

## THOUGHTS ON DAVID TRACY'S PAPER: EVIL CONSIDERED WITHIN LITURGICAL THEOLOGY

In his paper, David Tracy brings us face to face with the tragedy of rampant evil in our present age and with theology's at times vain endeavors to speak of this reality. In Tracy's paper, so rich in religious and theological culture, so encompassing of experience, so subtle in expression, at times so passionate in its expression, I find a diagnostics of modernity's failure to face up to evil and to transform suffering, and so of its failure to confess God in face of suffering, adding to the enormity of suffering by these very failures. I find also the suggestion of multiple retrievals from multiple resources, not "simple retrievals," but hermeneutical retrievals—from within modernity itself, from what precedes modernity, from biblical traditions, and most impressively perhaps from the histories of people who suffer, struggle and yearn. On the basis of such diagnostics and retrievals, the paper then offers a way forward, summarily expressed in the sentence: "the hope of Christians is to resist evil and transform suffering."

Tracy indicates the need to rediscover the unity of thought and feeling, content and form, prayer and action, if the Church is to protest evil and find the hope that is within it. Throughout the paper there is reference to memory, prayer and liturgy. If these references were to be pursued, I believe they would help us to see how in the life of the Church these factors come together in a liturgy open to the sufferings of the world and the memory of victims. To think theologically, in the unity of thought and feeling, in the unity of content and form, is to think the Church as the living Body of Christ in thought, prayer and action, as it is confronted in its faith, proclamation and prayer by evil, and in this confrontation finds hope. From this starting point, I have a word to proffer about three elements that belong to the emergence of hope within a liturgical theology, where thought and feeling, form and content, contemplation and action, are closely united by the very nature of worship: narrative, *eucharistia*, and doxology.

The retrieval of these elements of worship would of course itself require a critique of liturgical traditions, though it is not now possible to elaborate on this at great length. Suffice to say that the Church's worship can so construe the paschal mystery that with a certain rationality and ideology, it can marginalize some of its members and their suffering, or in the refusal to lament, embody a way of expressing evil and suffering that becomes sheer suppression or even complicity. Hence in a hermeneutical retrieval of the sources of hope in tradition, critique is essential—the critique of systems (political, cultural, religious, philosophical) that veer toward claims to be absolute and comprehensive.

In a special way, since we are discussing the face of evil, I would like to take note of the way in which evil can be rather falsely exorcised by certain ways of symbolizing sin. I think of the critique of the premoderns on sin, as done on the one hand by Paul Ricoeur<sup>1</sup> and on the other by Julia Kristeva, heeding them on the conceptual versions of the myth of original sin which they criticize, versions dating back through Scholasticism to Augustine, versions that cripple the movements of desire and effort that are marginal to the totally controlled, dubbing them sin or concupiscence, and so subjecting many to an ecclesial victimization which works its way into Western culture and modernity.

Reading Kristeva<sup>2</sup> in particular, we can note the following. As she reads the development of the Jewish and Christian symbol systems, she notes that the Abject is taken to be what is opposed to the "I" as the "I" is legitimated by culture and symbol system, and relegates wants (not just things wanted) to the abject. She dubs as Horror the cunning of civilization in pushing aside what is considered abject, by "purifying, systematizing, and thinking," with the collusion of rites and laws, symbols, and philosophies.

Sin in Judeo-Christian tradition and its ritual falls in line with this and becomes the interiorization of defilement. Wants are never wholly negotiated, but are triply betrayed by (a) putting sinfulness at the core of the self and identifying it with wants; (b) confusing finitude and sinfulness; and (c) the inquisitorial classification of what is dubbed sinful, heretical, schismatic, and impure, in short, abject.

