THE NEW

COMPARATIVE THEOLOGY

Thinking Interreligiously in the 21st Century

Edited by

Francis X. Clooney S. J.

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Interreligious Insights from the Next Generation

Edited by

FRANCIS X. CLOONEY, SJ

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PREFACE

James Fredericks has written a very fine Introduction to this volume of essays by younger scholars in the field of the new comparative theology, and I need not add further words of explanation here. But as editor, I would like to express my appreciation and gratitude for all that follows. From the initial 2007 panel at the American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting in San Diego to the gathering of those who would contribute to this volume and the several drafts of each essay, the process has been positive and collegial. In a commendable commitment to collaborative practice, all the contributors read and commented on each other's work, and likewise read and critiqued the Introduction by James Fredericks and the Response by me. My only regret is that the necessary limits of such a volume have meant that other fine younger comparativists could not be invited to contribute their own new and fruitful insights into comparative theology. I would like also to thank in a particular way Lee F. Spriggs, recently graduated from the Harvard Divinity School, for his most capable and painstaking work in taking our disparate efforts, putting them in order, and thus making it possible for this volume to move quickly toward publication.

Francis X. Clooney, SJ
Cambridge, MA

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Introduction

JAMES L. FREDERICKS

All journeys have secret destinations of which the traveler is unaware.
(Martin Buber)

Christians now live in a time when looking on the plurality of faiths as a subsidiary problem for their theology and practice is no longer possible. To be sure, sweeping statements about the present as the dawn of a 'new era' or calls for 'new paradigms' for understanding 'the current crisis' are not only tiresome; they are usually misleading. The increased proximity of religious communities to one another and their de-territorialization as cultural systems, however, cannot be ignored. Christians, and everybody else for that matter, have only begun to discern the import of the end of the colonial system, the rise of new forms of trans-national capitalism and the transformations being wrought by global communication and transportation technologies. Therefore, anyone who would try to think theologically about the diversity of religions today would do well to keep Buber's aphorism in mind. This includes those, like Francis Clooney and me, who would presume to give advice as to how theology should be done today. Starting in the later 1980s, Frank and I began to suggest a way in which we might rethink faith by means of a critical reflection on the texts and practices of other religious paths. Comparative theology, as we have proposed it, entails the interpretation of the meaning and truth of one's own faith by means of a critical investigation of other faiths.

The initial impetus for this volume came from a discussion within the Comparative Theology Group at the 2007 meeting of the American Academy of Religion. Michelle Voss Roberts, Tracy Tiemeier, Kristin Beise Kiblinger and Hugh Nicholson, all of whom have essays in this volume, presented their concerns about the problem of hegemony in comparative theology. Frank Clooney responded. In their presentation, these comparative theologians showed how what we are calling 'the new comparative theology' needs to be situated within the past history of Christianity's dealings with other religious

paths, a history that leads to a sobering recognition of Christian theology's willingness to implicate itself with western imperialism and its Orientalist discourses. This history includes traditional forms of Christian apologetics, Christian fulfillment theologies and proposals for 'pluralist' theologies of religions. Comparative theologians should not be sanguine about being immune from the problem of hegemony. After the 2007 AAR meeting, Frank invited Bagus Laksana, David Clairmont, Daniel Joslyn-Semiatkoski, Jeffery Long, and John Sheveland to expand the discussion.

The essays in this volume provide an opportunity to sample the work of scholars who are taking comparative theology in many different directions. I am happy to say that these essays prove that Buber was right – they are furrowed with trails leading to destinations about which Frank and I were unaware when we began our reflections some twenty years ago. No doubt there are more destinations to be discovered that remain a secret to us all. In any event, Frank and I are grateful for these essays and the new destinations to be discovered in them. I want to offer some introductory comments on each of the essays in this volume. Before doing so, a few thoughts about comparative theology as Frank Clooney and I have proposed it may provide a helpful trail-head for the journeys to come.

