



Narrative as a Possibility for Interreligious Dialogue: Reconsidering David Tracy's Narrative Theology and Its Application to a Theology of Pilgrimage

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Abstract

Certain models of Christian theology can facilitate interreligious dialogue. A prominent and significant model is narrative theology, distinctively presented by the Yale and Chicago schools. The core emphasis of this theology rests on narrative and narrative forms as means for articulating the stories within sacred texts. Scholars associated with these schools frequently draw upon the insights of philosophers and literary theorists such as Paul Ricœur and Erich Auerbach. David Tracy, a leading theologian of the Chicago school, leveraging Ricœur's concept of narrative, has endeavored to systematize a credible theology within the modern world. To this end, he elucidates two fundamental sources of theology: common human experience and language and the Christian texts, presenting a metaphysical method based on human encounter with the sacred text. His method is founded on the inherently narrative quality of human experience. In this sense, Tracy's theological method of mutually critical correlation between Christian texts and the construction of lived narratives shapes our being in the world. Tracy's narrative theology, centering on the stories of religions and the necessity of mutual attunement among adherents, yields the following effects: the fostering of mutual understanding and empathy, mutual correlation learning and growth, reflection on one's own religious beliefs through the beliefs of other religions, the recognition of diversity within a religious tradition, respect for the beliefs of other religions, respect for mystery and ambiguity, which are part of religious experiences, and the establishment and deepening of relationships. Beyond its significance for interreligious dialogue, this theological model also provides a fruitful framework for a theology of pilgrimage. From this perspective, pilgrimage is understood not merely as a set of religious rituals, but as the narrative of a lived experience

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in which the pilgrim's inner and outer journey is shaped through engagement with sacred texts, continually recreating meaning within one's present existence. Furthermore, pilgrimage may be conceived as a multidimensional space of dialogue involving the pilgrim, sacred texts, sacred places, religious tradition, fellow pilgrims, and even members of other religious traditions. By drawing upon Tracy's concept of *analogical imagination* and the notion of the *fragment-event*, this study shows how such encounters make possible the recognition of similarities within differences and foster an authentic encounter with the religious other. Moreover, pilgrimage, as a fragment-event of being situated in a sacred place, constitutes a dynamic process of self-encounter in which pilgrims, through rereading sacred narratives and recounting their own lived experiences, continually reinterpret and reconstruct their personal and communal identities.

Keywords: narrative theology, David Tracy, narrative, interreligious dialogue, theology of pilgrimage, analogical imagination, fragment-event

1. Introduction

The contemporary situation in which the boundaries between positivity and negation are increasingly blurred is characterized by a profound plurality of thought. Plurality and ambiguity have thus become essential features of the modern world. These characteristics are not accidental but emerge from the deep structural fractures that define modernity itself. Among the most significant of these fractures is the separation of theory from practice—a separation that stands in sharp contrast to ancient and medieval modes of thought, where philosophical discourse and theory, though conceptually distinct from philosophical practice, remained intrinsically connected to a concrete way of life. But philosophy in the modern world has largely been institutionalized as an academic discipline, increasingly detached from the lived practice of philosophical theory. As a result, its relevance to everyday existence has been substantially diminished. At the same time, pre-modern modes of understanding—such as narrative, rhetoric, poetry, and prayer—have lost their status as legitimate forms of systematic thought within the dominant intellectual frameworks of modernity.

Modern theology has not remained immune to this separation. It too has suffered from this separation, most notably in the form of a growing disjunction between theology and spirituality, as well as between theology and ethics. The marginalization of spirituality within theology represents one of the most serious challenges posed by modern thought, a challenge that has exerted a particularly profound influence on Christian theology.

Within the context of contemporary pluralism, a variety of theological models have

sought to respond to these challenges. Alongside the traditional Christian concern for ecumenical unity as an essential theological task, interreligious conversation has increasingly come to occupy a central place within theological reflection.