As a result, much having to do with confronting evil in an authentic way is suppressed. This includes (a) the desires of the flesh in the renunciation of their object (fleshly, erotic, spousal, maternal); (b) death, the horror of dead and decaying bodies (rites that camouflage) or even of sick ones (rites that confuse sin and sickness); (c) whole categories of "other" persons, for example, women, Jews, the mentally ill, homosexuals; (d) finally, many who suffer and are deprived of the power of speech to speak the self to the Other in mutual gift, and before the Other in witness to the world. In face of this, Kristeva wonders whether religion, or religious symbol and liturgy, any longer gives the power for the release of creative and aesthetic speech, since it seems to have been rendered as so symbolically controlled.

With these caveats about retrieving the symbolic, however, let me develop the three points mentioned above that within worship contribute to the Church's confrontation with evil and revival of hope.

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<sup>1</sup>Paul Ricoeur, "The Demythization of Accusation," and "Interpretation of the Myth of Punishment," in *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics* (Evanston IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974).

<sup>2</sup>Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) 1-132.

## NARRATIVE

The many forms taken by the *memoria passionis* are noted by Tracy and could be elaborated on further. They are found in the Gospels and its reading of the Hebrew Bible and wisdom literature: in the ways that Christian people tell their stories beginning from the stories of the martyrs and up to such stories as that of the Armenian people in this century; in the practices of popular religion that act out the memory, as on Good Friday, where we find a Christ who has taken the form of the suffering people and is present to their suffering in his suffering. Ideally such memories are to be nurtured in the Church's liturgy, but they are too often forms that are marginal to officially approved forms of remembrance, even while they have had historical influences on them.

The retrieval of these memories or narratives, inclusive of the passion narratives of the four Evangelists, are in the nature of what Jean-François Lyotard calls "petits récits."<sup>3</sup> Even though they record events of vast import, they have no grandiose claims to embrace the totality of a divine system or of human comprehension. Being other to each other, they make mutual demands and offer mutual enrichment, in a communion marked by otherness. The variety of such narratives, that take in the story of so many within the memory of Christ's Pasch, and their inclusion in worship, can be linked up with the observation of postmodern writers such as John Caputo, Jacques Derrida, Tzvetan Todorov, and Richard Kearney<sup>4</sup>, that the authentic concern for justice seems to begin by heeding the story of the "other," especially when this other has been made victim but has refused to accept this status.

The retrieval of the cosmic or the sacred, or the sense of communion with the transcendent and with creation, also belongs in liturgy, and can be done within the genre of "petits récits." As Patrick Bourgeois has remarked of the ideas of Paul Ricoeur on proclamation and manifestation, on symbol and metaphor, here lies the sacred which the movement of culture cannot contain,<sup>5</sup> so that as desire and hope it becomes the expression of the eschatological.

## EUCHARISTIA

In his *Theodramatik*, Hans Urs Von Balthasar describes the relation between Jesus Christ and the Father as *eucharistia*,<sup>6</sup> Christ and his body acknowledging

<sup>3</sup>See, e.g., "Lessons in Paganism," in *The Lyotard Reader*, ed. Andrew Benjamin (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991) 122-54.

<sup>4</sup>See "The Postmodern Imagination," in Richard Kearney, *Poetics of Imagining: From Husserl to Lyotard* (London: HarperCollins Academic, 1991) 170-207.

<sup>5</sup>Patrick L. Bourgeois, "The Limits of Ricoeur's Hermeneutics of Existence," in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn (Chicago: Open Court, 1995) 559.

<sup>6</sup>Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theodrama*, vol. 4, *The Action* (San Francisco: Ignatius

within suffering the gift and the hope of the freedom to love "otherly"—a valid conception it would seem, even accepting Tracy's demurral about the notion of suffering within the Trinity. In the gift and communion of the flesh and blood, the transformed bread and wine, the presence of Christ to his Church becomes apparent: Christ drawing the Church into himself and into his sacrifice through the free action of eating his flesh and drinking the cup of his blood. This eating and drinking together, in communion with Christ's self-gift, draws us into the communion of the Spirit wherein the Church is one Body in/with Christ. It is there that the one *eucharistia* rises to the Father with him, and Christ's continued sacramental presence in the world is expressed, ministering to, interceding for, suffering for others, in love.