The vexations and enticements of religious diversity are certainly nothing new to Christianity. Neither is the term 'comparative theology', whose roots go back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[1] David Tracy notes that 'comparative theology' is used in two different ways today. First, the term refers to the comparison of the doctrinal systems of two or more religious traditions. This is a non-theological (non-confessional) enterprise that is part of the general academic study of religion.[2] Tracy also outlines a use of this term that is both more precise and more widely used today. Comparative theology is a confessional discipline where one religious tradition (usually but not necessarily a 'home tradition') is critically correlated with another religion.[3]

Frank Clooney and I have proposed a procedure for doing theology comparatively that constricts Tracy's second definition somewhat. Comparative theology is not only a revisionist but also a constructive project in which theologians interpret the meaning and truth of one tradition by making critical

1 For a discussion of the history of this term, see Francis X. Clooney, SJ, 'Comparative Theology', in John Webster, Kathryn Tanner and Iain Torrence (eds), *The Oxford Handbook to Systematic Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 653–69. See also, David Tracy, 'Comparative Theology', in *The Encyclopedia of Religions*, Lindsay Jones (ed.), Vol. 13 (2nd edn) (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), 9125–34; and Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

2 See for example, Keith Ward, *Religion and Revelation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 40; and Robert Neville and Wesley J. Wildman, 'On Comparing Religious Ideas', in Robert Cummings Neville (ed.), *The Human Condition: A Volume in the Comparative Religious Ideas Project* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 9–20.

3 Tracy, 'Comparative Theology', 9126; Hugh Nicholson, 'A Correlational Model of Comparative Theology', in *Journal of Religion* (85:2, 2005), 191–213.

correlations with the classics of another religious tradition. Generally, as Tracy noted, comparative theology will be a confessional enterprise.[4] A number of observations can be made about this proposal for comparative theology.

First, comparative theology proceeds dialectically. Comparison begins with the critical study of another religion, sometimes by means of the reading of classic texts, sometimes by means of personal dialogue with the practitioners of the other religious paths, and optimally by taking both routes.[5] The conversation with the other tradition eventually becomes a conversation within the home tradition in which its classic texts, art, rituals, ascetic practices, etc. are reinterpreted in light of the study of the other tradition. The critical correlations established in the work of comparison can be positive or negative – sometimes the correlation will be a recognition of similarity, sometimes of difference. Both similarity and difference are of theological significance to the comparative theologian. I have tended to emphasize the theological interest of difference in my work. This emphasis is warranted by the need to resist theories of religion that marginalize difference and reduce religions to 'more of the same'.[6] Of course, theories of religion which privilege difference by contending that religions are incommensurate need to be resisted as well.

Second, comparative theology highlights the fact that thinking interreligiously is an intrinsic aspect of the theological enterprise itself (at least for Christian theology), not a supplementary reflection that can be consigned to an appendix of systematics. Frank Clooney makes this point as follows: 'Comparison and the appropriation of the new and different now take place *within* Christian theology, *while* it is being formulated, *not* as an appendage or corollary to an already fully formed theology.'[7] Doing theology comparatively, therefore, means that the correlation of Christian doctrines and

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4 See, inter alia, Francis X. Clooney, SJ, *Hindu God, Christian God: How Reason Helps to Break Down the Boundaries Between Religions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 10–11; and James L. Fredericks, *Buddhists and Christians: Through Comparative Theology to Solidarity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 96–9.

5 Frank Clooney has emphasized the importance of the 'patient reading' of texts. See Francis X. Clooney, SJ, *Theology after Vedanta: An Experiment in Comparative Theology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 153–6, 163–4; and *Hindu God, Christian God*, 10. In my work, I have given more emphasis to inter-personal character of dialogue and what I have called 'interreligious friendships'. See James L. Fredericks, 'Interreligious Friendship: A New Theological Virtue', in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* (35:2, Spring 1998), 159–74; and 'Abe Masao: A Friendship', in *Spiritus* 3 (2003), 237–48.

6 Perhaps my emphasis is also attributable to the fact that I work with Buddhists who highlight the non-theistic aspects of their tradition, instead of with Muslims or Hindus who emphasize theism. More inquiry into how the choice of a dialogue partner is leading to different emphases in our understanding of comparative theology would be welcome.

7 Francis X. Clooney, SJ, 'The Study of Non-Christian Religions in the Post-Vatican II Church', in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* (28:3, 1991), 488. Italics in the original. See also Francis X. Clooney, SJ, 'Neither Here Nor There: Crossing Boundaries, Becoming Insiders, Remaining Catholic', in Jose Cabezon and Sheila Davaney (eds), *Identity and Politics of Identity in Scholarship in the Study of Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 99–111.

practices with those of other religious traditions must be located at the center of the Christian theological *querens* itself.

