

Evangelical Review of Theology

EDITOR: DAVID PARKER

Volume 33 • Number 2 • April 2009

Articles and book reviews reflecting global evangelical
theology for the purpose of discerning the obedience of faith

Published by



for
WORLD EVANGELICAL
ALLIANCE
Theological Commission

With/Beyond Tracy: Re-visioning Public Theology

Timoteo D. Gener

KEYWORDS: *Culture, theological method, revised correlation, conversation, missiological, transformation, experience and reason.*

THIS STUDY EXPLORES David Tracy's approach to public theology with theology of culture as background to the topic.¹ More specifically, writing as a theologian from the Philippines, I seek to develop a basic understanding of 'public theology' for evangelical theological engagement in the country.²

1 I have explored Tracy's theology of culture in 'The Catholic Imagination in a Theology of Culture: A Conversation with David Tracy on Theology of Culture' (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, Center for Advanced Theological Studies, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California, June 2003). For a summary of Tracy's theology, see Gaspar Martinez's *Confronting the Mystery of God: Political, Liberation, and Public Theologies* (New York, London: Continuum, 2001), 152-215.

2 Robert McElroy credits Martin Marty for coining the term 'public theology' in 1974. See McElroy, *The Search for an American Public Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 4. This emphasis on 'public theology' in classify-

Here I am presuming that Tracy serves as a vital conversation partner.³ For one, his revised correlational method envisions a full spectrum of dialogical possibilities in conversation with public culture. As such, it appears to be a useful method for mission and dialogue with culture and society.⁴ Incidentally,

ing theology *as such* would be an interesting subject worth exploring for a future study. One wonders why, for example, Calvin or Barth had *not* made a point of this.

3 Various theologians have approached his insights from diverse emphases: fundamental theology, systematics, hermeneutics and rhetorics, philosophy of religion [cf. John P. McCarthy, 'David Tracy' in *A New Handbook of Christian Theologians*, Donald W. Musser and Joseph L. Price (eds.) (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 468.] As an evangelical, I am interested in engaging his public theology from a 'missiological' angle.

4 Tracy's correlational model of doing theology has been a congenial partner to the practice of theological inculturation in the Philippines. See Jose de Mesa, *In Solidarity with the Culture* (Quezon City, Philippines: Maryhill School of Theology, 1987), 1-42, esp., 20-21, 40-41. See also Stephen Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991) 81-96; Lode Wostyn and Jose de Mesa, *Doing Theology* (Quezon City: Claretian, 1991).

Timoteo D. Gener is Associate Professor of Theology at Asian Theological Seminary and at the Asia Graduate School of Theology-Philippines, Quezon City, Philippines. He holds a PhD from Fuller Theological Seminary and a M.Phil from the Institute of Christian Studies, Toronto, Canada. This is an extended version of the paper delivered by the author at the Annual Conference of the Evangelical Theological Society November 17, 2006.

Tracy explicitly aligns his general method of correlation(s) with H. R. Niebuhr's model of cultural transformation.⁵ For another, Tracy is a pivotal theologian who takes seriously the question of the relationship between Christian faith and the public sphere.⁶

I will begin by discussing Tracy's notion of public theology, including its correlational methodology, theological bases, and social strategy. From a synchronic presentation, I will add a diachronic rendering of Tracy's theological journey. From here, I will move on to offer an appreciation (*with*) and critique of (*beyond*) Tracy's proposals.

I Tracy's Model of Public Theology: An Overview

Tracy has been writing about 'public theology' for about a quarter of a century now. He delineates the public character of theology in at least two ways: theology as public discourse and as revisionist/correlationist theology.

1. Theology as public discourse

Tracy maintains theology to be a *public form of discourse* or a *discipline informing public discourse* rooted in a radically monotheistic claim and affirmed within a modern, pluralistic (United States) setting. This pluralistic context con-

sists of at least three publics: society, academy, and church.⁷ The theocentric basis is critical to his understanding of theology's public role.

For theology dares to speak of all reality—persons, history, self, all—in relationship to the whole of reality. That whole is believed in... as God. And theology—precisely as *theologos*—attempts to speak this word about God in fidelity to the demands and the disciplines of the three publics, not one: of church, academy, and the wider society.⁸

Because of the very nature of fundamental questions it asks and because of the nature of the reality of God upon which theology reflects, theology must develop public, not private, criteria and discourse.⁹

Publicness is tied with pluralism in public life. The public realm involves the 'pluralism of cultural worlds' both external and internal. Theologians are not only dealing with 'several publics external to the self but to several internalized publics in one's own reflections on authentic existence.'¹⁰ Theology's public nature directly relates to theologians' public role as well as to the 'publics' (reference groups) to whom they speak.¹¹ Theology engages the

7 Tracy, *Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), xi; 'Theology as Public Discourse,' *The Christian Century*, March 1975, 280; 'The Role of Theology in Public Life: Some Reflections,' *Word & World* 4:3 (1984), 230-32.

8 Tracy, 'The Role of Theology in Public Life,' 231.

9 Tracy, *Analogical Imagination*, xi.

10 Tracy, *Analogical Imagination*, 4.

11 Tracy, *Analogical Imagination*, 4.

5 Tracy, et al., 'Theological Reflection on Local Religious Leadership,' in *Parish, Priest, and People: New Leadership for the Local Church* (Chicago: Thomas More Press, 1981), 150-158.

6 For a summary of Tracy's theology as public theology, see Gaspar Martinez, *Confronting the Mystery of God*, 152-215. See also Gener, 'The Catholic Imagination,' Chapters 2, 5.

claims of the three publics.¹²

Tracy further explains that theology 'speaks from and to three publics.' As public discourse, theology does not simply *speaks from* a social location; it also *speaks to* that location.¹³ It draws from a social locus as it shares a certain consensus about what counts as public discourse, what needs to be addressed, how claims are warranted and advanced. But it also names God, speaks of God, and addresses God's concerns to that location (and implicitly, to the other publics).

One finds Tracy, therefore, moving beyond a pluralistic description toward discernment to norm theological reflection. The following remark is typical: 'To affirm pluralism responsibly must include an affirmation of truth and public criteria for that affirmation.'¹⁴ This leads aptly to Tracy's notion of criteria.

In *Blessed Rage for Order*, Tracy identifies two major criteria for fundamental or public theology: (a) criteria of adequacy to human experience (or

alternatively, criteria of intelligibility or credibility) and (b) criteria of appropriateness for Christian texts (or Christian identity).¹⁵ The first grounds the meaningfulness, meaning, and truthfulness of cognitive claims in a philosophical reflection on lived experience or the self as self, 'mediated through various disciplines such as art, history, cultural analysis, human scientific analysis, and philosophical analysis.'¹⁶ This is a way of honoring the integrity of contemporary experience (of pluralism) in theological reflection.

The second criteria searches for an adequate theory of interpretation to 'show how (the theologians') present categories are appropriate understandings of the Christian understanding of existence.'¹⁷ This is determined by referring to the 'meanings involved either explicitly or implicitly in the significant texts, actions, gestures, and symbols of the entire Christian tradition.'¹⁸

More recently, in recognition of the post-modern situation, Tracy supple-

ments his previous proposal by submitting three sets of criteria: the hermeneutical notion of truth as manifestation, criteria of reasonable coherence, and the ethical-political criteria.¹⁹ In so doing, Tracy modifies his notion of transcendental (metaphysical) reflection proper to theological reflection. First, truth as manifestation (or what he calls the analogical imagination) remains the foundation of possibility for public conversation as well as for the method of correlation. Second, reasonable coherence means a 'more flexible but no less rational criteria for the rough coherence of what truths-as-manifestations we may hermeneutically learn from revelation with what we otherwise know as reasonable from science and all other uses of reason.'²⁰ Finally, the ethical-political criteria as pragmatics combine with the truth as manifestation (hermeneutic) to reflect the interrelation of theory and praxis, revelation and salvation.

