

**“Here I Stand” (In Two Places):
David Tracy’s Interpretive Theory and its Application on Luther’s
Reading of the Pauline Corpus**

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Introduction

Hermeneutics can be defined as the theories and methodologies of interpretation. The discipline is concerned with how to approach and study texts and best elucidate their meanings. This is no simple and menial task however, as a reader or interpreter of a text is continually faced with the difficulties of how to approach a text with respect to the self, the text's tradition, and historicity.

Paul Ricoeur argues that the "hermeneutic problem was first raised within the limits of *exegesis*, that is, within the framework of a discipline which proposes to understand a text—to understand it beginning with its intention, on the basis of what it attempts to say"¹. However, this raised problems, because every interpreter was not impartial and instead *imparted* something of their own experience onto that of the author. Ricoeur adds, "based on the philosophical principles in physics and in ethics, the reading of Greek myths in the Stoic school implies a hermeneutics very different from the rabbinical interpretation of the Torah in the Halakah or the Haggadah"². Thus, not even the approaches to understanding the intent of the text matched because of cultural and ideological diffusion. To place this problem in modern terms, the psychologist will not agree with a sociologist on the interpretation of a historical event, and both will disagree with a historian.

Thus, interpretation must go about the work of "overcoming distance and cultural differences and of matching the reader to a text which has become foreign, thereby incorporating its meaning into the present comprehension a man is able to have of

¹ Ricoeur, Paul. *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974. 3.

² Ricoeur, *Conflict* 4.

himself”¹. In order to do this, it seems one must find a theory or a way of reading in which allows the reader to engage the text in his own world and his own time, yet still be cognizant of the tradition from which the text springs.

David Tracy presents a possible way of interpreting a text that would allow the reader to be immersed in tradition and yet also in the contemporary moment. He presents this theory in his book *The Analogical Imagination*. In the chapter called “The Classic”, Tracy attempts to sketch out how readers interact with a classic text. In doing so, he delves into the problems of hermeneutics that Ricouer was addressing. Tracy finds that it is possible to find a method of hermeneutical approach that allows for a reader to engage a text in their contemporary situation and still remain within a tradition.

What was striking about his approach is its application in the theology of Christianity. Tracy’s theory does much to explain the approach to interpretation of many great Christian thinkers to the texts that came before them. In particular, the works of Martin Luther come to mind. Luther’s writings were heavily influenced by Paul the Apostle, and in reading more of Tracy’s theory, it seems a task worth undertaking to investigate the application of Tracy’s notion of interpretation of a classic to Luther’s interpretation of Paul.

In doing so, it seems wise to first address Tracy’s notions on hermeneutics and what defines the “the classic” and the interpretation of a classic.

Tracy’s Notion of “The Classic”

David Tracy begins his chapter on “The Classic” in his book *The Analogical Imagination* by asserting that theology, as a discipline, can not be truly described as

¹ Ricouer, *Conflict* 4.

normative. By this, he means to say that as a process, theology can not attain some kind of truly impartial position. All theology tends to lie somewhere in the spectrum between becoming a repetition of what has already been stated in the canonized thought of a tradition, or claiming some kind of disingenuous autonomy of interpretation.

As for this first error, that of dogmatism, Tracy writes, “these theologies are finally not interpretations of the tradition itself. They are but simple repetitions”¹. In fact, Tracy argues that these “theologies” are nothing of the sort; instead, by endlessly repeating the basic fundamentals of a tradition and disregarding all other influence upon those who encounter the texts and symbols of a religion, the authors reduce the extent of their meaning by endlessly repeating the dogmatic interpretation. Thus, these “authoritarian, dogmatist, fundamentalist theologies are ideologies, not systematic theologies”².

In opposition to this dogmatic viewpoint is the Enlightenment-influenced viewpoint of objectivity. In the post-enlightenment surge of personal autonomy and freedom, interpreters of texts become entranced by the notion of impartiality. The texts became an object of scientific study, and not one to be engaged on a personal level at all. Tracy abhors this concept of autonomy in interpretation, stating, “any attempt at autonomy so pure that it is unaffected by the tradition in which we, willingly or unwillingly, stand is the final form of the general privatization which plagues our culture. If the terms ‘socialization’ and ‘acculturation’ mean anything, if ‘finitude’ and ‘historicity’ are other than empty abstractions, then one must restore a nonauthoritarian

¹ Tracy, David. *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*. Crossroad: New York, 1981. 99.

² Tracy, 99.

notion of authority and norm as well as a non-traditionalist notion of tradition to their legitimate place in all human reflection”¹.

Instead of these forms of interpretation, Tracy suggests an alternative which he labels “systematic theology”. This concept is based in accepting first the ultimate finitude and historicity of the individual thinker. By bridging the gap between dogmatic theology and illusory autonomy, the systematic theologian avoids the pitfalls of reiteration and individualization in encountering a text. These people do not claim to be free from the influences of their historical and cultural setting, nor do they confine themselves to the “safe-zone” of tradition. Instead, they stand firmly in both worlds, within the tradition, but at the same time, aware of their particular cultural milieu. Systematic theologians, “realize that as a matter of fact we are always already in a particular history that the route to liberation from the negative realities of a tradition is not to declare the existence of an autonomy that is literally unreal but to enter into a disciplined and responsive conversation with the subject matter—the responses and, above all, the fundamental questions—of the tradition”².

This idea of entering into a “conversation” is at the heart of Tracy’s position on how “understanding” and thus, interpretation, occurs. For Tracy, real conversation only occurs when, “participants allow the question, the subject matter, to assume primacy”³. By eliminating the self as focus, the give and take nature of the conversation allows for understanding to *happen*; that is to say, understanding is not the product of individual thought or effort, but is an event that occurs or is realized. This event is termed as

¹ Tracy, 100.

² Tracy, 100.

³ Tracy, 101.

“hermeneutical”, for “every event of understanding, in order to produce a new interpretation, mediates between our past experience and the understanding embodied in our linguistic tradition and the present event of understanding occasioned by a fidelity to the logic of the question in the back and forth movement of the conversation. We constantly mediate, translate, from our past understanding to our present one”¹.

From this, Tracy asserts that all understanding is finite. It occurs at the moment in which the conversation happens. This is also true for textual interpretation, and thus, Tracy defines a classic text as one that has the ability to provoke understanding in different historical settings. He writes:

I am not in fact leaving history when I interpret a tradition. Rather I am entering that history with a deep consciousness of it. I am willing to accept the risk that the subject matter of this particular text articulates a question worth asking and a response worth considering. When the text is a classic, I am also recognizing its “excess of meaning” both demands constant interpretation and bears a certain kind of timelessness—namely the timelessness of a classic expression radically rooted in its own historical time calling to my own historicity. That is, the classical text is not in some timeless moment which needs mere repetition. Rather its kind of timelessness as permanent timelessness is the only one proper to any expression of the finite, temporal, historical beings we are. The classic text’s real disclosure is its claim to attention on the ground that an event of understanding proper to finite human beings has here found expression. The classic text’s fate is that only its constant reinterpretation by later, finite, historical, temporal beings who will risk asking it questions and listening, critically and tactfully, to its responses can actualize the event of understanding beyond its present fixation as a text. Every classic lives as a classic only if it finds readers willing to be provoked by its claim to attention².

Thus, a classic text engages readers at all different points in history, and despite its production at one finite point, has meaning that extends beyond the boundaries of that

¹ Tracy, 101.

² Tracy, 102.

particular historical moment. Future interpreters find in its pages the same relevancy and, more importantly, ability to engage and question the reader that it possessed in its own contemporary moment. The reader will not see the classic text as “merely something that was of interest back then, as a period piece, whose use, although valid then, is now spent. Rather [the reader] will grasp something of genuine interest here and now, in this time and place. [The reader] will then recognize that all interpretation of classical texts heightens...consciousness of...finitude”¹.

