Integrating Vision: Comparative Theology as the Quest for Interreligious Wisdom

John Thatamanil

Abstract

This chapter argues that the two words in the term “comparative theology” generate between them a field of creative tension that require the nature of theology itself to be reimagined. The adjective “comparative” does not sit placidly alongside “theology,” leaving the latter materially unchanged for business as usual. The adjective pressures the noun to undergo transformation when encounters with other traditions compel comparative theology to remember that its primary genre once was, as Edward Farley has shown, *sapientia* or contemplative wisdom, and not academic text production. Because theological reflection in other traditions still remains a quest for such wisdom, an encounter between Christian theology as academic text production and theology as practiced by other traditions, will likely be of limited value. Theological writing that engages other traditions will have to harken back to its earliest genre—the quest for wisdom. Comparative theology, in at least one of its modes, will then become a quest for “interreligious wisdom.” In this chapter, I will attempt to offer a preliminary working definition of interreligious wisdom. The prime pedagogical question to follow is then, “How can interreligious wisdom be taught?”

1 Defining Disciplines: On Theologies of Religious Diversity and Comparative Theology

Two of the subfields at the center of Christian reflection on religious diversity, theology of religious pluralism and comparative theology, have flourished in Christian theological writing since the early 1990s.¹ The former subfield asks

¹ Among the earliest works identifying themselves explicitly as projects in comparative theology include Robert C. Neville's *Behind the Masks of God: An Essay toward Comparative Theology* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1991); Francis X. Clooney's *Theology after Vedanta: An Experiment in Comparative Theology* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1993); and Keith Ward's trilogy of books beginning with his *Religion and Revelation: A Theology of Revelation in the World's Religions* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1994).

about the meaning of religious diversity as such. Is religious diversity an error or part of the divine will? What is the meaning of that religious diversity for Christian faith? Comparative theology, on the other hand, focuses instead on concrete detailed engagements in which Christian theologians seek to learn more about ultimate reality from and with persons and texts of other religious traditions.

There was a brief sense of impasse and crisis in the late 1990s when some argued that comparative theology must replace a theology of religious pluralism because the latter enterprise seemed critically compromised. James Fredericks, in particular, argued that every extant option within the subfield had critical flaws.² However, new theologies of religious pluralism have since been ventured, and writing in both theological subfields flourishes, coming from a wide range of ecclesial communities including evangelicals, mainline Protestants, and Catholics.

The very work of theologies of religious pluralism—which I now prefer to call theologies of religious diversity (TRD)³—was once identified with theological liberals or pluralists such as John Hick and Paul Knitter as they were among the pioneering founders of the field.⁴ Responses to those voices from theological moderates and conservatives have served to broaden the range of available options, and that is much to the good of theological education. We are no longer in a historical moment in which the very attempt to discuss the meaning of religious diversity might give the appearance of presupposing a pluralist position. Regardless of where an institution or religious community falls on the theological spectrum,⁵ there are judicious voices that take seriously the question of the meaning of religious diversity, voices that can be taught in seminary and adult education classes. In sum, any theologian teaching a

2 For a sense of this impasse, see James Fredericks, *Faith among Faiths: Christianity and the Other Religions* (New Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1999).

3 For more on this matter, see my forthcoming book, *Circling the Elephant: A Comparative Theology of Religious Diversity* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2020). For now, it has always seemed awkward for a field to bear a name that is also given to one of the options within the field. To use “pluralism” as a name for one type within the field and for the field as a whole is, at the very least, inelegant and at worst confusing.

4 For John Hick, see his magnum opus, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005) and for Paul Knitter, see his *Introducing Theologies of Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002).

5 I use the word “spectrum” to characterize the field of theologies of religious diversity because the standard positions within the prevailing typology are not as discrete as the literature implies. Upon careful consideration, virtually any given theologian or theological position incorporates elements from across the typology. Typologies are good to think and teach with, but we ought not to lock ourselves within them.

responsible course on theologies of religious diversity now has access to the widest range of carefully articulated positions from and with which to teach.⁶ Students, whether exclusivist, inclusivist, pluralist, or particularist, can know that their position is a credible option from and with which to think, even if that initial position is subsequently subjected to stringent challenge.

What about the relationship between TRD and comparative theology (CT)? The sustained and patient work of learning with and from other religious traditions presupposes that there is some truth to be found in those traditions. To hold such a position would seem to require that theologians adopt, at the very least, an inclusivist posture, if not a still more robustly pluralist position. It is, of course, logically possible to do rigorous comparative theology from an exclusivist standpoint. Such comparative theology would amount to apologetics—disciplined learning about other traditions to argue that those traditions are mistaken in important ways.⁷ However, such work, at least done in responsible scholarly fashion, is rare to the point of vanishing. What is striking instead are evangelicals who have articulated reasons for believing that other traditions can and do hold religious truth that is not already found, at least explicitly, in their own traditions; such theologians have prepared the groundwork for doing comparative theology from an evangelical perspective even if that work still remains in its early stages. The work of Pentecostal theologians is especially noteworthy, and in particular the work of Amos Yong.⁸

One further note about the current state of theologies of religious diversity: not only is it the case that theologies of religious diversity are now being articulated from a wide variety of Christian confessional commitments, but TRD is being ventured from a variety of religious traditions. Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, and Jewish TRDs are readily available. This new religious diversity within the field is yet another reason to put to rest any talk about an impasse.⁹ In

6 Surely the reasons for this proliferation of a wide range of perspectives on religious diversity is due to the fact that religious diversity has become a matter of intimate experience for Christians from a wide range of confessional and theological orientations. Lived experience requires every theologian to think and write carefully about persons and communities who are no longer on the other side of the globe, but sometimes on the other side of the bed.

7 On the important role that apologetics can play in interreligious encounter, see Paul Griffiths, *An Apology for Apologetics: A Study in the Logic of Interreligious Dialogue* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007; previously published by Orbis, 1991).

8 Among this scholar's immensely prodigious output, I have found one of his slimmer volumes to be particularly powerful. See *Hospitality and the Other: Pentecost, Christian Practices, and the Neighbor* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015).

9 We will need more research to establish this point, but there is every reason to suspect that there is nothing "new" in absolute terms about these theologies of religious diversity. After all, virtually all of these traditions have been thinking about the meaning of diversity in

terms of pedagogy, the presence of this literature now means that classes in TRD need no longer be confined to Christian speculation about other religious traditions—an exercise that is interreligious in a rather limited sense. Now—and this turn is long overdue—our courses about the meaning of religious diversity can themselves be robustly interreligious. The gaze can be reversed. Christians can hear how persons from other religious traditions think about the meaning of religious diversity in general and the meaning of Christianity in particular.