Third, the problems of interpretation raised by comparison cannot be restricted to the soteriological questions that tend to dominate theologies of religions. Comparative theology addresses every aspect of the home tradition's doctrine and practice. Doing theology comparatively, therefore, is theology in the broadest sense of the word: the intellectually rigorous interpretation of the classic texts, doctrines and practices of one tradition in its entirety. Comparative theology certainly does not exclude a robust apologetics. A proper apologetics, however, does not render certain theological affirmations immune from the need to be revised by means of comparison with the affirmations of another tradition.

Fourth, comparative theology relies on limited experiments in comparison instead of theories about 'religious experience' or religion in general that seek to provide a foundation for comparison. In Frank Clooney's view,

> The more specific a comparison, the better; the more particular a Christian effort to understand a non-Christian text or practice, the better; the more we attend to learning about particular things and ideas that were previously 'other' to us, the better; and the more we write from within this expanded realm of knowledge, and not simply about it, the better.[8]

In varying degrees, this preference for specific, limited exercises in comparison is shared by theologians as diverse as John Berthrong, David Burrell, Catherine Cornille, Thomas Cattoi, Peter Feldmeier, John Keenan, Leo Lefebure, Michael Meyers, and Pim Valkenberg.[9]

The correlational character of comparative theology implies that it is a hermeneutical project in addition to being a constructive enterprise. The comparative theologian constructs correlations by maintaining a commitment to a home tradition and to what Frank Clooney has called a 'vulnerability' to the truth of another religious tradition.[10] Comparative theology requires a sophisticated

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8 Clooney, 'The Study of Non-Christian Religions', 489–90.

9 John Berthrong, *All Under Heaven: Transforming Paradigms in Confucian–Christian Dialogue* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994); David Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993); Catherine Cornille, *The Guru in Indian Catholicism: Ambiguity or Opportunity of Inculturation?* (Louvain: Peeters Press, 1991); Thomas Cattoi, *Divine Contingency: Theologies of Divine Embodiment in Maximos the Confessor and Tsong kha pa* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2008); Peter Feldmeier, *Christianity Looks East: Comparing the Spiritualities of John of the Cross and Buddhaghosa* (New York: Paulist Press, 2006); John Keenan, *The Meaning of Christ – A Mahayana Christology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989); Leo Lefebure, *The Buddha and the Christ: Explorations in Buddhist and Christian Dialogue* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993); Michael Meyers, *Brahman: Systematic Theology from a Comparative Perspective* (Richmond, UK: Curzon, 2000); John Thatamanil, *The Immanent Divine: God, Creation and the Human Predicament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006); Pim Valkenberg, *Sharing Lights on the Way to God: Muslim–Christian Dialogue and Theology in the Context of Abrahamic Partnership* (New York: Editions Rodopi, 2006).

10 Francis X. Clooney, SJ, *Theology After Vedanta* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1993), 4–6; James L. Fredericks, *Faith among Faiths* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1999), 169–71.

hermeneutics in that both poles of this tension require interpretation. First, there is the need to understand the Other in a way that does not annul the Other's alterity. This problem, enormous in itself, is but a preliminary step leading to the reinterpretation of the home tradition. And since the work of comparison usually leads to a heightened appreciation of the ambiguity and poly-vocality of the home tradition, the comparative theologian's need for hermeneutics cannot be over-emphasized. However daunting these challenges may be, doing theology comparatively requires us to resist the temptation to escape the tension of rootedness and vulnerability. Loss of commitment to the home tradition may make the work of comparison no longer theological. This opens up the question of how comparative theology is related to comparative religion and religious studies. By contrast, the loss of the allure of the Other leads us to the question of the relationship of comparative theology to the theology of religions. I want to offer brief comments on both of these issues.

