preacher of the Word of God.

Although he maintains that dogmatics is an enquiry, he equally insists that it is also an act of faith; meaning that it has to be a gratuitous gift of God and not a determination of human action. In this way, Barth's idea of dogmatics tends to exclude the rigours of fundamental theological approach especially in its Tracean understanding where any willing inquirer irrespective of his/her personal conviction can freely engage in. Since he envisaged no other source for theology outside the word of God in the Scripture, Barth did not border to consider the possibility of those outside the church engaging seriously with theology as an academic discipline. Certainly, he was conscious of religious studies being done in the universities by any interested person who follows its mode of reflection. But this is precisely what he is contesting – that theological enquiries be not confused with this 'religious studies' method of inquiry because they are two separate and distinct subjects.

[61] K. BARTH, *The Humanity of God*, p. 64.

[62] Barth clarifies however, that the qualifying attribute "evangelical" is not, and should not be, intended and understood in a confessional or denominational and exclusive sense, but that "evangelical" refers "primarily and decisively" to the Bible, which is respected by all confessions and denominations. It is in this sense that he thinks that while not all so-called "Protestant" theology is evangelical theology, there are evangelical theology in Catholic and Eastern orthodox worlds. Cf., K. BARTH, *Evangelical Theology*, p. 5.

However, although it is true that theological distinctiveness is to be maintained at all times, it is similarly true that in its engagement with the contemporary culture of pluralism, theology cannot afford to insulate itself without running the risk of total exclusion. Whether we agree with it or not, critical reasoning has become not only part and parcel of our contemporary mode of inquiry, but indeed, is becoming almost an exclusive mode. And in this mode of inquiry, transversality is the watchword, where every discipline criss-crosses every other discipline in order to be meaningfully communicable to all. No discipline pretends to remain locked-up in its narrow world; but every discipline opens its doors to other comrades so that in the spirit of camaraderie, there is a process of give and take. Without this policy of *porte-ouverte*, a subject is considered "private" and therefore not worth the while studying as a serious academic discipline.

Part and parcel of any religion's objective (especially those religions with missionary approaches such as Christianity) is to communicate that religion to others. In communicating the religion, one has to do so using the language and mode of inquiry that any given set of people understands. Although theology is not synonymous with preaching as Barth sometimes tended to imply, theology (just like any subject for that matter) is also a form of communication. What is communicated in theology is the rationality of that Christian belief that preaching proclaims. But before that rationality is communicated, it has to be first established. Within the Christian circle, it might be easy to establish the "rationality" of the Christian belief solely on the basis of the Christian proclamations. But such bases alone do not suffice to communicate the same belief to people outside the Christian circle. When it concerns the world of the academy, the rationality claim itself has to be rationally scrutinized before it can even merit discussion at all. The work of systematic theology is thus to put all these considerations into perspective. It has to decide on how far theology can engage in this open-door policy without altogether losing its identity. It has to establish the rationality of Christian beliefs without allowing Christian distinctiveness to be irretrievably compromised. It appears then that under its current form Barth's theology of retrieval cannot assume public character. For this reason, if we take the "reflective axis" in the hermeneutical method into consideration, we think that Barth's theology of retrieval can be updated in the following four manners:

Firstly, the legacies of the past which he sought to preserve, is better done in consideration of the realities of the present. Barth's interest in preserving the past made him lose sense of the present

thereby giving the false impression that the old is always better than the new. His interest in dogmatic theology obscured him to the usefulness of fundamental theology as an important tool in every theological inquiry. While the past is very important as it helps us to know where we started, the present is equally important in order not only to know where we are but eventually where we are going. It is true that in theological matters the past can be very precious, invaluable and indispensable; but understanding the past with the eye of the present is what keeps theology alive.

Secondly, there is no "Word of God" which is not expressed in "words of men". Even the "undiluted" and unfiltered" Word of God as found in the Scriptures is also expressed in human words with all its limitations and errors. They are words that were written within cultural contexts and, using languages that were *au courant* during the epoch they were written. The authors correlated their human experiences with what they believed were divine inspirations. To have done away with all forms of correlation meant that Barth missed a very important aspect of that past Christian heritage in his retrieval effort. Correlation has always been part of that heritage and should have been incorporated in his theology of retrieval. However, as we have seen, correlation itself has a limit.

Thirdly, a theology that is written for the church alone becomes *ipso facto* a catechism and no longer a theology. What makes theology a theology is its ability to be integrated into the world of the academy. The academy of today insists on subjecting all its disciplines to the universal criticizability norm operative in the academy. If theology is subjected to such, there is no way it can escape critical enquiries. Theology is a second-order and not a first-order language. But Barth's insistence on having a totally different criterion for theological criticizability that is exclusively intra, places theology in a somewhat awkward position in today's academic world. If, however, theology is rather properly understood as a second-order language that it is, then it has to formulate its language which should be open to criticism both by the church and by the academy.

This, in fact, is the position defended by Philip Clayton[63] when he describes theology in terms of explanatory (second-order) rather than as primarily descriptive (first-order) subject. He argued that, "viewed functionally, theological explanations attempt to establish a

[63] Philip CLAYTON, *Explanation from Physics to Theology: An Essay in Rationality and Religion*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1989.

link between the inherited beliefs and practices of a given religious tradition and the contemporary experience of its practitioners"[64]. This is another way of saying that, as long as it remains a second-order language, correlation is inevitable in theology. He proposes that for theology to operate as a science, it has to formulate explanations that are open to criticism and revision both by the church and by the academy so that the universal criticizability rule operative in sciences will be fulfilled in the explanatory effort of theology without it downplaying the content of beliefs and arguments. When he thus describes theology as "level-two discourse concerning level-one beliefs, attitudes, and practices of the Christian community"[65], this could be understood that both the church and the public have stakes in theology. In this regard therefore, no theology can be written *solely* for the church even if that theology is titled "Church Dogmatics".

Barth, for sure, never intended his theology to be pertinent to the Church alone. He wrote, in a massive manner, works that are destined for the "public" outside the confines of the church. In this regard, his works can be said to be "public". But in its usages here, "public" does not imply being pertinent to all people. It implies using criteria that are publicly acceptable to all in the exposition of an argument so that anybody (irrespective of the person's belief) can use the same argument and arrive at the same result. Of course Barth would not agree to this methodological procedure. He would argue that theology's distinctiveness forbids such procedure, and that the church's distinctive talk about God makes theological logic open only to the church's internal logic without any interference from outside. While this is partly correct when dealing with the question of Christian revelation, one need not strictly remain within this stricture when dealing with the question of religious and cultural pluralism. People involved in these questions are no longer Christians alone, and should therefore have at least a minimal point of contact from where they can meaningfully enter into the argument.

Fourthly, Barth's hard stance against any form of foundationalism in theological enquiry arises out of his erroneous belief that a *pure* theological truth is produced when theology refuses to rely on any other discipline's methodology in its enquiry. When Tracy argues however that "by the very nature of the kind of fundamental existential question that theology asks, and because of

[64] P. CLAYTON, *Explanation from Physics to Theology*, p. 148-149.
[65] P. CLAYTON, *Explanation from Physics to Theology*, P.167.

the nature of the reality of God upon which it reflects, theology must develop public, not private, criteria and discourse"[66], he means to say that the universal nature of these religious truth-claims compels theology not to remain within a particular constricted boundary. Clayton was even more direct on this point when he says that, "by the very nature of its claims, theology will find itself in dialogue with explanatory disciplines across the academic spectrum"[67]. While foundationalism by nature is reductionist and therefore ought to be rejected, its rejection, according to Clayton, need not imply anti-foundationalism. Therefore, Barth's insistence on avoiding foundationalism by setting a restricted boundary for theology outside of which it cannot cross without being viewed as "a-theology" or "non-theology" is uncalled for. This approach could be viewed as isolationism, which is even as unviable for theology as reductionism.