Whereas TRD, both in scholarship and pedagogy, has been structured by its typologies, textured comparative theological engagement across traditions refuses grand overarching judgments. Therefore, there can be no typologies within comparative theology. To read any text with theological judgment, whether from one's own tradition or another, is to find oneself in the midst of complex, subtle, and nuanced decision making of a sort that is resistant to rubrics. My own work, which explores the category of the human predicament by appeal to the "medical model," shows that not just traditions, but individual theologians within a given tradition, will disagree about diagnoses of the human predicament, etiologies, prognoses, and prescribed therapies. On such matters, grand sweeping pronouncements cannot be proffered.¹⁰ Comparative theologies will, in their *outcomes*, be as diverse as theologies are in general both within and across religious traditions. That said, given the relatively early stage of contemporary comparative theology as a field, there is not an indefinitely large set of approaches or *methods* for doing comparative theology. The work of teaching comparative theology, therefore, need not be hampered by the sheer variety of possible theological outcomes. As in any given field, methods are relatively few, but outcomes are many.¹¹

religiously diverse geopolitical contexts—often from positions of marginality—for a very long time. What is new is the emergence of these voices within a particular discourse constituted as an academic field.

10 See my *Immanent Divine: God, Creation, and the Human Predicament. An East-West Conversation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006).

11 The work of Francis X. Clooney's situated comparison—the work of crossing over and coming back—and Robert Neville's more speculative and metaphysically-grounded comparative methodology remain the two most prominent methodological options within comparative theology. The more recent work of Michelle Voss Roberts and Joshua Samuel, in which an ethnographic component is introduced into comparative theology, introduces new permutations. For Voss Roberts, see especially her *Tastes of the Divine: Hindu and Christian Theologies of Emotion* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014). For Samuel, see *Untouchable Bodies, Resistance, and Liberation: A Comparative Theology of Divine Possessions* (Boston: Brill, 2020) Likewise, the ritual turn in comparative theology inaugurated by Marianne Moyaert presents yet another option. See Marianne Moyaert's

When I read any theologian, whether a co-religionist or not, I routinely find myself in enthusiastic agreement and vehement disagreement depending on the particular passage or page I happen to be reading. Theological judgment inevitably hinges on the particulars. What does that mean for the work of theologies of religious diversity? Has the time now come to surrender typologies there as well? Regardless of what one believes about the merits of the classical typology in TRD, it is worth bearing in mind that it is misleading to make claims about entire “religions” as such. Hence, any typology that operates by appeal to judgments about entire traditions—all are saving, one is most efficacious, only one is saving—is sure to be inelegant and mistaken. These observations suggest that interreligious theological reflection will need to work for a richer synthesis between theologies of religious diversity and comparative theology so that these tasks are no longer carried out in isolation but in “mutual fecundation.”¹²

Even as we begin to sense the need for a deeper interpenetration between what we say *about* others (theologies of religious diversity) and the work of learning *from* those others (comparative theology), the latter discipline has recently experienced several transformations. Comparative theology—at least as performed by one of its contemporary founding fathers, namely Francis X. Clooney—has come to be characterized (and perhaps caricatured) as marked by a certain overly pristine logic: a person cleanly identified as located within one particular tradition ventures out into another clearly demarcated tradition only to return transformed and yet still remains, at least in terms of religious identification, what she was prior to departure.

In light of their classroom experiences, many younger theologians have questioned this way of imagining comparative theology as a process of “crossing over” and “coming back.” Many of the essays in the recent *Comparative Theology in the Millennial Classroom* make the point that linear accounts of belonging do not apply to millennial students, many of whom are untraditioned “nones,” unformed by any particular tradition and hence with no traditioned starting point. Still others are shaped from the first by more than one tradition, by virtue of intermarriage for example, and so cannot be said to have only one determinate tradition of origin.¹³ This transformation of how we understand the practitioners of comparative theology and how that practice is necessarily transformed by variegated patterns of belonging and affiliation is

“Towards a Ritual Turn in Comparative Theology: Opportunities, Challenges, and Problems,” *Harvard Theological Review* 111, no. 1 (January 2018): 1–23. All of these approaches can easily be taught within any single one semester course in comparative theology.

12 I borrow this creative expression from the writing of Raimon Panikkar.

13 Mara Brecht and Reid B. Locklin, eds. *Comparative Theology in the Millennial Classroom: Hybrid Identities, Negotiated Boundaries* (New York: Routledge Press, 2016).

an important and welcome change in comparative theological research and teaching.

As important as these transformations are, a still more basic transformation of the field is called for. Let me explain by adverting to personal experience. Some years ago, I created and served as Project Director for the American Academy of Religion/Luce Summer Seminars in Theologies of Religious Pluralism and Comparative Theology. Those seminars were designed to gather an interreligious teaching team of experts in those fields to introduce their areas of expertise to university and seminary faculty (AAR/Luce Fellows) who were relative newcomers. (This teaching team included, among others, Jeannine Hill Fletcher, S. Mark Heim, John Makransky, Peter Ochs, Anantanand Rambachan, Najeeba Syeed, and one of the founding figures in contemporary comparative theology, Francis X. Clooney.) During that process, some of the fellows repeatedly pressed us to be clearer: just what exactly is “comparative theology?” We spoke of comparative theology as both comparative and genuinely constructive/normative: comparative theology does more than compare. It genuinely aspires to learn more about ultimate reality by way of its engagements with other religious traditions. We talked about styles and methods of comparison including those of Clooney and Robert Neville. Clooney even ended up writing what is now a widely read and highly regarded primer on the nature and tasks of comparative theology over the course of these seminars.¹⁴

And yet, I observed lingering dissatisfaction among the fellows. I believe I now see (with the light of hindsight) what the fellows were trying to convey. In effect, they were saying, “You have told us a great deal about the term ‘comparative’ in ‘comparative theology,’ but you haven’t really spoken sufficiently about the term ‘theology.’” In retrospect, I am unsure that we ever managed to address this question to the satisfaction of our fellows. That question remained unanswered because, to some degree, we took the term “theology” for granted. After all, we know what theology is. We treated the noun as the constant and the adjective as the variable. We assumed that the variable needs unfolding and explication whereas the noun remains stable. To be clear, so precise an intuition never came to explicit thought; that conviction remained largely subterranean and so shaped our deliberations without quite rising to the surface. The danger here is plain: regnant Christian styles of doing theology remain uninterrogated and so the de facto norm. How Christian theologies past and their analogs in other traditions operate is rendered invisible.

