The resurrection of Jesus - what was it?
Plurality and ambiguity in the Christian resurrection hope

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ABSTRACT
David Tracy's usage of the concepts of "the plurality of language" and "the ambiguity of history" is described in detail and then employed in an attempt to answer the question, "What was the resurrection of Jesus Christ?" Both the impossibility of answering the question fully and the importance of keeping on asking the question and providing answers, are defended.

1 INTRODUCTION
Recently, David Tracy has taken the systematic theological approach of The analogical imagination a step further by developing "a philosophical groundwork for a practiced application of hermeneutics", in his Plurality and ambiguity (1987).

This paper is an attempt to apply his approach to the proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In 2-5 the relevant aspects of Tracy's own argument will be followed closely, using as far as possible his own terminology and expressions. In 6-7, respectively, the relevance of his ideas of "the plurality of language" and "the ambiguity of history" with a view to the Christian proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus will be demonstrated briefly. In part 8 some general conclusions will be made with regard to the question: The resurrection of Jesus Christ - what was that?

2 TRACY ON INTERPRETATION AS INTERRUPTED CONVERSATION
Tracy again develops the idea of conversation as a model for all interpretation.

He argues that, in our post-modern society, we realise some of the difficulties involved in such conversation better than ever before. He particularly refers to three difficulties involved in this interpretation-as-conversation, which continuously interrupt the conversation.

In the first place, classical modes of argument have become modern theories, methods and explanations that can interrupt all traditional conversations. These theories, methods and explanations can indeed be very helpful in the conversation, but they can also hinder and obstruct the interpretation process, when they are regarded as the conversation itself.

In the second place, a yet more radical interruption of all conversation is occasioned by the sense of radical plurality disclosed in post-modern studies of language as a disseminating, not a unifying, force.
The third, and the most powerful interruption of all, he says, is the radical ambiguity of all conversations as a heightened consciousness of the "terror of history" becomes ever more pervasive.

It is especially to these second and third interruptions that this paper will return.

Tracy starts his argument by calling to mind a manifold of interpretations of the French Revolution, and then asks the question: The French Revolution - what was it?

This question then serves as the leitmotiv, leading him on his search for a groundwork for interpretation, and demonstrating the different interruptions.

The reason for this choice is clear. The debates among historians of the French Revolution, he argues, present one of the most compelling examples of the difficulty of interpreting any classic event, text or symbol.

Despite the differing, and opposing, interpretations, we share one crucial insight: if we are to understand ourselves and our post-modern situation, we must risk interpreting that revolution which inaugurated the modern world. The scholarly debates on that palimpsest of events we too easily call the French Revolution continue unabated, for that event still affects us.

We know, as clearly as did the contemporaries of the Revolution, that something epoch-making happened - without being able to say what it was.

Scholars differ on many aspects of the French Revolution: on the way to interpret its texts, on the causal relationships between the different events, on its new symbols, on the aims, achievements and failures of the different groups, and so forth.

The major question for any contemporary interpreter, however, says Tracy, shifts to the question, What is the French Revolution now? What is that Revolution to us, its later narrators, analysts, and heirs? It becomes the demand, Who are we, we uneasy postmodern heirs of this pluralistic and ambiguous heritage?

He then goes on to argue that, at times, interpretations matter, especially in times of crisis in a tradition, a culture, or a language.

All of us know we have been formed by traditions whose power impinges upon us both consciously and preconsciously. We now begin to glimpse the profound plurality and ambiguity of our traditions, and we find ourselves in a crisis of interpretation.

In order to reflect on interpretation, he says, one needs a good example, in the sense of Kant's distinction between a mere instance and an example, something "paradigmatic", a "classic".

On historical grounds, classics are those texts that have helped found or form a particular culture. On more explicitly hermeneutical grounds, classics are
those texts that bear an excess and permanence of meaning, yet always resist definitive interpretation.

He shows how biblical texts have exercised such a role throughout Western history. The Scriptures have served, as Northrop Frye insists, as a kind of great code for Western culture. And yet this code functioned with extraordinary flexibility.