3.2. Tracy's Revisionism

Tracy, as we noted at the start of this chapter, was confronted with a situation in which he found himself "boxed in" at a corner in his American society. Not only was theology as a whole fighting to find a place in the American public arena, but Catholicism, to which he belongs, needed to experiment in order to be seen as truly American. The overall American experiment is such that one needed to be American first and foremost before one can profess to be any other thing within the "Americanness". Thus, there seem to be a double allegiance for every American – one (and the most important) to America, and then the other to whatever profession, religion or conviction one choses to engage in. But it looks like it has been the *de facto* norm that wherever these double allegiance comes into conflict, the Americanness seems to have upper hand over and above any other consideration. Thus it is that Catholicism, which, by its profession of faith, is obliged to pay allegiance to the Pope and Rome, has to go extra miles in order to prove that it is not a danger to the Americanness. It is within this "boxed in" context that Tracy constructed his revisionist pubic theology.

His first announcement in BRO that the theologian of the revisionist order has to withdraw allegiance from the church and surrender it to the community of scientific enquiry, looks like a re-enactment on the theological scene the political statement of John F.

[66] D. TRACY, AI, p. ix.
[67] P. CLAYTON, *Explanation from Physics to Theology*, p. 172.

Kennedy during the campaign period leading to his slim victory in the 1960 American presidency[68], and appears to have been tactically designed to compel his American audience to listen to what he had to say. Well, this "entry behaviour" seemed to have worked; but it came at a price. He had to revise traditional theology in such a way that it looked more secular than what was obtainable before, so that nobody within the circle of his audience would feel "irritated" when engaging with his proposals. Although Tracy had responded (as we noted in chapter 5) to Peter Berger's accusation that his theology was secular on the ground that it converges at the rejection of the supernatural, his qualification of his theology as rather transformationist leaves a lot of unanswered questions. We noted that his transformation agenda was such that it is the world which more easily has to transform the church and not the church the world. While the church has always been in the state of transformation since its inception, to think that the society should remain static while the church transforms is to neglect the sociological evolution of the society. Nationalism has been at the heart of the survival of any nation. But to think that the values of any nation should remain unaffected by the gospel or any other values considered as "outsider" is to make a monster of that nation. It is true that Tracy never explicitly argued his theological case on the basis of nationalism; but it is equally true that the fear of being "politically incorrect" appeared to have driven him to too much compromise in his Catholic experiment within the larger American experiment.

[68] As a Catholic, J. F. Kennedy appeared to have learnt a bitter lesson from the acrimonious defeat of Alfred E. Smith in 1928 in the presidency of the U.S. who, after serving for four terms as the New York governor, was faced with serious opposition and severe extra scrutiny when he became his party's nominee for the presidency, all on the prejudice of his being a Catholic. When Kennedy (another Catholic) won his party's nomination for the same post of the presidency, he was quick, during his campaign tours, to surrender his allegiance to the people of America instead of to any ecclesiastical official: "I do not accept the right of any ecclesiastical official to tell me what to do in the sphere of my public responsibility as an elected official". His statement was interpreted as promising the voters that "he would take orders from the people and not from the Pope". For a more detailed account of Catholicism and the public realm in the United States, cf., G. MARTINEZ, *Confronting the Mystery of God*, p. 171-176. The information above is culled from the pages quoted, as well as from his endnote.
Since this Kennedy's "masterstroke" however, notable candidates for the American presidency who are Catholics, and who appeared to have adopted this strategy of "surrendering" to the public instead of to the church include among others, John Kerry – the current U.S. Secretary of State – who, in the wake of his controversial support for abortion, often leaned on the separation of church and state in order to justify his political views. On one occasion, he was quoted to have said in the *Time* magazine: "I don't tell church officials what to do, and church officials shouldn't tell American politicians what to do in the context of our public life". Cf., Terry EASTLAND, *John Kerry's Catholic Problem*, in CBSNEWS (April 15, 2004), http://www.cbsnews.com/news/john-kerrys-catholic-problem/ consulted on December 11, 2015. Kerry was however to lose that election to George Bush in the 2004 presidential election.

When he argues for theology to develop public character, one would agree with him that it is not only a worthwhile venture but also one that should be strongly pursued. But when he implies by publicness an unfettered and unrestricted formulation without any form of control or input whatsoever from the church as a faith community, one should tread with caution. Since the Enlightenment period, the fear of being controlled by a superior (whether that superior is of government or ecclesiastical type) has been at the heart of intellectual revolution. Kant struggled with this fear and later codified it in his "The Conflict of Faculties"[69]. It was originally meant to be a publication on the relationship between the philosophical and theological faculties. But he later expanded it to include the relationship of what was then known as the "lower" faculty with the "higher" faculty.

What is of particular interest to us here is the general division of the faculties into two: three higher faculties and one lower faculty. The terminologies 'higher' and 'lower' had nothing to do with higher studies and lower study respectively. A faculty was considered "higher" if its teachings were expounded in the public; in which case the government had to censor what was put out in public because it had obligation towards the moral, intellectual and physical wellbeing of the public. These obligations were ways of securing a very strong and lasting influence on the people. Under this higher faculty was found theology, law and medicine. The government reserved to itself the right to sanction teachings done in the higher faculty. It insisted that in expounding their teachings in public, certain norms were adopted, certain teachings retained, and others excluded, as deemed fit by the government. In other words, these faculties exist in the universities only because they are useful to the government. On the other hand, the "lower" faculty was considered a private domain where the scholar was left alone to his/her reason. Philosophy occupied this enviable position alone. This faculty was independent of the government's command and control with regards to its teaching. It does not adopt its teachings to the directives by order of a superior. It was therefore considered a free faculty because it freely evaluates everything and concerns itself with truth. This is so because it arrives at a conclusion through reason, and not through recourse to any

[69] Immanuel KANT, *The Conflict of the Faculties* (1798) in *Religion and Rational Theology*, trans. & ed. by Allen W. Wood and George DI Giovanni, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 233-327.

external superior or authority. Kant explains why such a faculty with unlimited amount of freedom is referred to as "lower": "The reason why this faculty, despite its great prerogative (freedom), is called lower faculty lies in human nature; for a human being who can give commands, even though he is someone else's humble servant, is considered more distinguished than a free man who has no one under his command"[70].

On the other hand, the three higher faculties base their teachings on pre-written texts entrusted to them by the government. They are, according to Kant, not free to go outside those texts. He thinks that the theologian draws his teaching not from reason but from the *Bible*; that the professor of law draws his not from the natural law but from the *law of the land*; and that the medical expert does not draw his *method of therapy as practiced on the public* from the physiology of the human body, but rather from *medical regulations*. For these reasons, he believes that as soon as any of these faculties goes outside the prescribed text and presumes to derive its teaching from reason, it not only incurs the wrath of the authority of the government but also encroaches on the philosophical territory which it is not competent to navigate without losing its identity altogether.