14 Francis X. Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning across Religious Borders* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

My suspicion now is that the fellows who were being introduced to the work of comparative theology—gifted with “beginner’s mind”—tacitly appreciated something that some among the instructional team, or at least just I, did not. The term “comparative” does not sit placidly next to the term “theology” leaving the latter unaffected and unchanged; it refuses to behave. The adjective pressures the noun in ways that we had not then understood and likely will not for quite some time to come. Christian theology’s familiar adjectival companions include the terms “dogmatic,” “systematic,” “practical,” “pastoral,” and “constructive,” but only rather recently the term “comparative.” “Comparative theology” is not wholly new. Francis Clooney, Hugh Nicholson, and Tomoko Masuzawa have rightly reminded contemporaries that there is a nineteenth century literature on comparative theology.¹⁵ But it is not clear whether those who used the term then or now fully appreciated the metamorphic pressures generated by this most unusual of conceptual pairings.

I have argued elsewhere that the phrase comparative theology is likely to strike some as oxymoronic. Theologians customarily take for granted that theology is deliberative reflection about ultimate matters that takes place *from*, *for*, and *within* the parameters and constraints of a particular religious tradition. Theology is customarily distinguished from philosophy, for example, precisely insofar as philosophy rejects the “tutelage of tradition” and “dares to reason” autonomously. Theology, by contrast, as Clooney notes, is “faith seeking understanding.” And Clooney does not mean faith here as a universal human propensity, but faith as shaped and formed by particular confessions, creeds, and practices of the Christian community. Hence, comparative theology for Clooney is *Christian faith* seeking understanding, although of course, Clooney can readily imagine and welcome analogous particular projects emerging from theologians who belong to other traditions. Under these definitions, it is easy to see why some might think that if theological reflection is comparative, it cannot really be theology; and if it is theology proper, it cannot and indeed must not be comparative.

One way to respond to the pressures exerted by the juxtaposition of the two terms is to observe that the term “theology” has now come to acquire new generic meanings. The term can and does now refer to normative reflection as it takes place within any tradition. The apparent elasticity of the term is particularly striking in the case of some Buddhist scholars who have adopted

15 See Hugh Nicholson, *Comparative Theology and the Problem of Religious Rivalry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) and Tomoko Masuzawa’s *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

“theology” for their own purposes. I am thinking here in particular of the remarkable volume of essays, edited by Roger Jackson and John Makransky called notably, *Buddhist Theology: Critical Reflections by Contemporary Buddhist Scholars*.¹⁶ The full-throated adoption of the term “theology” by scholars from a tradition which is customarily regarded as lacking any *theos* altogether suggests that the term now enjoys an extensive semantic range even before the term “comparative” is brought into close proximity with it.

But even here, caution is warranted. The fact that some Buddhists find the term acceptable does not indicate that the term itself has therefore become generic, universal, or neutral. Words stubbornly carry the freight of their semantic and cultural histories with them—a truth that one does not have to be Gadamerian to accept. Nor is it the case that theology has to be stripped of its conventional meanings before it can become usable in interreligious and comparative contexts.

2 Reimagining Theology as the Quest for Wisdom

The recent pliability and expanding semantic range of theology notwithstanding, there remains a certain stark disjuncture between normative reflection as it transpires in a variety of other traditions and normative reflection as it takes place in contemporary western Christian quarters. Borrowing from the language of Edward Farley, that disjunction can be identified as a basic conflict about the question of genre. The question Farley asks and wants theologians to ask is just what is (Christian) theology’s primary genre?

To answer that question, Farley offers an archaeology of knowledge—to use Foucault’s phrase—to trace the historical configurations that have shaped what we take theology to be and to mean. In brief, he argues for three crucial historical periods each with its own radically distinct understanding of what theology is: “the period of pious learning (divinity), the period of specialized learning, and the period of professional education.” Although what Farley has to say about each of these three historical periods and the nature of theology within them is important, I am particularly struck by the transition he maps between Period 1 and Period 2, the transition from divinity to specialized learning. Hastily summarized, Farley observes that theological education in its earliest mode was a training in divinity where, “Divinity named not just an objective science but a personal knowledge of God and the things of God in the

16 Roger Jackson and John Makransky, eds., *Buddhist Theology: Critical Reflections by Contemporary Buddhist Scholars* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

context of salvation. Hence, the study of divinity (theology) was an exercise of piety, a dimension of faith.¹⁷ Farley uses a wide range of evocative expressions to name the earliest and, for him, the primary meaning of theology. Theology in its earliest period was, “a personal, cognitive disposition toward divine things.”¹⁸ In more elaborated fashion, he writes, “First, theology is a term for an actual, individual cognition of God and things related to God, a cognition which in most treatments attends faith and has eternal happiness as its final goal.”¹⁹ But that is plainly not what the genre of theology is now generally understood to be. He continues, “Second, theology is a term for a discipline, a self-conscious scholarly enterprise of understanding. In the former sense theology is a habit (*habitus*) of the human soul. In the latter it is a discipline, usually occurring in some sort of pedagogical setting.”²⁰

For Farley the transition between these two meanings and genres of theology occurs over a vast historical sweep. The first and most ancient meaning of theology persists from the early church and even through the founding of the medieval universities in the twelfth century. After the founding of these universities, theology begins to acquire a double sense. The first and primary meaning of theology is retained and by no means disappears. But theological knowledge understood as (*scientia*) also takes on a second set of meanings, not just “a passion or perfection resulting from the union of something intelligible and an actual intellectual power,” but also, “the enterprise of investigation or reflection which produces such knowledge. And as these enterprises can be directed to different sorts of things, types of *sciences* arise.”²¹ For Farley, it is at this juncture that theology acquires a complex double meaning, a doubling that has complicated our thinking about theology thereafter. The first, Farley calls “theology/knowledge,” and the second, he calls “theology/discipline.”²² Farley argues that our histories of the meanings of theology and our contemporary conversations about theology become infelicitous when we forget the distinction between these two meanings and confound them.

That problem did not, however, vitiate thinking about theology from the twelfth century through till the Enlightenment, because both meanings of *scientia* persisted during this period. They began to fall apart only after the German university model took over when the earlier and primary meaning and

17 Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2001; originally published by Fortress Press, 1994), 7.