Tracy proposes a step-by-step description of the interpretive process divided into “moments”. In the first interpretive “moment”, the interpreter of the classic text possesses certain distinct characteristics that inform their reading of the text. They bring to the conversation, “a certain preunderstanding of the subject matter of the text; certain personal questions, opinions, responses, expectations” that are seemingly personal, but really embody the “history of the effects and influences of the culture—including the history of the effects, influences and interpretations of this classic text in the culture”². Thus, the classic text and its history of interpretation engage the contemporary reader in the present moment, for every “present moment is, in fact, formed by both the memories of the tradition and the hopes, desires, critical demands for transformation for the future. The notion of present moment as pure instant, as an ever-receding image, is mistaken as the allied notion of a pure—isolated, purely autonomous—subject”³.

The classic text, in response to the readers’ predispositions and historicity, exerts on the interpreter a “provocation” or “vexing”. The classics’ claim to the attention,

¹ Tracy, 102-103.

² Tracy, 118.

³ Tracy, 119.

“transcends any context from [the reader’s] preunderstanding that [he] attempts to impose upon it, a claim that can shock [the reader] with the insight into [his] finitude as finitude, a claim that will interpret [the reader] even as [the reader] struggles to interpret it. [The reader] cannot control the experience, however practiced [he] is in the techniques of manipulation. It happens, it demands, it provokes”¹. This creates conditions for the byplay of the “conversation” which Tracy described as the location of meaning and interpretation. This claim of the classic text dislodges the reader from his predispositions and liberates him from the dogmatic base of tradition and entices him away from the autonomous position by inviting the ponderance of the fundamental questions of the classic text and thus the tradition of interpretation of the text in question.

This term of “conversation” perhaps must be better defined and described. It seems slightly vague in defining how the text can “speak” to a reader or interpreter. However, the idea is integral since it is the location in Tracy’s theory of meaning and interpretation. Paul Ricoeur, a noted writer on hermeneutics and interpretation provides a clearer vision of what Tracy intends to say when he refers to this idea of “entering into a conversation” with a classic text. Ricoeur stated that a textual account is entirely different from a spoken account. He holds, “as Jacques Derrida does, that writing has a root distinct from speech and that this foundation has been misunderstood due to our having paid excessive attention to speech, its voice, and its *logos*”². However, to understand Ricoeur’s theory on writing, one must first understand his model of discourse. He expresses there is meaning in any discourse on two levels: for an “utterer” and the

¹ Tracy, 119.

² Ricoeur, Paul. *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*. Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 1976. 12.

meaning of an “utterance”. Ricouer writes, “The concept of meaning allows two interpretations which reflect the main dialectic between event and meaning. To mean is both what the speaker means, i.e., what he intends to say, and what the sentence means, i.e., what the conjunction between the identification function and predicative function yields”¹. Thus, the difference in the meaning for these two categories is what is intended to be expressed, and the language in which it is expressed. Writing is the formal separation of the utterer’s meaning from the dialogue. What happens in reading a text is not a conversation with the author’s meaning, but a reading of a textual, linguistic account. Ricouer writes:

The dialogical situation has been exploded. The relation writing-reading is no longer a particular case of the relation speaking-hearing... In discourse, we said, the sentence designates its speaker by diverse indicators of subjectivity and personality. But in spoken discourse this ability of discourse to refer back to the speaking subject presents a character of immediacy because the speaker belongs to the situation of interlocution. He is there, in the genuine sense of being there, of *Da-sein*. Consequently the subjective intention of the speaker and the discourse’s meaning overlap each other in such a way that it is the same thing to understand what the speaker means and what his discourse means... With written discourse, however, the author’s intention and the meaning of the text cease to coincide. This dissociation of the verbal meaning of the text and the mental intention of the author gives to the concept of inscription its decisive significance, beyond the mere fixation of previous oral discourse. Inscription becomes synonymous with the semantic autonomy of the text, which results from the disconnection of the mental intention of the author from the verbal meaning of the text, of what the author meant and what the text means. The text’s career escapes the finite horizon lived by its author. What the text means now matters more than what the author meant when he wrote it².

¹ Ricouer, *Interpretation Theory* 12.

² Ricouer, *Interpretation Theory* 30.

Readers have no access to the intent of the original author since the author is not present, as in spoken conversation. The author's own meaning falls away, and the meaning is now in the court of the utterance in which the author expressed his own meaning.

The reader, in Ricouer's model, is now one in a mass audience. The text becomes much broader. It becomes detached from time and space, and is no longer a simple "travel guide" or a "diary" to a particular situation. Due to the author writing, "man and only man has a world and not just a situation"¹. Like Tracy, Ricouer sees the value of a text as the call it issues as something important and worthy to be read and interpreted. If the text finds an audience, the "right of the reader and the right of the text converge in an important struggle that generates the whole dynamic of interpretation. Hermeneutics begins where dialogue ends"²

Thus, what Tracy terms as "conversation" is really the reader's move to interpret the text in his own time and place. Tracy uses Ricouer's phrase "surplus of meaning" to express the idea that the text, as a written document, has the ability to escape the constraints of the horizon in which it was written and engage readers in their contemporary situations. This is the conversation of which Tracy speaks, the ability of a text to be engaged by readers in their own contemporary situations with knowledge of their own contemporary self. There is thus a slight phenomenological bent to both theories. As Ricouer puts it, "The text--objectified and dehistoricized—becomes the necessary mediation between writer and reader...To 'make one's own' what was previously 'foreign' remains the ultimate aim of all hermeneutics. Interpretation in its last stage wants to equalize, to render contemporaneous, to assimilate in the sense of

¹ Ricouer, *Interpretation Theory* 36.

² Ricouer, *Interpretation Theory* 32.

making similar. This goal is achieved insofar as interpretation actualizes the meaning of the text for the present reader”¹. (*Note: For the duration of this work, I will use both “conversation” and “interpretation” to describe this phenomenon in an attempt to stay loyal to Tracy’s language*)

Returning to Tracy’s process of interpretation, the dialogue between the reader and text has now begun. Tracy describes this as considering “the phenomenon of the game in an attempt to grasp the kind of dynamic actually at work” in the encounter with the classic text. This is the step where the reader, in his time period, has to respond to the troubles and questions raised by the text for his understanding of his place in the world and the place of the text in history of tradition. Tracy attempts to state that this dialogical model is the reader using the text as a sounding board for his own responses. This “dialogue”, “will demand that the interpreter enter into the back-and-forth movement of that disclosure in the dialectics of a self-transcending freedom released by the text upon a finite, historical, dialogical reader and received by the text from a now dialoguing reader”².

Moving from personal conversation with the text, the final step is moving into the larger arena of conversation with the community of interpreters. Although these other readers may not share the exact experience of the text that a particular interpreter had, they may recognize some resonances with their own experience. Tracy writes, “In the actual praxis of authentic dialogue, interpreters recognize that in every act of interpretation, they are also applying the disclosure of the text to some preunderstanding

¹ Ricouer, *Interpretation Theory* 91-92.

² Tracy, 120.

of the tradition”¹. These alternative interpretations challenge and are challenged by the interpreter’s own reading, and this byplay can affect the interpretations of the common texts. This dialogue is necessary in order to produce pluralism of interpretations and delineate the differences which will create conversation.

To deny this practice of interpretation as a vital part of encountering a classic text places one back in the trap of false objectivity and dogmatism briefly discussed earlier. To use Heidegger’s language of the self as a “thrown projection”, a reader is placed in a world in which he is “thrown” into a heritage of languages, histories and traditions that are particular to the individual². To understand the self, the individual’s understanding “must appropriate these meanings as possibilities for the future which [he/she] projects”³. The present is a finite horizon where everything has an initial meaning, but this meaning is limited without the legacy which the individual inherits from the past. Tracy here aims at delineating systematic theology from historical-critical, psychological, or sociological positions, which generally claim some objectivity. These readers believe, “the real meaning of a text may be uncovered by a deciphering, via some new method or technique (for example by psychological empathy), the mind of the author, the social circumstances, the life-world of the text, or the reception of the text by its original addressees. Then the meaning of the text becomes an object for our insatiable curiosity as to the strange possibilities of the human spirit. The text itself has nothing to say to us any longer, for its questions and answers, its subject matter, are now mere historical

¹ Tracy, 120.

² Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: Harper Press, 1972.