However, in expecting Eucharist to give true and real expression to the Church's relation to God in Christ, we need to be attentive to the conditions for authentic Eucharist. It is a Eucharist that carries the mark of Christ's blessing at the Last Supper, as it arose from suffering and in anticipation of his death, but with full reliance on God's promises. If retrieved in the fullness mentioned above, narrative opens the heart to the lament of the complaint against God, and thus frees the Church for authentic Eucharist within, not despite of or through the suppression of, suffering. In other words, in being dubbed the memorial of Christ's Pasch, in the life of the churches, Eucharist needs to arise from within the *memoria passionis* of all who suffer. Hence it is today unthinkable without being grounded in lamentation over an absent God, a complaint against God, a God who withdraws and yet claims to be affirmed in loving and Spirit-giving presence.

Eucharist for God's gift also appears quite poignantly in our time as impossible in the light of history without confession and the request for forgiveness for totalizing domination in which the Church (not only some "churchmen") has been accomplice. In this respect, there is much to learn from John Paul II's appeal for the forgiveness of Indians and African American peoples who have been dominated "to the roots of their culture," an appeal voiced in 1992 at Santo Domingo, or from his address to the Jewish people in the memory of the Holocaust.<sup>7</sup> When some bishops of the United States attempted to inject a plea for forgiveness into an episcopal discourse on women, the thought was speedily quashed, but in effect we are only on the ecclesial brink of recognizing how far this confession and appeal for forgiveness has to go, in order to satisfy what John Paul sees as a necessary postulate for the future of evangelization, that is, for the Church's claim to continue to give witness to Jesus Christ and to the God who comes in Jesus Christ.

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Press, 1994) 328-32.

<sup>7</sup>See David N. Power, "Liturgy and Culture Revisited," *Worship* 69 (1995) 229ff.

### DOXOLOGY

Eucharist completes itself in doxology. To grasp and retrieve this, we may turn first to the affirmation of the NAME that dominates in Jewish prayer, that interrupts every act of thanksgiving, every lamentation, every petition, the *chatimah* or blessing of the name that grounds the *todah*, or historical proclaiming and thanksgiving for God's deeds in history. It is a blessing paradoxically without conceptual content, only the chanting of a revealed but unpronounceable NAME, chanted even when, as in the hasidic tale, the rabbis must in despair throw the keys of the tabernacle of the Torah back up into heaven.

In Christianity too, we are accustomed to the trinitarian doxology which both ends and interrupts prayer. Its form of course has not been without controversy, and even in our day it is disputed because of its apparently highly masculine form. This is not the place to take up the issue, but it may be observed that the dispute is often engaged because attention is given to doxology's content and concept. The paradox of doxology is, however, that it leads those who remember and pray beyond thought, beyond words, beyond image, and even beyond the time-centered engagement of God with the world, to rest in the "ineffable, inconceivable, invisible and incomprehensible God" ("Anaphora" of John Chrysostom). In much theology and prayer today, the proclamation "God is Love" seems to fulfill this role, and perhaps some trinitarian doxology grounded in this affirmation will in time develop.

Whatever the precise form, it seems to me that in facing evil and in holding on to faith in God's promises, doxology provides the rest bred of remembrance, lamentation, and Eucharist. It is the moment of silence in the mantic uttering of the NAME when no other word is possible. It is the rest in the apprehension of the glory, of the eschatological horizon, which culture, words, even liturgy itself, do not encompass. In anticipating this glory it is retrieval of the beginning, the mysterious origins where all is gift and nothing is, except in being given. As Job forever teaches us, or as Jesus the just Abel teach us, the one who suffers, the one whose blood cries out from the earth, in the end enters silence. From within the silence, the Church affirms the gift and glory of a God who is one with the gift-bestowed (not just with the gift that is bestowed but with those whose very existence is gift and so who are gift-bestowed), even as they suffer and yearn for justice. From within this silence the hope rings out, the hope that David Tracy augurs, protesting evil and transforming suffering.

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