18 Farley, 30.

19 Farley, 31.

20 Farley.

21 Farley, 33; emphasis in the original.

22 Farley.

genre of theology began to recede. About the earlier medieval period, Farley writes that the “school theologians,” borrowing from Aristotelian anthropology, “portrayed knowledge (*scientia*) as a habit, an enduring orientation and dexterity of the soul, a knowledge of God and what God reveals.”²³ The sense of *scientia* as discipline does not displace this older meaning. In fact, Farley is clear about this period: “And if there is a dominant position, it is that theology is a *practical*, not theoretical, habit having the character of wisdom.”²⁴

What has transpired since, after the Enlightenment and the rise to prominence of the German university model, is a severing of the two meanings of *scientia* and the rise of a specialist discipline as the primary genre and meaning of theology. Farley writes,

The genre of theology, which has dominated the modern era, is a field of study, a “science,” replete with advanced degrees, learned journals, professional organizations, linguistic skills, and specialty rigor. It is clear that if this is what theology is, it is not available to the uninitiated. It is enclosed within an academic institution. Professional teachers pursue it; ordinary church members, and in many cases, even their clerical leaders, do not. Theology is done for them, about them, on behalf of them, but not by them. It is also clear that theology as a scholarly activity will not survive the student’s move from seminary to congregation or other leadership posts. This means that to teach theology as an academic field has obsolescence built into it. It is quickly shed like a heavy coat in hot weather. It is a pedagogy designed to be left behind at graduation.²⁵

In sum, theology is now one discipline among other university disciplines, and there is little sense in effecting unity either between these disciplines or between theology as academic pursuit and the formational work of the minister. Theology now operates almost entirely as a field of “academic study” and its normative written expression is the academic text. That understanding of theology remains the default norm that comparative theology inherits. Theology so understood may have lost its contemplative character, but not its Christian provenance nor its shaping by a particular historical turn of the Enlightenment.

²³ Farley, 35.

²⁴ Farley; emphasis in the original.

²⁵ Edward Farley, “Four Pedagogical Mistakes: A Mea Culpa,” *Teaching Theology and Religion* 9, no. 4 (2005): 200–203.

3 Comparative Theology as the Quest for Interreligious Wisdom

Farley's concern in these writings is *pedagogical*: how can the teaching of theology be transformed so that Christian theology remembers its earliest and primary meaning? How can that recovery revitalize theological education so that the formation of clergy and others can genuinely take the form of "minister as theologian," wherein the identity of the theologian is marked by the antique but ever-relevant sense of embodied practical wisdom.

My concern is *interreligious*. I wish to argue that the transformation that Farley calls for is essential and indispensable for comparative theology if comparative *theology* is to have any resonance with the modes of reflective activity taking place in other traditions. Why? Those who read in other traditions, even casually, quickly register that theology—or rather its analogs in other traditions—does not belong to the academic genre. Theology in these traditions—and I have in mind particularly Buddhism and Hinduism, no matter how rigorously analytical in their modes of argumentation, is always oriented toward personal and communal transformation. Farley's language of sapiential wisdom is on the mark. What Buddhists and Hindus are after is a conception of theology as a "*practical*, not theoretical, habit having the character of wisdom." It follows that if comparative theology *in its very genre* is to be in accord with the traditions that it works with and seeks to learn from, then comparative theology must also undergo the shift that Farley commends. It too must come to understand itself as sapiential wisdom, "a personal cognitive disposition toward divine things." To the extent that Farley's call is heard and Christian theologians remember and reinhabit the ancient sense of theology as wisdom, then the way is prepared for comparative theology to make the same turn.

Yet comparative theologians need not wait. Comparative theologians must make this turn if they wish to be in harmony with the materials that they find in other traditions. Otherwise, they will find themselves in a clash of incommensurable genres between, on the one hand, academic text production in which theology consists largely of propositions *about* divinity, and on the other, modes of theology in which theologians speak not only about but instead *of* and even *to* divinity or ultimate reality more generally. In the latter communities and tradition, even discourse about ultimate reality is proffered not for the sake of *information* but rather *transformation*.

Consider for example the *Brahmasutra* and the seventh-century master teacher Sankara's commentary on that text. That foundational text of the

Advaita Vedanta tradition begins, “Then therefore the enquiry into Brahman.”²⁶ The Sanskrit is, “*atha atah brahmajijnasa*.” Although the term, *brahmajijnasa* is translated customarily as “enquiry into Brahman,” the master teacher Sankara and the subsequent commentarial tradition is clear that the root grammatical and exegetical meaning of the term is “the desire to know” (*jijnasa*) Brahman. What sort of knowing is this? Is the enquiry or desire to know Brahman a quest for propositional knowledge? No. Even if what Sankara undertakes in the *Brahmasutrabhasya* is a closely argued and rigorous commentary, he is clear about what motivates the entire effort: “Virtuous deeds have secular prosperity as their results and these depend on the performance (of some rites etc.). But the knowledge of Brahman has emancipation as its result, and it does not depend on any other performance.”²⁷

The knowledge sought after here is not a narrowly theoretical knowledge; the end goal or *telos* of this knowledge is nothing less than “emancipation” or liberation (*moksa*). Indeed, even to undertake such an inquiry, the student must possess certain prerequisites.

They are discrimination between the eternal and the non-eternal; dispassion for the enjoyment of fruits (of work) here and hereafter; a perfection of such practices as control of the mind, control of the senses and organs, etc.; and a longing for liberation. Granted the existence of these, Brahman can be deliberated on or known even before or after an inquiry into virtuous deeds, but not otherwise.²⁸

Here again, Sankara teaches that the student must possess certain qualities and capacities before undertaking enquiry into Brahman. The admission requirements for the course of reading scripture are rigorous. In the immediate context of his commentary, Sankara is taking up an argument with the Purva Mimamsa school about whether those prerequisites should include knowledge of ritual practice and ethical action—*karma* broadly speaking. His answer is, strictly speaking, no. Knowledge of ritual practice and ritual theory are not required for taking up enquiry into Brahman. What matters is whether the student possesses virtues, capacities, and dispositions identified by Sankara.

26 Sankara, *Vedanta-Sutras with the Commentary by Sankaracarya, Part 1*, trans. George Thibaut, Vol. 34 of Sacred Books of the East, ed. Max Muller (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988), 9.

27 Sankara, *Brahmasutrabhasya*, trans. Swami Gambhirananda (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1993), 8.

28 Sankara, 9.

However, within the larger compass of Sankara's writing, we know that undertaking virtuous action, including ritual action, without attachment to the fruits of such action, is one of the means by which students can acquire the capacities enumerated by Sankara. When I engage in a virtuous action—without thought of how it might redound to my benefit and for the sake of that virtuous action alone—Sankara argues that such action leads to purification of mind (*cittasuddhi*). Such purity of mind is marked by the virtues and dispositions named in Sankara's list of prerequisites. Right actions done for their sake alone are ancillary means by which a student may come to acquire the virtues and dispositions required for inquiry into Brahman. Still, if these qualities are present, *regardless of how they have been acquired*, students are poised to commence inquiry into Brahman. Hence, those virtues alone suffice.

