

GRAND & TOY PERMAX REVERSIBLE • F14-0331-22
LIMITED

D0097

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 of Christianity.

FN: The category the "Christian fact," . . . is clearly meant to include not merely texts but also symbols, rituals, events, witnesses.

More summarily stated, each theologian must take a stand on both the basic formal methodological and material constructive issues which face us all. That stand should be taken as explicitly and as systematically as present resources will allow. Finally, that stand should take a self-consciously revisionist attitude toward the major present alternative models for a contemporary Christian theology.

Tracy, p. 3

The revisionist theologian's fundamental claim . . . is that nothing less than a proper understanding of those central beliefs -- in 'revelation,' in 'God,' in 'Jesus Christ' -- can provide an adequate understanding, a correct 'reflective inventory,' or an existentially appropriate symbolic representation of the fundamental faith of secularity.

Ibid., p. 9

Such theologians believe that only a coherent articulation of the reality of the Christian God can provide an adequate reflective account of both the unavoidable presuppositions of our inquiry and our moral activity, and of the basic faith in the final meaningfulness of an authentic life which secularity itself has articulated with such power.

Ibid., p. 10

This, in brief outline, is the situation of the modern Christian theologian. He finds himself disenchanted with

the mystifications promulgated by too many church officials and the mystifications proclaimed with equal certitude by the secularist self-understanding of the age. He believes he shares the basic Christian faith of the former and the secular faith of the latter. Indeed, he believes that the latter faith is at heart more honest than the most adequate articulation of the basic faith of secularity itself. He also realizes that his understanding of Christianity must take a revisionist form which takes people account of the cognitive, ethical, & existential crises of much traditional Christian self-understanding. No longer can his secular faith find adequate articulation through the model for rational reflection developed by the Age of Enlightenment. Rather, that model must yield to ~~the~~ one which can account for those insights developed since the "liberal" period and simultaneously negate those illusions of liberal secularity which both recent history and recent reflections have brought to light.

ibid.

The post-modern model of humankind . . . joins modernity in its rejection of a model of self-abnegation and in its demand for full-scale criticism, now ordinarily described by the more radical term "liberation." On the other hand, the contemporary model reveals certain illusions in the modern model. It points out, for instance, that the "modern pagan's" struggle for rational self-fulfillment is no longer an apt ethical model for our actual situation. By and large, the contemporary model can be described as a demand for "self-transcendence": a radical commitment to the struggle to transcend our present individual and societal states in favor of a continuous examination of those illusions which cloud our real and more limited possibilities for knowledge and action. Indeed, in the examination of the modern human model by those paradigmatic post-modern analysts, Marx, Freud, Nietzsche, and Kierkegaard, the cry of

"illusion" is surely the most frequent and the most damaging charge to the Age of Enlightenment. That charge has been expressed in a variety of ways: in Marxian terms, by the bourgeois intellectual's refusal to take note of or to struggle against the economic conditions which allow and enforce his privileges; in Freudian terms, by the disclosure of the subterranean forces of the unconscious which in fact motivate our presumably pure & autonomous conscious rationality; in the charges of Nietzsche and Kierkegaard alike, that our primary task is not the development of a frankly tuned autonomous & sincere rationalism, but the far more difficult task of becoming "individuals," of becoming a self who realizes his or her own radical limitations and possibilities and yet struggles to become a human being of self-transcending authenticity.

Ibid., 11

[Yet] the post-modern intellectual believes that he must remain in fundamental fidelity to the critical exigencies of the liberal period. He further believes that his application of this critique to the liberal self-image itself is the finest expression of his real ethical commitment to the deepest demands of the liberal spirit. That spirit has, I believe, been admirably articulated in recent theology by Bernard Lonergan's formulation of the imperatives operative in a model of self-transcendence. . . . To such imperatives and to the possibilities for authentic self-transcendence which a fidelity to those imperatives promise, the post-modern intellectual is irretrievably committed.

Ibid., 12

A revisionist reinterpretation of Christianity is an adequate critical articulation of, and symbolic representation for, both this secular faith and the basic meaning of the Jewish faith itself.

Ibid., 14.

What, then, is the fundamental nature of the faith of
secularity?