Every classic text occasions a kind of puzzling history of reception. And later readers come to those texts with the sometimes conscious, more often preconscious, memories of those former readings. Every classic bears with it the history of its own conflictual history of reception. Every classic brings a history of effects that we can never fully explicate. Every classic bears its own permanence and excess of meaning. But its permanence can quickly become excess. And that excess can sometimes yield to a radical instability of different receptions that defy any definitive interpretation.

In other words: a classic is an example of both radical stability become permanence and radical instability become excess of meaning through ever-changing receptions.

To encourage real conversation, and therefore real interpretation, Tracy says that it is important to find examples where the interpreter is forced to recognize otherness by confronting an unexpected claim to truth. So immune can we all become to otherness that we are tempted to reduce all reality to more of the same or to that curious substitute for the same we too often mean when we say similarity.

Classics, however, defy this temptation to domesticate all reality.

He remarks that scholars have their own special domesticating impulses and strategies to treat classics as private property, yielding only to their proper readings, thereby repressing their radical otherness and difference from the usual canons of civility.

He then shows that understanding classics at all is to understand them differently from how their original authors or their first audiences understood them.

Every interpreter comes to the text bearing those complex histories of effects we call traditions. There is no more a possibility of escape from our tradition than there is the possibility of an escape from history or language. Anyone who uses a language bears the pre-understandings, partly conscious, more often unconscious, of the traditions of that language.

Real interpretation, as conversation, or interaction, or dialogue, only occurs when a good interpreter is willing to put that pre-understanding at risk by allowing the classic to question the interpreter's present expectations and standards.

If we read well, we are conversing with the text. Just as there is no purely autonomous text, so too there is no purely passive reader. There is only that interaction named conversation. We are never pure creators of mean-
ing. In conversation we find ourselves by losing ourselves in the questioning provoked by the text.

Any claim to the pure autonomy of the text will not survive any good reading. And any claim that the reader creates the text will soon dissolve into sterile return of the same in every text. There is only one way of good conversation: we must insist upon the act of questioning.

Conversation in its primary form is an exploration of possibilities in the search for truth. In conversation, in following questions, one must allow for difference and otherness. At the same time, to attend to the different as different, the other as other, and not as more of the same, one must be able to understand the different as possible.

To recognise possibility is to sense some similarity to what we have already experienced or understood. But similarity here must be described as similarity-in-difference, that is, as analogy.

He now makes use of his well-known category of the analogical imagination. All good interpreters possess it. It means that conversation occurs if, and only if, we will risk ourselves by allowing the questions of the text, and we follow those questions, however initially different, other, or even strange, until the unique result of this kind of interpretation occurs: the exploration of possibility as possible and thus similarity-in-difference.

He rejects romantic categories, like empathy, to describe this analogical imagination of interpretation. The postromantic and postmodernist response is not likely to be one of identification or empathy, but a more wary, ironic, even suspicious response.

We strive for relative adequacy in our interpretation. The postmodern analogical imagination, allowing for the possibility of radical otherness, and questioning after similarity-in-difference, but always wary, ironic, critical and suspicious, can only hope for relative adequacy.

We can never possess absolute certainty. But we can achieve a good, that is, a relatively adequate, interpretation: relative to the power of disclosure and concealment in the text, relative to the skills and attentiveness of the interpreter, relative to the kind of conversation possible for the interpreter in a particular culture at a particular time.

However, while in conversation with the classic, we become aware of a radical conflict of interpretations.

Then we become aware of the occasional need to interrupt the conversation. Argument may then be necessary. Argument is not synonymous with conversation, but a vital moment within conversation that occasionally is needed if the conversation itself is to move forward.

In an important chapter, "Argument: method, explanation, theory", he discusses this aspect in more detail. He points to the different models of truth that are used in different models of interpretation, namely truth as manifestation, accorded primacy in the conversation-model of interpretation, and
calling for dialogue within the community of competent readers; truth as the argued consensus of warranted beliefs in a particular community of inquiry; and truth as coherence, also in terms of purely formal arguments.