The details of these debates matter for gathering a nuanced appreciation for Sankara's pedagogical project. But even apart from the subtleties of the arguments between Mimamskas and Vedantins, one thing is clear: Sankara is a theological teacher who teaches for transformation, and that is what reading the scriptures and the *Brahmasutras* are meant to be accomplish. The reading of the scriptures, the sutras, and his commentaries thereon are not in the first instance meant merely to convey propositional knowledge about Brahman. After all, given the ineffable nature of Brahman, no set of propositions is adequate. Brahman exceeds all language. *Neti, neti*, not this, not that.

The subsequent content of what Sankara has to teach will routinely include elements that will strike the western theological reader as familiar—arguments for the existence of Brahman, descriptions of the nature of Brahman and the like. What is noteworthy for present purposes is that those tasks are meant, not to generate in students a conceptual knowledge of ultimate reality, but to generate in properly prepared students deep transformation that will set them free from the cycle of transmigration. Indeed, the final teaching that Sankara has to offer is not that there exists an infinite reality named Brahman somewhere out there. The final goal of all his teaching is to persuade his readers to recognize that Brahman is just what they themselves always already are. *Tat tvam asi*, you are that. You are the infinite mystery. The light of consciousness that shines in you and makes possible all your worldly knowing, that very self (*atman*) is Brahman.

There is no deeper transformation possible than this. Persons who had formerly thought of themselves as finite ego-selves, threatened by danger and hoping to be completed and fulfilled by objects of desire come to see that that is not at all who or what they are. Instead, through karma yoga—disciplined action unattached to the fruits of action—the guru's guidance, and scriptural exegesis, they come to the knowledge that they just are Infinite reality itself. Such transformation can indeed only be called wisdom.

Sankara offers just one example of the kind of materials that comparative theologians might encounter when studying traditions other than their own. What befalls a theologian, let us say a Christian theologian, who is moved and claimed by Sankara and the tradition he mediates? If the *claims* and *aims* Sankara commends register their power and desirability on the heart and mind of a given theologian, what is that theologian to do? Here attention to particularity matters. If the claims and aims of Sankara's affirmation of nonduality (*advaita*) supplant a theologian's prior convictions, then the matter is relatively simple to resolve, at least in theory. Conversion is the solution.²⁹ The more interesting and complex challenge arises when the claims and aims of another tradition are felt to *supplement* rather than *supplant* one's prior convictions. What then is one to do? It is here that the notion of comparative theology as interreligious wisdom becomes particularly appealing and compelling.

What then is interreligious wisdom? Interreligious wisdom is the capacity to see the world through more than one set of religious lenses and to combine what is seen thereby into an integrated vision. That is just what one is called to do if one is claimed by both some particular form of Christian wisdom and Advaita convictions. Are these two distinct ways of seeing the world compatible? If so, how? What can persons and communities learn by drawing on the wisdom of both traditions? Answering questions such as these is the challenge of comparative theology.

Let's begin with the metaphor of lenses. For any wearer of glasses (as I am), the metaphor of lenses is suggestive. I am enabled to see, or at least see clearly, because the corrective prescriptions of my lenses make improved vision possible. Intriguingly, and this is often true in childhood, you often fail to recognize that your vision is far from optimal. After all, how could you? Others detect the symptoms—squinting, teary eyes, and headaches—and suggest that you might need glasses. How far your vision is from 20/20 is something you come to recognize only when you are sitting in an ophthalmologist's chair. "Which is better, this one or ... this one?" Only then, after your vision has been corrected, are you in a position to truly appreciate just how just how poor your vision was in the first place.

This metaphor is illuminating because most religious traditions take themselves to be corrective lenses, albeit of a metaphysical sort. They hold that human beings are captured in complex predicaments marked by affective and cognitive disorders that make it impossible for them to see the world and

29 While "conversion" is often understood as a category that is inapplicable to classical Hinduism, it is nonetheless the case that a variety of Hindu movements have emerged in the last century that now welcome non-Hindus into their ranks. ISKCON and Arya Samaj are the two most widely-known examples of such inclusive communities.

themselves truly. Curative treatment is necessary before right seeing is possible. Those who have not undergone treatment are in no position to understand the gravity of what ails them. Each religious tradition—or rather strands within it—offers a richly articulated account of what ails us and how to cure it. The wisdom that a tradition has to offer to rectify this predicament must be communicated in a graduated or incremental manner. Strategies of communication need to take into account what people are capable of understanding at any given stage in their developmental unfolding through the treatment process. As spiritual maturation takes place, new and subtler accounts of truth can be communicated.

The category of “predicament” can be framed neutrally with respect to the gravity of the condition under diagnosis by the tradition in question. The precise nature and gravity of the predicament is a matter of internal debate within traditions as well as across them. Nor does predicament discourse entail positing something like original sin as some Christian traditions do, or beginningless ignorance as Hindu and Buddhist traditions do. Some traditions are unwilling to ascribe a primordial fault of this kind. The category only entails that deep and accurate knowledge of the way things are will require addressing some ailment, propensity, or condition that obstructs or impedes such knowing.

Addressing such predicaments is never merely a matter of conveying information. Reading a prescription or knowing the chemical composition of one’s medicine is not the same as taking it. Whether one works with the metaphor of corrective lenses or this second metaphor of a human predicament as illness for which some treatment is required, transformation is a necessary precondition for right knowing. One might be able to recite the Four Noble Truths, but that is not the same thing as seeing the world as Buddhists do, let alone seeing the world as the enlightened do. Why? The Four Noble Truths, at least as explicated by some particular Buddhist community, articulate a comprehensive interpretive scheme—a way of seeing the whole of things from a Buddhist perspective. But for such a scheme to count as wisdom, the interpretive scheme must be installed in the body. It must come to shape the *comportment* of those who wish to see as Buddhists do. To see as Buddhists do is to move ever closer to seeing as the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas do.

Just what is comportment? Before I offer a formal definition, let me first turn to a narrative, in this case, Chuang Tzu’s tale of famously skilled and subtle butcher, Cook Ting who is carving up an ox in front of Lord Wen-Hui. In the story, Cook Ting carves up the ox with such ease, grace, and fluidity that his work has the appearance of a carefully choreographed dance: “At every touch

of his hand, every heave of his shoulder, every move of his feet, every thrust of his knee—zip! zoop! He slithered the knife along with a zing, and all was in perfect rhythm, as though he were performing the dance of the Mulberry Grove or keeping time to the Ching-shou music.” Witnessing this, Lord Wen-Hui exclaims, “Ah, this is marvelous! Imagine skill reaching such heights!”³⁰

And, here, in an inversion characteristic of Chuang Tzu, the cook corrects and instructs the Lord by saying that what he is up to has little to do with skill. Here, we must turn to the narrative at length:

Cook Ting laid down his knife and replied, “What I care about is the Way, which goes beyond skill. When I first began cutting up oxen, all I could see was the ox itself. After three years I no longer saw the whole ox. And now—now I go at it by spirit and don’t look with my eyes. Perception and understanding have come to a stop and spirit moves where it wants. I go along with the natural makeup, strike in the big hollows, guide the knife through the big openings, and following things as they are. So I never touch the smallest ligament or tendon, much less a main joint.