One of the most influential and conceptually rigorous responses to this situation is found in the work of the Catholic theologian David Tracy. His sustained engagement with the Christian tradition is carried out in constant conversation with the cultural contexts within which that tradition acquires meaning. Tracy's revisionist theology constitutes a complex yet internally coherent framework structured around four interrelated dimensions: God, tradition, culture, and the manner in which theology is understood and practiced (Martinez 2023, 21).

Tracy's theological project is deeply informed by hermeneutical theory and is distinguished by its emphasis on conversation and by its innovative appropriation of the concept of *the classic*. His work represents an ongoing conversation with the diverse elements that shape a cultural matrix, including science, philosophy, theology, and both fictional and non-fictional literature. As articulated by his teacher, theology mediates between a cultural matrix and the significance and role of religion in that matrix (Lonergan 1972, xi).

Conversation stands at the heart of Tracy's theology. For Tracy, theological conversation unfolds not only between interpreters and texts but also encompasses events, rituals, and institutions. Theology enters into conversation with every contemporary situation in which the theologian finds herself, insofar as the task of theology is to reinterpret and articulate the meaning of one's tradition within ever new and emerging contexts (Okey 2018, 130).

The core of Tracy's theological model is articulated through the twin concepts of conversation and the classic. One of the most decisive classics within Christian theology is the event of Jesus of Nazareth, narrated in the Christian Scriptures as the Christ. Tracy maintains that sustained conversation with such classics is indispensable for theology in the contemporary situation. Accordingly, following an examination of Tracy's theological framework and its major intellectual developments, this study argues that narrative not only provides a constructive framework for interreligious dialogue but also offers significant theological resources for interpreting pilgrimage as a hermeneutical and dialogical religious practice.

2. Tracy's Revisionist Theology

Providing even a concise account of the theological thought of one of the most

influential contemporary theologians is no simple task. In three of his major works², Tracy articulates the central concerns and enduring axes of his theological project. Broadly speaking, these concerns include the method of theology, theological pluralism, the plurality of cultures and religious traditions, theology as public discourse, and theology understood fundamentally as conversation. The primary aim of the present discussion is not an exhaustive exposition of Tracy's theology, but rather a reconstruction of the trajectory of his thought, through which the significance of narrative within his theological perspective can be discerned and, on that basis, a model for interreligious conversation can be articulated.

By critically engaging with and reassessing the theological approaches that preceded him, Tracy seeks to develop his theology in light of a sustained commitment to hermeneutics and conversation. The constitutive themes of his work include public theology, theological method, and the notion of the classic, while themes such as Christology, the doctrine of God, and pluralism—though no less important—receive comparatively less explicit attention. Tracy's revisionist theology initially takes shape as an attempt to articulate the method of mutually critical correlation, which subsequently evolves into a dialogical engagement between the two principal sources of every religious tradition, including Christianity. These two sources, as Tracy understands them, are common human experience and language, and the Christian texts (Tracy 1996, 43).

According to Tracy, theologians, as interpreters, always read one of these sources in the light of the other. Thus, in his early work he defines theology as an effort to establish the method of mutually critical correlation between interpretations of theological sources in order to respond rationally to the crisis of modernity and Christianity. Given the particular challenges and interpretive possibilities posed by religion as an ambiguous and plural phenomenon, the role of hermeneutics becomes indispensable in a proper modern theology (Tracy 2020, 137). As Tracy's theological research progresses, both conversation and the hermeneutically grounded concept of the classic assume an increasingly central role in his theological method. Influenced decisively by Gadamer, Tracy places conversation at the heart of theology. Indeed, Tracy understands the essential method of theology as being conversation itself.

It is therefore necessary to note that the foundational insights of Tracy's early studies—insights that serve as the groundwork for his later work—are

² The major books by Tracy that expose revisionist theology and the method mutually critical correlation are as follows: *Blessed Rage for Order* (1996), *The Analogical Imagination* (1981), and *Plurality and Ambiguity* (1987).

methodological in nature. Through the method of correlation, Tracy seeks to relate the Christian tradition to whatever cultural or social context it encounters. Within this framework, the enduring truths of Christianity are understood as having taken the form of classics within the tradition, while common human experience constitutes the contemporary situation. This core methodological commitment—the method of mutually critical correlation between Christian tradition and cultural context—remains a stable and enduring feature throughout Tracy’s later theological work.