He examines at length two kinds of argument, backed by explanatory theory and often leading to a reign of method, namely historical critical methods and literary critical methods. Both are central to any contemporary discussion of interpretation and he pleads for the importance of both, and for the necessity for both to strive for relative adequacy.

Explanation and understanding, he states, need not be enemies but may become wary allies. When methods are hardened into methodologisms and explanations become replacement for the effort to understand, the conversation will have ceased. All theory worth having should ultimately serve the practice of reflective living, he says. Method, theory and explanation can aid every conversation with every text, but none of them can replace the conversation itself.

For the purposes of this paper, it must suffice to refer only briefly to some of his remarks in this regard.

Firstly, concerning historical method. He affirms that it is indeed important "to know what actually happened in history". For all of us, he says, except dogmatists and fundamentalists, both religious and secular, the historical exposure of the ambiguities of our traditions has occasioned critical reflection. Such reflection provides distance from all that simply "is". Some recent rhetorical analyses even suggest that history and fiction are interchangeable genres, but it is still important to know what actually happened in history with whatever degree of historical certitude is possible. It is ethically obscene to state that it does not matter if the Holocaust happened or not. It is morally irresponsible not to care what actually happened, and what consequences ensued in all the classic events that formed our culture. And it is irresponsible for Christians not to care if Jesus ever lived at all and then go on to state their firm belief in Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ, argues Tracy.

In short: the historical memory of a people is the principal carrier of the history of effects of their classic texts, persons, events, symbols, and rituals, and the loss of those memories can be fatal to the culture. Without them we cannot act. To become socialized by learning one's language, according to Tracy, is to give life to all those carriers of meaning and action that are a tradition.

At the same time, he points out, there is no such thing as an unambiguous tradition; there are no innocent readings of the classics. We are who we are because of the traditions that form us, and our lives are shaped by the preconscious effects of all the traditions whose narratives and ways of envisioning the world have forged our memories and actions.

Accordingly, he pleads for the importance of historical enquiry. A usable past is a retrievable past, he says. Historical scholarship is at the service of the wider conversation of our common humanity. And relative adequacy,
also in historical enquiries, remains an ideal worth striving for. A dangerous free-for-all, where chaos rules, will occur when all methods, theories and explanations become suspect of scientism. Then we may encounter a radical rhetoricization of historical work, explosions of new antiromantic romantic outbursts in the culture at large, and, most desperately, new claims for purely autonomous texts or interpreters, he warns.

Secondly, concerning literary method. We have discovered that all understanding is out and out linguistic. We also sense that language is a matter of codes present in even our most highly individual usages. What we sense is that neat separations of form and content no longer work for understanding. There are no pure ideas free of the web of language. There are no pure messages. Whatever message comes, comes by means of its form, whether the text is as short as a proverb or as long as an epic, writes Tracy.

In this regard he emphasises that genres are productive of meaning. The fact that gospels are peculiar kinds of narratives and not theological essays, he adds, is not a merely rhetorical matter. Rather, the sense and the referent of the Gospels are produced by this unusual genre of gospel; a reason why proof-text criticism does not prove anything.

3 INTERRUPTED BY THE PLURALITY OF LANGUAGE
This brings us to the two chapters really important for this paper, namely "Radical plurality: the question of language" and "Radical ambiguity: the question of history".

He uses the term linguistic turn to describe the many theories that have made us aware of the uneasy relationships among language, knowledge, and reality. This linguistic turn has become an uncannily interruptive exploration of the radical plurality in language, knowledge, and reality alike, in his thesis.

He describes three stages in the history of this linguistic turn.

Firstly, the dream of positivism, namely to discover "a reality without quotation marks" (Nabokov), a realm of pure data and facts, has been shattered by this linguistic turn.

We now know: both the realm "out there" ("reality", science) and the realm "in here" (art, morality, religion, metaphysics, common sense) are linguistically mediate. "Every real spot out there needed naming, and every sharp pain in here needed language to understand it", in Tracy's words.

He then describes the history of this collapse of the positivist ideal of a scientific realm freed from all interpretation.