Summing up, public theology strongly repudiates the notion that theology is simply a self-expression of the church's own self-understanding. Theology ought not to remain exclusively in the church. '[T]he church when faithful to its own self-understanding is not a sect.'²¹ It has responsibilities to the wider culture. Consequently, it belongs as much in a modern univer-

sity and in the wider culture and not simply within the churches.²²

2. Revisionist Theology

Public theology is also *revisionist theology* (or *revised* correlational theology) which in its three forms (fundamental, systematic, or practical), seeks to 'render public the resources of theology for the overlapping publics of the church, the academy, and distinct pastoral, cultural, and political praxis movements.'²³ Hence, to render its resources for public transformation through correlation and conversation is theology's distinct role in public life.

In assuming this role, its distinction lies in adding a third public from which it draws from and speaks to: not just the academy and the general culture, but also the church, understood as a community of moral and religious inquiry and commitment.²⁴ As a modern discipline, however, it speaks to the academy (as a discipline of liberal art) and, through its academic work, to the general culture as well.²⁵

Because of the prominence of conversation, public theology is correlational theology. In Tracy's words, 'a correlational model of theology seems

12 Here he combines the analyses of historians, as well as culture and sociological theorists like Martin Marty, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, Clifford Geertz, Stephen Toulmin, Gregory Baum, Van Harvey, and Jürgen Habermas (*Analogical Imagination*, xii, 1-6, 31-40)

13 E.g. Tracy, *Analogical Imagination*, xi; 'The Role of Theology in Public Life,' 230.

14 Tracy, *Analogical Imagination*, xi. In doing this, Tracy was, in effect, proposing some boundary-markers for doing theology in contemporary life. Cf. Gareth Jones who says that from a rhetorical point of view, Tracy's *Blessed Rage for Order* seeks to 'halt the 'postmodernist slide' [*Critical Theology: Questions of Truth and Method* (New York: Paragon House, 1995) 115.

15 Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975, 1996), 64-87; also 'On Reading the Scriptures Theologically,' in *Theology and Dialogue*. Bruce Marshall (ed.) (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 36-37.

16 Gerald M. Boodoo, *Development and Consolidation: The Use of Theological Method in the Works of David Tracy* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Faculty of Theology, 1991) 112.

17 Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order*, 72; cited by Boodoo, *Development and Consolidation*, 114-115.

18 Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order*, 72. cited by Boodoo, *Development and Consolidation*, 115.

19 Tracy, 'The Uneasy Alliance Reconceived: Catholic Theological Method, Modernity, and Postmodernity,' *Theological Studies* 50 (1989), 561.

20 Tracy, 'The Uneasy Alliance Reconceived,' 566.

21 Tracy, 'The Role of Theology in Public Life,' 230.

22 Tracy, 'The Role of Theology in Public Life,' 230.

23 Tracy, 'Revisionist Practical Theology and the Meaning of Public Discourse,' *Pastoral Psychology* 26 (1977), 83.

24 Tracy, 'The Role of Theology in Public Life,' 230.

25 Tracy, 'Afterword: Theology, Public Discourse, and the American Tradition,' in Michael J. Lacey, ed., *Religion and the Twentieth Century American Intellectual Life* (Cambridge University Press, 1989) 193-203.

the best available for an understanding of the possible function of theology in the public realm.²⁶ This model 'not merely allows but demands that theology enter into serious conversation with all others in the public realm.'²⁷ Theology in the correlational model involves

the attempt to establish, in both theory and practice, *mutually critical correlations* between two sets of interpretation: an interpretation of the Christian tradition and an interpretation of contemporary experience.²⁸

It is not correlation in the mode of Paul Tillich, which is a one-way movement from existential questions to Christian answers. Rather, it is a both-way, self-critical approach to theology. There are two principal sources for doing theology (the Christian tradition and contemporary experience) and the goal is to critically correlate them for transformative theory and practice. Mutual criticism and correction between Christian tradition and contemporary experience follows from the fact of finitude and contingency.²⁹ The

qualifier 'mutually critical' signals the self-critical theological stance, as well as the attendant risks involved in the interpretive process. Hence, Tracy insists that his method is a revised correlational method—a revised form of Tillich's correlation.³⁰

Correlational theology as public discourse allies with a *rhetorical model for theological discourse*.³¹ From this angle, one can say that Tracy employs reason rhetorically, that is, reason *as* communication. It follows that he is not concerned with theoretical certainty but rather, to advance the conversation with its many dialogue partners.³² Thus, Webb advances that correlation

Introduction to Its Traditions and Tasks. Edited by Robert King and Peter Hodgson (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982, 1985), 36).

30 For a different reading of Tillich's method, see Timoteo Gener, 'Transformational Correlation: A Reformational Perspective on Cultural Theological Method in Conversation with David Tracy's and Paul Tillich's Correlational Approach,' in *That the World May Believe: Essays on Mission and Unity in Honour of George Vandervelde*. M. Goheen and M. O'Gara (eds.) (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2006) 29-43.

31 Most notably in Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987). Those who explicitly adopt a rhetorical theological model with affinities to Tracy's approach, include Stephen Webb, *Refiguring Theology: The Rhetoric of Karl Barth* (Albany: SUNY, 1991), and Don Compier, *What is Rhetorical Theology? Textual Practice and Public Discourse* (Harrisburg, PA: TPI, 1999).

32 Metaphysics and transcendental arguments receive a temporary, pragmatic usefulness. This rhetorical grounding has relevance to the charge of foundationalism in Tracy. See Webb, *Refiguring Theology*, 176-177, also 179 n.4.

26 Tracy, 'The Role of Theology in Public Life,' 234.

27 Tracy, 'The Role of Theology in Public Life,' 235.

28 Tracy, 'The Role of Theology in Public Life,' 235, my emphases.

29 'There is no innocent interpretation, no unambiguous tradition, no history-less, subject-less interpreter, no abstract, general situation, no method to guarantee certainty. There is only the risk of theological interpretation itself... and sharing that interpretation with the wider theological community for their criticism and their appropriation' (Tracy, 'Theological Method,' in *Christian Theology: An*

becomes (hermeneutical) conversation for Tracy, mainly 'rhetorical and not ontological, unpredictable and yet urgent,' and not dependent on a systematic philosophical framework.³³ In fact, Webb says, one can view Tracy's proposal as one that 'depends on a *tropical strategy of analogy* in rhetoric: both the similarity and the difference of the other must be recognized at the same time. From that recognition, true dialogical—mutually critical interaction—can take place.'³⁴

Correlation translates into conversation as a public strategy. The 'conversation' suggests that Christian theology does not have special prerogative to the recognition of truth. The classic manifestations of meaning and truth go beyond the confines of theology and the church.³⁵ This 'conversation' is an imperative for critical (social) collaboration and search for truth in the public realm.

