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Labor Room or Morgue: The Power and Limits of Pluralism and Christology

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Professor Wilson is right, "Christological reflection is crossing a threshold...entering an unfamiliar room."[1] My response focuses his point by posing a question and proposing an answer. Is this new room a labor room or a morgue? Will christological reflection in this room labor and give birth to a new and vibrant orthodoxy and orthopraxis? Or will it die shy and embarrassed for lack of moral and spiritual fortitude, or intellectual and practical wisdom?

The answer to the question of morgue or labor room lies in marking the powers and limits of christology and pluralism. Recent theological discussion suggests limits to christology's ability to respond to religious diversity. Likewise, concepts of pluralism are under scholarly scrutiny. We need to be aware of the limits of pluralism and christological reflection; otherwise, we risk dissipating the strength and wisdom of christology. Put positively, if we define the power and limits of pluralism and christological reflection, we have the opportunity for vital productivity.

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[1]On the whole, I agree with Mr. Wilson's judgments. He overstates his case, however, when he states that "the questions raised by historical research into the gospels, the New Testament, and the life of Jesus no longer capture christology." Although I disagree with James D. G. Dunn's attempt to locate some uniqueness in the historical sources of early christology— see his *Christology in the Making* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980)—it represents a major discussion in response to John Hick's *The Myth of God Incarnate* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977) and others of whom Mr. Wilson presumes hold the field today. Even Mr. Wilson significantly qualifies his judgment in note eleven where he notes recent Roman Catholic theology. In my opinion, the major shift is not to discount historical consciousness but to place it in a different position in christological reflection. Furthermore, the importance of praxis in contemporary christological reflection is greater than Mr. Wilson grants. My overall impression agrees with Johannes-Baptist Metz's observation that "the fundamental hermeneutical problem of theology is not the problem of how systematic theology stands in relation to historical theology, how dogma stands in relation to history, but what is the relation between theory and practice" in "Relationship to Church and World in the Light of Political Theology," *Theology of Renewal 2. Renewal of Religious Structures,* L. K. Shook (New York: Herder & Herder, 1968) 260. In addition to its new place, the historical quest is no longer after the interior consciousness of Jesus but, in many cases, the value and interest structure implied in the interaction between Jesus and others. The historical praxis of Jesus and the early Christian community remains a major moment in the majority of recent Catholic christologies and, thus, the vast majority of recent published critical works. Mr. Wilson's dependence upon Driver for his sweeping judgments on the role of historical consciousness is a bit denominationally, culturally and intellectually myopic.

To sustain Professor Wilson's metaphor, let's examine the room, walk around its walls, ceiling and floor. What sorts of furniture do we find? Can we do productive work in this place or

must we die? I believe this new room can be a labor room—if we foster a critical understanding and praxis of the power and limits of pluralism and christology. My intention is to describe at least some of the limits and turn their power to life and work.

I. MARKING THE LIMITS OF PLURALISM

The limits of pluralism are not easily described. As contemporary theologians, already in the room, we need to bump into some walls on the way to clarifying the room's limits. We need to say what pluralism cannot be before what it should be.

Pluralism in this discussion is not simply the experience of diversity, because the diversity of religious experience is certainly not new for historical Christianity. Christianity's beginnings were in at least as intense a diverse cultural setting as we experience.[2] To be sure, over the last 200 years European Christianity and its western hemispheric descendants were forcefully reacquainted with cultural diversity. But the phenomenon Professor Wilson sketches as a new threshold of pluralistic consciousness is not this general recognition and response to diversity. Christological reflection clearly has been sensitive to such diversity for some time.[3] I suggest pluralism means something more than the recognition of diverse religious experience. When Mr. Wilson speaks of pluralism he is describing a new *way* of conceiving and responding to diversity of religious experience. Thus, the first limit to pluralistic consciousness is the distinction between a *general* recognition of and response to diversity and some more recent, *specific* ways of conceiving, accounting for, and responding to this diversity. We are, then, talking about a peculiar theory about diversity called pluralism.

Pluralism cannot be eclecticism or relativism.[4] If the pluralist cannot be monistic and exclusivistic in christological claims, because it is morally and intellectually wrong, then the pluralist cannot be either eclectic or relativistic for the same reasons.