Positivist descriptions in science itself became increasingly irrelevant. It became clear that science was also a hermeneutic enterprise. Positivism, as the last intellectual stronghold against interpretation, could not hold. With science we interpret the world, we do not simply find it out there. Reality is what we name our best interpretation, and truth is the reality we know through our best interpretations, Tracy affirms. Reality is constituted through the
interpretations that have earned the right to be called relatively adequate or true.

And now: in science language inevitably influences our understanding of both facts and data, truth and reality. We do not first experience or understand some reality and then find words to name that understanding. *We understand in and through the languages available to us*, including the historical languages of the sciences.

This has been, of course, a rejection of the fundamental belief shared by the two otherwise conflicting options of modern intellectual life, namely positivism and romanticism, says Tracy.

Both positivism and romanticism see language as an instrument we use, only after the fact of discovery or cognition, either to articulate and communicate scientific results as facts rather than as interpretations (positivism) or to express or represent some deep, nonlinguistic truth inside the self (romanticism). In both these readings language is instrumental and secondary, even peripheral, to the real thing, Tracy points out.

In his view, however, we understand in and through language. We find ourselves understanding in and through particular and public languages, which are social and historical. I belong to my language far more than it belongs to me. To try to escape this fact either by romantic hyperbole or positivist fiat is to find oneself not freed from language but trapped in two intellectually spent but culturally powerful languages, namely romantic expressivism and positivist scientism, says Tracy.

To challenge these instrumentalist interpretations of language has, however, not only reintroduced society and history into all notions of reality and truth, but has also displaced the autonomous ego from its false pretensions to mastery and certainty.

The second important stage in the linguistic turn that he considers, is the "crucial interruption" caused by Ferdinand de Saussure and his followers, introducing a theory of language as system and the discipline of linguistics. He evaluates some of the implications of synchronic analyses of language as a system, and then turns to Derrida, who forms his main focus of attention in this chapter.

Derrida, for him, represents the third stage in the radical interruption by the linguistic turn. Now the categories of pluralism and difference in language, and the fragile relation between language, knowledge and reality, are developed to extreme consequences.

Says Tracy: "When Jacques Derrida enters, the conversation stops". And continues: His purpose is to produce a rhetoric of radical destabilization. Derrida has exposed the illusion that any reality can ever be fully present to us.

*All grammar and logics seem to become unstable and plural in the presence of this radical rhetoric let loose within grammar and logic themselves. Even hermeneutics can seem to become undone from within.*
This then becomes the challenge for Tracy: "If all is difference, can any genuine conversation or even argument occur?" Or: After the interruption of the linguistic trajectory from Saussure to Derrida, the hope for both conversation and argument may seem in vain. But is it? He does not think so. In fact, his study is about this hope, and the final chapter deals extensively with that, but only after he has made the question even more urgent and difficult by describing the even more terrifying interruption by the ambiguity of history.

In the rest of this chapter on language, he considers the advantages and difficulties involved in Derrida’s position. Positively, he argues that deconstructive analyses are meant to function as linguistic therapy, and to expose certain fundamental illusions in our familiar accounts of knowledge, reality, and language. The illusion that we could separate knowledge from language has already collapsed in the first therapeutic stage of the linguistic turn. Now deconstruction helps to correct the illusion that turning from language as use to language as system (Saussure) could stabilize the ever-increasing plurality.

The category of discourse was now discovered to explore language. To discover discourse, he states, is to discover society and history, since every discourse expresses conscious and unconscious ideologies, whether the someone who speaks or writes is aware of them or not, and it is to admit the need for ethical and political criticism of the hidden, even repressed, social and historical ideologies in all texts, in all language as discourse, and, above all, in all interpretations.

For this reason, he pleads for new strategies of resistance in interpretation, rejecting new monisms of "more of the same", defending differences and pluralities, and willing to converse with one another on the ethical-political implications of our analyses of language and reality.

This brings Tracy to the next chapter, to "the nightmare from which we are trying to awake", history itself.