Tracy regards religion, as the most pluralistic, ambiguous, and important reality of all, as the most difficult and thereby the best test of any theory of interpretation (Tracy 1987, x). Conversation within today’s pluralistic and ambiguous world is inherently risky, for not only does each religious tradition possess the capacity to offer insights and responses to cultural and secular concerns, but secular culture and particular cultural contexts likewise contain insights that can illuminate the self-understanding of religious believers who inhabit them.

Nevertheless, while Tracy affirms conversation as the foundation of theology and endorses the effectiveness of Gadamer’s dialogical model for textual interpretation, he stresses that the hermeneutics of retrieval or recovery must be complemented by the hermeneutics of suspicion and the use of critical theory, since conversation is subject not only to ambiguity and error but also to systematic distortion (Sanks 1993, 719).

The theologian, understood as a hermeneutical interpreter, faces a decisive task in determining which phenomena are to be interpreted. The most effective way to ensure that the phenomenon is genuinely religious is to choose, for interpretation, one of the religious classics of a particular religion. By selecting a recognized religious *classic*—whether a text, symbol, myth, ritual, person, event, or doctrine—the interpreter gains two advantages: first, the phenomenon, whatever else it may be, is guaranteed to be religious; second, as a *classic* religious expression, the phenomenon lends itself to an interpretive theory designed to engage with expressions of experience, rather than directly addressing claims to purely unexpressed experiences (Tracy 1984, 303).

The classics of a particular religion, much like cultural *classics*, are public realities accessible to all. By *classics*, he is referring not only to the *classics* of Greek and Latin literature or the music of Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms, but more generally to those “certain expressions of the human spirit [which] so disclose a compelling truth about our lives that we cannot deny them some kind of normative status” or alternatively, he explains, “what we mean in naming certain texts, events, images, rituals, symbols, and persons *classics* is that here we recognize nothing less than the disclosure of a reality

we cannot but name truth" (Sanks 1993, 714).

As Tracy holds, the classics, insofar as they point to fundamental truths about being human and the world, are present in every culture. Drawing on Gadamer, Tracy likens the religious *classic* to the actual experience of a work of art—which can be called a realized experience, an event of truth (Tracy 1981, 111). The work of art discloses an event not merely of taste, genius, or beauty in the modern sense; it also discloses a deeper truth (Tracy 1981, 115). In Tracy's later writings, conversation with the classics—clearly inspired by Gadamer—becomes the central theme of his theology.

In this sense, understanding requires interpretation, interpretation requires conversation, and conversation, in turn, requires an analogical imagination. To navigate the ambiguity and plurality generated by conversation, careful attention must be paid to its most basic form. In the contemporary world, conversation has replaced argument not only as a pervasive practice but as a necessary one; in its most original form, conversation is an exploration of possible paths toward truth. Conversation takes difference and otherness seriously. Within the elliptical movement of conversation, attentiveness to the other as other opens a space for the disclosure of truth.

Understanding possibility involves recognizing similarity to what has already been experienced or understood. Within conversation, such similarity is articulated through analogy, and the imagination cultivated for this encounter is what Tracy calls the analogical imagination. This imagination reminds us that conversation occurs if, and only if, we will risk ourselves by allowing the text to question us (Tracy 1987, 20).

As noted earlier, Tracy conceives theology as an effort to achieve the method of mutually critical correlation between tradition and the contemporary situation, a task he develops within a hermeneutical framework that interprets both sources (Tracy 2020, 141). Existential and theological truth is not achieved by discursive reason; rather, it is disclosed through what Tracy conceptualizes as the *classic*.

Tracy's revisionist theological model thus represents an attempt to subject both secular culture and religious tradition to mutual critique in light of contemporary movements emerging from secular culture. The realization of such a model is possible, in his view, only through the method of mutually critical correlation.