[2]Helmut Koester, "One Jesus and Four Primitive Gospels" in *Trajectories through Early Christianity,* James M. Robinson and Helmut Koester (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), especially 207-211; cf. Koester's *Introduction to the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982).
[3]Major figures of the modern period have discussed the issue of christology and diverse religious expressions. For example, Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (2 vols., New York: Harper & Row, 1963) 1. 31-44; *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958) 210-65. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977) 453-478; *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion,* edited by E. G. Speirs and J. B. Sanderson (New York: Humanities Press, 1962), vol. III (fortunately this unhappy translation and edition is soon to be replaced by Peter C. Hodgson's English translation of the recently completed German critical edition). Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960) 77-79, 120, and 145-55.
[4]Wayne C. Booth, *Critical Understanding: The Power and Limits of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1979). For a more extensive discussion of the terms "eclecticism" and "relativism," 12-23; 25-6; cf., David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981) 366; hereafter, Tracy, *Analogical Imagination.*

A brief perusal of the eclectic's room explains this judgment. Ultimately eclecticism brings with it a certain scissors and paste pragmatism. The eclectic says, "There is good in other religions. So I will choose the good parts from all the religions and put them together." In the eclectic's room, the furniture might come from many periods, religions, and cultures. Nonetheless, the furniture all works for the eclectic's purposes.[5] But who decides what those

purposes are? Inevitably—the eclectic. In short, the eclectic can work in this room, but it is unlikely anyone else can. If something is born in this room, it will serve the eclectic's purposes. If christomonism is subject to christofacism, an eclectic response to religious diversity is nearly as much at risk.

The walls of the relativist's room are of glass, sometimes invisible and other times mirroring the room, its contents, and other walls. The relativist supposes an infinite regression. At first the relativist theologian is delighted at the seemingly infinite variety. After a certain point, imagining new furniture and bizarre arrangements for christological reflection wears thin and threatens to bore the relativist to death.

This is much like what happened to our family this past Fourth of July. We expended considerable effort to find a good location for watching fireworks displays in the Twin Cities. We warmed up on a spectacular display on the Minneapolis side. Then came the main event on the State Fairgrounds in St. Paul. Despite the initial "oos" and "ahhs," after two hours we became bored with the fireworks. Faced with this sort of boredom, we humans become anxious and easily upset. Like our daughters on the Fourth, the temptation is to lash out at one another—do anything to stay alive. Fearing this violent conflict, we insist on tolerance. After all, we argue, religion is a relative matter. Some say it's relative to your culture, others to your sexual drive, still others to unresolved conflicts with your parents. Why risk. conflict?

These hidden "causes," "motives," or "values" are like the rotten eggs in the following allegory.The relativist imagines the room with one big table around which we all sit. Upon initiating the conversation, one of the persons at the table smells a rotten egg. Turning to the neighbor, our relativist says, "You have a rotten egg in your pocket." The neighbor sticks a hand into the pocket. Sure enough, there is a rotten egg. Then, however, the neighbor turns to our relativist and draws a deep breath. "Humpf," the neighbor replies, "So do you." Upon checking, everyone at the table has rotten eggs in their pockets. As a result, they agree to ignore the stink, since everyone has it.

Better to tolerate the stink than become intolerant. And I agree. Tolerance is better than bigotry.However, we can and must avoid what Professor Wilson calls "the emptiness of this enforced and repressive tolerance." If you will, people who spend most of their time pretending not to have religious values significantly different, if not contradictory, to others will never appreciate differences in other religions nor enjoy their own religious values. Whatever a critical pluralism is, it cannot be a relativism which bores us to death or represses a vibrant particularity in enforced tolerance. Behind all relativism is too high a

[5]Bernard J. F. Lonergan, S. J., *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958) 416-421.

degree of skepticism which leads to inaction. Above all, the christological reflection we desire (orthodoxy) leads to appropriate action (orthopraxis).

The pluralist might dream with W. H. Auden in "Anthem":

Let us praise our Maker, with true passion extol Him.
Let the whole creation give out another sweetness,
Nicer in our nostrils, a novel fragrance

From cleansed occasions in accord together
As one feeling fabric, all flushed and intact,
Phenomena and numbers announcing in one
Multitudinous oecumenical song
Their grand givenness of gratitude and joy,
Peaceable and plural, their positive truth
An authoritative This, an unthreatened Now
When, in love and in laughter, each lives itself,
For, united by His Word, cognition and power,
System and Order, are a single glory,
And the pattern is complex, their places safe.