4 INTERRUPTED BY THE AMBIGUITY OF HISTORY

He strikingly describes the all-embracing influence of history, including the interruptions embedded in it. Language and history are indissolubly bound, he says. To interpret language is to find oneself in the contingent reality named history. We are inevitably shaped by the history we were born into. To be born in history is to be born, live, and die bounded by a particular sex, race, class, and education, and to learn a language carrying a range of values, hopes and prejudices that function preconsciously.

However, once vibrant words, expressions, ideas and symbols can die the death of a thousand qualifications. They can even fall victim to historical violence.

Therefore, we should be wary of using too easily such words as "belong" and "participate" to describe our relationship to history. They may reflect too
optimistic a view, and may lack the necessary resistance, suspicion, critique and distance. For Tracy this is important. We must confront the interruptions embedded in our history, he affirms, for paradoxically we also belong to them, and we cannot simply ignore or deny them, or allow them to determine our lives uncritically. He mentions not only the Holocaust, but also several other interruptions, saying: The Holocaust is a serious interruption of all the traditions in Western culture. None of us know even yet how to name it properly. This much, however, is clear: if we continue to talk about our history as if that tremendum event did not happen, then we are not truthfully narrating our history.

When we risk genuine conversation with the classics, we must keep all of this in mind, he argues. He specifically refers to the Christian scriptures, saying that to cherish them as a charter document of human liberation is entirely right, yet we must also face its anti-Judaic strands, strands that reach us with the full history of the effects of centuries of Christian "teaching of contempt" for the Jews.

He adds, however, that to see how ambiguous our history has been, is not to retire into complacency, but instead to assume responsibility, also in the ways we face the interruptions in our history, the ways we discard any scenarios of innocent triumph written by the victors, the ways we do not forget the subversive memories of individuals and whole peoples whose names we do not even know, in short, in the ways we interpret the classics, our traditions and life itself.

The relevant point for this paper is, in Tracy’s words, that no classic text or classic event comes to us without the plural and ambiguous history of effects of its own production and all its former receptions.

He admits that ambiguity may perhaps be too mild a word to describe the strange mixture of great good and frightening evil that our history reveals. The same history involves startling beauty and revolting cruelty, partial emancipation and ever-subtler forms of entrapment.

He therefore advocates the role of retrieval in historical studies, helping us to hear the systematically repressed voices of the "others", the experiences of the previously ignored categories of persons, the otherness of the previously marginalized people and peoples.

He deals extensively with the interruptions of radical evil in our traditions, and with ways to interpret and resist them in our own conversations. This possibility of resistance to ourselves, and listening to the narratives of those who suffered because we imposed our otherness on them, is in itself a hope-giving possibility, is his conviction. In this regard he discusses at length the importance of a hermeneutics of suspicion, and of ideology critique, saying that to understand the difference between an error and a systematic distortion is to understand a central difference between modernity and postmodernity, and showing the importance of religion in this process, being able to describe as sin what other interpretations may simply regard as error.
Also in this regard he discusses the relationships between knowledge, interpretation and power, arguing that our discourses exclude those others who might disrupt the established hierarchies or challenge the prevailing hegemony of power, again pleading for the importance of the voices of "the victims of our discourses and our history", and defining his idea of "critical theory".

5 RESISTANCE AND HOPE IN CONVERSATION
All of this leads him to the final chapter, in which he develops his actual statement, namely that religious traditions, in spite of everything, can offer hope in this conversation which human life ultimately is. Again, some ad hoc remarks must suffice.

Firstly, concerning religions. Religions, he argues, bear extraordinary powers of resistance, their chief resistance being to more of the same. Through their knowledge of sin, they can resist all refusals to face the radical ambiguity of any tradition, including their own. They also resist the temptation to see the problem but not to act.

Above all, Tracy says, religions are exercises in resistance, revealing various possibilities for human freedom, so that, to interpret religious classics, texts or events, is to allow them to challenge what we presently consider possible, since they make claims to ultimate hope, and can help us to discover new modes of action that are, ethically, politically, and religiously, acts of resistance to the status quo.