It was this type of conflicts between the higher and lower faculties that Kant set out to solve by proposing, among other things, that amicable accommodation (*amicabilis compositio*) is not a solution but that rather a settlement has to be determined as in a lawsuit where verdict is reached by the decision of a judge (in this case, reason) which has the force of law[71]. He was proposing, in other words, that in the conflict between the higher and lower faculties, it is the lower faculty that must determine, through reason in the public arena, the verdict. And the verdict he determined for theology to be taken as a university subject is that first it (theology) has to be transformed into a historical subject, and secondly only reserved for candidates training for ecclesiastical ministry who at that time, were also civil servants working for the state.

It is true that this division into higher and lower faculties no longer exists; and it is also true that Kant's concept of university subjects has been fragmented and disintegrated to include several autonomous and independent courses; however, Tracy's push for publicness in theology within his larger revisionist theology appears to

[70] I. KANT, *The Conflict of the Faculties*, p. 249.
[71] Cf., I. KANT, *The Conflict of the Faculties*, p. 260.

have been a revival of this Kantian conflict of the faculties. The only difference is that in the case of theology, the "external" superior authority from which it has to be rescued today is no longer the government but the church. And as Kant's arguments were based on purely secular concept of the university and the knowledge derived therefrom, it is wrong for Tracy to have built his own argument on this secular concept and still deny that his theology is a secular theology.

As Kant was afraid that the higher faculties were unduly controlled by the directives of the government and therefore needed to be rescued by the superior rationality of philosophy, so also, Tracy fears that theology has been excruciatingly squeezed and stunted, no thanks to undue interference from the church. A public arena appears therefore to be a safe haven where such interference can be curbed. But in rescuing theology from one authority figure – the church – Tracy merely exchanged that figure for another figure – the community of scientific inquiry. And if our suspicion that it might have been the fear of being "politically incorrect" that pushed him to too much compromise in his experiment, is brought in to bear, then one can see that the authority of the American "political correctness" has been added to the one to which theology must be answerable. At the end, theology seems to be a discipline that is perpetually doomed to remain under one form of authority or the other. When political correctness spills out of control, the result for theology is incorrectness, both politically and theologically. In his *The State of the University*, Stanley Hauerwas stated that, "there is a link between the politics that would relegate the church to the private and the knowledges of the university that legitimate the subordination of the church to the state in the name of peace"[72]. It appears that by taking away theology from the church and surrendering it to the scientific community all in a bid not to be perceived as being "politically incorrect", Tracy has tilted to Hauerwas' second option. But, is he justified?

Tracy's revisionist public theology is built on the prerogative he accorded fundamental theology over and above dogmatic theology. He set out to argue for the necessity of fundamental theology for the whole of theological project. In itself and as such, such necessity should never be in doubt. But he ended up not just with the necessity of fundamental theology but with the reducibility of the whole of

[72] Stanley HAUERWAS, *The State of the University: Academic Knowledges and the Knowledge of God*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2007, p. 4.

theology to fundamental theology. And this is where the real problem lies. Surely, his theological treatises touched on what he labelled systematic theology, as well as on practical theology. But, in accordance with his fundamental principles, he remained on the level of "method" without doing actual systematic (to use his own terminology) and practical works. He is not obliged to do these works if he is not a systematic or practical theologian. But when he claims to have done them, he should at least do them *in concreto*. Such concrete work would have opened his eyes to the fact that theology is not just like any other university subject, but is different. It is different because of its object which is God. But the type of object for which God is for theology is not the one that is freely and uninterruptedly available to any intelligent scholar to interpret at will without any recourse to what that God means to the Christian tradition that proclaims it. The God that forms the object of theology is not the God of the philosophers but rather the God that is revealed in the Scripture whom only the Church is best placed to proclaim. At least on the notion of this type of God, no matter how the common human experience might suggest otherwise, the church cannot be side-lined as having no voice.

This does not however mean that theology is restricted exclusively to the function of the church in the Barthian terms; for as Hauerwas rightly argued, "theology properly understood as knowledge of God means theology cannot be restricted to one 'field'"[73]. Tracy himself tacitly acknowledged that there is something unique in the nature of the type of God that theology proclaims. This uniqueness is a pointer to the fact that only a unique institution such as the church is equipped with the "correct" key to "unlocking" this God.

If theology is not restricted to one field but must wander from discipline to discipline in order to justify the universality of this God, it is not for it to thereby render its primary constituency irrelevant or redundant by subordinating it either to the state, to the public, or to the community of scientific inquiry. These institutions have serious roles to play in theology no doubt. But that role does not include "taking over" theology completely from the church in order to make it conform to the norms of scientific enquiry. Whereas liberal and independent thinking might be the norm in a secular concept of the university that tends to either exclude theology altogether, or at best, to force it to shed off all its elements that are construed as preventing

[73] S. HAUERWAS, *The State of the University*, p. 6-7.

it from conforming to this liberal idea, such secular concept does not exhaust the whole concept of the university or of learning for that matter. Tracy's argument that a public realm by definition is dependent on a shared concept of reason can be interpreted to imply that any "reason" that does not conform to this liberal, secular, and independent notion of learning is not worthy of the name. When he therefore argues for publicness in theology on the strength of this "shared concept", it would imply that he does not recognize any specificity in theology. Of course this idea plays into the American concept of democracy where, among other things, the element of "equality of all" is at its heart. Knowledge, in this reading, is therefore reducible to one concept of reason. But must theology be forced to adapt to that one central form of reason before it can be considered a public discourse?

4. Ways in which Theology may be Conceived as Public Discourse while Remaining a Function of the Church

Tracy's argument that a public realm, by definition, is dependent on a shared concept of reason, may not be sustained given the numerous technical and specialized knowledges which concepts of reason might be too "technical" to fit into the one "shared" concept. In fact, our so-called "shared reality" or "shared concept of reason" might after all be the greatest illusion of all – an elaborate fantasy for that matter – if we consider the technical compartmentalization of our universe. What one believes colours one's reality and influences the interpretation of that reality. Such interpretation is understood not in the context of a shared reason but in the context in which it has been interpreted by the particular world-view that gave the interpretation[74].

[74] It was insinuated that there was an African tribe where diamonds were regarded as just shining stones good only as play-toys for children and for cracking palm kernels. There was no value attached to them until the European merchants came and were "horrified" to see such precious treasures being toyed with. They asked to be allowed to collect some of those stones to give to their own children who also liked "playing" with them. The African tribesmen gladly allowed them to take as much as they needed. They went home with them, sold them, and came back and bought over the entire land. From then on, the hunt for diamond began. It was the reverence with which the Europeans approached the stones that made the tribesmen to begin to attach value to those "useless" stones by regarding them now as "precious" stones. Because of this change in the status of the stone, people started fighting for it to the extent of shedding blood in order to have the diamond. For the African tribe, the diamond remained a toy for children and a shining stone for cracking palm kernel. But viewed from the European reality, it has become an invaluable treasure that can only be gotten through shedding of blood. In fact, this stone has simply and tragically become "blood diamond".