3. Inner Theological Reasons

From scriptural grounds, how does Tracy support his model of public theology that emphasizes the intrinsic role of three publics (academy, church, society) in theological reflection? As we have seen, Tracy qualifies that the universalizing impetus of the Christian

message (that which drives theology to be truly public) ultimately resides in the nature of God as God as revealed in Jesus Christ, the God to whom Christians bear witness. From this Christian self-understanding, Tracy claims that faith in the 'all pervasive reality of God' disclosed in Jesus Christ leads to 'fundamental trust in and loyalty to the world in all its ambiguity' even to 'the church as... primary mediator of the gift of God in Christ.'³⁶

Ambiguity pertains to the mixture of good and evil, light and darkness, which does not exempt members of the church. In John's Gospel and the Johannine epistles, one discerns a Christian ambivalence in relating to the world expressed in both profound trust in and loyalty to the world that God created, and real distrust in that world expressed in denunciation, even flight from it.³⁷ It is amidst the radical contingency and ambiguity of all life that the Word *enables* and commands *work* for the world and the neighbor.³⁸ This Christological understanding is a key theme in Tracy's constructive proposals: Jesus as the Christ, 'the decisive Word-event of divine self-manifestation.'³⁹ The intrinsic connection between the manifestory christic vision and cultural valuation lies thickly on the nature of Jesus Christ as *Logos*, not just *Kerygma*.

33 Webb, *Refiguring Theology*, 177.

34 Webb, *Refiguring Theology*, 177.

35 Werner Jeanrond, 'Correlational Theology and the Chicago School,' *Introduction to Christian Theology: Contemporary North American Perspectives*. Edited by Roger Badham. (Louisville: WJKP, 1998), 142. Hence, Jeanrond's remarks: 'Only a public theology can be really correlational' (142)

36 Tracy, *Analogical Imagination*, 47, 49-50.

37 Tracy, *Analogical Imagination*, 48.

38 Tracy, *Analogical Imagination*, 48.

39 Tracy, 'A Theological View of Philosophy: Revelation and Reason,' in *The Question of Christian Philosophy Today*. Edited by F. J. Ambrosio (New York: Fordham University Press, 1999), 148.

4. Publicness and particularities

To open up the public realm for the resources of churches, Tracy invokes the need not only for argument but also conversation in shaping public life. In other words, for particular traditions to participate in public, the public realm has to be reconfigured to include both argument and conversation.⁴⁰ This bears the notion that publicness is inherently dialogical, grounded in the notion that human action is 'intrinsically interactive and communicative.'⁴¹

Here Tracy substantially adopts Habermas' general criteria for argument for publicness: 'criteria of intelligibility (coherence), truth (warrants-evidence), right (moral integrity) and equality (mutual reciprocity).'⁴² But Tracy insists argument should be complemented by, if not subsumed under, the model of (hermeneutic) conversation. Thus Tracy reconfigures Habermas' criteria as 'de facto conditions of possibility for the presence or absence of both argument and conversation.'⁴³

It follows that conversation with the religious classics of culture does not mean abandoning the general criteria for publicness. It does mean that prevailing selective (technicized, instrumental) rationality of Western culture has to be abandoned in favor of 'a more

comprehensive notion of reason... and thereby of religion's own relationship to that more comprehensive role.'⁴⁴ This comprehensive notion of reason, allied with the criteria for genuine conversation, Tracy finds congenial to appreciating the disclosive and transformative truths of concrete classics of art and religion.⁴⁵

Precisely as conversation, the interaction between reference groups is shared, shareable, public. Precisely as the result of conversation, the disclosure-transformation is a public candidate for possible consensus in the public realm.⁴⁶ Contrary to narrativist and postliberal focus on Christian identity, it is the effect that remains public, not the origin of the Christian classics. These (culture-transforming) effects are a distillation of the disclosive and transformative shareable possibilities, which comes through conversation. In this regard, every classic needs continuing conversation by the wider community constituted by its effects.⁴⁷

II. Public Theology, Modernity, Postmodernity: Tracy's Theological Journey, Self-Criticisms

Here we present Tracy's account of his theological journey. We contrast this section as diachronic (historical) compared to the preceding synchronic (thematic) account. The succeeding sections following this account point

toward an evangelical appreciation and critique of his theology.

As a dialogical theologian, Tracy's thinking has evolved and is evolving through continuing conversations.⁴⁸ Consider the following retrospective remarks, which summarize in a self-critical way the thrust of his major publications.

Blessed Rage for Order is straightforwardly modern theology, with much I would wish to defend, especially things like the reflections on limit language and the demand for publicness of theology. However, I now see not only the weaknesses of some of my own formulations in *Blessed Rage for Order*, but of the modern project itself, of which that book is representative. I already had certain hesitations when I started *The Analogical Imagination*. That is why I developed the notion of the classic, which is the major innovation in the first part of that book. So in a sense the turn there, more than in *Blessed Rage for Order*, is to a *hermeneutical* understanding of theology. Hermeneutics is in *Blessed Rage*, but only as part of this larger modern project. As in *The Analogical Imagination* hermeneutics *becomes* the project,

especially for systematic theology. The reason I wrote *Plurality and Ambiguity* is simply because the sense of both plurality and of ambiguity, namely, the sense of postmodernity, became even stronger for me, and I felt obliged, ethically almost, to try to clarify that for myself in relationship to what remains a fundamentally hermeneutical theology. And then *Dialogue with the Other* is an attempt to say that what is called for now is the relationship to the other and the different.⁴⁹

For Tracy, modernity has made 'great strides' which still needs defending but it has also 'grave defects' which were not sufficiently reflected in his earlier work, *Blessed Rage for Order* (henceforth, *BRO*).⁵⁰ He distinguishes the 'straightforwardly modern theology' of *BRO* from the 'fundamentally hermeneutical theology' started in *Analogical Imagination* (henceforth, *AI*). Hermeneutics is present in *BRO* but subsumed in the modern project. In *AI* hermeneutics (or hermeneutical theology) becomes the project, not modern theology. His succeeding works after *AI* draw from the 'sense of postmodernity' but his perspective remains fundamentally hermeneutical.⁵¹

40 Tracy, *Analogical Imagination*, 123.

41 Tracy, 'Public Theology, Hope, and the Mass Media: Can the Muses Still Inspire?' in *God and Globalization Volume 1*, Edited by Max Stackhouse (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000), 235.

42 Tracy, 'Public Theology, Hope, and the Mass Media', 235.

43 Tracy, 'Public Theology, Hope, and the Mass Media', 235.

44 Tracy, *Analogical Imagination*, 120.

45 Tracy, *Analogical Imagination*, 123.

46 Tracy, *Analogical Imagination*, 124.

47 Tracy, *Analogical Imagination*, 125.

48 On this see Todd Breyfogle, Thomas Levergood, 'Conversation with David Tracy,' *Cross Currents* 44 (Fall, 1994), 293-94, 301. See also Tracy, 'On Reading the Scriptures Theologically,' 35-68, esp., 58-60; 'The Uneasy Alliance Reconciled, 548-570; 'God, Dialogue, and Solidarity: A Theologian's Refrain,' *How My Mind Has Changed*, edited by James M. Wall & David Heim (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991).

49 Breyfogle and Levergood, 'Conversation with David Tracy,' 301.

50 One of these defects not reflected in *BRO* entail 'the separation between theory and practice, and in the case of theology, between theological theories and spiritual practices' (Breyfogle and Levergood, 'Conversation with David Tracy,' 294).