³ Tracy, 103.

curiosities”¹. To turn to Ricoeur, it is the attempt of the reader to reengage the “utterer” to get at the utterance meaning and not to engage the text as an individual reader. Ricoeur himself calls hermeneutics “anti-historical” because of the fact that a text is projected beyond its temporality by its form.

The other end of the spectrum is to refuse to engage the present world. Tracy explains that to, “stay in that horizon by refusing the risk of interpretation of the classics of the tradition—in the manner of authoritarian theologies of mere repetition and reconstruction—is to hand myself and my tradition over to the dustbin of history. It is to insist, in effect, that the properly human task is not understanding but certitude; that so obvious, so familiar are the responses that the fundamental questions constituting the responses need not be struggled with; that my present horizon is so clear and distinct that no effort of interpretation is required for it to be relocated by the classics of the tradition; that so eternal is that tradition that I, too, somehow partake in its atemporality”². This kind of outlook is held by fundamentalists. In accepting the literalism of their sacred texts, they do not allow for the fundamental questions of the texts to trouble their present beliefs. They transport themselves back to the time at which the texts were written, denying that their current situation or any event since the authoring of the text has created the conditions necessary for interpretation. The inverse of this perspective is that of declaring autonomy from all traditional influences. By doing so, the reader denies the importance of tradition as authoritative, and thus denies any relevance that historicity can have on their reading of a text as “abstract, metaphysical talk”³.

¹ Tracy, 105.

² Tracy, 103.

³ Tracy, 103.

The Production of the Classic

Important to this theory is the adjunct theory about the production of the classic text itself. Tracy does not hold any pretensions about solving the debate about the process of producing “art”. He does see in the process of creation analogous points with the process of interpretation outlined above.

The artist, like the reader, is a finite historical being, with a particular history and particular culture. He employs language, “that carries the entire history of effects and influence of the tradition” just like the systematic theologian is attentively aware of the history of his particular tradition. The difference is what Tracy terms, “intensification”, or an extreme moment of experience and understanding. Tracy writes, “The sign of an artist may well be a willingness to undergo the journey of intensification into particularity to the point where an originating sense for the fundamental questions and feelings that impel us all, and a rare response in thought and feeling to those questions, is experienced—and often experienced as some kind of gift, come ‘unawares’”¹. This experience is what motivates the artist to begin the rendering process. The rendering itself comes from the same kind of move that the reader makes in encountering a classic text. The “fundamental questions” that the creator of a classic struggles with are categorized by Tracy as being “truth of existence” questions, where the artist expresses fear that “I have not lived, I have not entered, I have not allowed myself to be caught up in the self-transcendence of the ‘game of life’”². This is not without danger, however. In attempting to translate the experience, the author risks losing the original experience. This is the “explanation” step of interpretation, or making public the reading of the text

¹ Tracy, 125.

² Tracy, 125.

that the reader has just undertaken. This experience can “prove alienating and reductive, just as the initial shock of the realized experience and understanding in the interpretation of the classic can resist any explanations which deny this experience by alienating us from it and reducing it to something else”¹. However, this is a necessary gamble in any form of expression. One must move from the utterer to the utterance in order to convey any kind of message. Minimally, it preserves a sign of the original experience, one that can then convey that meaning to a wide audience. The text, “fixes or codifies the meaning and thereby allows that meaning to escape the confines of the author’s intention, the original addressee’s reception or the original sociohistorical locus of the text. Thereby the meaning endures for interpretation”². The artist is keenly aware of transcending these boundaries, and calls the reader into the world that he occupied in his experience. The artist:

...knows that we dare not allow timidity in entering the ‘game’ of expressing a truth of existence. Here we must enter, play and be played until we have experienced and recognized where and how we belong, where and how we participate in the fundamental questions and responses to life itself. The artist knows we can not allow timidity in expressing that understanding. We must feed the imagination; we must be alert to the possible presence of some disclosure; we must recover, discover, invent, create a genre and style, a personal voice, to render, to express the meaning of that intensified experience of something essential³.

With this, Tracy acknowledges the phenomenological bent of the creation of the classic. The recognition of the self as transcendent seems to be a key cog in this formula.

¹ Tracy, 127.

² Tracy, 128.

³ Tracy, 129.

Thus, having described Tracy's theory of interpretation of the classic text and the intertwined ideal of the creation of the classic itself, attention can now be turned to the task of applying the theory. First, I will undertake addressing the notion of the Letters of Paul as a "classic" in Tracy's terms.

The Pauline Corpus as a "Classic Text"

Paul's personal experiences, as well as his motivations for writing the letters that now form the Pauline Corpus, fit very well into the model for creating a "classic" text. Paul, as Tracy states, receives an "experience" that jars him from his everyday existence to "intensification". One of the first biographical details of Paul's life that is of importance is his former affiliation with the Pharisaic Jews. In Galatians 1:13-19 Paul writes:

¹³ For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it:

¹⁴ And profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers.

¹⁵ But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace,

¹⁶ To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood:

¹⁷ Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus.

¹⁸ Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days.

¹⁹ But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother."¹

J. Louis Martyn, a prominent Pauline scholar, fills in the details of Paul's zeal for persecuting Christians, stating that, "Paul identified the nascent church as a group of Jews that was in some way radically unfaithful to God, and he saw in that unfaithfulness a

¹ King James Version, www.biblegateway.com.

threat to corpus Israel so serious as to demand the groups annihilation....when he was faced with the emergence of the church, he listened to the voice of the Law, and in that voice he heard God calling for the end of a group that was in some sense a basically aberrant sect of Jews”¹. Paul’s faith was strong, and he was a law abiding Jew who believed in the Law of Moses and followed its teachings. The Pharisees placed “emphasis on ritualistic purity. Careful to eat the right kinds of foods, to purify vessels used in food preparation, and to exclude the unclean from table fellowship, the Pharisees obviously treated all of life as a ritual”². These Jews were among the most zealous in Judea, and brought the piety of the temple into their everyday lives.

The famous story of the apparition of Jesus experienced by Paul on the Damascus road detailed in Acts 22:11 was for Paul the “experience” that would qualify as “intensification” in Tracy’s model. And, as Tracy notes as a common experience to many authors of classics, this experience does cause Paul at first to become dislocated from his former tradition. Paul writes about his vision:

¹⁹ For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God.

²⁰ I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.³

Paul’s conversion is directed by God, of this much he seems sure. However, this certainly does not exclude him from the pain and suffering that would be associated with this kind of drastic change. Paul is “crucified with Christ” and experiences all the suffering and pain that is associated with the crucifixion. The verb *systauroo* in Greek is

¹ Martyn, J. Louis. *The Anchor Bible: Galatians*. New York: Doubleday, 1997. 161.

² Roetzel, Calvin J. *The Letters of Paul: Conversations in Context*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998. 38.

³ KJV.

used in the gospels to “speak literally of the simultaneous crucifixion of other men along with Jesus”¹. This word choice indicates, “Paul’s participation in Christ’s crucifixion is the form of the death Paul has already experienced as the paradigmatic eschatological *anthropos*. In this event, Paul was torn away from the cosmos in which he had lived, and it was torn away from him. For in dying with Christ on Christ’s cross, this zealous Pharisee suffered the loss of the Law, sure his earlier guide to all of the cosmos” (Martyn 280). Paul’s conversion is not one of sudden enlightenment and joy-but rather one of suffering, of “tearing away”, and displacement. Crucifixion is a grisly death, slow and painful, where one suffocates as the breath slowly falls away from the body. Paul did not choose this image carelessly. Indeed, it seems he wants to convey the separation he felt in other parts of the letter as well. In 6:17, Paul writes:

¹⁷From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.²

Some people read this as the language of Stigmata, and hold that when Paul claims the marks of Christ, he claims to be the recipient of the wounds of the crucifixion. There are two more metaphorical meanings that are likely, and fit better in the context of the letter. First, if he indeed did mean the wounds of the cross, Paul probably was attempting to reinforce the point made earlier that he was crucified along with Christ. His wounds and suffering are real, tangible and evidence of his dislocation and displacement from the former world he lived in. The New Oxford Annotated Bible presents an interesting alternative. In the footnotes, there is a line reading, “Paul may also be suggesting that his

¹ Young, Robert. *Young's Analytical Concordance to the Bible*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Press.