The point we are trying to make is that, in those technical subjects, it is not the public that gives the meaning to words and terminologies that they use. It is rather those particular subjects that are better placed to say that, in their usage of them, these words or expressions mean this or that. Hauerwas explained how different disciplines use particular words to describe good works done in those disciplines. He points out for instance that in physics, the best work is described as "elegant", which seems to mean that the implications of the work may not be understood or that the work itself may not be understood. However, in mathematics, the best work is described as "deep". And "deep mathematics usually indicates math not well understood in the community of mathematics". When something "deep" in mathematics becomes generally understood, it ceases from being 'deep' and becomes 'applied' mathematics. Biology uses the word "interesting" to describe a work that generally helps one to understand or 'see' what was not understood before. As for the social sciences, the word "robust" is usually used to describe the work that helps the social scientist explain wider implications other than the ones the work was initially designed to accomplish. In humanities, the word "influential" gives the indication that the work so-described has changed the minds of other scholars who know something about the subject. Such works can, in philosophical terms, be said to represent a powerful argument. He concluded by seeking to know which words are used in theology to describe a ground-breaking "discovery":

> "I often reflect that the word that should best describe theology is "faithfulness" which may well make theology closer to mathematics and physics than the social sciences. At least in mathematics and physics it is still assumed that such work is committed to truth"[75].

From the analyses of Hauerwas above, one can observe that, from the point of view of "shared concept of reason", neither the word 'elegant' nor 'deep' nor 'faithful' mean what they generally are taken to mean in the public realm. Their meanings are accorded by the domains in which they are used, and not by the general understanding of the words. They are specific to those domains which in turn give them the meanings that others must have to understand as such without arguing that they must conform to the general meanings available to all, irrespective of specialization. Those words are still public in the sense that they are available to anyone wishing to make

[75] Cf., S. HAUERWAS, *The State of the University*, p. 20.

use of them. But they must be understood as being a function of those specialized disciplines that gave particular meanings to them. One can conclude that, in the same way, theology can fulfil its publicness while still remaining a function of the church.

Tracy's push for publicness in theology through his "shared concept of reason" is to ensure that the Christian truth is better communicated to people outside the Christian circle. George Karuvelil[76] has tried to develop this issue of communication and fundamental theology by arguing that since the task of fundamental theology is to reach out to the modern world, this task has to be approached from the point of view of communication. But he insists that communication is not something that takes place in the abstract, but in fact, it is something that is rooted in the lives of the communicator and the addressee. This being the case, he says that culture plays a crucial role in the encoding of the message by the communicator and the decoding of it by the addressee[77]. The encoding functionality of the communicator and the decoding functionality of the addressee function separately. Each is independent of the other in the sense that a communicator does not necessarily "force" his/her encoded message dawn the throat of the addressee but allows the latter to decode what she receives and figure out how to make sense of it in her world.

The subtle point we want to make is that the communicator does not need to tailor the message in such a way as to "force" the addressee to accept it. A correct and true communication has to be clear and distinct. If the content of what one is communicating is vague because one is trying to impress the addressee, the communication cannot be fruitfully passed on adequately. While clear and distinct ideas have been at the heart of Tracy's theology, his insistence on the so-called "shared concept of reason" appears to be a tailoring of the Christian message in such a way as to "force" it down the throat of the addressee. While this tendency appears to lend credence to the popular view that theology as an academic subject must be radically separated and distinguished from Christianity as a religion, it does not explain how such a radical separation and distinction guarantees that such a theology remains "Christian" theology. Although theology as a discipline and Christianity as a

[76] George KARUVELIL, *To Whom am I Speaking? Communication, Culture, and Fundamental Theology*, in *Theological Studies*, vol. 76, no. 4 (Dec. 2015), p. 675-697.
[77] G. KARUVELIL, *To Whom am I Speaking?* p. 676.

religion, are not one and the same thing, any attempt to make them radically unrelated will only erode the specificity of theology itself, and encourage the much-dreaded fundamentalism in Christian religion.

On the question of their insistence on the universal truth claim for theology on the strength of which Barth's and Tracy's theologies converged, it has to be pointed out that they differ on their conceptions of what constitutes that theological truth. Barth's retrieval theology climaxed with his famous harsh criticism of religion in §17 of *Church Dogmatics*. Although we have argued that his theory of religion cannot, and should not, be adequately assessed on the strength of this paragraph alone but must include his later treatment of the subject-matter in §69, it is obvious that Barth's entire argument was substantially built on his concept of truth as correspondence. Whether in its J. L. Austin's version[78] according to which there is a particular state of affairs in the world to which a statement must correspond in order to be adjudged true, or in its Alfred Tarski's *Semantic Theory of Truth*[79] according to which the notion of *satisfaction* plays a determinant role in making a predicate true, Barth's conception of a religious truth (and therefore of a theological truth) is that such truth must somehow correspond to what Christian revelation says. In fact, he made it explicit that he understands "truth" in the sense of the Greek word *aletheia*, and insists that "God's being, or truth, is the event of his self-disclosure"[80]. In this regard therefore, Barth can be described as a realist. He proposes an objective and mind-independent truth as characterizing Christian propositions. Thus, knowledge of God has its basis in God and not in human subjectivity. God's being is the ground for the assertion of faith in God; that is, the basis of faith does not lie in faith itself but in God as revealed in Jesus Christ.

Based on this, there was a noticeable tension in Barth between the truth of Christianity and the "truths" of non-Christian "revealed" religions. And there was also a serious doubt whether (on this conception of truth) there could possibly be any "truth" at all in "non-revealed" and non-monotheistic religions. Even in Christianity itself, any "truth" that came as a result of natural reason is despised as "no-

[78] J. L. AUSTIN, *Truth*, in Aristotelian Society suppl. Vol. 24, 111-129, reproduced in Simon BLACKBURN and Keith SIMMONS (eds.), *Truth*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 149-161.
[79] Alfred TARSKI, '*The Concept of Truth in Formalised Language'*, in *Logic, Semantics, Metamathematics*, (2nd ed.), trans. J. H. Woodger, Indianapolis, Hackett, 1983, p. 152-278.
[80] K. BARTH, *Evangelical Theology*, p. 9.

truth" at all. In fact, as we saw in chapter 3, his bitter clash with Emil Brunner bordered heavily on the justifiability or otherwise, of natural theology; in other words, of a theology that neither corresponds to a "particular state of affairs" of revelation (because its purported knowledge of God does not come from God but from human subjectivity), nor satisfies the predicate "is a reflection on revelation". In Barth's view, theology can be justified if and only if it is a reflection on revelation; and since natural theology is not a reflection on revelation, it has no justification for claiming to be theology. This was just one of the numerous "a-theologies" or "non-theologies" which Barth discarded on the basis of their perceived non-correspondence to the Christian revelation. This way of thinking makes truth a single big "whole"; and other subsidiaries of truth can only be truth to the extent that they "correspond" to this whole.

Tracy, on the other hand was not so much interested in such a correspondence as a measure of theological truth. His method of correlation makes it impossible to remain within one source for theology. Both the Christian text and the common human experience must critically correlate in order to give theology its proper fitting. He searches not for a supernatural reality to which theological truth must correspond but rather for a shared concept of reason in which theology must partake to be considered rational. One can see therefore that Tracy is working from the perspective of a coherence theory of truth which states that a proposition is true if and only if it forms a coherence whole with the other propositions we embrace. When they cohere with each other, they form a harmonious whole. This is a theory of truth that appeals to idealists who do not believe in the existence of a world that is independent of the workings of the mind. But Tracy, for sure, cannot, without qualifications, be categorized as an idealist – certainly not in its monistic form, because, if there is a single defining qualification of Tracy's thought, it is pluralistic.