Secondly, concerning pluralism. He affirms pluralism, but warns that it may never simply become a passive response to more and more possibilities, which is merely the perfect ideology for the modern bourgeois mind (Simone de Beauvoir), and simply masks a genial confusion, in which one tries to enjoy the pleasures of difference without ever committing oneself to a particular vision of resistance and hope. The great pluralists in Western tradition, Tracy holds, knew that any worthy affirmation of plurality was the beginning, but never the end, of a responsibly pluralistic attitude. There must be other criteria besides those of possibility and openness, he stresses, advocating reasonable criteria for assessment.

Finally, on the inadequacy of religious language: Tracy reminds us that in and through even the best speech for Ultimate Reality, greater obscurity eventually emerges to manifest a religious sense of that Reality as ultimate mystery. Silence may be the most appropriate kind of speech for evoking this necessary sense of the radical mystery.

According to him, the most refined theological discourse always returns to a deepened sense of this ultimate mystery, and he refers to Thomas, Rahner, Jüngel, Tillich, and many others, also in other religious traditions. There is no classic discourse on Ultimate Reality that can be understood as mastering its own speech. If any human discourse gives true testimony
to Ultimate Reality, it must necessarily prove uncontrollable and unmasterable, he concludes.

6 THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS - AND THE PLURALITY OF LANGUAGE

It is impossible to go into detail. However, every New Testament scholar and systematic theologian knows only too well that the proclamation of the resurrection in the books of the New Testament took place in quite diverse language-worlds.

The different traditions and writers of the New Testament already understood, interpreted, explained and proclaimed the message of the resurrection of Jesus in many different ways, against different backgrounds, within different philosophical frameworks, with different purposes, and accordingly also with different terminology, expressions, symbols and languages.

Both literary and historical studies have demonstrated that time and again. In fact, there is an abundance of scholarly work available in which the different books of the New Testament are treated separately, in order to show how the message of the resurrection functioned in each of them. Although they often disagree with a view to detail, the overriding consensus is obviously that there was, from the very beginning, not merely one resurrection-message, but that it was understood, appropriated and proclaimed in several contexts, all of them linguistically mediated.

Very often attempts have then been made to distinguish some basic elements in all of these differing traditions and interpretations on the resurrection. Some scholars have attempted to show that there were some basic, especially "historical", material or at least assumptions underlying all these traditions and interpretations. Some others have attempted to deduce some formal characteristics, a "pattern" or "paradigm" (Perry 1986), present in all or most of the traditions, although the different authors and traditions used widely differing language to make the same point. Still others have merely listed the manifold of interpretations, without trying to harmonise them into a comprehensive view. And, of course, some have simply concluded that this wide variety of terminology and expressions shows that nothing really took place - and that all of these were merely words, stories and myths (cf Smit 1988).

In order to remind ourselves of the different language-worlds in terms of which the message of the resurrection was understood from the very beginning, one only has to look at the informative study of Pheme Perkins, Resurrection. New Testament witness and contemporary reflection (1984).
7 THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS - AND THE AMBIGUITY OF HISTORY

Once again it is impossible to go into detail. However, every student of the history of Christian theology and every systematic theologian knows only too well that the proclamation of the resurrection in the course of history has also taken place in extremely diverse language-worlds.

In general one can argue that in different social contexts, public and ideological discourses, philosophical and religious environments, and confessional and other traditions, some of the motifs already present in the manifold of voices of early Christianity itself, were accentuated, and others neglected (cf Scheffczyk 1976; Gesche 1973).

Let us recall some well-known examples, in an attempt to grasp something of the way in which "legitimate", in the sense of "original", motifs in the resurrection/proclamation became part of "the terror of history", serving to dehumanise and oppress people, instead of liberating them and giving them hope and life.

* Already very early, and in dominant traditions of Christianity until today, the aspect of non-materiality present in some of the New Testament traditions has been embedded in especially Greek, and particularly Platonic dualistic thought-patterns, with the result that corporality and materiality were often despised, with devastating effects on creation and humanity.

