Francis X. Clooney, S.J.

The Future of Hindu-Christian Studies: A Theological Inquiry. New York: Routledge, 2017. Pp. xii + 135. Hb, \$70.

Francis X. Clooney, S.J., Parkman Professor of Divinity and Professor of Comparative Theology at Harvard Divinity School, has largely defined the contemporary fields of comparative theology and Hindu-Christian studies in North America. In 2010, he authored a short introduction to the former field, simply entitled *Comparative Theology* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010). In the present volume, he performs a similar service for Hindu-Christian studies. Whereas the 2010 volume served mainly to consolidate insights from Clooney's own work, the *Future of Hindu-Christian Studies* is far more outward facing, while also being more focused and provocative in its claims.

The occasion for the book was the prestigious Westcott-Teape Memorial Lectures, which Clooney gave in New Delhi, Kolkata, and Chennai in 2015, and at Cambridge University in 2016. Its structure consists, simply, of the three lectures, with a new prologue and epilogue added for publication. The lectures correspond to three defining moments in the encounter of Hinduism and Christianity: the efforts at dialogue and inculturation by Jesuit missionaries in India, from the Italian Roberto De Nobili to the Indian Noel Sheth; the contributions of notable Hindu historians and comparative philosophers, from the Śrīvaiṣṇava Alondavilli Govindacharya to the contemporary provocateur Rajiv Malhotra; and the new opportunities opened by contemporary methods in religious studies, especially in the American Academy of Religion. Consonant with Clooney's previous work, each of these three chapters is self-consciously limited. We learn little to nothing about the contributions of Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg, Sadhu Sundar Singh or other Protestant missionary scholars of Hinduism, for example, and Clooney offers only short asides about contemporary ethnographic studies of ritual hybridity in India. For Clooney, authentic comparison entails a willingness to take risks (114), including the risk of committing to the particular—whether these be particular religious texts, as in most of his work, or particular intellectual and confessional trajectories, as in the case of these lectures.

From one point of view, *The Future of Hindu-Christian Studies* can be read as a parade of exempla, case studies of missionaries and scholars taking precisely such risks, from the late seventeenth century to the present day. Clooney ultimately finds all of the exempla he surveys—including, to some extent, his own (see 115–17)—as insufficient to the full promise of the field. Nevertheless, all receive some degree of praise for their varied attempts to open “third spaces” for mutual encounter, spaces that are “unstable, unsettling, and never spaces

in which set identities are merely displayed, honored, and safely stored away" (11). He faults de Nobili and other early modern Jesuits such as Jean Venance Buchet and Gaston-Laurent Coeurdoux for forming "far too swift" judgements against the Hindu traditions they studied (31), and contemporary Indian Jesuits such as Ignatius Puthiadam, Anand Amaladass, and Sheth for failing to integrate fully their impressive Indological studies into their Catholic and Jesuit theological formation. Greater praise is offered for the "fresh space" (34) opened to Jesuit tradition by the revolutionary Hindu-Catholic monastic, Brahmabandhab Upadhyay, as well as for the bold scholastic syntheses of such noble "imperfectionists" (38) as the Jesuits Pierre Johanns and Richard De Smet. Similarly, in the second and third chapters of the book, Clooney expresses greatest appreciation for those Hindu philosophers and contemporary religionists who risk a perhaps inevitable failure to open spaces of real, transformative encounter: Brajendranath Seal, Kotta Satchidananda Murty, Swami Tyagananda and Pravrajika Vrajaprana's engagement with Jeffrey Kripal, and Gavin Flood, among others.

The combination of existential risk and imaginative, substantive engagement, which Clooney so strongly valorizes, informs his modestly controversial claim that Hindu-Christian studies is most properly theological, and that it necessarily entails a healthy skepticism "toward unanchored study, study which is merely distanced from faith and community and therefore gives no clues as to spiritual genealogy" (124). He draws on both the Apostle Paul's Letter to the Philippians and the medieval Hindu *Crest Jewel of Discrimination* to suggest the necessary intellectual and personal virtues of the ideal student in the field, and he outlines an ideal method, which begins with a theological problem in one tradition, immerses the scholar deeply in an exploration of this problem in the other tradition, and concludes with a "return" that notes the effects of such immersion on the scholar's original commitments (115). For Clooney, and for many of his interlocutors, what is unsettled in such an encounter is faith, a deeply personal surrender to the living God. Particularly in light of his accounts of the new pluralism of contemporary religious studies in the third lecture, however, it is not obvious why the closely held commitments of a feminist philosopher or an aesthetic theorist need be taken any less seriously than explicit religious faith. The point seems to be authentic, existential engagement rather than theology, as such.

But this is a minor quibble. *The Future of Hindu-Christian Studies* is an invaluable resource, both for its careful genealogies of Jesuit and Hindu explorations in the field and for its clear articulation of its prospects for the contemporary academy. For those who aspire to become "imperfectionists" like Upadhyay, De Smet, and Clooney himself, it offers both encouragement and

fruitful precedents from which to draw; for others, the rich intellectual history may be of greater interest. Either way, it belongs in any theological library and in the curricula of graduate and advanced undergraduate courses.

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DOI:10.1163/22141332-00503007-08