For Tracy however, a theological or a religious proposition must cohere with other propositions that are common to our ordinary everyday experiences in order to be taken as true or meaningful. The danger though is that such "common experience" often becomes the Procrustean bed on which every truth must fit. Surely, there are some human experiences that are not so "common". Does their "uncommonness" disqualify them from being true? In other words, must every truth be common to everybody in order to be regarded as truth? This is why our imperative question becomes: to what extent must theological truths cohere with other rationalities or common human experience without allowing itself to completely disappear, or

submerge itself in the "harmonious whole" to the extent that its particularity is no longer of any importance?

Barth's tendency towards the correspondence notion of truth for his theology of retrieval is to guarantee the maintenance of his position that theology is a function of the church. On the other hand, when Tracy argues for publicness in theology, no correspondence notion of truth can sustain his argument because the public is so diverse that it cannot be limited to one focal point. This is why it has become necessary that there should be a joint reflective axis where fundamental and dogmatic theologies can collaborate in theological confrontation with pluralism. Because of the nature of theological discipline itself, no one concept of truth is sufficient to do justice to its claims. Whereas theology participates in the public arena by giving rational justifications for its assertions, the church still reserves the right to give particular meanings to some of its claims, at least, which must have to be understood in their particularity in which they have been proposed by the church.

While discussing how Barth's Christology contributes to a revival in theological method, Benoît Bourgine said: "… the logic of Christology determines a logic of theology which may be summed up in two basic attitudes: the rational effort of theology proceeds from the facticity of faith and revelation; it owes it to itself to take into account the historicity of revelation and theological language"[81]. He is, in other words, subscribing to a method that remains somehow within the realm of *fides quaerens intellectum*; but with openness for mutual confrontation of that *fides* by other non-theological academics. In this sense, the church will still perform its function as the determiner of the *fides* while the academy and the public will seek an *éclaircissement* of that *fides* using tools that can be available to all rational thinkers. In this way, the *fides* and the *intellectum* are not in conflict but in complementarity. Bourgine describes these two models of theology as "prophetic" and "sapiential", representing a viewpoint centred on revelation itself and the one articulated via a human universal, respectively. He places Barth undoubtedly to the prophetic type, while he categorizes Tillich and Rahner (and we shall add, Tracy) as embodying theological trend with orientation to a sapiential pole.

[81] Benoît BOURGINE, *The Christology of Karl Barth*, in Stuart George HALL (ed.), *Jesus Christ Today: Studies of Christology in Various Contexts*, Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, 2009, p. 179-208, p. 206.

What is most important to us however, is his final take on the complementarity of these two models: "These two paths are not two alternative branches; they represent a double research axis that theology must obligatorily assume, proportionately"[82]. Avery Dulles[83] had earlier acknowledged the need for this type of complementarity when, after discussing his models of revelation from the perspective of fundamental theology, he admitted that it was not "a full theology of revelation", but only serves as "a grounding for the dogmatic enterprise". He confessed that many points he discussed were left "vague or untouched", needing dogmatic theology for their completion. He then concluded: "A fundamental theology of revelation, while providing materials that are helpful to the dogmatic task, cannot by itself complete that task"[84].

The double research axis that Bourgine talks about is what Dulles says is needed for a complete theology of revelation. But they are even more needed when talking of a theological approach to pluralism because it requires both intellectual engagement and a serious grounding in Christian confession. It is under this double research axis or the reflective axis that we think that theology can develop public character while still remaining a function of the church. And this appears to be a credible way in which academic theology and confessional theology can truly correlate in order to fulfil the aspirations of the *Concilium* theology[85]. But will it address the much-desired question of rationality that has been the main concern of academic theology?

5. THEOLOGY AND THE CONTEMPORARY RATIONALITIES

Theology has been trying over the years to justify its status as a "rational" subject that should compete with others in the university. It has been the concern of academic theology that a "one-legged support" argument for theology tends to isolate it from the committee of scientific inquiry. But confessional theology argues, on the other hand, that surrendering theology to the whims and caprices of the so-

[82] B. BOURGINE, *The Christology of Karl Barth*, p. 208.
[83] Avery DULLES, *Models of Revelation*, New York, Orbis Books, (1983), 1992.
[84] Cf., A. DULLES, *Models of Revelation*, p. 265.
[85] The *Concilium* is a publication of the *International Association of Conciliar Theology*, founded in 1965 and inspired by the Second Vatican Council. It promotes theological discussion in the spirit of Vatican II; and has among other things, emphasized the need to bridge the gap, through dialogue, between academic theology and theology that renews the church and nourishes its spiritualties.

called scientific community tends to destroy that one legged support completely and replace it ironically with another "one-legged" support as determined (this time around) by the scientific community. In this sense, theology becomes what the scientific community wants it to be, and not what the church, under whose auspices theology emanated, says it is. The latter contends that with its admission into the so-called scientific community, theology tends to lose its identity. But academic theology insists that it has no place in the university if theology fails to rigorously identify with the norms and standards of scientific community. In fact, they argue that "rationality" can only be applied to theology if it is willing to abide by the general norms of rationality.

This polarization between academic and confessional theology with regards to the question of theological rationality has cast a doubt about the status of theology as a science. How then can one argue for "theological rationality" that can satisfy both confessional and academic theology when they correlate in the sense of theology being a public discourse and at the same time a function of the church? In other words, how can theology fruitfully engage with the scientific community without allowing theology to completely disappear?

First, one has to re-think the question of theological rationality. If one considers the concept of rationality from the basic dictionary definition of it, one would realize that the word "rationality" simply implies reasonableness or being agreeable to reason. In this sense, rationality as applying to religious beliefs poses no problems at all in as much as such beliefs are in agreement with reason. We already examined, in chapter 5 of this work, how philosophers of religion have been using this general concept of rationality to argue that religious beliefs are not only rational but also true because they are warranted beliefs. They arrived at this conclusion not on the account that religious beliefs cannot be contradicted (rationality has never implied immunity from being contradicted); they are taken as rational because they are arrived at through some logical reasoning that leads to coherent conclusions.

Karl Popper's *principle of rationality*[86] according to which "agents always act in a manner appropriate to the situation in which they find themselves", has generated a lot of controversy in philosophy. He himself considers the principle as being without any empirical content and therefore "strictly speaking false" or "nearly

[86] Cf., Karl R. POPPER, *The Myth of Framework: In Defence of Science and Rationality* (edited by Mark Amadeus Notturno), London, Routledge 1994, chap. 8.

empty". Yet he maintains that it should not be rejected or falsified because "it is a good approximation to the truth", and because, it is "tremendously useful". The difficulty in this famous 'principle of rationality' is that Popper upholds that a principle that is not universally true is false. Now, the 'principle of rationality' as he stated it, is not universally true, therefore ought to be false. Yet, he maintains that it should not be rejected on the account that it is a good approximation to the truth.