A good cook changes his knife once a year—because he cuts. A mediocre cook changes his knife once a month—because he hacks. I’ve had this knife of mine for nineteen years and I’ve cut up thousands of oxen with it, and yet the blade is as good as though it had just come from the grindstone. There are spaces between the joints, and the blade of the knife has really no thickness. If you insert what has no thickness into such spaces, then there’s plenty of room—more than enough for the blade to play about it. That’s why after nineteen years the blade of my knife is still as good as when it first came from the grindstone.³¹

Within its native context, Chuang Tzu is teaching a characteristically Taoist truth. To follow the Way is to know the joints of reality or, to use another metaphor, to go with the grain of things—in this case, to know where the empty spaces are. The invitation issued is to be attuned to the way of things and to act accordingly, a way of acting that is so gracious that it gives appearance of musicality, or of a carefully choreographed dance. Such work gives the appearance of being effortless, although of course, as the tale makes clear, effortlessness is

30 Chuang Tzu, *Chuang Tzu: Basic Writings*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), Kindle ed., “The Secret of Caring for Life,” Section 3.

31 Chuang Tzu, “The Secret of Caring for Life,” Section 3.

not easily or speedily acquired. It has taken Cook Ting years to carve as he now can without dulling his blade in the slightest.

A full treatment of how this dexterity is attained is beyond the scope of these reflections. But much is clear: Ting's capacities are installed in the body by way of spirit. They are not accomplished by deliberative rationality or even by way of a knack or skill narrowly construed. They seem to rest in a deeper intuition that has seen, with eyes closed, the deep patterns of nature. That (non)seeing has become manifest in a set of bodily dispositions and capacities that now allow him to do his work effortlessly, because those dispositions and capacities have become part of his comportment in the world. Ting is so in accord with the Way that he can now engage the ox in a fashion that is strangely free of violence. He no longer hacks at things. So, his blade is not blunt nor, we might add, is he. Cook Ting has come to know the Tao in his very flesh.

The tale concludes with one more surprising reversal: Lord Wen-Hui exclaims, "I have heard the words of Cook Ting and learned how to care for life!" A Lord not only learns from a cook, but in this topsy-turvy vision, a butcher teaches care for life. The tale offers its final lesson: the work of managing our political affairs, which is the labor of caring for life, requires understanding the Tao. The rhythms and patterns of human life are nothing other than the patterns found in the natural world. That is why the Lord can learn from the cook.

Comportment then is the state in which persons come to be true to the way things are. It is bodily right orientation, reflected in stable dispositions and capacities, and prized by a particular religious tradition's comprehensive interpretive scheme. Comportment is accomplished by undertaking the therapeutic regimen commended by that particular tradition in order to remedy contrary dispositions and incapacities that mark the human predicament. Undertaking a therapeutic regimen, which might include scripture reading, memorization, contemplation, meditative practices, singing, dancing, celebrations of Eucharist, consumption of hallucinogenic compounds, etc., generates in persons and communities the quality of comportment prized by the community in question.

What does this tale have to do with interreligious wisdom? Before the narrative can offer us an object lesson about interreligious wisdom, it is a pointer to what constitutes Taoist wisdom, at least as Chuang Tzu sees it. To be wise in the Taoist way is to train oneself in the dispositions and capacities that enable one to be in harmony with the patterns of the Tao. Cook Ting knows the Tao not by textual scholarship. He knows by way of spirit, intuition, and the long and painstaking process of bodily learning. What such bodily learning makes possible is not *knowledge about* the Tao but *knowledge of* the Tao.

Elsewhere, I have spoken of this difference in another vocabulary: first-order and second-order knowledge.³² In that essay, I spoke of the difference between the swimmer's knowledge of water and the knowledge about water possessed by a non-swimmer who nonetheless happens to be an expert in fluid mechanics. Without trivializing in any way what the latter knows about water—surely vastly in excess of most swimmers—the expert risks drowning if dropped into the deep end of a pool. His encyclopedic knowledge *about* does not generate knowledge *of*. The swimmer's knowledge of water is akin to Cook Ting's knowledge of the Tao. In both cases, we are speaking of an embodied wisdom, one that surely includes, but in some ways exceeds conceptual or cognitive knowing. Cook Ting has acquired an embodied intimacy with the ways of the Tao by long training.

What are the implications of this analysis for interreligious wisdom? I venture that interreligious wisdom requires that the one seeking such wisdom train herself in acquiring the dispositions and capacities prized by other ways of being in the world, and integrate into her bodily comportment, in the Christian case, what a Christian body already knows. If religious wisdom is embodied knowing, it must follow that interreligious wisdom must likewise be installed in the body. Hence, if religious wisdom is embodied orientation to understanding the world as Hindus, Buddhist, Muslims, or Christians do, then interreligious wisdom is the work of acquiring a complex and enfolded wisdom that requires the creative synthesis of two ways of seeing the world.

Returning to the metaphor of lenses, we know that with or without glasses, just such integration is happening in the brain as it synthesizes distinctive information about the world that is given to the brain by each individual eye. What each sees is not identical with what the other sees. In fact, it is precisely the distinctiveness of each that makes depth of field possible. With just one eye, the world would seem to us flat. Binocular vision offers depth perception.

Without suggesting that the wisdom that comes to us from just one religious tradition is impoverished, it is possible nonetheless to suggest that interreligious binocular vision might well offer perspectives on ultimate reality and world that monocular vision does not. To see as Christians do *and* to see as Buddhists do is to have attention called to features of experience that are typically not the focus of one tradition alone. Moreover, deep resonance and complementarity might also emerge. What might be the effect of practicing sociality through Eucharistic life and learning to see the world as marked by dependent coarising (*pratityasamutpada*)? What dimensions of the divine life

32 John J. Thatamanil, "Transreligious Theology as the Quest for Interreligious Wisdom," *Open Theology*, vol. 2, (2016): 357–59.

might be gifted to Christians who have come to understand nonduality of self and ultimacy through Sankara's Advaita? Just such possibilities are intimated through the ancient Indian parable of the blind(folded) men and the elephant which I have treated elsewhere.³³ Trust in this promise of richness is what motivates the quest for interreligious wisdom.