51 See Gaspar Martinez, *Confronting the Mystery of God*, 178.

What in modernity needs 'defense' and what are its 'grave defects'? First, Tracy articulates a basic summary and defense of what he calls 'modern truths.'

The truth, indeed (as earlier secularization theologies were not wrong to argue) the theological truth of modernity, still needs defense, including theological defense. For beyond a discredited myth of progress and against a wholesale Weberian pessimism lie the *modern truths* which Habermas and many other moderns have striven to defend: the reality of reason as communication; the hopes alive in all the new countermovements to a dominant techno-economic realm; the drive to a Jamesian cultural pluralism and a genuine political democracy undivided from economic democracy. The liberating power of all that is occurring in the Eastern and Central Europe and elsewhere shows the power of that drive to modern democracy and pluralism.⁵²

Notice especially Tracy's carefully worded claim about the reality of reason: it is reason as communication. As we have seen above, this points to the (often neglected) role of the rhetorical (hermeneutical) model in Tracy's theology.⁵³ Apparently for him, as suc-

ceeding sections would show, this seems related to the valuing of comprehensive reason in shaping public life.

Strongly dialogical in his thinking, Tracy very rarely lays down what he rejects.⁵⁴ But these denunciations can be found in his recent identification of modernity's fatal defects. Tracy calls attention to three great separations of modern Western culture: '(1) the separation of feeling and thought; (2) the separation of form and content; and (3) the separation of theory and practice.'⁵⁵ All these are peculiarly *modern* divisions especially considering the difference in the outlook of the ancients and the medievals. What originally were helpful distinctions in pre-modernity became in modernity unbridgeable separations.⁵⁶ These separations lead Tracy to doubt whether *Western* modernity, with its techno-economic culture and impoverished notion of reason, can heal itself.⁵⁷

In the following major section, we will probe if Tracy's public theological project is still vulnerable to the 'separations,' which he rejects. But it would be wise first to recall what evangelicals could learn from him toward a public theology in this new millennium.

52 Tracy, 'Literary Theory and Return of the Forms for Naming and Thinking God in Theology,' *Journal of Religion* (1994), 304.

53 Aside from Webb, *Refiguring Theology*, 176-77; see also Don Compier, *What is Rhetorical Theology?*. Among others, the Yale postliberals (Lindbeck, Frei, Placher) often miss this in their evaluation and criticism of Tracy.

54 William Placher recognizes this disposition as an asset and a liability, *Unapologetic Theology* (Louisville, KY: W/KJP, 1989), 155.

55 Tracy, 'Traditions of Spiritual Practice and the Practice of Theology,' *Theology Today* 55 (Jl 1998): 235.

56 Tracy, 'Traditions of Spiritual Practice', 235-236.

57 Tracy, 'Literary Theory and Return of the Forms,' 304-5.

III. A Reformational Evangelical Response

With very few exceptions, evangelical interaction with Tracy's (and Tillich's) correlational theology has often been indirect.⁵⁸ What I attempt to do here is provide a personal assessment of Tracy's public theology from a Reformational evangelical standpoint.⁵⁹

1. With Tracy.

I note my own evangelical appreciation of Tracy in relation to public theology.

a) Key Concepts.

Crucial to Tracy's presentation are key terms that could serve as handles or building blocks for a foundational, even an ecumenical, public theology. It is not surprising then that Reformed ethicist Max Stackhouse relies on Tracy's language and concepts in advancing a basic understanding of public theology.⁶⁰ The key concepts

include theology as public discourse, God in public, religion, plurality and ambiguity, correlation, conversation, rhetoric, which are discussed in the context of modern and postmodern cultural shifts.

To keep the practical balance between the kerygmatic and the apologetic, or the creational/doxological with the diaconic dimensions of the faith, evangelicals would do well to wrestle with these concepts: to deal with them as talking points, to work around them or to reconfigure them.⁶¹ I have some difficulty with Tracy's proposals, as the next section would describe. As an evangelical, I would prefer to add to Tracy's cluster of key terms: the centrality of mission, Scripture, the Church and its practices.⁶² But overall, we are indebted to Tracy for having opened a new field of theological reflection for conversation and deepening.

b) A Critical Social Perspective.

Tracy challenges us in a fundamental way to think Christianly about pluralism and public life. Nowadays, it is more or less established that social differentiation is integral to the reality of

58 Cf. Ray Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2001) Chapters 2-4. Here Anderson dialogues with Don Browning whose revised correlational method in practical theology heavily borrows from Tracy. Also, Orlando Costas' hermeneutical proposals in *Liberating News* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989); and Clark Pinnock's *Tracking the Maze* (New York: Harper and Row, 1991).

59 The Reformational stance is a sub-tradition within the Reformed faith. It is a Reformed strain associated with the Dutch Calvinism of Abraham Kuyper, Herman Dooyeweerd, and others like Al Wolters, Richard Mouw and Nicholas Wolterstorff.

60 Max Stackhouse, 'Public Theology and Ethical Judgment,' *Theology Today* 54 (July 1997) 165-79.

61 Cf. Don Browning's suggestion that Tracy's critical correlational approach 'combines the best of the cultural-linguistic and the apologetic approaches' (*A Fundamental Practical Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1991) 45).

62 To put it another way, theological method should be about biblical (missional) discernment within a consciously Trinitarian frame of reference.

pluralism.⁶³ Yet more than two decades ago, Tracy was already alerting theologians to engage this societal differentiation more consciously as public theological agenda.⁶⁴ The different publics address and elicit different theological orientations and interests. Tracy's insights on theology and its 'publics' engage this facet of contemporary public life.

More foundationally, Tracy has signaled the need for social theory in theological engagement.⁶⁵ I find intriguing parallels to this need for critical social perspective among evangelical theologians. Evangelical Calvinist philosophers Richard Mouw and Sander Griffioen have called on evangelicals to engage the fact of pluralism(s) with a particular Christian social theory.⁶⁶

c) Reconceiving Theology.

In an increasingly pluralistic and highly differentiated public culture, how does one view what is theological?

63 Michael Welker, "Is Theology in Public Discourse Possible Outside Communities of Faith?" in *Religion, Pluralism, and Public Life: Abraham Kuyper's Legacy for the Twenty-First Century*. Edited by Luis Lugo (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 119.

64 Neo-Calvinist philosopher and theologian of an earlier generation, Abraham Kuyper was a towering figure who has also reflected deeply on these questions. For a brief introduction on Kuyper, with recommended readings, see Richard Mouw, 'Abraham Kuyper: A Man for This Season,' *Christianity Today*, October 26, 1998.

65 Tracy, 'Public Theology, Hope, and the Mass Media,' 235

66 Richard Mouw and Sander Griffioen, *Pluralism & Horizons* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993).

As a definition that engages 'plurality and ambiguity' both in the churches and the wider society, Tracy advances the idea that theology articulates 'mutually critical correlations between the meaning and truth of an interpretation of the Christian fact and the meaning and truth of an interpretation of the contemporary situation.'⁶⁷ As we have seen, this is grounded in the co-affirmation of church and world in God's creation. Strongly dialogical and calling for active solidarity with the oppressed, Tracy also wishes to dissociate his approach from theological elitism: 'the belief that only a learned elite can read these [religious] texts properly.'⁶⁸

Evangelicals do not seem to have much of a problem warding off a kind of pernicious elitism, but co-affirming the church and world as a theological stance is theologically suspect. There is however, a recurring dissatisfaction with unidirectional theologies as in the following imploration from Nicholas Wolterstorff.