When one dissects Popper's theory, one can say that although a principle that is occasionally contradicted (and therefore not universally true) is by default false, this does not however remove the fact that it can still be rational in as much as it is an approximation to the truth. Rationality in this sense does not necessarily imply universality; approximation to the truth suffices to accord the status of rationality. Rationality does not also mean provability. Gordon Clark[87] has been a champion of arguing that there are certain axioms which cannot be proven, but which are assumed in order to make any progress in an endeavour. The geometry axioms that 'a straight line is the shortest distance between two points' cannot be proven. But in order to begin doing geometry at all, it has to be believed. No one questions the rationality of such axioms on the basis of the fact that it cannot be proven. In the same way, the concept of an infinite regress is not after all infinite if one considers the fact that in order to begin at all to formulate the concept, one has to begin somewhere. That 'somewhere' is not something that can be proven. But nonetheless, for a circular infinite regress to make a meaning, it is necessary to assume that 'somewhere' from where one begins to explain the concept. If one follows Clark in championing this type of rationality, then it is pertinent to note, like he did, that at the root of every statement about truth, is something which one must "choose" to believe, but which cannot be proven from within that statement's system of thought.

This so-called 'presuppositional method' of apologetics has been variously applied to the Christian belief where it is argued that the truth of Christianity must be presupposed as the proper starting point in apologetics. If this were the case, then Barth appears to have "correctly" started his dogmatics with the doctrine of the word of God and the church proclamation as the material of dogmatics. With this

[87] Cf., Gordon Haddon CLARK, *Three Types of Religious Philosophy* (1973), Jefferson, Maryland, The Trinity Foundation, 1989. cf., also, Gordon H. CLARK, *Religion, Reason and Revelation* (1961), Jefferson, The Trinity Foundation, (1986) 1995.

church proclamation as the "axiom", he insisted that dogmatics has to be first and foremost a "scientific" self-examination of this distinctive talk about God. He did not start with seeking to revise this Christianity's self-understanding in order to first make it scientific before it could become theological.

However, when one talks of rationality in theology, the issue at stake is not whether theological statements have meaning or not, or whether such statements are agreeable to reason or not. At least, from the philosophical point of view, it has been "proven" that Christian beliefs taken as warranted or as having greater probability to be true, are rational. The bigger issue for theology is, to what extent (if any) theology, which calls itself a science, follows the specific scientific principles that are operative in the conventional universities of the world. How does theology justify its cognitive claims using the scientific principles or methods of justification? This is where the gap between academic and confessional theologies widens. According to this thinking, theology can only be considered rational if it is founded on the basis of the accepted scientific principles. Thus it is that "foundationalism" as a method in theological inquiry has sprung up as a justification for theological rationality, and found favour mostly with academic theology. But its opposite, the "anti-foundationalism" or the "non-foundationalism", has tried to insist on the theological non-viability of the former as a method of theological inquiry. This became the major argument of confessional theology. While foundationalism insists on the universalist type of rationality, arguing for a very strong anchoring of theological truths on external sources as a condition for any theological work to be carried on at all, the anti-foundationalist holds rather a particularist type, maintaining that such external sources or authorities very easily erode theological traditions and compromise its specificity.

Contemporary theology has tended to become an exercise in mediation between these two theological poles. Philip Clayton, in his own attempt to bridge this dichotomy between foundationalism and anti-foundationalism, has been arguing very strongly for a move beyond foundationalism, which does not translate to acceptance of anti-foundationalism. Apart from his earlier work where he made a strong case for the understanding of theology as explanation, so that in its broader sense, the term "scientific" is taken to denote any explanatory discipline, empirical or otherwise[88], his more recent

[88] Cf., P. CLAYTON, *Explanation from Physics to Theology*.

works have focused on the theme of integration as a way to "reconcile" theology with other areas of human scientific learnings. In proposing a form of theology as adventure[89] using this principle of integration, he says: "There is no integration if one sees contemporary culture and science as enemies from which one needs to protect her faith on every front. Nor is there integration if one retains nothing from the tradition *with which* to engage as she pursues dialogue with science, philosophy, and other religious traditions". He added that, "the drive to integrate is an ethical and deeply religious commitment that… lies at the very core of Christian identity in today's world"[90]. The idea of integration is therefore necessary to bring together the particularist rationality argument of confessional theology and the universalist rationality argument of academic theology. Christianity is after all both particular and universal; hence theological rationality has to be somewhat transversal.

Wentzel van Huyssteen, while arguing for a transversal rationality, has suggested that science cannot claim rationality at the expense of religious faith and theological reflection[91]. Theology and science, he says, are certainly different modes of reflection, but they do share the richness of the resources of human rationality. For this reason, there is need for interdisciplinarity between theology and science, and also between theology and the rest of the contemporary rationalities. This transversality takes the form of an intersection between two or more rationalities in such a way as to avoid absolutism and relativism.

It appears, however, that Tracy's idea of "shared concept of reason" suggests a sort of longitudinal rationality where the goal seems to be that of linking theological rationality directly to scientific rationality so that they become a single rationality. And it appears that Barth's "one support" spinning top suggests a sort of parallel rationality that have nowhere to intersect and interact with other rationalities. Surely, theology has a lot to learn not only from the sciences, but also from the rest of other rationalities. Such other rationalities provide veritable "sources" for theology, just as theology can equally provide insights to them. But (and this is our insistence), there can be dialogue, through the method of transversality, between

[89] Cf., Philip CLAYTON, *Adventures in the Spirit: God, World, Divine Action* (edited by Zachary Simpson), Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2008.
[90] P. CLAYTON, *Adventures in the Spirit*, p. 256.
[91] J. Wentzel VAN HUYSSTEEN, *The Shaping of Rationality: Toward Interdisciplinarity in Theology and Science*, Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, U.K., William B. Eerdmans, 1999.

two different reasoning methods without trying to reduce one to the other, and without insisting that the concept of reason operative in them must be "shared" in order to be considered rational.

On what concerns the truth-claim arising from such dialogue, it is important to recall that Popper's "principle of rationality" is not all about universality but more about approximation. One does not need to achieve universality or consensus in order to guarantee truthfulness. Once a proposition is a good approximation to the truth, it meets Popper's principle of rationality (all other criticisms against the principle not withstanding). On this basis alone, the theological truth arising from a correlated academic and confessional theology is considered to have met the basic "scientific" criteria for truth if it is a good approximation to truth, and not if it is consensually accepted. While slightly modifying Popper's "approximation" theory, van Huyssteen observes that science often progresses through revolutions and radical shifts. Because of this, he believes that what is achieved in scientific inquiry is not so much approximation of truth, as an estimation of it. This is why, for him, what actually guarantees the truth is what he calls "better" estimates of what the world is like. He argues that, "our accepted 'truths' should be viewed as nothing more than the best possible estimates or judgments that we are able to make in the present moment"[92]. If science as a whole relies, for the validity of its propositions, on the notion of an estimate (albeit, a better one) of what the world is like, the truths of theological dialogue between academic and confessional theologies should be able to be validated with the same reliance on "estimate" without necessarily insisting on consensus.

In summary, to do justice to the culture of pluralism, and to take the plurality of culture, religion, and various rationalities into account, it appears that academic theology and confessional theology must have to come together in order to give theology a public character without undermining its status as a function of the church. In this way, theology would have developed links through which these various diversities can be integrated without however losing consciousness of its primary constituency.