* Closely related to those traditions, the aspect of individual salvation, present in some of the New Testament interpretations, has been accentuated in pietistic or spiritualistic circles to such an extent that once again the New Testament proclamation has become seriously one-sided and distorted, often with lamentable effects on society.

* In important strands of Christian tradition the foundational position and the surprising nature of the resurrection message were completely lost, and replaced by general philosophical and religious convictions on "an immortal soul", with the result that the resurrection completely lost its central place in orthodox systematic theologies (cf Durand 1982 on the immortal soul; Heyns 1978 as a typical illustration of the trend: the resurrection occupies only one page out of 418, and that only in the sixth subdivision of the tenth chapter; and Schlink 1983 for a systematic theology according the resurrection a more central place.

* For short and tragic spells in the history of Christianity this dualism, with its emphasis on eternal life, heaven and the saving of souls, was taken to severe extremes. Sometimes human life was almost seen as worthless compared to the confession of sins and eternal salvation. In general this dualism led to a separation in the popular mind between things eternal and things temporal, between the religious and the secular spheres, between the divine and the "humanist", which sadly affected human lives. It led to the church's (original) opposition to many movements within history to better the plight of people,
including the abolition of slavery and the defence and implementation of human rights - and somewhere in the background lurked ideas and viewpoints associated with and ultimately based on the resurrection message.

* In many of the most enthusiastic missionary enterprises within Christianity the motif of proclamation, witness and mission, combined with the aforementioned pietism and spiritualism, "saving souls for heaven", had unfortunate results in the Third World, including Africa, causing not only painful memories but indeed also structures of colonial and military oppression, still powerful today.

* Often the existence of the church, and finally of God, was almost exclusively associated with death. The church-yard became the grave-yard. God became the-god-of-the-gaps, in Bonhoeffer's terminology. Death, together with sin or guilt, was seen as the ultimate human "borderline"-question, to which only religion could offer solutions. At the same time that the church (and God) were accorded a legitimate, respectable and unassailable position within society, the church (and God) were also relegated out of life and history, politics and society, into the borderline-situations.

* In modern-day circles influenced by existentialism, the aspects of history and cosmology, also present in the New Testament witness, were regarded as mythology, and only the possibility to experience the power of the resurrection already here and now was appropriated. Bultman could use as a powerful motto that to know Christ is to know Him in the power of his resurrection, and Fuchs could just as powerfully interpret 1 Corinthians 15 in the light of 1 Corinthians 13, arguing that the power of the resurrection is the power of love (cf Künstl 1973).

* In many missionary undertakings and colonial conquests, symbols associated with Christ’s lordship and rule, such an integral part of the resurrection and ascension proclamation of the New Testament, were employed to legitimate the cruel subjection of people, with the result that many suffering Christians still find it easier to appropriate the message of the cross than that of joy, victory and life (for several instructive contributions, Miguez Bonino 1984; also Mofokeng (1983) on "the long Good Friday-experience").

* Many times in the history of Christianity the symbols of Christ’s resurrection and lordship were used in a triumphalistic way by the church and its leadership, to legitimate their own authority, not only in the church itself, but also within society. Especially the Calvinist tradition was often accused by others that they saw themselves as sitting at the right hand of God, instead of the crucified Jesus.

* Particularly within Roman Catholic fundamental theology the miraculous element in the resurrection-message was increasingly used as apologia, as proof, as the miracle par excellence, that had to convince people of the truth not only of the Christian religion, but sometimes also of its specific historical embodiment and representatives, namely the authoritative church
and its doctrine. Instead of being the liberating power giving people hope and inspiration, this often made it extremely difficult for people to accept the Christian gospel, because they experienced the particular way in which the resurrection was now formulated and portrayed as a stumbling-block, expecting of them a *sacrificium intellectus* which they were incapable of making with honesty and self-respect (Fiorenza 1984; Ghiberti 1982).

* Quite often the motif of prayer and intercession, which is in the New Testament tradition also linked to the resurrection, ascension and intercession of Jesus Himself, has been used for selfish purposes, to legitimate wars, to "get God on our side", and generally to try to manipulate God.