I am all for Church Theology. But is the relation of the Church theologian to the non-theological disciplines exclusively that of melting down gold taken from the Egyptians? Isn't some of the statuary of the Egyptians quite as OK as it is? Does it all reek of idolatry? Isn't there something for the Church theologian to learn from the

67 Tracy, 'The Foundations of Practical Theology,' in *Practical Theology: The Emerging Field in Theology, Church, and World*. Don Browning (ed.) (New York: Harper & Row, 1983), 62.

68 Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity*, 104.

non-theological disciplines? So too for the biblical scholars of the Church... They interpret their Bibles so that Christian fidelity does not require joining the Flat Earth Society. So it is misleading to use exclusively one-directional metaphors. It's true that, instead of making the world of the Bible fit into our world, we ought to fit our world into its world. But in some respects, even in many respects; not all.⁶⁹

2. Difficulties.

I note two primary areas of difficulties I have with Tracy's theology: its experiential foundationalism and its understanding of the public realm as the realm of reason. Both are actually variations on a single theme: theology as a public discourse.

a) Theology, Experience and Tradition.

To structuralize the co-affirmation of the church and the world in theological method and to preclude unilateral interpretations, Tracy proposes the bipolar, dialectical relationship between experience and tradition. Human experience serves as an independent theological source, distinct from the 'inner-theological' demands of tradition.⁷⁰ Both sources (experience

and tradition) differ in their own distinctive criteria and modes of analysis. For Tracy, mutually correlating these bipolar sources leads to relatively adequate theology in the polis.

Tracy's understanding of two *polar* sources, two *poles* of experience and tradition leads to major difficulties. First, while Tracy clarifies the 'full spectrum of possibilities' allowed in his method of correlation,⁷¹ it is noticeable that his structural polarity leads to a hermeneutical imbalance. It tilts toward human experience. "Direct' experience, the 'realized' experience, the 'immediate experience of the self as self,' the 'primordial experience of the self,' all encounter a fundamental dimension of basic faith which serves as the requisite foundation for any subsequent interpretations. Accordingly every religious expression assumes this experiential dimension and proceeds from it."⁷²

emy of Religion LXI/4 (1993) 684ff. As Stell creatively points out, on *this* point Tracy stands on similar footing with George Lindbeck. (679-703).

71 Tracy, 'Foundations of Practical Theology,' 63 (my emphases): It ranges 'from claims of *identity* (between meaning and truth of the Christian fact and the contemporary situation) through claims for *similarities-in-difference* (*analogies*) or complementarities to claims of *pure confrontation* or non-identity. Any option is logically possible in principle.'

72 Stell, 'Hermeneutics in Theology and the Theology of Hermeneutics,' 684-5. Cf. *Blessed Rage for Order*, 103: 'We misunderstand the function of religious language if we claim that it causes (presents) our general confidence or trust in the meaningfulness of existence. We understand such language correctly only when we recognize that the use of religious language is an effect (a re-presentation) of an already present basic confidence or trust.'

69 Nicholas Wolterstorff, *What New Haven and Grand Rapids Have to Say to Each Other* (Grand Rapids: Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary, 1993) 45-46.

70 Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order*, 44-5; The Analogical Imagination, 88. Cf. Stephen Stell, 'Hermeneutics in Theology and the Theology of Hermeneutics,' *Journal of the American Acad-*

Secondly, and related to the first, the assumed polarity of sources corresponds to a similar structuring of substantive issues. The specificities (thickness) of religious belief are assumed to be developed by conscious reflection upon pre-theoretical, inexpressible experience.⁷³ For instance, in cognitively re-presenting these experiences, Tracy 'employs language like 'liberation,' 'emancipation,' 'wholeness,' 'salvation,' to articulate the conviction elicited and empowered by that experience itself.'⁷⁴ These experiential terms, however, are not abstract as they receive their concreteness from a tradition with its particular historical events, experiences, and personages.⁷⁵

It leads us then to say that Tracy's framework resort to the valuing (and borrowing) of non-religious criteria ('public modes of argument' in fundamental theology) over against the public appeal of systematic theology.⁷⁶ It is the modes of argument of fundamental theology (not systematic theology) that seek 'to provide arguments that all reasonable persons whether 'religiously involved' or not, can recognize

as reasonable.'⁷⁷ In effect, Tracy, identifies genuine publicness with general philosophical argument, thereby 'undercut[ing] the ability of Christians to employ the specific resources of their traditions to engage in public conversations.'⁷⁸ Along similar lines, if both theological sources are deemed equal, as Tracy seems to suggest, 'this may lead to the attenuation of theology's own recourse, God's self-disclosure in Jesus Christ.'⁷⁹

One sees, therefore, a flattening or homogenizing of Christian specificity in public discourse. This is noticeable even in Tracy's other definition of theology as 'interpretation of religion.'⁸⁰ The same can be said with his non-religious (supposedly universal or thin) notion of 'public(s)'. It is homogenizing, as it has not allowed the particularities of ecclesial communities and the academic community to clear expression over against the media and other publics.⁸¹ Also, limiting the publics to three 'does not sufficiently illuminate either theology's relations to other 'societal subsystems,' such as education, the family, and the judicial system or the effects of the market and media subsystems on academic theology, the church, and other subsystems and publics.'⁸²

⁷⁷ Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, 57.

⁷⁸ Ronald Thiemann, *Constructing a Public Theology* (Westminster: WKJP, 1991), 21.

⁷⁹ Hans Schwarz, *Method and Context as Problems for Contemporary Theology* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1991), 26.

⁸⁰ Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity*, 85.

⁸¹ Welker, 'Is Theology in Public Discourse Possible Outside Communities of Faith?' 119.

⁸² Welker, 'Is Theology in Public Discourse Possible Outside Communities of Faith?' 119.

⁷³ This inexpressible experience being 'the eruption of a power become self-manifestation from and by the whole' (*The Analogical Imagination*, 685). Cf. quoted in Stell, 'Hermeneutics in Theology...' 685.

⁷⁴ Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, 173; quoted in Stell, 'Hermeneutics in Theology...' 685.

⁷⁵ Stell, 'Hermeneutics in Theology...' 685

⁷⁶ Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, 'The Relation Between Fundamental and Systematic Theology,' *Irish Theological Quarterly* (1996) 142-144; also Linell Cady, *Religion, Theology and American Public Life* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1993), 33-37.

b) Comprehensive Reason, Pluralism and the Public Realm.