No current construal of the relationship between comparative theology and comparative religion is entirely satisfactory. This is because the term 'comparative theology' continues to be used in various ways. For example, David Tracy, in keeping with his view that theology in general be included in 'religious studies', thinks that comparative theology should be considered a sub-discipline within comparative religion.[11] Tracy's proposal begs the question of how comparative religion itself is to be defined.[12] In the interest of a better understanding of comparative procedure carried out theologically, I will define comparative religion as a discipline located within the secular study of religions. Comparative religion holds up for itself the scholarly ideal of detached inquiry and seeks, as its primary public, the academic community of scholars. In contrast, comparative theology does not proceed from a religiously neutral starting point (however elusive this neutrality may be to begin with). Comparative theology understands itself as a procedure which is normative, constructive, and revisionist, and which is often done by believers for the benefit of believers, even as it includes the academy of scholars as a public to be addressed as well. Unlike comparative religion, comparative theology entails a 'faith seeking understanding' (*fides quaerens intellectum*). However, I do not think it wise to draw too sharp a distinction between these two disciplines. The comparative theologian, perhaps more than any other theologian, should be interested in the methods of comparison and the findings of the non-theological study of religion.[13]

Comparative theology should also be distinguished from the theology of religions. By 'theology of religions', I mean the attempt to understand the

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11 Tracy, 'Comparative Theology', 9126.

12 Tomoko Masuzawa, 'The Legacy of Comparative Theology', in *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 72–104.

13 Clooney, 'Comparative Theology', 664; and *Theology after Vedanta*, 4–6; Fredericks, *Buddhists and Christians*, 97–8.

theological meaning of the diversity of religions in keeping with the doctrinal requirements of a home tradition. This enterprise is not exclusively a Christian preoccupation and the comparison of these theologies itself is of interest.[14] Very often, the primary interest of theologies of religions is soteriological: can the one who does not follow my path be 'saved'? Generally, theologies of religions are not based on detailed studies of the specific teachings of the other religious traditions. They depend instead on meta-religious theories of religion or concern themselves with the doctrinal requirements of the home tradition.[15]

For the time being, at least, I maintain that Christian comparative theology should be seen as an alternative to the theology of religions. I recommend this because theologies of religions are not adequate to the purposes and practices of comparative theology as I envision it. This is the most controversial position I have taken in my proposals for doing theology comparatively.[16] Given the prescriptive (or should I say 'proscriptive'?) nature of my proposal, I want to restrict my argument about the theology of religions to Christian theology.

There are several reasons for concluding that comparative theology should be taken up as an alternative to the theology of religions. First, for most Christian theologies of religions, comparative procedures that require the careful and detailed study of other religious traditions have generally been secondary to the construction of comprehensive theological interpretations of other religions. Comparative theology seeks to resist this. A comprehensive Christian theological understanding of religious diversity, as David Tracy argues, should come only after detailed studies of other religions. This project has barely begun to have an impact on Christian theology.[17]

Second, none of the candidates for a Christian theology of religions is adequate to the hermeneutical requirements of doing theology comparatively. Interpreting the religious classics of other traditions in keeping with the doctrinal demands of Christian faith usually leads to systemic distortions in the reception of the Other. Moreover, these distortions succeed in what I have called the 'domestication of difference', in which the threat of the Other, as well as its transformative power, are muted.[18]

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14 See Jeffery Long's essay in this volume and Kristin Beise Kiblinger, *Buddhist Inclusivism: Attitudes Towards Religious Others* (Aldershot, England and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005).

15 For a dependable and insightful summary of the various positions, see Paul F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002).

16 See Fredericks, *Faith among Faiths,* 163–8; and *Buddhists and Christians*, 198–202, 110–12. Frank Clooney takes a position that is similar to mine; see Clooney, SJ, *Oxford Handbook*, 666; *Theology after Vedanta*, 6–7, 193–6; and 'The Study of Non-Christian Religions in the Post-Vatican II Church', 489. In addition, see Klaus von Stosch, 'Komparative Theologie – ein Ausweg aus dem Grunddilemma jeder Theologie der Religionen?', in *Zeitschrift für Katholische Theologie* (124, 2002), 294–311; and Norbert Hintersteiner, *Traditionen überschreiten: Angloamerikanishe Beiträgen zur interkulturellen Traditioneshermeneutik* (Wein, 2001), 318–20. For criticisms of my position, see footnote #10 of Kristen Beise Kiblinger's essay in this volume.

17 Tracy, 'Comparative Theology', 9127.

18 For a perspective on the hermeneutical importance of difference incorporating feminist discussions, see Michelle Voss Roberts, *Dualities: A Theology of Difference* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 2010).