Nonetheless, a pluralist's christology must bracket with provisionality this hope for "peaceable and plural, their positive truth." Short of the day of such fragrance, the pluralist needs to sniff smells all too familiar and not so sweet. Furthermore, the pluralist learns to appreciate at least some of these particular but different smells without blending into them. Too often the vision of peaceable and plural becomes embodied in imperial designs of Victorian and Edwardian Englishmen or their more contemporary counterparts in liberal American theologians. A maturing pluralist consciousness moves beyond either imperial or bland inclusivism to the birth of particularity. Or, to once again call upon Auden:

A poet's hope, to be,
like some valley cheese,
local, but prized elsewhere.[6]

Thus, liberation from social, cultural, and historical particularity in religion and theology is not possible. All too often, however, a dichotomy between "this pole and a nonhistorical, immutable universality is often overdrawn."[7] Any striving for universality is done from within intellectual communities which have their own traditions, development, and assumptions. Nonetheless, such striving is appropriate and necessary in the critical pluralist's room. A critical pluralism engenders and appreciates particularity and strives for universality. One of the crucial skills such a critical pluralist theologian must practice is the placing of provisional brackets on the scope and character of claims and research. The claims to truth, meaning, and meaningfulness in theological proposals must presume these brackets. These brackets are necessary for labor, and it is a labor room we seek. No one person, no one school, no one religion can encompass unbracketed claims to truth, meaning, and meaningfulness.

[6]I simply cannot avoid the contrast between an American process cheese and, for example, a Wisconsin sharp cheddar.

[7]James M. Gustafson, *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective: Theology and Ethics,* vol. I (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1981) 150; hereafter, Gustafson, *Theocentric.*

The goal is to make access to one's own particularity as public as possible and to make clear one's own commitment to work with others in support of theirs. The principle of publicness

excludes eclecticism and relativism since they both depend upon an understanding of religious values as essentially private and irrational, not subject to public rational conversation.

Justice becomes the primary issue. We must seek a just access to the means and materials for work in this critical pluralist room. All those who are competent,[8] even the eclectic and relativist, are welcome in the conversation. However, their eclecticism and relativism should be regularly appreciated and criticized rather than tolerated.

The importance of just access to the means and materials for work requires at least the representation of those who otherwise are not a part of the community of critical discourse within our room. Christological reflection must take seriously the interests of women, who are gaining access to the room, and the poor and working classes, who are normally denied access to the discussion of christology. This is not to say they do not have theories about the nature and work of Christ. They do; however, these theories often exclude them from the political power inherent in christological reflection. For example, much popular christology among the poor is masochistic and fatalistic. "We suffer even as Jesus suffered. What more can we expect," they say. In short, critical pluralistic christological reflection must include class and racial interests outside the room. It is precisely on this matter that the most incisive work in liberation christological reflection is done.[9]

If our work in the pluralist's room is to be vitally productive, it must foster and render particularity public. But, how? In what manner might we take particular interests seriously in this critical pluralist's room? James M. Gustafson, in his first volume of a systematic theological ethics, proposes three ideal approaches (types) for taking into account particularity. The first approach defends a particular tradition through isolating its distinctive features in one of two manners; either there is a defense of the tradition as simply the revelation or authentic recovery of the revelation of God; or, on the basis of a profound historical and cultural relativism there is acceptance of a particular tradition as one's fate. The second general type makes an apology for the tradition, often appealing to general intelligibles. The third approach, Gustafson's preference,

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[8]The topic of linguistic and communicative competence is too complicated to take up in this short essay. I can only assert some provisional beginnings of theories of communicative competence which appreciate particularity while seeking universality. The most helpful discussion of this topic can be found in Juergen Habermas, "Vorbereitende Bemerkungen zu einer Theorie der Kommunikativen Kompetenz," *Theorie der Gesellschaft oder Sozialtechnologie?* (Frankfurt, 1971) 101-141 and "On Systematically Distorted Communication," *Inquiry* 13 (1970) 205-18.