² KJV.

scars identify him as belonging to Christ like the brand marks on a slave”¹. This presents another image of toil, pain and suffering. “Belonging to Christ”, a phrase used frequently in Paul’s writings (see Rom 1:6, 8:9, 1 Cor 15:23, 2 Cor 10:7, Gal 3:29, Gal 5:24), is not simply being part of the faithful here, but instead subjecting one’s self to the rigors of a slave². Paul, in talking about his transition into ministry and the call of God, is not portraying a pleasant journey, but one of trouble and trial.

To get a clearer picture of why this transformation was finally successful, one must look to the following verses in the above passage. When Paul says that “when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb” to give him the *apokalypsis* of Jesus, there is much more than just a simple conversion story. The key phrase here is “who separated me from my mother’s womb”. This reference creates a tone of separation from one of the safest spaces known to man—the womb, the locus of life and safety, and then being called into a new existence in the world, much as a child born again. Although it can be interpreted as Paul’s calling was predestined from before he was born as the Hebrew prophets were in the Old Testament, the language is still as powerful. Galatians 1:15-16 are key to the understanding of Paul’s conversion because, “Paul was compelled to see there the clear sign that God stood and stands on the side of the crucified Messiah, that this Messiah is in fact the Messiah of *God*, and that the church is in fact the church of *God*. Paul had, then, to rethink the whole of the conceptual world in which he had been living”³. This moment is another key crossroads in the decision to create a classic according to Tracy. The artist struggle with the conceptions about the

¹ Coogan, Michael D., ed. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001. NT 319.

² *Young’s Analytical Concordance*

³ Martyn, 163.

“truth of existence”. For Paul, his existence had revolved around the piety of Pharisaic Judaism, but his vision of Christ crucified changed his world perspective so drastically that he was forced to reconsider the foundational questions of life. The crucifixion marked the “crux” of Paul’s theology, and marked for Paul the end of the distinctions and laws that separated people before Christ. Christ, in a way, was the destroyed of conventions, differences, and through his ministry and death called all of mankind, Jew and Gentile, to His side. Paul himself says in Galatians 3:27-29:

²⁷ For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

²⁹ And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.¹

Thus, Paul, as one who has seen this new creation emerging in the world, decides to write to those who have also experienced some part of what he has seen. In writing his letters, Paul hopes to share his experiences and the vision of Christ that was so important to his own life. His vision of the cross was so transformative that he was compelled to continually relate his experience in the hopes of impacting others. Paul was dedicated to “the reconceiving of all life, especially the moral dilemmas of life, in light of the cross. Paul demonstrates his own transformation not in the least by dedicating himself fully to the...questions. As one deeply aware of belonging to the Body of Christ crucified, he is

¹ KJV.

able to 'become all things to all people', in other words, to see the needs of the other with such clarity as to take them up..."¹.

It would seem in looking back at the history of Christian theology that Paul succeeded in his task of relating his experience. If one looks at many of the seminal writers of the Christian tradition, Paul stands out as one of the most prevalent and frequently cited influences. James Dunn writes that Paul, "belonged to that generation which was more creative and more definitive for Christianity's formation and theology than any other since...the fact remains that Paul's influence and writings have shaped Christianity as the writings/theology of no other single individual have", and that, "Paul's theology inevitably provides an indispensable foundation and serves as a still flowing fountainhead for the continuing stream of Christian theologizing"² Readers continue to flock to Paul's writings even today, and the varieties of interpretations that arise from Pauline scholarship are a testament to the enduring qualities of the letters.

In summary, Paul himself seems to exhibit the qualities of Tracy's typical "classic author/artist" figure. Paul's ordinary life was overtaken by his experience on the Damascus road, and this experience drove him to reconsider his worldview and the basic foundational truths of his existence as a human being. Upon questioning these fundamentals in the light of his experience, he chose to write about them as to pass on his own personal experience of struggle and adjustment, which in turn provided a base for many others to interpret and engage his texts in their own world and horizons. The

¹ Brown, Alexandra R. *The Cross and Human Transformation: Paul's Apocalyptic Word in 1 Corinthians*. Fortress: Minneapolis, 1995. 168.

² Dunn, James D.G. *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1998. 3-4.

multitude of interpretations which have arisen since the writing of the texts would again corroborate the assertion that the letters of Paul meet Tracy's standards for recognition as a classic.

This being asserted, the focus must now shift to the application of the "interpretation" branch of Tracy's theory, exemplified below in Martin Luther's encounter with the classic texts of Paul.

Luther's Contemporary World

In order to examine Luther's reading of Paul from a hermeneutical position, we must first take stock of the world Luther inhabited. Theology was an important discipline, and Luther was well versed in almost all of the key texts of his day, in almost all of the theological traditions. In addition to heartily meditating on the Scriptures, Luther commented or annotated the sermons of Johannes Tauler, wrote *Disputation Against Scholastic Theology*, an attack on the pervasive school of late medieval thought, and was well versed in classical philosophy. Historians generally agree that "young Luther was closely acquainted with the medieval theological traditions in their various exegetical, mystical, and scholastic forms"¹. Accepting that Luther was probably highly aware of the contemporary thought of his day, we can turn to dissecting these traditions, their effect on the general populous of the time period, and how they interacted with Luther's own experiences.

In the Scholastic tradition which was greatly influenced by the writings of Thomas Aquinas, the road to salvation was a cooperative process. Man, by performing

¹ Ozment, Steven. *The Age of Reform 1250-1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980. 233.

good works, worked in tandem with the gift of grace from God in order to achieve his glorification. Thus, man put forth effort to achieve his salvation, and as a reward for this effort, God not only gave grace to aid man's works, but also elevated him to eternal life.

However, in the late medieval period, men influenced by the work of William of Ockham attempted to alter this schema slightly. They "desired to preserve human freedom, even from the salutary causality of a prevenient infusion of grace"¹. For these men, a troubling conundrum existed if God had to infuse grace into an individual in order for the individual to serve and love God appropriately. Free choice and will seemed to be vital to the intent of the meritorious act. Denying the widely accepted precept that man's will was errant because of the Fall of Adam, these Ockhamists added a condition that man could indeed do moral good within a state of nature, without the aid of grace from God. This kind of moral action would not affect the salvation of the individual, but would instead receive grace as a reward for this action.

This idea was vital in the medieval model of salvation, which was based on a model of pilgrimage. The Church controlled the infusion of "grace" through the sacraments, and initiating one's journey to salvation meant turning to the Church and its institutional grace. Man could go to confession, or receive communion, in order to enter into a state of grace so that his meritorious acts would count towards his salvation. This was obviously a sliding scale. If man sinned, he would need to receive the sacraments in order to reengage the journey in a state of grace. Thus, it was man who was ultimately responsible for at least initiating the traverse to salvific glory.

¹ Ozment, 233.

Penance was perhaps the most important part of late medieval theology for the air of anxiousness it created in the general populous. Looking to the Ockhamist vision of the journey to salvation, the penitential system was a key cog in getting to the afterlife. However, this system was extremely demanding of an individual. The believer in the late medieval period, “encountered a very demanding penitential system, one that provided only temporary relief, and even that with conditions attached and threat of purgatorial suffering for unrepented sins”¹. The idea of unconditional forgiveness of transgressions and a concrete assurance of ultimate salvation were totally alien concepts to the late medieval person. This uncertainty and guilt were integral to the survival of the religious system in the period, and proponents of any kind of human perfectibility were greatly chastised².

The penitential process was one of transforming a metaphysical sin into a worldly punishment. As Stephen Ozment states:

The penitent to partook of the sacrament of penance was expected to be truly attrite of heart, confess all conscious sins, receive absolution, and bear obediently the works of satisfaction imposed by the priest as just punishment. According to medieval theologians, confession overcame the subjective guilt one personally felt for sinning, while priestly absolution made one fully contrite and guiltless in the eyes of God. Beyond the overcoming of guilt, however, there remained a punishment for sinning, which had to be borne in eternity so that the injured parties, among them God himself, could receive full and just satisfaction. In the final stage of the traditional sacrament, priestly absolution transformed this eternal penalty, justly imposed by God on the sinner, into a manageable temporal penalty, that is, something the penitent could do already in this life to lessen his future punishment; for example, special prayers, fasts, almsgiving, retreats, and pilgrimages. If such works of satisfaction were neglected, the penitent could expect to burn for his laxness after death in purgatory (216-217).