1. As articulated by Tracy, the faith of secularity has already undergone a transition from a modern to a post-modern or contemporary model. Its modern phase was initiated by the Enlightenment's demand for "demystification of the Western religious world-view," for "freedom from oppressive authorities and freedom for autonomous, critical, rational thought." For Peter Gay (II, p. 306), "what the E. at its best always attempted (was) to substitute the authentic if relative certainty of experience for the absolute but spurious certainty of metaphysics or tradition." Its overriding question was "how to find the proper sphere and justified boundaries of freedom" (*ibid.*, p. 290). Modern theology in this context, at least where it did not become "dogmatic," (see B. Lonergan, "Theology in its New Context," 2nd collection, 55-67), found itself engaged in the struggle for a process that would eliminate the merely mystifying components of the basic Christian vision of the world while at the same time restoring, with contemporary integrity, Christianity's central vision of God and humanity (Tracy, p. 5). One way at least in which this struggle was articulated is in the form of whether modernity's "turn to the subject" would turn theology into anthropology, or whether there could be developed a theological anthropology. Tracy highlights the scope of modernity's challenge: It "eventually reached the stage of challenging every important cognitive claim of the Christian tradition, every major ethical stance it traditionally proclaimed, and, at its limit, the most basic understanding of exactly what the fundamental existential faith of Christians really meant." (p. 5)

2. The clash of cognitive claims between modernity and traditional Christian self-understanding is more fundamentally a clash over the morality or ethics of inquiry: the morality of obedience and loyalty vs. the morality of scientific and historical knowledge. Most modern theologians eventually came to share the latter morality and reinterpreted their loyalty to church tradition as an "honest resolve to study that tradition critically and thereby

and its self-understanding" (7)

3. But the full dimensions of the situation are more serious yet. Secularity itself underwent at least a threefold self-criticism, on the basis of its already firm allegiances to secular standards for knowledge and action. First came the classic phase of post-modern critique of Enlightenment rationalism: Marx, Freud, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, and (I believe) Jung. These critiques clarified rather than abrogated modernity's full affirmation of the ultimate significance of our lives in this world. They shifted the model of modernity from one of rational self-fulfillment to one of self-transcending authenticity: "a radical commitment to the struggle to transcend our present individual and societal states in favor of a continuous examination of those illusions which cloud our real and more limited possibilities for knowledge and action" (11). They exposed the mythical and mystifying character even of the modern model of the enlightened thinker "who rejects the oppressive tutelage of established authorities and dares to impose methods of rational inquiry upon any and all subject-matters" (10 f.).

Next came the hermeneutic philosophies of Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer, the former permeated by a perhaps Romantic anti-technological bias, the latter insisting upon the need for the continual and repeated restoration of tradition as entailed by any philosophical recognition of our actual historicity.

Finally, there is the critical social theory of the Frankfurt school, with its emphasis on the destructive consequences of Enlightenment instrumentalist rationality; on the neglect of reason's capacity for negation entailed in the liberal model of rationality; and on the need for a retrieval of the radically critical & emancipatory power of human rationality itself.

Permeating all of these critiques, it would seem, is the shift from models of development to models of liberation, but precisely because of a fundamental attitude which affirms the ultimate significance and final worth

The Revisionist Model, 5

of our lives, our thoughts, and actions, here and now, in nature and in history. This is the faith of secularity, a basic orientation determining one's cognitive beliefs and ethical actions.

4. It is this faith that is shared by the revisionist theologian with his secular contemporaries. "No more than they, can he allow belief in a 'supernatural' realm of ultimate significance or in a supernatural God who seems, in the end, indifferent to the ultimate significance of our actions. Such beliefs do not represent his faith, his basic understanding of existence, his fundamental commitments."

But he continues to do theology because he also holds that a proper understanding of the explicitly Christian faith can render intellectually coherent and symbolically powerful that common secular faith which we share. Only a proper understanding of the central beliefs of Christianity -- in "revelation," in "God," in "Jesus Christ" -- can provide "an adequate understanding, a correct 'reflective inventory,' or an existentially appropriate symbolic representation of the fundamental faith of secularity." The revisionist theologian finds he can surrender neither his secular faith nor his faith in the God of Jesus Christ. He does deny the purely secularist negation of any real ground of meaning outside ourselves arising in the worthwhileness of our common secular faith, because he believes that "only a coherent articulation of the reality of the Christian God can provide an adequate reflective account of both the unavoidable presuppositions of our inquiry and our moral activity, and of the basic faith in the final meaningfulness of an authentic life which secularity itself has articulated with such power." He also denies "any essentially positivist 'revelational' affirmation" that we can transcend our faith in this world in favor of some presumably greater, supernatural world, because he believes such an affirmation cannot adequately reflect or ensure his commitment to the "final worthwhileness of the struggle for truth and honesty in our inquiry, and for justice and even agapic love in our individual and social practice." He is "unable to share many of the traditional

traditional Christian self-understandings precisely because he believes that such understanding negates the fundamental faith of his life as that very faith is appropriately expressed in the true faith of Christianity itself." (9)