[9]Hugo Assmann, "The Power of Christ in History: Conflicting Christologies and Discernment," *Frontiers of Theology in Latin America,* ed. Rosino Gibellini (New York: Orbis, 1979). Juan Luis Segundo during his recent North American lecture tour spoke of two kinds of liberation theology. The first and oldest, born in the universities, takes a critical stance regarding the theology and piety of the poor, but nonetheless makes their interests central to christological reflection. The second, more recent and acceptable to the Catholic hierarchy, not only accepts their interests and agenda but makes their theology and piety normative. Segundo understands himself to be a part of the former group and classifies the recent work of Gustavo Gutierrez as a part of the latter.

has the theologian developing an "aspect of a tradition, being quite explicit about what is discarded from it, how various theological doctrines and principles are recombined as a result of the selection of certain themes to be central, giving reasons for how one works with traditional materials and also reasons for the selection one makes from other ways of explaining and construing the significance of 'the world.'"[10]

In pursuing Mr. Wilson's point, we have clarified the limits to this new and specific way of conceiving, accounting for, and responding to diversity which influences much of contemporary christological reflection. If the pluralist's room is to be a labor room, it must engender and appreciate particularity and strive for universality. Striving for universality is achieved through the just inclusion of all interests in the conversation and the action which results. Ways of appreciating particularity, following Gustafson's suggestions, take one of the three ideal types. Two brief descriptions remain: first, three examples of theological candidates for critical pluralist status and, second, some brackets and limits on christological reflection. Gustafson's three ideal types provide the outline for the description of candidates for critical pluralist status.

II. PLURALISM AND THE LIMITS OF CHRISTOLOGY

Mr. Gustafson's own proposal illustrates his third type. Since his proposal also brackets the place of christological reflection as a response to diversity, his proposal is described last. In addition to Gustafson, two major theological proposals immediately come to mind which are candidates for such critical pluralist status: David Tracy and George A. Lindbeck.

David Tracy best fits Gustafson's second ideal type: apologist for a tradition. Since Mr. Wilson has already discussed him, my comments sketch Tracy's method for rendering public the Christian faith. Tracy's *The Analogical Imagination* moves significantly beyond either the work of Bernard Lonergan, his teacher, or even Tracy's own earlier work, *Blessed Rage for Order,* on the question before us.[11] While the two earlier works were neither monistic nor, generally speaking, eclectic, they came close to leaving the pluralist enterprise in relativism. At times, I can appreciate Tracy's detractors' wonderment at his ability to say yes to almost everything and no to almost nothing. In *The Analogical Imagination,* Tracy provides for making public a particular religious heritage without dissolving it into either a bland or imperial tolerance. He argues that various religious communities can come to the public pluralist room and work together by rendering explicit the way of being in the world that their religious classic proposes. He defines a religious classic and its role in plural public conversations. Tracy's overall methodology remains the same as in *Blessed Rage for Order.* His commitment to the public truthfulness, intelligiblity, and meaningfulness of various religious classics is tempered with his dialectic of already/not yet; otherwise one begins to hear benevolent, but nonetheless imperial, drums in the background.

[10]Gustafson, *Theocentric,* 153-4.
[11]Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order* (New York: Seabury, 1975); *Analogical Imagination.*

Another major candidate for a critical pluralist theological proposal is the recently published work of George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age.*[12] His argument on behalf of particularity takes the second form of Gustafson's first type: profound cultural-linguistic difference. Professor Lindbeck is mainly concerned to give an account of doctrine which allows for pluralistic particularity. He calls his proposal a culturallinguistic account of religion and doctrine.

Professor Lindbeck describes three models of religion and theology, not to be confused with Gustafson's ideal types for taking particularity into account in the theological enterprise. Lindbeck accounts for pluralistic particularly by bypassing, in his terms, either a "cognitive-

propositionalist or experiential-expressive model of religion and theology."[13]

He understands the cognitive-propositionalist approach to be the classical model for understanding doctrines. These doctrines are propositions which refer to historical and metaphysical realities. These propositions are subject to public truth claims in any reasonable audience. The experiential-expressive model steps back from this kind of claim to truth. Instead, it argues that different religions are diverse expressions of a common core religious experience.[14] Doctrines are expressive symbols of this experience. Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic proposal places emphasis "on those respects in which religions resemble languages together with their correlative forms of life and are thus similar to cultures."[15] The predominate function of church doctrines in this perspective is their use, not as expressive symbols or as truth claims, but as "communally authoritative rules of discourse, attitude, and action."[16]

As a result, the doctrines regarding the person and work of Christ, in this proposal, are primarily concerned with the rules of grammar for articulating the Christian language game and lifestyle. Lindbeck represents a significant reconceptualization of Nicaea and Chalcedon.[17] He wishes to distinguish between doctrines, on the one hand, and the terminology and conceptuality in which they are formulated, on the other. In developing this distinction, Lindbeck further argues that the christological statements of Nicaea and Chalcedon are second order guidelines for Christian discourse rather than first order affirmation about the inner being of God or of Jesus Christ.