¹ Ozment, 216.

² Weber, Max. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. New York: Routledge, 2002.

This system presented the conditions for the rise of the “indulgence” as a popular form of penance. Under the papal bull *Unigenitas*, Clement IV decreed that since Christ had bled such a copious amount of blood on the cross, the pope had now at his disposal this vast treasury of redemptive power against sin since one drop of the Savior’s blood would have redeemed mankind. Pope Sixtus IV extended this redeeming power to those souls in purgatory, allowing the living to buy the “freedom” of those already passed on. Men like Johann Tetzel took full advantage of this, praying on human emotions by “graphically depicting the voices of wailing dead parents in purgatory, who pleaded with their children for the release that a few alms could readily purchase”¹.

Confession was also a key component of this model, and also became a point of difficulty for laity in this system. Confession became more inquisitory, delving into the motivations for sins, and demanding that all parishioners confess at least once a year and during Lent. This act was designed to make people aware of their sins, why they were committing them, and by doing so, prepare them to do the penance which would return them to the straight path to righteousness. However, “Priests and laity were often completely frustrated when they attempted to determine degrees of consent to sin and culpability” that there existed within the clergy, “a ‘penchant for grading sins’, especially sexual sins, and interrogating laity about their sex life”².

This kind of penitential system and confessional system led to the establishment of clerical ideas of piety in the lay world. The laity were not held to the same high standards of obedience and conduct in their lives, but the penitential system that

¹ Ozment, 217.

² Ozment, 218.

developed in the later medieval period exhibited signs of attempting to impose monastic ideals upon the laity. Stephen Ozment comments, "One cannot find in the literature on confession and penitential practice even a notion that religiously earnest laity may require a distinctive piety of their own, or that a moderated clerical regimen may not be the most satisfying spirituality for laity. The domination of lay piety by clerical ideals is attested not only not only by the preoccupation of this literature with the sexual sins of laity, but also by the penances these manuals prescribed for confessed sins"¹. This was taken to the extreme in one manual which suggested martyrdom, hair shirts, vigils and flagellation were appropriate not only for the clergy, but for the laity as well.

There was a growing sense of this religious "anxiety" amongst the laity, one enhanced by the spread of humanism. With the growing urbanization and the advances of economics, science and culture, the medieval period and the understandings of the world and individual that it fostered were antithetical to the emerging consciousness in societies at large. The penitential system was clearly part of this outmoded medieval mindset. The monastery, as an important center of learning, was slowly being replaced as learning became more secular. Human freedoms were becoming more valued, and discipline in the monastic, communal sense was being exchanged for more individualistic control. Thus, "monastically derived lay piety with prominent clerical ideals of obedience and sexual purity seemed incongruous to an increasingly literate, socially mobile urban laity, who prized simplicity, directness and respectful treatment in all aspects of their lives"².

¹ Ozment, 219.

² Ozment, 220.

This anxiety certainly was preeminent when a twenty-one year old Martin Luther entered the Augustinian cloister at Erfurt on July 17, 1505. Luther's childhood had been marked by a strict upbringing, and his religious background had been drilled into him by his father and mother, who were both extremely devout. Luther knew well the ideas of God and Christ as judge, and admitted, "that he was utterly terror stricken at the sight of Christ the Judge" in pictures or art in his youth¹. For Luther, as for others in society, the monastic life was seen as a place to avoid this uncertainty, a place to cultivate, through rigorous obedience, the spiritual discipline necessary for salvation. The young Luther was driven to the cloister by a near-death experience in a thunderstorm on his way back to the University of Erfurt after a short visit to his home. During the storm, he was knocked to the ground by a bolt of lightning, and made a vow to St. Anne that if he were allowed to survive his ordeal, he would become a monk. In this lightning strike, Luther saw, "God the all-terrible, Christ the inexorable, and all the leering fiends springing from their lurking places in pond and wood that with sardonic cachinnations they might seize his shock of curly hair and bolt him into hell"². Young Luther was already starkly aware of the wrath of God and his terrible power, and this episode only deepened his understanding as such. Upon entering the cloister, his dread of God's wrath became even more pronounced.

After his probationary year in the monastery which apparently passed without much difficulty, Luther was "overtaken by another thunderstorm, this time of the spirit.

¹ Bainton, Roland H. *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther*. Abingdon-Cokesbury: New York, 1950. 30.

² Bainton, 34.

The occasion was the saying of his first mass”¹. As the apocryphal story goes, Luther stumbled on the part of the mass where the priest must address the offering unto God, saying “We offer unto thee, the living, the true, the eternal God”. Luther wrote afterward:

At these words I was utterly stupefied and terror-stricken. I thought to myself, ‘With what tongue shall I address such Majesty, seeing that all men ought to tremble in the presence of even an earthly prince? Who am I, that I should lift up mine eyes or raise my hands to the divine Majesty? The angels surround him. At his nod the earth trembles. And shall I, a miserable little pygmy, say “I want this, I ask for that”? For I am dust and ashes and full of sin and I am speaking to the living, eternal and true God².

For Luther, God was not a loving figure. Instead, he was the angry God of the Old Testament, full of wrath and sitting in judgment of Luther’s every deed and gesture. His stumbling during the ceremony was an expression of his anxiety over his own place in relation to such a mighty and imposing figure. It did not help his fears when after the mass his own father heightened this anxiety. Luther had been educated in order to pursue life as a lawyer, a profession which his father Hans had been sure would allow Martin to provide for himself and his wife in their old age. Citing the adage to “honor thy father and mother”, Hans chastised Martin for running off to the monastic life on the prompting of a vision that could have just as easily come from the Devil as God.

Hearing this from his own father, Luther devoted himself wholly to the monastic existence, perhaps to assure himself that his life was one of salvation and not damnation. The monastic life afforded Luther the opportunity to undertake the most stressful program of self-piety that was available, and he dove headlong into the opportunity

¹ Bainton, 39.

² Bainton, 41.

afforded him by his seclusion from the outside world of society and its evils. Luther, “fasted, sometimes three days on end without a crumb...He laid upon himself vigils and prayers in excess of those stipulated by the rule. He cast off the blankets permitted to him and well-nigh froze himself to death. At the time, he was proud of his sanctity”¹.

Luther himself wrote later of his years in the monastery:

I was a good monk, and I kept the rule of my order so strictly that I may say that if ever a monk got to heaven by his monkery it was I. All my brothers in the monastery who knew me will bear me out. If I had kept on any longer, I should have killed myself with vigils, prayers, reading and other work²

However, no matter how many extra tasks and mortifications Luther heaped upon himself, they could not quiet his misgivings about his salvation. Luther thus took a trip to Rome, a place full of the relics of the Saints and holy sites where he could attempt to wash away the guilt and sinfulness that burdened his consciousness.

This trip had perhaps more of an adverse effect on his anxieties. Luther arrived to find the Italian priests to be rather flippant about their offices. He was stymied by the speed and relative disengagement with which they said masses. As Bainton notes, “Some of the Italian clergy, however were flippantly unbelieving and would address the sacrament saying, ‘Bread thou art and bread thou shalt remain, and wine thou art and wine thou shalt remain’”³. This, combined with the sexual exploits of some of the clergy and the historical legacy of the impiety of some popes, began to shake the foundation of Luther’s faith in the Church as the way to salvation.

¹ Bainton, 45.

² Luther, Martin. *Selections From His Writings*. Edited with an Introduction by John Dillenberger. New York: Anchor, 1962.

³ Bainton, 50.

He returned to Wittenberg and attempted again to engage the penitential system. Luther engaged in confessional binges, “often daily, and for as long as six hours on a single occasion”¹. Luther would search his soul, repeating to himself the seven deadly sins and Ten Commandments in hopes that he would remember all of his transgressions. However, it was not these major transgressions that troubled Luther, since he was strictly pious in regards to those codes. It was the small sins, the ones that seemed to Luther too imminently forgettable for mere men to remember. Every small impure thought or improper motivation for an action must be remembered and accounted for. This was not easy, as Luther saw sin working within him to attempt to hide his transgressions from his memory to protect his own ego. Luther’s extremism in trying to assure his contrition baffled even the monks in his own monastery. One of his confessors even commented, “Man, God is not angry with you. You are angry with God. Don’t you know that God commands you to hope?”².