It is intriguing 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. Using Habermas' critical social analyses, he believes in retrieving comprehensive reason (as opposed to selective, instrumental rationality) to revitalize theology and public life. Underlying this is Tracy's assumption that public life is the realm of reason and (public) theological discourse has to rely on public meaning to contribute to a shared rational consensus. Tracy takes for granted that the means of assessing universal claims should be through public modern criteria for argument and conversation. Indeed, the global statement that all theology is public discourse 'depends on what he refers to as the ordinary or normal meaning of public, namely, that it appeals to all people on grounds that any reasonable person would accept.'⁸³ Henceforth,

[i]n any and every case, the fundamental ethical commitment of the theologian *qua* theologian remains to that community of scientific inquiry whose province logically includes whatever issue is under investigation.⁸⁴

Even if the later Tracy (especially of *Plurality and Ambiguity*) names the present as postmodern not late-modern

(contra Habermas),⁸⁵ he has not softened his appeal to a universal public. By appealing to a (universal) public discourse (with Habermas), Tracy grounds Christianity in the broader traditions of Western culture.⁸⁶ In this way, this universal public assumes a public realm of commonly held assumptions.⁸⁷ Consistent with such direction, Tracy accords primary status to human rationality as a categorical tribunal, which adjudicates the claims of both experience (Culture) and tradition (Faith).⁸⁸ What tends to be ignored, however, is how potentially stifling this (over)reliance on reason is to a pluralistic conversation. As Richard Bernstein notes,

It is the appeal to something like the idea of rational consensus that has always been used to block, stifle, or rule out 'revolutionary' turns in the conversation. To speak of the argumentative redemption of validity claims through the appropriate level of discourse is either poten-

⁸⁵ Tracy, *On Naming the Present: God, Hermeneutics, and Church* (Maryknoll: Orbis; London: SCM, 1994).

⁸⁶ Tracy, 'Theology, Critical Social Theory, and the Public Realm,' in *Habermas, Modernity, and Public Theology*. Edited by Don S. Browning and Francis Schüssler Fiorenza (New York: Crossroad, 1992) 19; cf. Owen Thomas, 'Public Theology and Counter-Public Spheres,' 461-62; also William Placher, 'Revisionist and Postliberal Theologies,' 411-12.

⁸⁷ Tracy, 'Theology, Critical Social Theory, and the Public Realm,' 19.

⁸⁸ cf. Frans Josef van Beeck, *God Encountered: A Contemporary Catholic Systematic Theology*, Volume 2/1 (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1989) 270.

⁸³ Owen C. Thomas, 'Public Theology and Counter-Public Spheres,' *Harvard Theological Review*, 85:4 (1992) 456.

⁸⁴ Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order*, 7.

tially stifling or sheer bluff.⁸⁹

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. Thus, speaking of Tracy's fundamental criticism of liberation theology as uncritically supernaturalist and neoorthodox on the basis of (an assumed) shared commitment toward 'a basic secular faith,'⁹⁰ Christine Gudorf asserts

The problem with Tracy's 'basic secular faith' is precisely that it is not 'shared by all those committed to the contemporary struggle for liberation.... For Tracy, this western European intellectual tradition is normative... Yet much of the world, including most Latin Americans, has never experienced the Enlightenment or significant degrees of secularity. Tracy writes of judging and evaluating pluralism, but his perspective on the contemporary situation ignores the majority of the world.⁹¹

Theologies from the Majority World pose a major challenge to 'shared, rational consensus.' But this challenge is not just from the field of Christian theology. Recent social science tends

to confirm Bernstein's claim against such a consensus. According to recent historical studies, advanced bureaucracies of the late capitalist modern state fail to function for the well being of various groups. On the contrary, various oppositional, counter-public spheres have emerged in response to the failure of the late capitalist, welfare state. This development of oppositional public spheres is neither a matter of Habermas' idea of the formation of 'deception-free consensuses through rational speech,' nor a matter of mass movement of the dispossessed. These autonomous mass movements are actually the ones who institute a plurality of public spheres, signaling 'the emergence of a new political theme under the late capitalist, welfare state conditions.'⁹² By upholding Habermas as *the* social theorist of the public sphere,⁹³ Tracy tends toward a homogenizing notion of the public that may vitiate his concern not to overlook the voices of excluded others, including those who are (unavoidable) victims of modern public discourses.⁹⁴

III. Beyond Tracy: Transformationist Public Theology

In what follows I will sketch elements

⁸⁹ Richard Bernstein, *Philosophical Profiles: Essays in a Pragmatic Mode* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986) 80, quoted by Owen Thomas 'Public Theology and Counter-Public Spheres,' 463.

⁹⁰ The reference is to *Blessed Rage for Order*, 245.

⁹¹ Christine Gudorf, 'Liberation Theology's Use of Scripture: A Response to First World Critics,' *Interpretation* 1987 (January), 13.

⁹² John Keane, *Public Life and Late Capitalism: Toward a Socialist Theory of Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) 29, quoted by Thomas, 'Public Theology and Counter-Public Spheres,' 460.

⁹³ Tracy, 'Public Theology, Hope and the Mass Media,' 232-33.

⁹⁴ This suggests a conflict as he tries to hold together Habermas and Foucault's social insights with less kerygmatic-theological intention, see Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity*, 79.

of a culture-transforming public theology that appropriates Tracy's key insights. This facilitates a reorientation of Tracy's hermeneutical theology toward the concrete urgency and challenge of the gospel and culture encounter.⁹⁵ In a way this accords with the pioneering notion of public theology by Martin Marty and reiterated by Roman Catholic theologian Robert McElroy: 'a self-consciously religious effort to form and mold American culture and politics so that they conform more fully with God's plan of salvation.'⁹⁶

First, taking the cue from Tracy, I intend to elaborate on a theology of public life configured missiologically. This combines a biblical theology of public culture supported with a social theory that recognizes the fact of differentiation. Second, I will outline a theological method that reconfigures the apologetic function of correlation, within a Trinitarian understanding of theology and ministry. Finally, I will build on Tracy's claim that theology is possible outside of the churches' domain. This insight is critical to enable the church to fruitfully engage culture in an ongoing mission and dialogue.

1. Culture-Transforming Theology of Public Life.

When Tracy aligned his theological method with Niebuhr's 'Christ and culture' models, affirming especially the

transformational stance, he was in effect venturing into a theology of culture. Consequently, echoing Niebuhr, he imagines a variety of 'dialogical possibilities' between Christian faith and secular culture: the continuum ranging from identity to confrontation. But Tracy does not explicitly link public theology with theology of culture. Instead, for him, fundamental theology is intentionally public theology.⁹⁷ Here we discern a secularistic bias in Tracy, one that Christine Gudorf (among others) has previously identified and rightly criticized.⁹⁸

Moving beyond Tracy, instead of situating public theology within fundamental theology, it seems more fruitful to view public theology as a theology of American culture viewed transformationally. And in terms of orienting framework, one could view theology of public culture as a moment within missiology: the study of the Christian movement, of the missionary activity of the church in all its dimensions, in different times and places.⁹⁹ The interpretive framework for this missiology does not rely on criteria determined by

⁹⁷ Stell, *Hermeneutics and the Holy Spirit*, 216.

⁹⁸ Gudorf, 'Liberation Theology's Use of Scripture,' 13. Peter Berger, in an earlier essay, airs a similar criticism, see 'Secular Theology and the Rejection of the Supernatural: Reflections on Recent Trends,' *Theological Studies* 38 (1977) 39-56.

⁹⁹ *Lecture Notes: Introduction to Missiology*, Maryhill School of Theology, Quezon City, Philippines, 1993. In relation to the rest of theology, missiology promotes a missionary theology, or a reordering of the whole of the theology to be more missionary in its outlook and concerns.

⁹⁵ Lee Moonjang, 'Reconfiguring Western Theology in Asia,' *Trinity Theological Journal* 10 (2002): 37-38.

⁹⁶ McElroy, *The Search for an American Public Theology*, 4.

a secular interpretive context but rather by a transformational theological base: God as creator, reconciler and redeemer of all things.