He isolates three such regulative principles present at these ecumenical councils.

[12]George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984); hereafter, Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine.*

[13]Lindbeck explicitly cites Bernard Lonergan's five point summary of his theory of religion. They are: "(1) Different religions are diverse expressions or objectifications of a common core experience. It is this experience which identifies them as religions. (2) The experience, while conscious, may be unknown on the level of self-conscious reflection. (3) It is present in all human beings. (4) In most religions, the experience is the source and norm of objectifications: it is by reference to the experience that their adequacy or lack of adequacy is to be judged. A fifth point...characterizes the primordial religious experience as 'God's gift of love'..." Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine,* 31; cf. Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972) 101-124.

[14]Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine,* 31-2.

[15]Ibid., 33.

[16]Ibid., 34.

[17]Ibid., 91-6.

> First, there is the monotheistic principle: there is only one God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jesus. Second, there is the principle of historical specificity: the stories of Jesus refer to a genuine human being who was born, lived, and died in a particular time and place. Third, there is the principle of what may be infelicitously called Christological maximalism: every possible importance is to be ascribed to Jesus that is not inconsistent with the first rules. This last rule, it may be noted, follows from the central Christian conviction that Jesus Christ is the highest possible clue...within the space-time world of human experience to God, i.e., to what is of maximal importance.

These paradigms are not "simply replicated" in Lindbeck's pluralist's room but followed in the

"making of new formulations."[18]

Although I have significant reservations regarding Lindbeck's proposal, some of which I discuss below, he has rendered a great service to theological reflection in general, and christology in particular, by providing a relatively clear and simple means of understanding the role of classical doctrine in the construction of contemporary theology. For example, the guiding principle of historical particularity established at these councils does not necessitate Pannenberg's attempt to base theology on history but discourages christologies which cannot account for and incorporate the historical particularities of Jesus of Nazareth. In contrast to Pannenberg, Schillebeeckx's christological project does not ground christology in the fate and ministry of Jesus but it incorporates them at crucial stages of the project.[19] Historical particularity is not sufficient, nor the sole norm or vantage point; it is, nonetheless, necessary.

Lindbeck's proposal not only provides internal rules for doing theology in the pluralist's room but also accounts for other religions on the same basis, as cultural-linguistic systems. If becoming Christian is gaining competence in the Christian cultural-linguistic system, becoming Buddhist implies the same kind of process. The particularly religious aspect is "a system of discursive and nondiscursive symbols linking motivation and action and providing an ultimate legitimation for basic patterns of thought, feeling, and behavior uniquely characteristic of a given community or society and its members."[20] With this definition and understanding of religion in hand, he is able to delineate a highly empirical and public process for the study and comparison of religions—so public, in fact, that even nonbelievers can engage in research on a religion's basic doctrines or guiding principles with relatively public and testable conclusions.

Tracy's proposal is at crucial points quite different from the existential-expressivist model. However, since Tracy's proposal overlaps with what Lind-

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[18]Ibid., 94-5.

[19]Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969) 28; Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord* (New York: Seabury, 1980) 36 (hereafter, *Christ*); *Interim Report on the Books Jesus and Christ* (New York: Crossroads, 1981) 62. In many ways this discussion parallels Wilhelm Herrmann's response to Martin Kaehler. Herrmann agreed with Kaehler's judgment that one could not come to faith by means of such a historical reconstruction but that one could, once one had faith, use the New Testament documents historically reconstructed, for critiquing one's theology and faith. Cf. Wilhelm Herrmann, "Der geschichtliche Christus der Grund unseres Glaubens," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 2 (1892) 250-51.