Third, preoccupation with a theology of religions is not helpful in supporting Christians in their need to respond to the pluralism of religions not only with fidelity to their own tradition, but also with creativity in embracing the Other. I make this claim even as I admit that I am a Christian inclusivist. Among various candidates for a theology of religions, the inclusivist (or fulfillment) theology model is the most adequate to the demands of Christian faith. However, the apriorism of theologies of religion can function ideologically by protecting Christians from the necessity of changing their minds, at least about theologically significant matters, in response to the encounter with the Other. Moreover, the continued emphasis on a theology of religions hobbles interreligious dialogue by allowing Christians to continue to talk to themselves and place in abeyance the need to engage in and be engaged by the bewildering fact of religious diversity today.

Fourth, in the past, Christian theologies of religions have not been sufficiently attentive to the hegemony of their discourse. When theologies of religions function as a template for doing theology comparatively, the comparative theologian is placed in the unhappy position of knowing more about other believers than they know about themselves. Comparative theology, more so than theologies of religion, is able to be attentive to what Jean-Francois Lyotard famously called 'the postmodern condition' – the crises of grand narratives brought about by the growing proximity of all the grand narratives to one another. Religious or philosophical theories about the ultimate unity of all religions notwithstanding, this postmodern condition is where we all find ourselves in beginning to think theologically about ourselves and our world.[19]

Of course, all of the above is but the starting-point for a new generation of theologians who are doing theology comparatively, not their final destination. The theologians who have contributed essays to this volume have their own exciting ideas about what kind of map those who do theology comparatively should be using to find their way. The essays are noteworthy for the immense diversity of their concerns. As a group, the essays are confrontational and sagacious, discerning but also inventive. Tracy Tiemeier, toward the end of her essay in this volume, makes an astute observation: the discipline of comparative theology, at least as Frank and I have proposed it, is still quite young. If these essays are any indication, the discipline is growing up fast. The comparative theologians who have contributed to this volume are eager to take us to destinations as diverse as missiology and musicology.

Above, I claimed that comparative theology was defined by a tension established by fidelity to a home tradition and vulnerability to the Other. Bagus Laksana provides a new voice in comparative theology that helps us to see how

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19 For my views on these four points, see Fredericks, *Faith among Faiths*, 103–18, 162–86; and *Buddhists and Christians*, 1–29, 96–115. See also, 'A Universal Religious Experience?', in *Horizons, Journal of the College Theology Society* (22:1, Spring 1995), 67–87; and James Heft (ed.), 'Off the Map: Roman Catholicism and the Dialogue with Buddhism' (forthcoming, 2010).

this tension asserts itself in both a global and a local context. Laksana does theology comparatively for his Christian community in Indonesia. His essay, 'Comparative Theology: Between Identity and Alterity', explores the tension of fidelity and vulnerability by recommending pilgrimage as a metaphor for how to maintain that tension. He takes as a model Ali ibn Abi Bakr al-Harawi, a thirteenth-century Syrian Muslim whose life was spent crossing the borders separating the three Abrahamic monotheisms. For al-Harawi, pilgrimage was never simply an act of piety, safely encircled by the boundaries of his own religious community. Pilgrimage was 'a privileged locus' for the 'creative negotiation of religious identity' by means of intimacy with the Other. Laksana offers al-Harawi's willingness to make pilgrimages as a model for comparative theologians as they try to find ways of resisting the temptation of reducing the Other to more of the same and externalizing the Other as insurmountable difference.

Kristin Beise Kiblinger's 'Relating Theology of Religions and Comparative Theology' offers a critique of the role that the theology of religions should play in doing theology comparatively. Kiblinger recognizes the weaknesses of inclusivism and pluralism, but draws our attention to alternative forms of these theologies that have been proposed by Paul Knitter, Schubert Ogden, Paul Griffiths, S. Mark Heim and herself. When comparative theology is construed as an alternative to the theology of religions, comparativists can be naïve about the presuppositions they have about other religions – presuppositions that shape their comparisons. Most challenging, for me at least, is her claim that even theologians who call for placing more emphasis on actual experiments in comparison have subconsciously adopted some version of these newer forms of inclusivism and pluralism.

Hugh Nicholson's essay, 'The New Comparative Theology and the Problem of Theological Hegemonism', takes Kiblinger's concerns to a very different destination. Nicholson agrees with my judgement that the debate about theologies of religions has reached an impasse and that we need to turn to comparative theology as an alternative. But where Kiblinger argues that the sharp separation of comparative theology and the theology of religions fails to take into account more recent developments in thinking about inclusivism and pluralism, Nicholson argues that separating the two promotes 'the comforting illusion' that the problem of hegemonism can be solved by renouncing our attachments to theologies of religions. In Nicholson's view, comparative theology, as it has been proposed by Frank Clooney and myself, is but the latest development in Liberal Theology's effort to transcend 'the political', which Nicholson understands as the inevitably antagonistic and exclusivist dimension of inter-faith relations.