This does not mean, however, a one-way movement of influence or even a polarized relationship between Christian faith and modern themes. Rather, both are engaged in a relationship of reciprocity. I like the way Jacob Klapwijk refers to this two-way influence, preferring to call it *reciprocity of transformation* but still upholding the primacy of Scriptural authority for all of life.

[There are two ways this relationship is expressed:

(a) in virtue of the *religious principle inherent in the Christian faith* it is possible to develop Christian philosophical perspectives and insights, an activity in which insights (originating in philosophy generally) are appropriated, critically reinterpreted, and integrated in the Christian view;

(b) *the philosophical tradition at large, in turn, also harbors the potential to detach concepts from the Christian philosophical heritage, to reinterpret them, and to put them to use in an opposed religious (or ideological) way of thinking.*¹⁰⁰

Klapwijk invokes critical discern-

ment to arrive at transformational quality.^{101]}

I will link this later on with a transformational correlational approach that moves beyond Tracy.

Beginning with a vision of human unity based on creation, public life can be viewed as 'pre-political.' Seen in this way, public life 'is more basic than politics; it existed long before political institutions were developed and refined.'¹⁰² In a very cosmopolitan era, however, a creational underpinning for public culture might also avail itself of 'an understanding of society as comprising institutions that have their inner coherence and integrity before the sovereign Creator.'¹⁰³ This also harks back to the biblical idea of creation or more precisely, of created diversity.¹⁰⁴ From a creational perspective, culture is woven into the original creation expressed in various manifestations of human cultural activity: familial, economic, recreational, ecclesial, and political.¹⁰⁵ To put this in Christian philosophical terms, creation has several 'parts,' 'modes' or 'spheres,' and understanding them may help us to arrive at moral discern-

101 Klapwijk, 'Epilogue: The Idea of Transformational Philosophy,' 249.

102 Parker Palmer, *The Company of Strangers* (New York: Crossroad, 1981, 1991) 23.

103 Elaine Storkey, 'Sphere Sovereignty and the Anglo-American Tradition' in *Religion, Pluralism and Public Life*, 203. See also, Henry R. Van Til, *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1959, 1972, 2001).

104 Mouw, 'Some Reflections on Sphere Sovereignty' 104.

105 Mouw, 'Some Reflections on Sphere Sovereignty' 104.

100 Jacob Klapwijk, 'Epilogue: The Idea of Transformational Philosophy,' in *Bringing Captivity into Every Thought: Capita Selecta in the History of Christian Evaluations of Non-Christian Philosophy*. Jacob Klapwijk, Sander Griffioen and Gerben Groenewoud (eds.) (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1991), 262.

ment in navigating the complexities of cultural life.¹⁰⁶

Interestingly, this particular angle may enliven public theology because of its attention to a historical/creational unfolding of differentiated publics and plural theologies on the road toward a fuller understanding of the good news of God's reign in societies and cultures. This implies that we should be affirming, not a singular, monologic public theology but rather (potentially, at least) a variety of transformational public theologies as well theology of various publics. Reference to the singular (public theology), however, remains useful especially in identifying a specific view or motivation (here I take to be missiological) for the work of theology.¹⁰⁷

In an amazing way, the Scriptures portray the Spirit of God as the agent of redeeming creation from human sinfulness, 'working to effect a special kind of unity and concord.' The classical biblical texts include Genesis 1, Joel 3:1-5, Luke 4: 16ff, Acts 2. The Spirit works to realize a 'differentiated unity of the creaturely, a differentiated unity of the people of God, as well as a differentiated knowledge of God.'¹⁰⁸ In the

outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, 'a differentiated, differentiation-protecting experience of community is established' without dissolving or suspending the different languages, loyalties and historical customs of peoples.¹⁰⁹ As the messianic bearer of the Spirit, Jesus brings to Israel and to all peoples justice, compassion, and the knowledge of God. In the process, he will bring the universal fulfillment of the law, the establishment of the righteousness intended by God, in the city of God. The paradox of the Gospel, however, is that it is through the cross and resurrection that the Spirit of God will realize the righteousness that God commissions in the world.¹¹⁰

2. Theology beyond the churches.

Viewed missiologically, Tracy's insistence that theology is a public discourse or his insight that theology goes beyond the confines of the Christian churches is crucial. It calls Christians to the public role of churches as well as the public dimensions of Christian theology. For Tracy, this involves willingness to dialogue with modern Western culture, which is not simply a matter of Christian obligation. The imperative assumes the indicative, which include the gracious reality (of God in public) as well as the mutuality of relationship between Christianity and modernity.

Tracy, however, privileges academic theology in revitalizing public life.

106 Mouw, 'Some Reflections on Sphere Sovereignty,' 104.

107 Max Stackhouse's view of public theology, comes closest to what I envision as a missiological public theology, even though he never mentions the term missiology or missiological. See his recent, 'Public Theology and Ethical Judgment,' *Theology Today* 54 (July 1997), 167-8.

108 Michael Welker, '... And Also Upon the Menservants and the Maidservants in Those Days Will I Pour Out My Spirit: On Pluralism and the Promise of the Spirit,' *Soundings* 78 (1995): 58.

109 Welker, 'And Also Upon the Menservants and the Maidservants,' 60.

110 Welker, 'And Also Upon the Menservants and the Maidservants,' 62.

This is where we want to move beyond his contributions. What we need is a basic re-visioning of theology that structuralizes reciprocity of transformation, where mission and dialogue are intrinsically interrelated, but one whose criteria will not be dependent on a secular interpretive context (e.g. religious studies, philosophy).¹¹¹ I will now develop this more fully to conclude my presentation.

3. Transforming Correlations.

Tracy's hermeneutic does not fully deliver what it seeks to achieve: reciprocal transformation signaled by mutual criticism and correlations. Human experience serves as the ultimate grounding of religious language (and thus, of any Christian theology). Thus, Christian discourse loses its thickness and particularity (God's action in Christ) in the correlation. This cultural pull also shows itself in Tracy's valuation of human rationality as the categorical tribunal, which adjudicates the claims of the two sources. It is however a rationality that appeals to a consensus-based loyalty to the morality of scientific knowledge. This accommodationist drift may also be seen in the way Tracy puts action as secondary to meaning in the order of hermeneutical reflection.

In this, Tracy's work as a whole is vulnerable to the liberationist criticism that he is one with western liberals in seeing the religious question as cognitive (the crisis of cognitive claims), or the question of the (secular) non-

believer. 'All other questions—justice, liturgy, discipleship—have to be understood through this modern crisis of secularistic nonbelief.'¹¹² Misunderstanding, not suffering, is the primary problem demanding a solution.¹¹³

From a missiological point of view then, one wonders if Tracy's theological method truly bolsters a biblical prophetic vision or undercuts it. We pose this question because, at a foundational level, to speak Christianly (that is, biblically), the practice of theology finds itself intrinsically connected with Christ's continuing ministry through the Holy Spirit in the world.¹¹⁴ The route to the universal is through the particularity of Christian revelation. To pursue this prophetic lead and avoid uncritical synthesis with culture (western or otherwise), I suggest reconfiguring the correlation by upholding Scripture as the primary source (Scripture) for Christian theology but with two secondary sources alongside it (tradition and experience).¹¹⁵ There is an evangelical suspicion at work here.