[20]Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine,* 62.

beck calls the experiential-expressive model, a comparison with the cultural-linguistic model is appropriate here.[21]

The principal difference between Lindbeck's model and the experiential-expressive model is the conception of the relationship between language and experience. The cultural-linguist's conception is the inversion of the experiential-expressivist's. For Lindbeck, the humanly real is not "constructed from below upward or from the inner to the outer, but from the outer to the inner, and from above downward." The "heights and depths of human knowledge, faith, and love are the effects and not the causes of" cultural-linguistic competence.[22]

The contrast between the experiential-expressive and cultural-linguistic proposals, stated in an overly simplified manner, is as follows. If the former were to meet a Zen Buddhist, who was unimpressed with the Christian claims regarding Jesus as Lord and Messiah, she would most

likely begin the conversation by appealing to some allegedly shared depth-religious experience. The experiential-expressivist would do so in hopes of finding common ground for shared work. Some individual experiential-expressivists, upon finding such common ground, might declare the Zen Buddhist an anonymous Christian. The cultural-linguist would find such a suggestion nonsense. The Buddhist, unless exposed to latent Christianity by being reared in a Christian society, would find the claims of Jesus being Lord and Messiah nonsense. The only way these two inhabitants of cultural-linguist's pluralist's room could work together would be by taking on the painstaking task of learning one another's cultural-linguistic systems. Most likely this would be a lifetime task, since most of the system is an unconscious competence. Even then there is no guarantee that such a procedure would lead to life. It does, at the bare minimum, provide a shared task; whether it is productive work is unclear. Will we only talk in this room?[23]

Both Tracy and Lindbeck describe potential models for doing theology in this pluralistic room. Their models are not completely incompatible but they are significantly different so as to make them more than complementary differences. Tracy's proposal for rendering explicit the Christian religion's classics provides for particularity and discontinuity but nowhere near as much discontinuity as Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic model does. Lindbeck's provides an immediately available method for articulating new christologies in this pluralist room and, perhaps of equal importance, adjudicating and evaluating differences among various Christian proposals for contemporary christology. However, though he struggles to avoid the accusation of relativism, his cultural-linguistic model requires a greater exposition before I will be convinced he has not forsaken ontological truth claims subject to a public discourse outside the Christian cultural-linguistic game. Indeed, to overstate my suspicion, I wonder if Lind-

[21]In fact, Schubert M. Ogden, *The Point of Christology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982) better fits Lindbeck's experiential-expressivist model. On the issues of our discussion, Ogden's portrayal of his revisionist agenda is substantially different than Tracy's and Schillebeeckx's. In terms of our discussion, he finally recedes from historical particularity into relativism.

[22]Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine,* 62; Tracy understands the relationship between language and experience as dialectical, allowing for Lindbeck's characterization without reducing the relationship to Lindbeck's somewhat one-sided presentation. Cf. Tracy, *Analogical Imagination,* 202-18.

[23]One is left with the same question upon reading John Cobb's *Beyond Dialog* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982).

beck's proposal is not simply too skeptical regarding ontological truth claims and thus too sectarian.[24] If it finally is so sectarian, then its value to our labor room is considerably truncated since it forsakes the striving for universality. Be that as it may, I have only scratched the surface of these two highly suggestive and, I believe, productive models for doing theology in Professor Wilson's pluralistic room.

As I understand Tracy and Lindbeck they both encourage and account for dialogue among religions without dissolving them into one another. In Mr. Wilson's terminology, Lindbeck supports the "two-covenant" option far more effectively than Tracy. Tracy is closer to the formalist option. Both encourage and account for mutual transformation. Lindbeck, for example, speaks of both Buddhism and Christianity in their earliest developmental stages as basically pacifist religions. Both encountered warrior-based cultures, Christianity in northern Europe and Buddhism in Japan. Both were mutually transformed by these encounters. However, Lindbeck

argues, the Christian knight and the Buddhist samurai are more profoundly affected by the cultural linguistic systems of Christianity and Buddhism than they are by the warrior systems. We might like to debate his judgment but he provides us with the model for such fruitful discussion.