Hope, however, seemed a foreign concept when even the stories of the Bible showed that sinners often sin without any kind of recognition. Luther realized that, “Sinners often sin without compunction. Adam and Eve, after tasting the fruit of the forbidden tree, went blithely for a walk in the cool of the day; and Jonah, after fleeing from the Lord’s commission, slept soundly in the hold of the ship”³. Luther was discovering that there was something more deeply wrong with human nature than the penitential system could account for. There was little hope in the idea of paying for all of

¹ Bainton, 54.

² Bainton, 54.

³ Bainton, 55.

one's transgressions, because there were so many that the system could not possibly catch them all.

Horribly depressed and gripped by nightmares that constantly tormented his sleep, his mentor, Johann Von Staupitz attempted to aid Luther by directing him away from the minutia of the penitential system towards the more grand scale dreamings of Catholic mysticism. The idea of most mystic traditions in the Catholic Church was to immerse oneself in the divine, to realize that one's self was an outpouring of the creator, and to stop fighting against the immensity of the Divine and instead, take solace in the fact that man is one with that which created him. This vision did not appeal to Luther, who still thought of God as unable to accept something impure into His perfect nature. Also, Luther could not love a God who was so judgmental, one who sat ready to send his soul to hell for the tiniest imperfection. Intercession, through the routes of penance and pilgrimage had already been tried and still left doubts in Luther's mind. God was not bound to any system, and could therefore deny salvation to any man on any grounds. It seemed ludicrous to Luther that there was no assurance. Similarly, if he followed the teachings of Augustine, God was so absolute that man's fate had already been determined. Luther had never before reached these depths of distress, even through all his trials in the past. He later wrote, "I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners, and secretly, if not blasphemously, certainly murmuring greatly, I was angry with God"¹.

Staupitz, seeing Luther approaching the breaking point, decided to take drastic measures. He told Luther to study for his doctoral degree and begin teaching the Bible at

¹ Luther, 11.

Erfurt. Staupitz thought that by giving Luther his old teaching chair at the University, he would, "drive this agonizing brother to wrestle with the source book of his religion".

This was a shocking turn, since, "Luther was following a prescribed course and the Bible was not the staple of theological education"¹. Luther, an obedient monk even in his doubt, did what his mentor asked and began to study the text.

After beginning his lectures, he was reading the letter of Paul to the Romans, and was struck in the difficulty of reading the text. It troubled him greatly, as Paul's work engaged him greatly, but his meaning continually escaped Luther. He wrote:

"I had indeed been captivated with an extraordinary ardor for understanding Paul in the Epistle to the Romans. But up till then it was not the cold blood about the heart, but a single word in Chapter 1:17, "In it the righteousness of God is revealed", that had stood in my way. For I hated that word, "righteousness of God", which, according to the use and custom of all my teachers, I had been taught to understand philosophically regarding the formal or active righteousness, as they called it, with which God is righteous and punishes the unrighteous sinner.

Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe he was placated by my satisfaction...I was angry with God, and said, 'As if, indeed it is not enough, that miserable sinners, eternally lost through original sin, are crushed by every kind of calamity by the law of the Decalogue, without having God add pain to pain by the gospel and also by the gospel threatening us with his righteousness and wrath!' Thus I raged with a fierce and troubled conscience. Nevertheless, I beat importunately upon Paul at that place, most ardently desiring to know what St. Paul wanted"².

Luther's transformative experience that changed his entire view of Christianity was catalyzed by his reading of Paul in the library at the monastery in Erfurt. The writings of Paul, as can be seen throughout Luther's corpus, were a driving force for his theology and more importantly were the texts that originally challenged his understanding.

¹ Bainton, 60.

² Luther, 11.

Luther's Encounter with Paul

Before Luther's encounter with Paul, he had already begun to become cognizant of his own inklings about his situation. He was stuck in the midst of a flawed system, hopelessly lost and desperate for a way out. Luckily, as Staupitz had planned, Luther found some solace in the study of the Bible. Luther was first struck by the helplessness of Christ on the cross. If God was indeed almighty, Luther was perplexed as to why Christ would cry out "Why hast thou forsaken me?" during the crucifixion. Luther assuredly knew why he, a sinner, would be so weak. But Christ was the antithesis of Luther, the Word become flesh, and was omnipotent rather than impotent. The only answer for Luther was that Christ indeed had assumed the iniquities of mankind, and had "so identified himself with us as to participate in our alienation. He who was truly man so sensed his solidarity with humanity as to feel himself with us as to feel himself along with mankind estranged from the All Holy"¹. Jesus was no longer a fearful judge, but instead was one who suffered the pain of humanity. To be sure, God was still judgmental, and was still a highly mysterious figure. However, God became a more neutral figure, "neither malicious nor capricious. If, like the Samaritan, God must first pour into our wounds the wine that smarts, it is that he may thereafter use the oil that soothes"². However, the idea of justice was still at hand. How would God be placated since the Scriptures did indicate that He was a "just" God"? For the answer to this persistent question, Luther turned to Paul.

Luther saw in Paul one who had grappled with the same problems and doubts that assailed him in his trials. He saw in his tower experience his own "Damascus road", and

¹ Bainton, 62.

² Bainton, 64.

even refers to himself as a “great...Saul” in reference to his earlier days as a monk¹. He shared the same lust for the dogmatic rites and the energetic adherence to them that Paul had exhibited as a Pharisee. Thus, it was no surprise that Luther was at first extremely frustrated by Paul. Luther wrote extremely bitterly about his failures to connect with the letters of Paul, considering he was constantly drawn back to them in his reading. To Luther, Paul’s writings were a “stumbling block”, because they dealt with this idea of the “justice of God”, a demonstrably difficult phrase for Luther to incorporate into his life of faith. Despite this difficulty, Luther “persisted in grappling with Paul, who plainly had agonized over precisely his problem and had found a solution”².

In this continual return to the Pauline text, one can see the echoes of Tracy’s first and second “moments” of interpretation. Luther engages the text with his own contemporary conceptions about its contents. He states, that he had been taught about Romans 1:17 that the “righteousness” described there was the justice of a vengeful God by all his teachers³. Undoubtedly, Luther had his presuppositions about what the Letters were supposed to contain since he was a monk in the Augustinian tradition. But he was also highly aware of his position and the atmosphere of his contemporary position. The medieval model of salvation was on the brink of breaking down, and the world was moving forward. He was looking for a way to reaffirm his place as a Christian, but at the same time make sense of the contemporary trends. Tracy’s statement that the “present moment is, in fact, formed by both the memories of the tradition and the hopes, desires,

¹ Luther, 4.

² Bainton, 64.

³ Luther, 11.

critical demands for transformation for the future”¹ describes perfectly Luther’s approach to the text according to Luther’s own account.

As to the second “moment” Tracy describes, the Pauline Corpus clearly exhibited a “vexing” situation for Luther, particularly the Epistle to the Romans. The letter’s focus on “justice” was at the heart of Luther’s own struggles, and this focus called him back repeatedly to examine it. Finally, Luther achieved his moment of understanding, commonly known as the “tower experience”. He writes:

“At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, ‘In it the righteousness of God is revealed as it is written, “He who through faith is righteous shall live”’. There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely the passive righteousness with which merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, ‘He who through faith is righteous shall live.’...There a totally other face of Scripture showed itself to me. Thereupon I ran through the Scriptures from memory. I also found in other terms an analogy, as, the work of God, that is, what God does in us, the power of God, with which he makes us strong, the wisdom of God, with which he makes us wise, the strength of God, the salvation of God, the glory of God...And I extolled my sweetest word with a love as great as the hatred with which I had before hated the word ‘righteousness of God’. Thus that place in Paul was truly the gate to paradise”².