To desire interreligious wisdom, even to hold that such wisdom is possible, presupposes a great many subtle affirmations. First, interreligious wisdom is possible only if there are, at least in the case of some traditions, ways of seeing and experiencing the world that are compossible and even complementary. When considering any two traditions—or for that matter, even very different strands of a single tradition—fundamental differences often seem quite evident—although even here, the comparativist must refrain from drawing premature conclusions. Differences do not stand up and announce themselves but are discerned through careful comparative learning. And even when strong disagreement is eventually recognized, such differences may prove to be productive. The discovery that you and I disagree on some matter—and not just think that we disagree—is already a real gain in conversation, particularly if we begin with very different religious vocabularies. We have clarified terms and concepts and have come through sustained conversation to see that we really do disagree.

Now, a subsequent conversation can begin about what to make of our disagreement. Is one of us in error? Both? Perhaps both our perspectives are partial or valid from different but not incompatible perspectives? Are our differences consequential or relatively marginal? Engaging with these questions can be deeply enriching and can enhance our readings of experience and our sense of the world. In other words, discovery of disagreement need mean neither the end to conversation nor the foreclosure of the possibility of interreligious wisdom.

Indeed, in the quest for interreligious wisdom, simple agreement would be less promising. If you and I are already in agreement, then it is unlikely that I have something new to learn from you. Of course, that we can discern agreement even across strikingly different religious and linguistic vocabularies is no trivial matter; there is much to be learned from recognizing that differences in religious idioms need not entail incommensurability of thought and experience. But deeper possibilities for interreligious wisdom present themselves

33 See my forthcoming book, *Circling the Elephant: A Comparative Theology of Religious Diversity* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2020). There I make clear why it will not do to speak of blind men for reasons indebted to lessons learned from disability theology.

when one intuitively or senses not identity or agreement but resonances, possible complementarity, and tensions that might prove to be productive.

In sum, interreligious wisdom is a matter of comportment that generates first order knowledge about ultimate reality and the world by integrating what one has come to see about the world through more than one set of religious lenses. To train oneself in the dispositions and capacities prized by two or more religious ways of being in the world and to integrate those dispositions and capacities into embodied knowing is the desired goal of interreligious wisdom. At its deepest and best, such wisdom is not merely a matter of conceptual learning—it is information about other traditions that now is integrated alongside information previously known about one's home tradition. That preliminary work is important and noteworthy and must play a role in the quest for interreligious wisdom. Such information teaches us about the claims of other traditions. But interreligious wisdom attends to the way in which those claims are intimately wedded to the aims sought for by the tradition. Interest in *aims* not just *claims* is the distinguishing feature of interreligious wisdom *qua* wisdom. When one is committed to the aims of two or more traditions, then learning *information* must of necessity become part of a larger quest for *transformation*.

4 Toward a Pedagogy for Interreligious Wisdom

What then are the implications of this vision of comparative theology for pedagogy? I have argued that comparative theology seeks interreligious wisdom. Moreover, I have argued that essential to this process is the first order knowing that is generated by undertaking the disciplines or therapeutic regimens of more than one tradition. It should be further specified that we must undertake such therapeutic regimens in responsible learning with and from persons from those traditions in order to avoid problems of misappropriation. Simply knowing about the world as Buddhists or Hindus do is not yet interreligious wisdom. Interreligious wisdom requires a further step: the move toward integration—thinking about and living with what one is coming to know of ultimate reality and the world through two or more ways of knowing, but now as written into the body. Here, we have to pose a question as old as Plato's *Euthyphro*, albeit slightly reconfigured: can interreligious wisdom be taught?

Pondering that question is complex and context dependent. A complete answer would require extended consideration that moves well beyond the scope of this chapter. One would have to take up questions about the epistemological norms that currently prevail in university-based education, the

extent to which even seminaries are constrained by those norms, both for good and for ill, and even mundane questions such as staffing. After all, it is appropriate to wonder if interreligious wisdom can be taught in a religiously homogenous seminary. Without treating each of these questions in full, I wish only to argue here that incremental steps in the direction of interreligious wisdom can be ventured. I shall use my own institutional context to speak of how this might be done.

At Union Theological Seminary, we have two instructors who are substantially trained in and qualified to teach within distinctive Zen Buddhist lineages. Both have decades of meditative experience within their respective Zen schools. In addition to teaching Zen traditions in rigorous and scholarly fashion with recourse to primary materials, both also teach courses in which Buddhist meditation is practiced. To use my language, both teach students Buddhist interpretive schemes *and* the therapeutic regimes by which the world as understood by those interpretive schemes is inscribed into flesh. Over the course of the semester, they require students in their classes to engage in many hours of meditation outside the classroom. Of course, there is no way in which, despite these hours of practice, students can accrue even a fraction of the time to which disciplined adherents of Zen traditions, especially monastics, have committed themselves. Nevertheless, this embodied learning provides a meaningful practical and experiential basis from which the quest for interreligious wisdom can be launched.

Why and how? Because this learning occurs within the context of a Christian theological institution, a context in which Buddhist students are obliged to think about Christian traditions, and Christian students are compelled to think about the meaning of their Buddhist practice for Christian faith. If anything, it is the teaching of Christian spiritual disciplines that now must be fostered in comparable depth in a historically Protestant seminary that has shied away from forms of practice that might be figured as self-salvation through works righteousness. Indeed, this very recognition—only now incipiently emerging—is itself a fruit of the presence of another community for whom the rigorous practice of therapeutic regimens matters.

It would be misleading, however, to say that Union is absent of Christian therapeutic regimes. Far from it. Regular worship, rigorous theological study, a culture of protest in the traditions of liberation theology, practice in the homiletical and liturgical arts, training in pastoral care and listening—all these are key elements in Christian therapeutic regimes, particularly those taken to be essential for the formation of ministers. What is less fulsomely offered are courses in Christian spirituality in which the robust work of contemplative prayer is undertaken. This remains a lacuna in need of filling.

Nevertheless, at least some students at Union are being shaped in substantive ways by the interpretive schemes and therapeutic regimes of both Christian and Zen traditions. Doing the work of such learning and thinking about that labor is key to courses on Buddhist-Christian dialogue. Comparable courses also exist on Hindu-Christian dialogue and Muslim-Christian dialogue. Particularly noteworthy is "Liberation Theology and Engaged Buddhism," Union's course co-taught by Claudio Carvalhaes and Greg Snyder, each of whom is an expert in the traditions they teach. Snyder is a Zen master and Carvalhaes is a leading expert on Latin American liberation theology. In this co-taught course, both instructors and students are together learning what each tradition has to teach, and, in the process, are together learning to engage in mutual critique and mutual transformation. What does each tradition have to say about anger, violence, care for non-human creatures, and ultimate reality? In conversations such as this, students engage in matters theoretical and practical and attend not merely to the interpretive schemes but also the therapeutic regimes of these traditions. Hence, a class is offered within a larger institutional milieu in which interreligious wisdom can be birthed.