Accordingly, Tracy understands the task of contemporary theology as extending beyond the confines of the academy and the church to a broader public sphere. The theologian must therefore be capable of speaking as a citizen, an intellectual, and a believer. Conversation thus becomes the organizing principle of theological method, and the method of mutually critical correlation is transformed into a conversational

process through which the theologian is defined as a participant in reciprocal exchanges between religious tradition and the contemporary situation. This conversational possibility has two significant consequences within Tracy's theological system: first, it distinguishes his approach from that of theologians such as Tillich and Niebuhr, who also employed correlational methods; second, it opens a genuine space for dialogue with other religious traditions.

Within a theology of conversation, the classic plays a decisive role. The classic texts are not unique; they are merely the best examples for testing any theory of interpretation because they are the most puzzling examples of the complex process of interpretation itself (Tracy 1987, 14). In *Plurality and Ambiguity*, Tracy emphasizes that a theology of conversation requires suspicion no less than retrieval. His engagement with Paul Ricœur is particularly evident in his appropriation of the hermeneutics of suspicion. Indeed, in the years following the publication of this work, Tracy gradually shifts—under the influence of postmodern thought—from an emphasis on the universal classic to the notion of the fragment.

3. From the Classic to the Fragment in Tracy's Theology

Across more than five decades of theological work, Tracy's sustained concern with situation—that is, culture and the questions it generates—has constituted the initial point of departure for his revisionist theological model. In an effort to establish a rational correlation between the worldview embedded in Christian texts and doctrines—concerning nature, humanity, the cosmos, and God—and the contemporary situation, Tracy first employed the method of mutually critical correlation. He subsequently expanded this method under the influence of the *Gadamerian hermeneutical model of conversation*³ as well as Ricœur's philosophical hermeneutic phenomenology.

The Gadamerian hermeneutical model of conversation is also concerned with external, rather than merely internal, conversation (dialogue). In the present age, the world has become increasingly interconnected through technologies, economies, and highly complex systems that accelerate the circulation of information—developments that can at times facilitate conversation, yet at other times obstruct intercultural and interreligious communication. In such circumstances, Tracy argues, Gadamer's understanding of dialogue as the foundation of all understanding, including intercultural exchange, can serve as a useful model, not only for the Western

³ Gadamer's dialogue hermeneutics

philosophical turn to language and to the Other but also for a desperately needed intercultural and interreligious dialogue. Today, interreligious dialogue more than ever requires conceptual clarity regarding what genuinely constitutes conversation and what does not, especially as it stands as one voice among many within the plurality of contemporary religious cultures (Tracy 2020, 201).

Gadamer's hermeneutics is commonly described as a hermeneutics of recovery or retrieval, grounded in a fundamental trust in tradition. It unmistakably privileges a hermeneutics of confidence that seeks to retrieve conversation with the intellectual classics and, more broadly, with the ongoing and inexhaustible cultural tradition of the West—particularly its philosophical and artistic *classics*. Tracy observes, however, that while Gadamer harbored an intrinsic humanistic suspicion toward the hermeneutics of suspicion—especially those associated with Freud, Marx, the Frankfurt School, and their critical theories—and stood as a prominent critic of such approaches, he nonetheless, and perhaps inadvertently, generated a form of hermeneutics of suspicion himself. Tracy maintained that Gadamer himself interpreted this second major component⁴ of his hermeneutics as explicitly a hermeneutics of suspicion (Tracy 2020, 206).

There is no reason why Gadamerian hermeneutics should not be interpreted as both a hermeneutics of retrieval and a hermeneutics of suspicion. Gadamer's dual hermeneutic, despite its relatively conservative tendencies, remains open to contemporary critical theory. Drawing on the conversation between Gadamer and Habermas, Tracy insists that contemporary theology has no excuse for failing to render itself public in response to our present disordered condition. He further argues that there is no participant in the secular public realm who can afford to ignore the valuable public resources of art, religion, and theology (Tracy 2020, 287).