Both Tracy and Lindbeck limit the power of pluralism and suggest limits to christological reflection. Neither do so as explicitly, or severely, as the theologians to whom we now turn. For these theologians, the present challenge to do christology in a pluralist room has heightened their sense of limits to the intense christological focus of so much of Christian theology in the modern period.[25] This need to limit the place of christological reflections has at least two different sets of proponents. The first Mr. Wilson discussed under the topic of christocentricism. The second set of proponents follow in one way or another the argument of Hans Frei. He argues that most theology since the work of Schleiermacher has focused on christology.Furthermore, this christological focus has understood christology as primarily apologetics. Frei considers this trend tactically and strategically inappropriate, since this strategy renders most modern christology unduly subject to Feuerbach's critique of religion. That is, christology becomes without remainder the projection of our alienated needs, hopes, and desires upon a transcendent screen.[26]

Gustafson's third ideal type, at least as he develops it, fits within those persons sensitive to Frei's call to draw limits on christological reflection. As a result, Gustafson's recent work illustrates both the limits of pluralism and christological reflection. His proposal develops the last and third ideal type for

[24]Mr. Lindbeck attends to this issue by outlining an initial response in chapter three, under the section, "Excursus on Religion and Truth," 63-9. He uses the interesting work of David Burrell on this question.

[25]Mr. Wilson noted a very important analysis by Gene TeSelle, *Christ in Context* (Philadelphia: Fortess, 1975) and his subsequent papers for the Currents in Contemporary Christology Group, AAR.

[26]Hans W. Frei, "Remarks in Connection with a Theological Proposal." Lecture delivered at Harvard University, 7 December, 1969, 5, 8.; *The Identity of Jesus Christ* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975) xvi.

appreciating the particularity of one's tradition and limits the place of christology in a pluralistic conversation.

He concludes that "[l]iberal theology, like evangelical Protestant religion, [has become] preoccupied with the significance of religion for human subjects and for human culture and morality."[27] Therefore, he turns from the anthropocentric tradition to a theocentric starting and vantage point for theological ethics. He eschews both Frei and Lindbeck's attempts to defend a biblical theology and Tracy and Gilkey-like attempts to "forge a hermeneutical theory, or a theory about a 'public theology,' or a moral theory on which all rational persons could agree."[28] Instead, he develops the "highly theocentric tradition" preceding and subsequently influenced by John Calvin. He is, however, extemely selective in his use of Calvin; thus his preference for the third ideal type. He so profoundly limits the place of christological reflection that he belongs in our discussion as a bracket on its usefulness in the pluralist room.[29]

Christological reflection cannot fulfill all the necessary work, if Christian theological reflection in the pluralist room is to engender a new orthodoxy and orthopraxis. Limits need to be found, brackets put in place. If Lindbeck is at all right, such brackets do exist in the history of doctrine, in the form of linguistic rules for enacting the Christian conversation. Seen as a limit to

christological claims, even if one disagrees with his experiential-expressivist leanings, Gustafson's effort to do theocentric ethics is appropriate work for a critical pluralist.[30] With these non-christological efforts as brackets, the pluralist doing christological reflection can more appropriately limit the claims which need to be sustained in the pluralist conversation. Clearer limits prevent dissipating the power of christology and potentially return to a central place the church's teaching on monotheism, trinity, and historical particularity.[31]

Perhaps modern European and North American Christian theology, lost in a cultural solipsistic triumphalism, has little sense of the limits of christology. Having displayed christological maximalism, we have left behind the previous rules of Chalcedon and Nicaea: monotheism and historical particularity and specificity. Without some sense of a Christian grammar for maintaining fidelity to Christian tradition and setting brackets on christological reflection, we risk losing our soul, even if we gain the world.

[27]Gustafson, *Theocentric,* 84.

[28]James M. Gustafson, "The Bishops Pastoral Letters: A Theological Ethical Analysis," in *Criterion* 23, 2 (Spring, 1984) 10; *Theocentric,* 84 and 154.

[29]The stark contrast between *Theocentric* and Gustafson's *Christ and the Moral Life* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968) is at times breathtaking.

[30]The more recent work of Gordon D. Kaufman develops some of the same brackets characterizing Gustafson's work. Cf. *An Essay on Theological Method* (Missoula, Montana: Scholars, 1975) 1-16; *The Theological Imagination: Constructing the Concept of God* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981).

[31]The new discussion of trinitarian theology also brackets christological reflection and attempts to respond to religious pluralism. Robert W. Jenson's *The Triune Identity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982) roughly follows Lindbeck's proposal as does Eberhard Jungel's *God as the Mystery of the World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983). Oddly enough the latter does so by extreme dependence upon the historical particularity of the New Testament narrative.