David Clairmont's essay, 'On Hegemonies Within: Franciscan Missions and Buddhist Kings in Comparative Theological Contexts', takes Nicholson's concern about hegemonism in a decidedly unexpected direction. Clairmont documents the way in which hegemonies are at work not only between religious communities, but within them as well. As an example of these 'hegemonies within', he takes us to sixteenth-century Sri Lanka and the struggles of

Franciscan missionaries, whose encounter with Buddhism was complicated by the ambiguities of Christian theology and the politics of Portuguese colonialism. Playing off what Michelle Voss Roberts (citing Patricia Hill Collins)[20] calls 'outsiders within', Clairmont shows how the Franciscans became 'insiders without'. Reflecting on this example, he argues that comparative theologians need to reflect on specific historical encounters between faiths and to appreciate the conflicts – theological, political, and ethical – engendered by such encounters. The missionary efforts by the Franciscans in Sri Lanka show that an encounter with another religious community not only poses new theological challenges for understanding one's own faith, but also confronts us with the contradictions and ambiguities that are endemic to the home tradition. In this way, comparative theologians need not only to hear the voice of the Other, as Laksana argues in his essay, but also the voice of those marginalized by 'hegemonies within' their own tradition.

Hugh Nicholson calls us to recognize the inevitability of antagonism among religious communities and the ethical responsibilities of comparative theologians to do their work aware of these antagonisms. Daniel Joslyn-Siemiatkoski's essay, 'Comparative Theology and the Status of Judaism: Hegemony and Reversals', provides us with a concrete example of how comparative theologians have succeeded in skirting this very issue.[21] Joslyn-Siemiatkoski argues that, for comparative theology, Judaism has been a 'submerged tradition', cast either as merely another 'world religion' (heedless of its historical and theological relationship with Christianity) or studied only in terms of its scriptures (the 'Old Testament' and heedless of the post-scriptural Rabbinic heritage of Jews). In his essay, Joslyn-Siemiatkoski goes far beyond the widely acknowledged demand that Christians renounce their supersessionist theologies of Judaism. He wants us to rethink basic Christian doctrines in light of this renunciation and he holds up comparative theology as a way to accomplish this task. Moreover, his essay includes a concrete example of this revision of Christian understanding by providing a reflection on the Pauline critique of the Law (and Augustinian/Lutheran theologies of grace versus works) by means of a close reading of the Mishnah *Avot* and its discussion of Torah.

Michelle Voss Roberts' essay, 'Gendering Comparative Theology', demonstrates how comparative theology and feminist thought can be both a blessing and a challenge to one another. In doing so, she makes a significant contribution to our understanding of hegemonic discourse and its impact on comparative theology. Instead of theories of religion in general, comparative theologians study the specific truth claims of those who are 'insiders' to a tradition. But this has unintended and undesirable consequences because women and other marginalized people often remain 'outsiders within' the tradition. This problem is

20 See below, p. 110.

21 The same may be said for Daniel Joslyn-Siemiatkoski's *Christian Memories of the Maccabean Martyrs* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

compounded by the fact that the hagiographies of women are often written by men in a way that legitimizes an androcentric construction of the tradition. Comparativists need to recognize that women's voices do not represent 'the tradition' as their male hagiographers construct it. Women speak as 'outsiders within' their traditions in a way that requires and also empowers us to rethink traditions. To make her point, she compares the lives of two women, Mechthild of Magdeburg, a Christian contemplative, and Lalleswari, a Saivite poet-saint.