For Tracy, dialogue, rather than argument, is the more encompassing category needed (Tracy 1987, 22). Conversation has the capacity to redirect attention from the three cognitive realms of modernity—science, ethics, and aesthetics—which have become sharply separated, toward the limit-questions of religion and theology implied in all three spheres and by their necessary interactions. Indeed, despite Tracy's criticisms of Habermas, the latter's conception of the unfinished project of modernity remains significant for him. Tracy believed in the intrinsic link of any

⁴ According to Tracy, Gadamer's hermeneutics has two components: language and dialogue are the foundation of all understanding, So, of any hermeneutics of retrieval and trust. The second component is his hermeneutically transformative concept, an innovative critical concept implying a critical theory that exposes systemic distortions in reading the tradition and, at time, in the tradition itself (Tracy 2020).

dialogical theory of communicative reason in the contemporary era to a testable sociological theory of modernity (Tracy 2020, 266).

In light of Tracy's openness to Habermas's critical social theory and Ricoeur's hermeneutics of suspicion, he is considered that any good hermeneutical interpretation constituted by all three basic forms of hermeneutics—retrieval, critique, and suspicion—results in an understanding of any strong fragment as a public fragment-event, whether that fragment be another person, a text, an analogy, or the self's own self-understanding (Tracy 2020, 14). So, according to Tracy's view of good hermeneutical interpretation, the task of contemporary theologians is to understand how fragments actually reach beyond their particular origins to achieve public and universal effect.

But what is Tracy's meaning of fragment? Tracy notes that the fragment emerged as an essential category in six distinct intellectual fields: classical studies, biblical studies, archaeology, literary theory, philosophy, and theology. In his perspective, fragments shatter, fragment, negate any closed totality system (Tracy 2020, 1). Tracy believed that the cultural and intellectual condition, as well as the existential and spiritual situation of modern humanity, is more fragmented than any prior stage in Western history. Fragmentation, however, can provide a greater range of resources for retrieval and realization amid present constraints. These fragments, understood as small-scale events within Western culture, can prepare thinkers for the intercultural and interreligious conversation that has now become an urgent necessity.

By extending the method of mutually critical correlation first toward a hermeneutics of trust or retrieval, and then toward an adequate hermeneutics encompassing retrieval, critique, and suspicion, and by simultaneously transforming the notion of the classic into that of the fragment—a concept that incorporates recognition of the other, difference, and alternative cultures—Tracy presents his revisionist theology as an urgent and public response to the pressing questions of contemporary society.

From his perspective, fragments, like classics, are particular expressions that appear in diverse forms—texts, images, rituals, and events. The fragments embedded within classics enable theologians to perceive the resources of tradition more clearly, thereby allowing them to discern points of convergence with other cultures and otherness in relation to core concepts within their own tradition, such as divine revelation and Christology.

Tracy suggests that for any reader open to rethinking fragmenting and pluralistic contemporary culture studying certain concepts, categories, and fragments as

resources available is required. Indeed, he does not regard pluralism as a novel feature of reality, but as a perennial condition. Such plurality is evident not only in theology, culture, and religions, but also, quite explicitly, in language itself, in interpretations, and in foundational texts. Tracy's emphasis on close analysis of the New Testament and the early church reveals the presence of plurality even in those formative periods, thereby affirming the legitimacy of contemporary plurality. That earlier plurality invites us, in turn, to view present diversity with renewed interpretive openness (Okey 2023, 127).

Preventing theology from being reduced to a purely confessional system of belief requires liberation from the confines of purely propositional rationality and an invitation to conversation grounded in an adequate hermeneutics applied to every fragment within a plural world. In this sense, Tracy's theology remains committed to rational argument in defense of the reasonableness of affirming God as the Infinite. Accordingly, Tracy identifies the ultimate task of theology as naming the Infinite God within the conditions of contemporary plurality, and as uncovering each fragment within every tradition in the form of narrative, metaphor, and symbol—thereby reviving premodern structural modes of thought.