Luther had found in Paul something that jarred him from his dogmatic position and his contemporary time period. Luther assuredly seemed elated at the moment of his “tower experience”, but his work had just begun. What this encounter did was establish Paul as the basis for Luther’s further work on the idea of “justification by faith”. It did not, however, quell all of his doubts or answer all of his questions. In fact, the experience was shocking enough for Luther to describe it as “*Anfechtung*”, the same word he used to

¹ Tracy, 103.

² Luther, 11-12.

describe his experience during the thunderstorm which almost took his life. There is no English equivalent, but it roughly can be said to mean something like a collective mix of emotions expressing fear, shock, trembling and panic. This description is not out of tune with Tracy's theory. Tracy claims that the classic text "can shock [the reader] with the insight into [his] finitude as finitude, a claim that will interpret [the reader] even as [the reader] struggles to interpret it. [The reader] cannot control the experience, however practiced [he] is in the techniques of manipulation. It happens, it demands, it provokes" could very well be applied to Luther's initial experience encountering the horizons that Paul's writing had opened to him¹.

Luther now began to engage the Pauline corpus in light of his experience and began to create his own understanding of their contents. Many of his main theological doctrines are supported entirely by his readings of Paul. It seems pertinent to review how Pauline texts gave impetus to some of these major doctrines.

Righteousness now had two forms for Luther, active and passive. Active righteousness was the righteousness of the world, and encompassed customs, political laws, ceremonies and even biblical law. It was that which men could codify and see, and which man could follow with reason. The other kind of righteousness for Luther was passive. This righteousness was the righteousness of the true Christian, that which is tied to faith and is received as a "gift of God". He writes, "The second kind of righteousness is our proper righteousness, not because we alone work it, but because we work with that first and alien righteousness. This is that manner of life spent profitably in good works,

¹ Tracy 102-103.

in the first place, in slaying the flesh and crucifying the desires with respect to the self”¹. He cites Galatians 5:24, which reads, “And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts” (KJV) in support of this denial of the material righteousness as true righteousness.

Also, man had the stain of original sin on him and therefore could never truly judge right from wrong. Reason was thus corrupted by sin. Luther responded to these uncertainties by stating that man could not be without sin. It was useless to attempt to do good works because man was perpetually in a state of sin. Laws were there for man to realize his own inability to follow them and accept his imperfection. Once the spell of disillusionment had been broken, man could give himself completely to God's grace and have faith. The righteousness of the true Christian could not be earned, “for the nature of this righteousness is, to do nothing, to hear nothing, to know nothing whatsoever of the law or works, but to know and believe this only, that Christ is gone to the Father and is not now seen: that he sitteth in heaven at the right hand of his Father, not as a judge, but made unto us of God, wisdom, righteousness, holiness and redemption: briefly, that he is our high priest intreating for us, and reigning over us and in us by grace”². Here, Luther cites Romans 4:15, which states, “Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression”³. Thus, since heaven is not under any law, there is no sin in heaven.

For Luther, faith was the existential relationship with God and the act of receiving the imputation of God. God imputes man with Christ-like attributes which are

¹ Luther, 88.

² Luther, 105.

³ KJV.

completely foreign and alien since man is sinful by nature. God is merciful and allows man to share in the grace of Christ and be saved by it. Luther described this relationship as a marriage between the believer and Christ, citing Ephesians 5:31-32:

³¹For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.

³²This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.¹

Luther reminded man that, "Christ and the soul become one flesh. And if they are one flesh and there is between them a true marriage...it follows that everything they have they hold in common, the good as well as the evil. Accordingly, the believing soul can boast of and glory in whatever Christ has as though it were his own, and whatever the soul has Christ claims as his own"². Man was not transformed completely, but was *simuli justus et peccator*, or at once justified and a sinner. In respect to the law, man could never be justified for he was never without sin. However, by faith in Christ, man is simultaneously saved from damnation through the power of the cross. Luther turns to Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:56-57 for support, quoting:

⁵⁶The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.

⁵⁷But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.³

With this, man could be less self-vigilant and did not have to trouble himself with progressing forward on the journey to salvation. Rather, he could be comforted that Jesus died *pro nobis* and his grace could be counted upon for man's salvation. Works were no longer the vehicle to reach heaven, and Luther saw good works as flowing forth from the

¹ KJV.

² Luther, 60.

³ KJV.

acceptance of the imputation of God. Luther writes, "Whoever, therefore, does not wish to go astray with those blind men must look beyond works, and beyond laws and doctrines about works"¹. He turns to 1 Corinthians 1:21, citing, "For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe"².

Luther advocated the reception of the imputation of God on a personal level, and thus opposed the medieval traditions surrounding interpretation of the Bible as well. In Luther's eyes, the Bible was the word of God, and through the Word and opening one's self to God's gift, one could receive salvation. In medieval times, only the clergy could read the Bible. The text was available in Latin only, severely limiting the number of other people educated enough to read it. He wanted all peoples to read the Bible and see the Word for themselves, and thus advocated scripture be translated into the vernacular. The mediation of a professional priesthood was not necessary, and the Catholic Church obscured the interaction of the believer with the divine. Man himself could receive the righteousness from God and did not need an agent to help him reach salvation. Luther thus created a priesthood of all believers and assured that authority in the new churches would be based from the bottom up. For this new idea he turned to Paul citing 1 Corinthians 4:1, "Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God"³.

In looking at these examples, Luther displays signs of Tracy's third "moment" of interpretation where a reader engages the classic text to answer questions that were raised

¹ Luther, 71.

² KJV.

³ KJV.

in the wake of original encounter with the text's "vexing" elements. The questions of how his new understanding of righteousness plays out in the world is aided by the citations he continually finds within the Pauline corpus. Indeed, the entire corpus of Luther's writings is saturated with citations of Paul. Even upon a cursory scan of the body of Luther's work it is easy to see that the Epistles are cited more frequently than any other biblical source.

Looking at Tracy's final "moment" of interpretation, we must gauge Luther's conversation with his contemporary interpreters of the same classic texts. Even though Luther had managed to find a source to foster his own thought, it was not without opponents. In attempting to discern Luther's response to this "moment" in the interpretive process, it serves to turn to Luther's debate with Desiderius Erasmus. Erasmus, like Luther, attempted to "revive the Christian consciousness of Europe through dissemination of the sacred writings"¹ and published the first Greek New Testament in Europe. At first, these two men were compatriots, as Luther was fond of Erasmus' work on the New Testament, and even commented that instead of lecturing on Galatians in 1519, he would have "been happier to have waited for a commentary from the pen of Erasmus"². They agreed that the church had "relapsed into the Judaistic legalism castigated by the apostle Paul. Christianity, said Erasmus, has been made to consist not in loving one's neighbor but in abstaining from butter and cheese during Lent"³. However, this period of favorable relations passed as the root differences in their viewpoints began to emerge. Erasmus was a humanist to the core, and believed in the individual as a capable, moral being. Luther, of course, believed that man was sinful and

¹ Bainton, 125.

² Bainton, 125.

³ Bainton, 126.

could do nothing good or moral without the aid of grace. This led to their great debate on free will, in which both men freely and frequently cited Paul. Erasmus uses Romans heavily to emphasize his view, especially with respect to God's impending judgment. It makes no sense to Erasmus to have God judge his own conduct. For example, he writes, citing Romans 2:4, "Dost thou despise the riches of his goodness and patience and long-suffering? Dost thou not know that the greatness of God is meant to lead thee to repentance?" How could the disdain of a commandment be imputed, if there is no free will? And how could God invite us to do penance, when he has created impenitence? And how could a condemnation be justified, when the judge himself has compelled the outrage?"¹. For Erasmus, if Luther argues that there is no free will, we must necessarily attribute all evil to God as well, and thus, God seems ridiculous to be any type of judge, since all he judges and punishes is his own conduct. Again, Erasmus writes, "But how could it be justified that 'wrath and indignation...tribulation and anguish' (Romans 12:8-9) shall be visited upon the transgressor, if he is doing nothing freely, but everything through necessity?"². Man's striving and constant effort is necessary to find salvation, and Erasmus uses Paul's parable of the runner to back up his claim. 1 Corinthians 9:24 reads, "Do you not know that those who run in a race, all indeed run, but one receives the prize? So run as to obtain it...they [run] indeed to receive a perishable crown, but we an imperishable one"³. Only effort can attain a prize. We are encouraged to "fight the good fight" in Timothy, and according to Erasmus, we can not ignore, as Luther does, these admonitions to take action. To be sure, grace will be there to assist us, but we can not lie

¹ Erasmus, Desiderius and Martin Luther. *Discourse on Free Will*. Translated and edited by Ernest F. Winter. Continuum: New York, 1961. 40.