¹¹² Rebecca Chopp, 'Practical Theology and Liberation,' in *Formation and Reflection*. Edited by Lewis Mudge and James Poling (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 127.

¹¹³ Compier, *What is Rhetorical Theology?*, 19.

¹¹⁴ Ray Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2001).

¹¹⁵ Costas, *Liberating News*, 151. Costas viewed reason not as a source but rather, a medium by which Christians process (evaluate, clarify, receive) the claims of Scripture, tradition (church), and experience. See also Michael Nazir-Ali, 'Culture, Conversation, and Conversion,' *AD 2000 and Beyond: A Mission Agenda*. Chris Sugden and Vinay Samuel (eds.) (Oxford: Regnum, 1991) 34.

¹¹¹ As I see it, this is where Tracy finds its fundamental justification for his criteria for revised correlation.

The difference between the classical/evangelical paradigm of correlation and the revised correlation paradigm seems finally to rest on a difference in the doctrine of revelation. If there is absolute mutuality of criticism, then there is parity of disclosure. If parity, then the priority of special revelation (Christ-event) is denied. How can this denial not mean an inordinate trust in the general state of human experience and wisdom, and a corresponding diminution of the unique deeds and disclosures of God?¹¹⁶

Correlation should flow from, and be corroborated by, biblical-theological interrelation. Thus, to make sense of non-Christian insights in terms of a Christian perspective (*pace* Klapwijk), correlation has to be discerned through a process of *rereading* (and reenacting) of the Scripture as God's people.¹¹⁷ Another way to put it is this: while the contemporary situation may be viewed as the situation within which reflection and action take place, it would be God's Word which illuminates the reflection and guides the action.¹¹⁸ The Word of God 'does not come simply as another source of knowledge about ourselves or the world, but a dynamic

call which demands a response.'¹¹⁹ Culture and experience may contribute to the framework within which we understand the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, but their revelatory value is neither primary nor even equal to scriptural revelation.¹²⁰

Correlation thus has to be discerned through the outworking of God's story in creation, the Incarnation and the outpouring of the Spirit.¹²¹ It must also respect the Scripture's diverse modes of uttering God's word.¹²² In cultural theological terms, correlation may be linked with the translatability of the Gospel—Gospel as public truth for all peoples and nations. Here culture can be seen as that which provides 'the idiom(s) in which the Gospel speaks.'¹²³

¹¹⁹ William Dyrness, "How Does the Bible Function in the Christian Life?" *The Use of the Bible in Theology: Evangelical Options*. Edited by Robert Johnston (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985), 164.

¹²⁰ For an extended discussion of Tracy's method, see Gener 'Transformational Correlation.' On the usefulness of Tracy's theory of experiential religion, see my "The Catholic Imagination and Popular Religion in Lowland Philippines: Missiological Significance of David Tracy's Theory of Religious Imaginations" *Mission Studies* 22 (2005), 25-57.

¹²¹ A hermeneutical awareness of the biblical (Christological) horizon shifts the emphasis away from the thinking subject to the 'whole person' whose life is graced by the empowering ministry of God in Christ. See Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology*, 17.

¹²² The story of God's people and God's world is conjoined with the history of Israel (OT), Jesus Christ, and the church (NT). But the progression of the story (biblical time-line) reflects not only the unfolding differentiation and complexity of human life. It also reveals the diverse forms of God's speech.

¹²³ Fackre, *Ecumenical Faith in Evangelical Perspective*, 213.

¹¹⁶ Gabriel Fackre, 'David Tracy: Evangelically Considered,' in *Ecumenical Faith in Evangelical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 214.

¹¹⁷ William Dyrness, *The Earth is God's: A Theology of American Culture* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1997), 80-1.

¹¹⁸ Cf. Allan Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1976), 12.

Correlation could then be construed as 'the interpretation [and incarnation] of faith in the idiom [as well as structures and institutions] of its time and place'—a familiar practice of the Church in history.¹²⁴ The Church shares the Gospel with the receiving culture in a sense of profound identification, and a listening heart.¹²⁵ It will not mean submission to the 'other' nor aggression against the 'other.' Rather, it will consist of self-assertion (including initiatives of transformation) of God's people, nurtured by real listening.¹²⁶

IV. Conclusion

I have attempted as an Asian (Filipino) theologian to engage David Tracy's approach to public theology from a Reformational evangelical perspective. Looking back, for Tracy, theology's public nature directly relates to theologians' public role as well as to the three 'publics' to whom they speak: church, academy and society. Because of the prominence of conversation, public theology for Tracy is correlational theology. In dialogue with Tracy's approach, I have sketched the contours of a missiological public theology that draws from Tracy but criticizes him internally. Instead of situating public theology within fundamental theology, I have argued for a rethinking of public theology as a theology of public culture viewed transformationally.

It is hoped that this study has challenged evangelical readers to the public role of churches as well as to the public dimensions of Christian theology with implications not just to North American Christianity but also to the global evangelical churches' cultural and societal commitment to be 'salt and light' in God's world.

¹²⁴ Fackre, *Ecumenical Faith in Evangelical Perspective*, 210.

¹²⁵ C. Rene Padilla, *Mission Between the Times* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985); Jose de Mesa, *In Solidarity with the Culture* (Quezon City: Maryhill School of Theology, 1987) 27-42.

¹²⁶ Robert Bolton, *People Skills* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979). On the notion of transforming initiatives, see Glen Stassen, *Just Peacemaking* (Louisville: WKJP, 1992).

Transforming the Indian Culture of Poverty and Oppression

Samuel Jayakumar

KEYWORDS: *Dalits, inequality, physical disability, governance, mission, new society, modernity, grace, Scripture*

political and religious nationalism, post-modern mind set, oppression of children, urbanization, neglect of the disabled and others.¹

THE LAUSANNE FORUM on World Evangelization, which met in Pattya in 2004, concluded that

The dramatic change in the political and economic landscape in recent years has raised new challenges in evangelization for the church. The polarization between east and west makes it imperative that the church seek God's direction for the appropriate responses to the present challenges. In the 31 issue groups these new realities were taken into consideration, including the HIV pandemic, terrorism, globalization, the global role of media, poverty, persecution of Christians, fragmented families,

Poverty therefore remains a major challenge for the mission practitioners. This paper explores some of the proven historical approaches to the problems of the Indian poor, the Dalits and the marginalized people groups. Lessons are drawn from historical models of the Dalit group conversions to the gospel of Christ. Historical examples found in the 19th century European Christian mission have demonstrated themselves capable of combating the socio-economic problems of poverty, child labour, oppression of women and physical ailments;

¹ D Claydon (ed.), *A New Vision, a New Heart, a Renewed Call: Lausanne Occasional Papers from the 2004 Forum for World Evangelization* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2006), x.

Dr **Samuel Jayakumar** holds degrees in philosophy and theology from Osmania University, Andhra Pradesh, and pastoral counselling from Serampore University. This paper is based on his PhD in Dalit Theology and Mission history from the British Open University through the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, which has also been published by Regnum Press and ISPCK, Delhi (1999). He has lectured in several seminaries and colleges in India, and is currently Professor & Head Department of Mission & Ministry, TAFTEE, Bangalore, India. Associated with both the Church of South India and the Evangelical Church of India, he has published and edited a number of books and articles in both English and Tamil, including *Mission Reader: Historical Models for Wholistic Mission in the Indian Context* (2002) and *Renewal of Mission in India: A Historical Perspective*, (2008)