For Christians, the event of Jesus of Nazareth, narrated in the New Testament as the Christ, constitutes the very heart of Christianity. This event is singular and irreplaceable, in and through which the universal Christ is disclosed by way of the particularity of incarnation, proclamation, ministry, cross, and resurrection. The Christ-event functions as the Christian *classic* indispensable for public conversation with the contemporary situation. As a foundational reality, it enables the discovery of truth within a world that is perpetually changing, divergent, and plural.

Christ serves as the mediator of God to humanity, a mediation enacted through Scripture, tradition, and the Church. This mediation takes the forms of manifestation, proclamation, and praxis. Tracy's sustained emphasis on form as central to mediation shapes the ongoing development of his Christological thought. The task of the Christian theologian, on the one hand, is to offer a hermeneutical interpretation of Christianity's particularity, and on the other, to defend the public character of the Christian *classic*. One way of fulfilling this task is to understand *classics* as fragment-events—fragments that resist all totalizing systems, including the totalization of Christianity itself. Such an understanding allows theologians to rethink the Christian community, freeing it from totalitarian tendencies and rendering it applicable within individual lives. At the same time, it opens Christian thought and practice to the infinite love revealed in Jesus Christ as the triune God.

This understanding of the *classic* as fragment-event clears a path toward a credible and genuinely public theology. Theology, as an inherently hermeneutical practice, is thereby aligned with a conception of the classic that also lies at the heart of narrative. Narrative, as an intrinsic quality of human experience (see Crites 1971)—through which desires, expectations, and the manifold dimensions of life are expressed and understood—possesses the capacity to function as a fragment-event that offers insight into diverse religious and cultural classics.

A classic story inherently unveils potential meaning embedded within a classical possibility. However, if the deployment of classical stories is limited to offering a specific perspective on fundamental questions arising in life's situations, its efficacy diminishes once the core idea is assimilated. According to Tracy, should the primary purpose of a narrative be to deliver logical argumentation, the storytelling is reduced to a disposable tool. Conversely, narratives presented within powerful frameworks, such as the Gospel narratives, possess the capacity to convey universal meaning. As Aristotle articulates in *Poetics*, form and content are inextricably linked in artistic works. The power of the narrative resides in its capacity to embody a truth of existential and universal significance; such narratives empower the Christian believer in love, freedom, and peace, even amidst the inevitable suffering and tensions of human experience. Narratives thus enable a transformation of expectations regarding divine power, teaching us—through reflection on the life and words of Jesus—to understand God's power in this world as nothing other than love (Tracy 1981, 276-278).

In this way, Tracy's revisionist theology seeks, through the retrieval of premodern structures such as narrative, to transform our engagement with sacred texts, moving beyond purely conceptual or propositional approaches that characterized earlier theological models. From Tracy's perspective, narrative provides a fitting mode for embracing the realities of lived experience in all their complexity—wonder and tension, success and failure, hope and desire. The story each individual tells reveals hidden layers of personal identity, while one's way of living constitutes an untold story that represents existential possibilities.

Narrative represents the articulation of event, and the event of Jesus Christ stands at the center of Christianity. When this event is understood as a fragment-narrative, interreligious conversation can take place without insisting upon conversion to Christianity. On the one hand, non-Christian participants are able to understand the narrative as narrative; on the other, the fragmented Gospel narrative rests upon an existential and universal dimension that enables non-Christians, through its

interpretation, to envision their own lives—like that of Jesus of Nazareth—as lives marked by love intertwined with suffering.

In engaging a Gospel narrative, the acceptance of interpretive plurality is intrinsic to conversation. Yet narrative not only transcends the propositional structures of modern thought and avoids the totalizing potential of grand narratives of salvation centered on the Christ-event; it also creates, in a distinctive and compelling manner, the very possibility of conversation itself. Consequently, it can be asserted that contemporary theology is considered irreducibly hermeneutical—a hermeneutics composed of retrieval, critique, and suspicion.