[92] J. W. VAN HUYSSTEEN, *The Shaping of Rationality*, p. 156-159.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

The culture of pluralism has impacted greatly on Christian theology. With the "theory of inclusiveness" embedded in the notion of pluralism, theology has been struggling to demonstrate how to address this culture in such a way as to maintain a balance between an inclusiveness that tends to exclude one's particularity in order to be viewed as rational, and an inclusiveness that makes insistence on one's particularity appear totally "irrational". Karl Barth and David Tracy addressed the culture of pluralism with similar theological concerns, but with significantly different tactical approaches. While Barth anchored his theology on the church in order to maintain its particularity and distinctiveness in the midst of plurality, Tracy anchored his on public in order to maintain its scientificity and rationality among plurality. Barth's approach is a prototype of confessional theology which is concerned with conserving the church's confession in theological discourses. For this school, theology is first and foremost a church's confession anchored on faith-commitment of the theologian, before it seeks to become "scientific" through rational explanation of this faith. Tracy's approach, on the other hands, typifies the academic theology that seeks to first establish the rationality of theology as a condition for its admission into the scientific community. Although it doesn't altogether exclude the confessions of the church, it does not approach theology "confessionally" but rather "rationally". This means that those confessions have to be rationally revised so that they can be "rationally" confessed. One can therefore say that while Barth was primarily concerned with faith and secondarily with thought, Tracy appears to be primarily concerned with thought and secondarily with faith.

But these different primary concerns have consequences for theology. For Barth, theology becomes a one-way direction: theology must be re-directed away from liberalism back to the Word of God as found in the Bible. There is nothing fundamentally wrong with such re-direction in itself; except that all dissenting voices in theology that tend to approach theology from any other direction were viewed as "a-theological". In this sense, human subjectivity or human experiences in theology is viewed with suspicion. Because theology is viewed as basically a reflection or a commentary on revelation, and although he pitches revelation against the religion of revelation, only the religion of revelation becomes the "true" religion in the sense of a justified

sinner. And while acknowledging that the revelation of God is not bound up with the religion of revelation, his treatment of truths *exra muros ecclesiae* as "apparently" secular but "actually" Christocentric makes it difficult to approach the religious other as really "other". To avoid this one-way approach, we proposed a symphonic understanding of pluralism, and concluded that neither the religion of revelation as insisted by Barth, nor the revelation of religion as taught by Neo-Protestantism will suffice as a theological approach to the culture of pluralism.

Tracy's theology, while advocating for a mutually-critical correlation, tended to do so from a position of non-commitment. From this position, it becomes very easy to dismantle the "axiom" from where Christian theology ought to emanate, and reconstruct such axioms on supposedly more rational foundation. Because he was intent on making theology in its entirety an entirely public discourse, he did not seriously consider the role of the church in theological discourse. In fact he is one of those who tend to radically separate theology as a subject from Christianity as a religion. Although the two are not, and should not be, equated, a diametric opposition of them renders the role of the church in theological discourse redundant. It is true that Tracy advocates for intensification of particularities; meaning that one has to undergo a journey of intensification within her particular tradition, the goal is not to make the outcome of such intensification an enrichment of the tradition as such (he insists that in such journey of intensification, 'something else might eventually be revealed to be the case'), but to make it a publicly shareable material that will be acceptable to all.

In our contemporary world however, there is no longer a scandal of particularities. In fact, Clayton argues that it is precisely particularities rather than commonalities that postmodernity celebrates:

> "Diversity is now the name of the game; multiple perspectives are the bottom line; every person and cultural group has his, her or its particular perspectives; and we rejoice – at least in theory – in the differences between them all. There is no longer a scandal of particularity in a postmodern age because *it is precisely particularity that is being celebrated by postmodern thought*"[1].

[1] Philip D. CLAYTON, *God and Contemporary Science*, Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997, p. 2 (emphases are his).

But if postmodernity celebrates particularities, this should not imply "isolationist particularity". Within the celebration of particularities, others (other religions, rationalities) are always lurking by the side as part and parcel of this postmodern world. Therefore, any Christian theology that does not take the reality and challenges of others (especially other religions) seriously is not fit to serve the interest of Christianity. Living the Christian life inter-religiously has become the new normal in our world of today. Werner Jeanrond reminds us that, "religious otherness is omnipresent in our lives today, not merely as a subject for discussion in our schools and universities, but also as a challenge on our streets, on television screens, at work, and at play – everywhere"[2]. Theology has gone beyond the rhetoric of playing on words with regards to the possibility or impossibility of dialoguing with the religious other. The Western hermeneutics focused exclusively on the interpretation of texts are already being surpassed in respect to the issue of interreligious dialogue. Jeanrond, for instance, believes that hermeneutics is much larger than mere interpretation of texts. He thinks that it concerns all forms of communicative expression of which human beings are capable. This is why he decided to approach interreligious dialogue from the perspective of what he calls a "hermeneutics of love", arguing that "a hermeneutics of love widens the object of interpretation beyond writing"[3]. In this way, he opens up the possibility of dialoguing even with those religions with no written texts. This approach, certainly, represents an effort to break through the limitations posed by academic theology's strict focus on texts, and argue that there are other ways in which various religions are interconnected aside the written texts.

In fact, Catherine Cornille, while discussing the conditions for interreligious dialogue, presented this element of "interconnection" as the third of her five conditions. She says: "One of the basic conditions for interreligious dialogue is a sense of commonality or solidarity among religions, and of the relevance of the other religion for one's own religious tradition"[4]. In this sense therefore, no Christian theology, in this contemporary world of inclusiveness, can afford not

[2] Werner G. JEANROND, *Toward an Interreligious Hermeneutics of Love*, in Catherine CORNILLE and Christopher CONWAY (ed.), *Interreligious Hermeneutics*, (Interreligious Dialogue Series 2), Eugene, Oregon, Cascade Books, 2010, p. 44- 60, p. 45.
[3] W. JEANROND, *Toward an Interreligious Hermeneutics of Love*, p. 53.
[4] Catherine CORNILLE, *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*, New York, The Crossroad, 2008, p. 95.

to concern itself with "religious languages from other sources" as Barth's confessional theology had earlier counselled. But in concerning itself with these other religious languages, one must not also fall into the temptation of trying to force the Christian distinctive religious language to cohere with those others in order to meet up with the so-called criteria of adequacy to common human experience. Just as various human experiences that fashion the perception of their "public" vary from culture to culture, religious experiences that give rise to various religious languages equally vary from religion to religion. It is true that Cornille talks of "a common ground" such as "a common origin or goal outside or within religious traditions" (p. 95), or "common mystical experiences" (p. 110) as good starting points or even as the very goals of dialogue. But while one can discover such similarities or commonness through dialogue, their pre-discovery need not be a condition for starting a dialogue.

One of the shortcomings of purely academic theology is its tendency to so fixate on 'common ground', on 'shared concept of reason', on 'similarities', etc., that sometimes it plays down on stark differences, even when it talks of 'similarities-in-differences'. Jonathan Sacks has however, advocated for a 'theology of difference' when he said:

> "Often, when leaders meet and talk, the emphasis is on similarities and commonalities, as if the differences between faiths were superficial and trivial. That is not, however, what comes to the fore at times of conflict. It is then that what seem to an outsider to be minor variations take on immense significance, dividing neighbourhoods and turning erstwhile friends into enemies. …There is nothing so slight that it cannot, under pressure, be turned into a maker of identity and thus of mutual estrangement. We need, in other words, not only a theology of commonality – of the universals of mankind – but also a theology of difference"[5].