² Erasmus and Luther, 41.

³ KJV.

idle, since it contradicts what we are told and know about God through revelation. Man needs to join “virtuous endeavors with divine grace, in order to reach perfection gradually through righteous deeds”¹.

Luther responds in kind, criticizing Erasmus’ own timidity in taking a definite position on the question of free will. Erasmus was willing only to concede that the will enjoyed some freedom. In *Bondage of the Will*, Luther retorts:

...it is not irreligious, idle or superfluous, but in the highest degree wholesome and necessary, for a Christian to know whether or not his will has anything to do with matters of salvation...If we know nothing of these things, we shall know nothing whatsoever of Christianity, and shall be in worse case than any people on earth! He who dissents from that statement should acknowledge that he is no Christian; and he who ridicules or derides it should realize that he is the Christian’s chief foe. For if I am ignorant of the nature, extent and limits of what I can and must do with reference to God, I shall be equally ignorant and uncertain of the nature, extent and limits of what God can do and will in me—though God, in fact, works all in all. Now, if I am ignorant of God’s works and power, I am ignorant of God himself; and if I do not know God, I cannot worship, praise, give thanks or serve Him, for I do not know how much I should attribute to myself and how much to Him. We need, therefore, to have a clear-cut distinction between God’s power and ours, and God’s work and ours, if we would live a godly life².

Luther then cites 1 Corinthians 12:6 as support for his conclusion. The passage reads:

⁶And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.

⁷But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.³

We can see that Luther was indeed aware of the other interpretations of Paul in his contemporary setting, and that he did respond to these interpretations in order to engage a larger arena of thinkers and to stimulate conversation on the topic.

¹ Erasmus and Luther, 44.

² Luther, 169.

³ KJV.

Summary

David Tracy's theory of the "classic" and interpretation gives a good outline of the reading of Paul's letters by Martin Luther. The Pauline texts fit the mold of a "classic" because of their creation in response to an experience of the author that sparked a deep questioning of the meaning of existence and what it was to be human. Paul's vision drove him to move the experience out of his personal understanding into writing, where it could be interpreted and reach others beyond his own contemporary horizon. When Martin Luther encountered these writings of Paul, he was struck by their relevance to his contemporary situation, and he was thus vexed by them. In reading, he gained a new perspective that challenged his old views, and he struggled with the texts of Paul to interpret them, and thus bring meaning to his own horizon.

Admittedly, this is just one approach to hermeneutical theory. There are many approaches to be engaged, but Tracy's theory in particular could be useful for the study of the progress of a religious tradition's writings and interpretation over time. One could easily apply this theory to Augustine's reading of Paul, or to Luther's reading of Augustine for that matter. It seems that in every tradition, reinterpretation and discussion of the "classic" texts of that tradition in many ways unearths new ideas with the reengagement of the texts. By allowing the interpreter to be contemporary and still stand in the arena of tradition, Tracy's hermeneutics are seemingly an ideal for this kind of reengagement of a religious tradition's corpus of texts. Tracy himself states, "all those systematic theologies which bear the most promise for being candidates for contemporary Christian systematic classics are profoundly hermeneutical enterprises: Barth's retrieval of Calvin; Lonergan and Rahner of Aquinas; Reinhold Niebuhr of Augustine; H. Richard Niebuhr

of Jonathan Edwards; Paul Tillich and Rudolf Bultmann of Luther; all systematic theologians of some primary set of meanings in the scriptures”¹. This essay is but one application of a hermeneutical approach that may in some ways lend a window as to how religious traditions can grow and foster an engaging hermeneutical position in their theologians.

Tracy, David. *The Hermeneutical Turn: Theological Hermeneutics from Kant to Heidegger*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001.

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¹ Tracy, 104

Annotated Bibliography

Bainton, Roland H. *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther*. Abingdon-Cokesbury: New York, 1950.

Bainton provides one of the most clear and well-written biographies of Luther. His work has long been judged as the hallmark for comparison. The book does a wonderful job of melding the personal aspects of Luther's life with the historical and theological.

Brown, Alexandra R. *The Cross and Human Transformation: Paul's Apocalyptic Word in 1 Corinthians*. Fortress: Minneapolis, 1995.

Professor Brown's work nicely highlights the theology of the cross in 1 Corinthians and its place in the theology of Paul on a larger scale. She writes much about the event of the cross ending the distinctions and boundaries of the world that Paul knew.

Coogan, Michael D., ed. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

A NRSV bible with annotations.

Dunn, James D.G. *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1998.

Dunn attempts to complete a full theology of Paul, covering all the main topics discussed in scholarly readings of Paul, from the image of the cross to the place of Judaism within Paul's theology.

Erasmus, Desiderius and Martin Luther. *Discourse on Free Will*. Translated and edited by Ernest F. Winter. Continuum: New York, 1961.

This book chronicles the discussion of the idea of free will between Erasmus and Luther. Their responses to one another's works are included and the discussion helps to illuminate the differences on the freedom of human beings in determining their soteriological fate.

Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: Harper Press, 1972.

An extremely dense volume but useful for helping to delineate Tracy's position on how the classic text projects the reader into a future. This is a take on Heidegger's idea of a "thrown projection".

Luther, Martin. *Selections From His Writings*. Edited with an Introduction by John Dillenberger. New York: Anchor, 1962.

A collection of several writings by Luther, nicely compiled and edited. It includes *Bondage of the Will*, *Commentary on Galatians*, *Preface to the Latin Writings*, *Freedom of a Christian* and several other works that were cited in the paper.

Martyn, J. Louis. *The Anchor Bible: Galatians*. New York: Doubleday, 1997.

Martyn investigates the Pauline epistle in depth, looking for seminal conflicts and problems that arise. Martyn is deeply in tune with the apocalyptic notions of Paul, and highlights these well in the commentary.

Ozment, Steven. *The Age of Reform 1250-1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980.

Ozment's book provides a wonderful history of the development of the religious crises the brought about the Reformation. He also manages to capture the spirit of the society in relation to these crises in his writing.

Ricouer, Paul. *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974.

Another investigation by Ricouer of the problems of hermeneutics. He grafts phenomenology onto the hermeneutical model in order to solve some of the difficulties that arise.

Ricouer, Paul. *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*. Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 1976.

Ricouer here chronicles the move from the model of speaking to the model of writing for communication and dialectic. He outlines what is gained and lost in these models, as well as the implications for hermeneutic investigations. He also discusses the ideas of metaphor, symbol, and ultimately the ideas of understanding and explaining language.

Ricouer, Paul. *Paul Ricouer on Biblical Hermeneutics*. Edited by John Dominic Crossan. Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1975.

Ricouer applies much of his interpretive theory to the Bible and uses examples of biblical stories to explicate his theories of hermeneutics in the context of Scripture. It is also accompanied by several other essays from other scholars addressing Ricouer's work in this area.

Roetzel, Calvin J. *The Letters of Paul: Conversations in Context*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998.

Roetzel provides a nice survey of the issues and conflicts that arise within each of the letters in the Pauline corpus. He also provides wonderful background information on the world that Paul inhabited and the influences from Paul's contemporary culture and society that are exhibited in the apostle's writings.

Tracy, David. *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*. Crossroad: New York, 1981.

Tracy's book attempts to address the place of theology in a growing pluralistic culture. The chapter entitled "The Classic" delineates his views on the problems and methods of interpreting texts and hermeneutics.

Weber, Max. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. New York: Routledge, 2002.

An interesting alternative theory as to why the Reformation came about and was so successful, highlighting the religious influence on economics. Helpful in giving another angle of approach to the history of the period.

Young, Robert. *Young's Analytical Concordance to the Bible*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Press.

A biblical concordance to the KJV.