4. Applying Tracy's Narrative Theology to a Theology of Pilgrimage

One of the most significant contributions of Tracy's narrative theology lies in its applicability beyond the interpretation of Christian texts, providing a constructive framework for understanding religious experience itself. If, as Tracy argues under the influence of Ricœur, narrative is not merely a means of recounting events but rather the fundamental structure through which human beings experience and interpret reality, then many religious practices can likewise be understood as intrinsically narrative. Pilgrimage is among the most prominent of these practices. From this perspective, pilgrimage is no longer conceived simply as the performance of rituals at a sacred site; rather, it becomes a lived narrative of the encounter between the pilgrim and the sacred, in which past, present, and future are woven together through an ongoing hermeneutical process. Entering a sacred place is therefore not merely a geographical movement but an entrance into an interpretive horizon where sacred narratives, personal experience, and the collective memory of a religious tradition interact to generate new meaning.

This interpretation is fully consistent with the foundations of Tracy's revisionist theology. For Tracy, human experience is always understood in relation to classical religious texts and traditions. The classics are not merely repositories of doctrinal propositions; rather, they are texts whose enduring power enables them continually to reshape the interpreter's horizon of understanding. Accordingly, pilgrimage may itself be understood as a hermeneutical encounter with the classic. In this encounter, the sacred place functions analogously to the sacred text: it challenges the pilgrim's existing assumptions, raises new questions, and opens fresh possibilities for interpreting one's life. Pilgrimage is therefore not the repetition of a fixed past but the continual re-creation of meaning in the present.

In light of this interpretation, Tracy's notion of mutually critical correlation can likewise be employed in a novel way to articulate a theology of pilgrimage. Whereas in his earlier theology this correlation is established between common human experience and the Christian tradition, a theology of pilgrimage reformulates this correlation as one between sacred narratives and the pilgrim's lived narrative. Neither narrative possesses ultimate authority in isolation. Without engagement with lived experience, sacred narratives may be reduced to historical documents, while lived experience without the guidance of tradition risks collapsing into subjectivism. Religious meaning emerges precisely through the critical dialogue between these two narratives: the pilgrim's life is reread in the light of the sacred narrative, while the sacred narrative itself discloses new dimensions of meaning through contemporary human experience. Pilgrimage, therefore, constitutes an ongoing hermeneutical process in which text and life, tradition and experience, past and present continually interpret one another.

Such a narrative understanding of pilgrimage also has important implications for interreligious dialogue. Tracy's concept of the analogical imagination demonstrates that genuine understanding of the religious other does not require the elimination of differences; rather, it arises through recognizing similarities within difference. The analogical imagination enables meaningful relationships between diverse experiences without reducing them to a single conceptual framework. Thus, pilgrimage may be understood as a multidimensional space of dialogue: between the pilgrim and the sacred text, between the pilgrim and the sacred place, between the pilgrim and the religious tradition, among fellow pilgrims, and even between adherents of different religious traditions who encounter one another at sacred sites. In such encounters, the religious other is no longer perceived as a threat to one's identity but as an opportunity for expanding one's horizon of understanding. Each religious narrative, when brought into conversation with others, neither loses its identity nor dissolves into them; rather, it discloses previously unrecognized dimensions of its own significance. Consequently, pilgrimage fosters mutual understanding, empathy, reciprocal learning, and respect for religious diversity, thereby exemplifying the dialogical aims of Tracy's public theology.

Furthermore, pilgrimage may also be viewed as a concrete realization of public theology. Just as Tracy insists that theology must engage the public sphere rather than remain confined within the community of faith, sacred places likewise transcend the private domain of religious devotion. They are public spaces where cultures, languages, traditions, and diverse forms of human experience converge. Within such

spaces, pilgrims learn to understand truth not as an exclusive possession but as a shared and open horizon. This experience cultivates empathy, mutual responsibility, and genuine understanding across religious boundaries, allowing pilgrimage to assume a significance that extends beyond the confines of any single religious tradition.

Nevertheless, the application of Tracy's thought to a theology of pilgrimage is not limited to his earlier theological project. His later transition from the concept of the classic to that of the fragment, or fragment-event, reframes pilgrimage as an event of disclosure rather than merely an engagement with enduring tradition. Whereas the notion of the classic still presupposes a degree of coherence and continuity of meaning, the fragment-event points to those moments in which truth discloses itself through interruption, discontinuity, and unforeseeable encounter. Truth appears not as a closed conceptual system but as an event that continually exceeds every attempt at definitive conceptualization.