Up until now, comparative theology has been dominated, for the most part, by the concern of theologians who are North American or European, Christian and male. In the next generation, new voices will make the conversation considerably more complicated. Tracy Tiemeier's essay, 'Comparative Theology as a Theology of Liberation', aims to shape the way we do theology comparatively by getting comparative theologians to sit down and learn from Asian and Asian American theologians. In pursuing this goal, she singles out Aloysius Pieris, Peter Phan, and Sathianathan Clarke as conversation partners to show how, for Asian and Asian American theology, questions of culture and interreligious living are inseparable from questions of justice. Asian and Asian American theology will help to change the subject from western concerns with historical and systematic issues to the theme of liberation.[22] This shift provides a basis for her to critique the AAR comparative theology group's definition of the discipline. Tiemeier expects this dialogue to bring us to a revision not only of what it means to do theology, but what it means to work for liberation as well. To take a concrete step in this direction, she offers a reflection on Antal, a Hindu saint in the Srivaisnava tradition, as a way for Christians to raise questions about the embodiment of liberation.

Jeffery Long's essay, '(Tentatively) Putting the Pieces Together: Comparative Theology in the Tradition of Sri Ramakrishna', intersects with the stance Kristin Beise Kiblinger takes *vis-à-vis* the theology of religions in several ways. He is in agreement with her in holding that the theology of religions and comparative theology are not, in practice, separable. And significantly, he wants to alert his own tradition (the neo-Vedanta of Sri Ramakrishna) to the need for what he calls (citing Kiblinger) an 'open inclusivism'. This means that the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle of religions can only be put together 'tentatively', as he says in his title. In this respect, the essay can also be taken as a response to Kiblinger's call for constructing theologies of religion in dialogue with other traditions. Long carefully (and even courageously) chooses to revise the Sri Ramakrishna community's strongly held pluralist theology, a teaching central to the tradition, by constructing critical correlations with process thought and Jain theology.

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22 See also, Tracy Sayuki Tiemeier, 'Retrieving "Asian Spirituality" in North American Contexts: An Interfaith Proposal', in *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* (6:2, Fall 2006), 228–33.

John Sheveland's essay, 'Solidarity through Polyphony', also brings us back to the question of a theology of religions in a new way. He proposes that 'polyphony', the musical form that arose in European music after plainchant, be used as a model for comparative theology. Polyphony provides for a unity-in-distinction of voices which produces 'a polyphonic whole more beautiful than the sum of its parts'. Moreover, the contrapuntal relation of the voices brings out a beauty in each voice that could not be heard in the voice apart from the polyphony. His goal is to move away from judgement of others (inherent in many theologies of religions) towards an 'aesthetic understanding' of religions which emerges in the polyphony the theologian creates in the work of comparison. The goal of this theological aesthetics is to promote a solidarity among religions based in the 'principle of non-competition' inherent in polyphonic form. A concern for the ethical import of doing theology comparatively is never far from Sheveland's reflections. In an approach quite different from my own, he argues that 'rival truth claims may be of interest in the distant future, but only after the laborious work of comparison, i.e., careful listening, takes place'. Therefore, 'the prospects for interreligious learning and conflict resolution are encouraging'.

Writing almost twenty years ago, Frank Clooney predicted that the divide between those who seek to construct general theories about 'religion' and those who proceed with limited experiments in comparison will dominate the theological debate over the next generation.[23] This prediction has proven correct, even though, in keeping with Buber's aphorism, the journey has taken us to destinations of which neither Frank nor I were aware when we began this trek. Buber was right: all journeys, or at least the really important journeys, are full of surprises and delights. Frank and I have been delighted with the journey so far. We believe these essays demonstrate that doing theology comparatively is a journey whose secret destinations have only begun to show up on the horizon.

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23 Francis X. Clooney, SJ, 'The Study of Non-Christian Religions in the Post-Vatican II Church', in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* (28:3, 1991), 483.

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Comparative Theology: Between Identity and Alterity

A. BAGUS LAKSANA

Introduction

> I roam the lands east and west; to many a wanderer and hermit was I a companion. I saw every strange and marvelous wonder, and experienced terror in comfort and misery. I have to come to be buried alone beneath the earth; I hope that my Lord will be my companion.[1]