It goes without saying that students in theology classes are unlikely to acquire the combination of textual and practical mastery attained by the likes of Paul Knitter or Aloysius Pieris. Yet they can make incremental movement toward embodied knowing. What can be done in a single course or even a two or three-year master's degree cannot equal the intensive embodied learning that most traditions require from their adepts. The processes of formation prescribed by any single tradition are complex and customarily require lifelong learning, not to speak of formation in two traditions. Still, the impossibility of accomplishing the maximal is no justification for forgoing the incremental.

What is at stake pedagogically is clarity about the question of genre; it is more than possible to convey that theology is more than academic text production. The body-mind can, by participation in the therapeutic regimens of other traditions, acquire a measure of tacit knowing of other ways of interpreting the world, and, building on the basis of such knowing, students can write, preach, and teach in ways that demonstrate more than a propositional knowledge about this or that feature of other traditions. Nor should propositional knowledge be dismissed; it has legitimate importance and value, and most teaching in academic contexts will continue to be about conveying such information. The communication of such information might amount to second order rather than first order knowledge, but such knowledge too can contribute to the cultivation of deeper transformation, so long as teaching insists that propositional knowledge within religious communities is meant to serve deeper ends. That insight about propositional knowledge can be taught, performed,

and embodied through a practical intimacy with the therapeutic regimes of the various religious traditions.

Of course, the pedagogical particulars of this process hinge on a host of further contingencies: which traditions are being taught, the staffing level in those traditions, the composition of the student body, the denominational tradition, if any, of the host institution, and on and on it goes. There is no one-size-fits-all formula for establishing the institutional conditions under which interreligious wisdom can best be cultivated.

Are there risks involved in the quest for interreligious wisdom? What risks must educational institutions in particular contend with? At the very least, educational institutions such as seminaries must be mindful to avoid misappropriation. By misappropriation, I mean the use or appropriation of the wisdom and practices of another tradition without the endorsement of the communities in question. This risk is especially fraught when there are deep and persistent historic asymmetries of power between the community that appropriates and the community from which practices and wisdom are appropriated. The following sorts of questions must be posed: Is the institution in a position to be accountable to the communities and traditions from which it seeks to learn? Are instructors who teach expert in the traditions they are teaching? More specifically, given the complexities of teaching the religious disciplines of particular traditions, do those who teach possess some measure of expertise in the prescribed spiritual itineraries of their traditions? Those who pursue interreligious wisdom are, after all, not merely invested in conveying information about traditions, but seek transformation by taking up the therapeutic regimens of those traditions.

Are those who teach mindful of the potential problem of contraindication? By contraindication, I mean to signal that many spiritual traditions have clearly graded and ordered sequences of spiritual disciplines that must be carefully prescribed to students according to their particular needs and aptitudes. Even within a tradition, not every spiritual discipline or therapy can be combined with every other. That challenge becomes even more complex when dealing with disciplines across traditions. Can ingredients from the therapeutic regimens of the various traditions be combined? In what order? Navigating questions such as these in any context, whether classroom or otherwise, is enormously complex for teachers and students alike. They will not be answered in short order and will likely require a long process of trial and error through which practical pedagogical wisdom will be required.

These complexities, risks, and dangers notwithstanding, there is enormous promise in the quest for interreligious wisdom. The seemingly intractable problems that human communities and indeed the species itself now face are

unlikely to be resolved by appeal to the resources of any single religious community. We need deep interreligious wisdom if we are to resolve problems of a ruptured global economic order, rising ethnonationalist authoritarianism, and grave ecological peril. When confronting such vexing civilizational challenges, one intuits the promise of cultivating communities of students who embody the wisdom of the traditions they study. Compassionate students who embody and exhibit the rich enfolded binocular vision that comes through the careful study and practice of the interpretive schemes and therapeutic regimes of more than one tradition are just the kind of religious leaders we need in our complex multireligious societies. The work of comparative theology is meant to serve the cultivation and formation of just such students.

Bibliography

- Brecht, Mara and Reid B. Locklin, eds. *Comparative Theology in the Millennial Classroom: Hybrid Identities, Negotiated Boundaries*. New York: Routledge Press, 2016.
- Clooney, Francis x. *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning across Religious Borders*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.
- Clooney, Francis x. *Theology after Vedanta: An Experiment in Comparative Theology*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1993.
- Farley, Edward. "Four Pedagogical Mistakes: A Mea Culpa," *Teaching Theology and Religion*, 9, no. 4 (2005): 200–203.
- Farley, Edward. *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2001; originally published by Fortress Press, 1994.
- Fredericks, James. *Faith among Faiths: Christianity and the Other Religions*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1999.
- Griffiths, Paul. *An Apology for Apologetics: A Study in the Logic of Interreligious Dialogue*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007; previously published by Orbis, 1991.
- Jackson, Roger and John Makransky, eds. *Buddhist Theology: Critical Reflections by Contemporary Buddhist Scholars*. New York: Routledge, 1999.
- Moyaert, Marianne. "Towards a Ritual Turn in Comparative Theology: Opportunities, Challenges, and Problems." *Harvard Theological Review* 111, no. 1 (January 2018): 1–23.
- Neville, Robert C. *Behind the Masks of God: An Essay toward Comparative Theology*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1991.
- Samuel, Joshua. *Untouchable Bodies, Resistance, and Liberation: A Comparative Theology of Divine Possessions* (Boston: Brill, 2020).
- Sankara, *Brahmasutrabhasya*. Translated by Swami Gambhirananda. Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1993.

- Sankara, *Vedanta-Sutras with the Commentary by Sankaracarya*, Part 1. Translated by George Thibaut. Vol. 34 of Sacred Books of the East, edited by Max Muller. New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988.
- Thatamanil, John. *Circling the Elephant: A Comparative Theology of Religious Diversity*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2018.
- Thatamanil, John. *Immanent Divine: God, Creation, and the Human Predicament. An East-West Conversation*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006.
- Voss Roberts, Michelle. *Tastes of the Divine: Hindu and Christian Theologies of Emotion*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2014.
- Ward, Keith. *Religion and Revelation: A Theology of Revelation in the World's Religions*. New York: Clarendon Press, 1994.