Pilgrimage may itself be conceived as a fragment-event—a singular event in which truth emerges not as part of a closed totality but as an unrepeatable disclosure of the sacred. The sacred place is therefore not simply a setting for ritual performance but a locus of encounter in which the pilgrim's horizon of understanding is reconfigured through the presence of the sacred. This fragment-event is constituted through the rereading of sacred narratives, the retrieval of religious memory, experiences of suffering and hope, moments of prayer and silence, and encounters with fellow pilgrims. Here truth is disclosed less through doctrinal formulations than through the existential reality of lived experience, calling the pilgrim to an ongoing reinterpretation of both self and world.

Accordingly, the principal contribution of Tracy's narrative theology to a theology of pilgrimage lies in its elevation of pilgrimage from the level of ritual practice to that of a hermeneutical, narrative, and existential experience. The pilgrim who returns from the journey is no longer the same person who began it. Through an ongoing dialogue with sacred texts, sacred places, religious tradition, fellow pilgrims, and ultimately with oneself, a new narrative of life is continuously formed. Pilgrimage thus becomes a dynamic process of reinterpreting and reconstructing both personal and communal identity, in which truth is experienced not as an object of possession but as an ever-unfolding event that continually transcends definitive closure. Within this framework, a theology of pilgrimage may ultimately be understood as a theology of participation in truth, where narrative, dialogue, the analogical imagination, and the fragment-event together enable human beings to dwell more deeply within the

unfolding horizon of the sacred.

5. Conclusion

Tracy's theological turn reveals the fundamentally practical dimension of his thought—a vision whose core is sustained conversation with diverse traditions and cultures. His persistent emphasis on theological method, together with the transformation of critical mutual correlation into a Gadamerian model of conversation and subsequently into an adequate hermeneutics encompassing retrieval, critique, and suspicion, demonstrates a profound commitment to openness, self-criticism, and the ongoing transformation of both the theologian and the Christian theological community. Tracy's affirmation of pluralism, not as a novel feature of reality but as a perennial condition, necessitates the adoption of new methods and the creative application of diverse interpretive strategies within the modern and postmodern worlds.

From this perspective, Tracy emerges as a theologian whose work is termed "revisionist" precisely because it reflects a continuous process of self-revision as a believer in the contemporary world. His sustained engagement with classics and fragments, articulated through a methodical conceptual shift, opens genuine possibilities for interreligious conversation. Within this framework, narrative appears as one of the most promising sites for such conversation, insofar as it possesses both the capacity for critical re-interpretation and an intrinsic openness to plurality, which it simultaneously acknowledges and enacts.

Beyond its significance for interreligious dialogue, this study has argued that Tracy's narrative theology also provides important conceptual resources for developing a theology of pilgrimage. By extending the notions of mutually critical correlation, analogical imagination, and the fragment-event beyond their original theological context, pilgrimage may be understood not merely as ritual observance but as a hermeneutical and dialogical event. Within this framework, sacred narratives, lived experience, sacred places, and encounters with others continually reshape both personal and communal identity. A theology of pilgrimage thus emerges not as a departure from Tracy's theological vision but as a natural extension of its central hermeneutical insights.

The Islamic intellectual tradition has likewise long recognized the centrality of dialogue; indeed, it has situated conversation at the very heart of its intellectual and spiritual reflections. The attention devoted by Muslim mystics and philosophers such as Avicenna and Suhrawardī to narrative, symbolic storytelling, and both inner and

outer forms of conversation attest to the vitality and maturity of Islamic thought. It therefore seems that, through the adoption of contemporary theological methods such as those developed by Tracy, rich and constructive engagement with Islamic intellectual traditions can significantly contribute to the advancement of interreligious conversation. In this respect, Tracy's narrative theology offers not only a fruitful model for interreligious dialogue but also a compelling framework for rethinking pilgrimage as a dialogical and transformative religious practice.

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