These are the words written on the cenotaph of the tomb of Ali ibn Abi Bakr al-Harawi (d. 611 H/AD 1215), a curious and avid Muslim pilgrim who lived mostly in Syria, serving various Muslim rulers during the tumultuous years of the Crusades, including Saladin (r. 564 H/AD 1169–589 H/AD 1193) and his son, al-Malik al-Zahir Ghazi, the ruler of Aleppo. On the surface, these words might seem either too self-referential or too pious, but what might be much more interesting is what lies behind them. For al-Harawi, the 'strange and marvelous wonder' would not have been limited to Muslim cities and shrines, but also Jewish and Christian ones, for he visited many of them and treated them with deep respect. And the 'wanderer and hermit' to whom he was a companion might have included some Christian monks and pilgrims. As a Muslim servant of the Ayyubid rulers, he rejoiced at the chance of meeting with Byzantine Emperor Emmanuel Comnenos (r. 1143–80) and of imbibing the sacredness of Hagia Sophia. In the context of the tensions, not to mention a heightened sense of hostility between 'Muslims' and 'Christians' during the Crusades, it is indeed rather strange to find a personality like al-Harawi whose life was defined by a border crossing between the three Abrahamic religious worlds.[2] Obviously, he

1 Josef W. Meri's introduction to al-Harawi's *Kitab al-Isharat ila Ma'rifat al-Ziyarat* (*A Lonely Wayfarer's Guide to Pilgrimage*) (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, Inc., 2004), xxv.

2 Al-Harawi's personal life journey was also marked by border crossing: belonging to a family that originally came from Herat, he was born in Mosul, Iraq; after briefly serving the Abbasid caliph in

embodied a rare spirit of fostering an authentic religio-cultural identity that to a certain degree was marked by a constant act of including and communing with the other, rather than excluding the other, a strategy that was more common during his time. This was a pious Muslim who, even while serving Saladin, never hesitated to testify about the presence of saintly and righteous people among the 'Frankish' in Jerusalem, at a time when anything 'Frankish' would have represented the reality of demonic force for most of his fellow Muslims.[3]

So, if we may ask, what enabled al-Harawi to foster this attitude throughout his life? For his ability to negotiate his strong identity as a Muslim in a constant and rather intimate encounter with the other is rather unusual. I surmise that his passion for doing pilgrimage must have played an important part. For al-Harawi and his like-minded pilgrims, pilgrimage was never just an act of piety fully enclosed in the confines of a particular religious tradition. Instead, it was often a sustained encounter with the 'strange and marvelous wonders' of the other and Other, made possible by the audacity of the pilgrims themselves to cross the borders, be they religious, cultural or political.[4] As shown in the life and work of al-Harawi, pilgrimage has become a privileged locus in which a creative negotiation of religious identity in the proximity and intimacy with God, the Other, as well as with the religious other, occurs in all its complexity.[5]

Shifting our attention to our own world, the persistence of the challenge of encountering alterity that al-Harawi and his contemporaries had faced is stubbornly noticeable, if not made much more complex due to what had happened in the tumultuous centuries in between. The Crusades are certainly no longer the norm of the day, but our age has yet to overcome the many barriers that we have come to put in place precisely at the decisive junctures where we have to encounter the other. In our era, dealing with the specter of hegemony against the other becomes much trickier precisely because it is so real, complex and

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Baghdad, he settled in Aleppo, Syria, working for various Ayyubid rulers, while doing an enormous amount of travels in the Near East, North Africa, Byzantium, and Mediterranean islands. He was buried in Aleppo. Besides being an avid pilgrim, al-Harawi was also an ascetic, preacher, counselor and emissary, as well as scholar and poet.

3 Amin Maalouf, *The Crusades through Arab Eyes* (New York: Schocken Books, 1984).

4 In the case of al-Harawi, both his passion for pilgrimage as well as his role as the emissary of Muslim rulers were marked by reaching out to the other. As a Muslim pilgrim, he visited Jewish and Christian sites, while as the emissary of various rulers, he worked for the rapprochement between the Caliph and the Ayyubids, between the Crusaders and the Ayyubids, and so forth. He was appointed a preacher of the congregational mosque in Baghdad by the Abbasid Caliph al-Nasir li-Din Allah (r. 575 H/1180 AD–622/1225), whose rule was marked by the rapprochement between the Sunnis and the Shiites. As a Sunni, he never hesitated in showing his deep respect for 'Ali, so much so that others might have seen him as a crypto-Shiite.

5 By stating this, I certainly do not view all forms of pilgrimage as belonging to this category. In some cases, pilgrimage can become narrow and exclusive, used as a sign of forging a distinct identity at the expense of the other. Even during al-Harawi's time, pilgrimage of this sort existed. The Crusaders were sometimes called 'soldiers-pilgrims'. In fact, part of their motivation was to regain the exclusive possession of the Holy Sites in Jerusalem, excluding even their eastern Christian brothers and sisters.