This theology of difference can also be equated to a theology of particularity which Clayton says, postmodernity celebrates. However, one should also not lose sense of what Cornille says that, "some belief in the interconnection or interrelatedness between religions is necessary in order to render dialogue both possible and meaningful"[6]. It is on this understanding of interconnection and interrelatedness that various religions can dialogue and learn from one another. Dialogue

[5] Jonathan SACKS, *The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations*, London, Continuum, 2002, p. 21.
[6] C. CORNILLE, *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*, p. 95.

creates an atmosphere of "listening". When one listens, one hears, when one hears, one knows; and, as Anthony de Mello would say, to *really* know is to be transformed by what one knows[7]. It is in this manner that Christianity can be transformed through interreligious dialogue. The transformation for certain does not come from "outside" through spirited concession to find a common ground at all cost; it rather comes from "inside" through the willingness to say what has been previously said, but now in a better way, thanks to the fruit of listening to the "other" through dialogue. In this way, the "connective principle" is really complemented by the "guarding principle"[8]. Inasmuch as one should interconnect with others, one should equally guard one's primary base against being totally eroded.

The practice of earlier pluralist theologians of leaving their houses unguarded because they want to construct others' houses is therefore a misplaced priority. It is not the duty of Christian theologians to try to determine for other religions which aspects of their religions lead to salvation and which do not. These are the duties of the theologians of these religions. They should determine for themselves what "salvation" means for them, that is, if they have any concept of salvation at all. The duty of the Christian theologian is to state the Christian position as clearly and as distinctly as possible and be ready to defend such position with convincing arguments. But, as the hallmark of a good scholar is the ability to modify one's position when confronted with superior argument, the theologian must also be ready to modify her earlier positions in the light of the new-found insights gained from dialoguing with others. It is in this sense that other religions can serve as invaluable sources of insights in theological development.

Lindbeck's version of postliberalism and his intratextual hermeneutics which makes the text to absorb the world and not vice versa cannot therefore be accepted, because, it makes Christianity and Christian theology appear static, unable to be touched or affected by the world. In her effort to ease the tension between identity and

[7] Cf., Anthony DE MELLO, *The Song of the Bird*, Gujarat (India), Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1987, 2006, p. 106-107.

[8] William Christian has argued that in the hermeneutics of interreligious dialogue, one should be guided by these two principles. The 'connective principle' seeks to discover the commonalities between religions. But one should also guard well the teachings of his own tradition and not allow its voice to be confused with other voices. This is what he calls the 'guarding principle'. According to him, the two principles should complement each other. Cf., William A. CHRISTIAN Sr., *Studying Doctrines of Religious Communities*, in James KELLENBERGER (ed.), *Inter-Religious Models and Criteria*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1993, p. 135-150.

alterity often generated in theological discourse about the "other", Marianne Moyaert compared Lindbeck's intratextual hermeneutics with Ricoeur's principle of intertextuality[9]. According to her, unlike Lindbeck who insists on untranslatability of religions, Ricoeur speaks of translatability de jure and argues for a praxis of linguistic hospitality with a double duty to expropriate oneself as one appropriates the other. Although she sees both authors as conceiving our era as post-Babel in the sense that humanity exists as fragmented, she could not hide her preference for Ricoeur's rather than Lindbeck's approach to this post-Babel challenge:

> "Lindbeck believes that the real challenge in this post-Babel age lies in protecting traditions against erosion. But Ricoeur wants to mend the broken middle. His hermeneutical anthropology is inspired by the hope that brokenness will not have the last word, and this hope is fed by faith in the primary interconnectedness of all humanity. I believe that theologians who are likewise convinced of the theological importance of interreligious dialogue can find in Ricoeur a traveling companion"[10].

The encounter of Christianity with other religions cannot just allow Christianity to absorb the world in a one-way direction as proposed by Lindbeck. The interconnection among religions disavows such one-way direction. In the same way, the encounter of theology as a whole with other rationalities cannot allow theology to remain unaffected by these other modes of thought. The best way to achieve all these interconnectedness without sacrificing the particularity of theology and Christianity at the altar of shared concept of reason is to bring academic theology and confessional theology together and make theology both a public discourse and a function of the church.

[9] Marianne MOYAERT, *Absorption or Hospitality: Two Approaches to the Tension between Identity and Alterity*, in Catherine CORNILLE and Christopher CONWAY (ed.), *Interreligious Hermeneutics*, (Interreligious Dialogue Series 2), Eugene, Oregon, Cascade Books, 2010, p. 61-88.

[10] M. MOYAERT, *Absorption or Hospitality*, p. 88.

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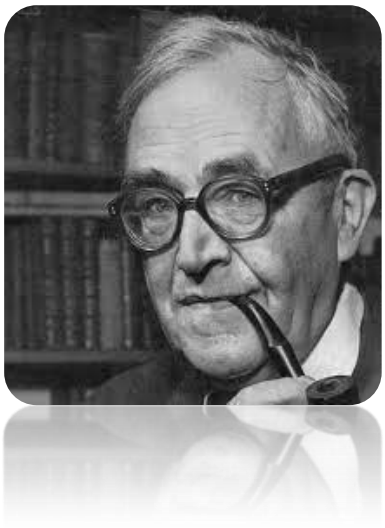
KARL BARTH (1886-1968)



"Theology cannot be carried on in the private lighthouses of some sort of merely personal discoveries and opinions. It can be carried on only in the church – it can be put to work in all its elements only in the context of the questioning and answering of the Christian community and in the rigorous service of its commission to all men" – Karl Barth.

"Dogmatics is a theological discipline. But theology is a function of the Church…. When the Church puts to itself the question of truth in its threefold form in a way which is objective and not arbitrary, its self-examination acquires the character of a scientific undertakings which has its own place alongside other human undertakings of the same or similar kind" – Karl Barth.

"Theology must begin with Jesus Christ, and not with general principles, however better, or, at any rate, more relevant and illuminating, they may appear to be: as though He were a continuation of the knowledge and Word of God, and not its root and origin, not indeed the very Word of God itself. Theology must also end with Him, and not with supposedly self-evident general conclusions from what is particularly enclosed and disclosed in Him: as though the fruits can be shaken from this tree; as though in the things of God there were anything general which could know and designate in addition to and even independently of this particular" – Karl Barth.

"Theology would be an utter failure if it should place itself in some elegant eminence where it would be concerned only with God, the world, man, and some other items, perhaps those of historical interest, instead of being theology for the *community*. … Consequently fundamental trust instead of mistrust will be the initial attitude of theology toward the tradition which determines the present-day Church" – Karl Barth.

DAVID TRACY (1939-)

"The Christian theologian *qua* theologian need not be an explicit believer. What he needs is some adequate pre-understanding of the subject-matter (religion) – a pre-understanding basically present to anyone able to ask the fundamental questions of human existence articulated in religious and theological speech" – David Tracy.

"Even if in fact the theologian is a believer in the tradition, in principle as a fundamental theologian… the theologian should argue the case (pro or con) on strictly public grounds that are open to all rational persons" – David Tracy.

"Academic theologians… may abstract themselves from religious "faith-commitments" for the legitimate purposes of clarifying the arguments of theological discourse so they may be viewed as public arguments in the obvious sense – argued, reasonable positions open to all intelligent, reasonable, and responsible persons" – David Tracy.

"Contemporary Christian theology is best understood as philosophical reflection upon the meanings present in common human experience and the meanings present in the Christian tradition" – David Tracy.

"The struggle of modern theology (has) eventually reached the stage of challenging every important cognitive claim of Christian tradition. … The fundamental loyalty of the theologian *qua* theologian is to that morality of scientific knowledge which he shares with his colleagues, the philosophers, historians, and social scientists" – David Tracy.