* Especially within Anglo-Saxon traditions, the promise of new life was often interpreted in terms of the cyclic return of the seasons in nature, where the promise of new life in spring inevitably follows the coldness and death of the winter landscape. Particularly in the northern hemisphere, where Easter in the liturgical calendar coincides with the return of spring, this linkage provided easy, convincing and moving illustrations. The negative results, however, are also clear to see. The radical newness of the resurrection-message was lost, the vision of a new, completely different kingdom and life was traded in for the assured return of what was ever-present, the open future for a cyclic view of history, with the accompanying preference for the status quo, and the good life of the well-known and often idealized past. Often this led to a naive kind of optimistic belief and an ill-founded promise to people that everything will come right, that good always triumphs over bad, like light over darkness, and life over death.

* In circles influenced by evolutionist thinking, the eschatological motif of several New Testament traditions, according to which Jesus' resurrection was the foretaste of what is to happen with all of creation, led to the resurrection-message being interpreted as something natural, as the (proleptic) realisation of what is in any case part of cosmos and humanity itself, as the final demonstration of that towards which everything is already gradually developing. Once again, the radical newness of the proclamation was exchanged for cultural optimism.

* In circles influenced by Hegelian and specifically Marxist thought and praxis, the resurrection is often hailed as a powerful symbol for revolt, *Die opstanding maak ons opstandig*. The motifs of eschatological promise, of ethical motivation and of socio-political critique, all certainly present in New Testament traditions, are combined in a way sometimes simply legitimating all kinds of very specific revolutionary action as a powerful slogan.

Examples can be multiplied. The general point, however, is clear:

The ambiguity of Christian history, and the sometimes terrifying uses that have been made and that are still made of motifs integrally part of the New Testament proclamation of the resurrection, must make us aware of the dangers in-
volved in any attempt to formulate today what the resurrection of Jesus really was.

8 CONCLUDING REMARKS
Although the resurrection of Jesus and the French Revolution as test cases for hermeneutics obviously differ in many important aspects, there are also remarkable similarities, which make Tracy's analysis very instructive.

It is not possible or necessary to repeat all the relevant aspects. His analysis has deliberately been presented in such a way as to make relevancy for the resurrection message clear. Only a few remarks must suffice.

Concerning the resurrection one can certainly say that "interpretation matters", not only because of its central position within the whole of Christianity itself, but also because of its enormous effects on people and human history, because of its symbolic and ideological, its life-giving and oppressive power.

Concerning the resurrection one can also say that, in order to understand ourselves, our history and our situation in life, we must risk interpreting the resurrection, that revolution which inaugurated Christianity, the church, new concepts of history, indeed, in its own way, the modern world.

If it applies to the French Revolution, it applies even more to the resurrection of Jesus. Without it, we would not have been who we are, and the world we live in would not have been what it is. We are part of the history of its effects. In order to understand ourselves, we must understand the resurrection. It still inspires, motivates and legitimates, if not consciously and personally, at least collectively and sub-consciously, much of what is happening in our lives and history. And with all classics, this history is a conflictual one, it involves many interruptions, and it certainly calls for critical appropriation, and for suspicion.

Often this message has almost disappeared from the Christian tradition, often it has been suppressed, often it has been misused, often it has been subjected to "historical violence" - and for us no innocent reading of the resurrection message is possible.

In short, to adapt Tracy's words, we know that in the resurrection of Jesus something epoch-making happened, affecting not only the history of his followers and the early church, but indeed the entire world and its history, including present struggles in the world - without being able to say clearly and unequivocally what it really was.

The resurrection challenges us with something different, with a claim that defies "more of the same", which invites us to sense it as "possible", to distinguish some kind of similarity with what we know and experience, in order that we may be able to talk about it at all, but at the same time it speaks of Ultimate Reality, of mystery, so that we know that in our attempts
to name it, and to locate it somewhere in our language-worlds, we actually never succeed in really appropriating the mystery.

The resurrection is, again in Tracy's words, truly a classic: historically, it has helped found and form a most influential culture; hermeneutically, it bears and excess and permanence of meaning, yet always resists definitive interpretation.

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