



Athanasios N. Papathanasiou

An inquiry into the tension between faith, hospitality, and witness. Reflections on Comparative Theology from an Orthodox point of view

Abstract

The relatively new discipline of Comparative Theology remains largely unknown to the vast majority of Orthodox theologians and schools, while heated debates have been raging among western academic circles for more than thirty years. The encounter of the Orthodox theology with the Comparative Theology is of special importance, so scrutinizing the issues involved is necessary for a holistic approach and evaluation of Comparative Theology's contribution. Comparative theology contributes a lot to deepening one's faith through God's mystical presence in religious otherness. In this process, offering hospitality to otherness and witnessing to your own faith are not two irreconcilable things. They go hand-in-hand. Moreover the theological (not religious at large) character of the Comparative Theology is of



Assoc. Prof. Dr. Athanasios N. Papathanasiou, Assoc. Professor of *Missiology, Intercultural Christian Witness and Dialogue*, University Ecclesiastical Academy of Athens, Greece

crucial importance, since it brings to the fore the importance of the quest of truth without restricting itself to a merely descriptive role.

Keywords

Comparative theology, theology of religions, witness, mission, dialogue, intercultural theology

1 Introduction

I have the impression that the discipline of Comparative Theology has been *terra incognita* for many Orthodox so far.¹ Heated debates have been raging among western academic circles for more than thirty years. Happily enough, some Orthodox theologians have engaged themselves recently; nevertheless the whole issue still remains largely unknown to the vast majority of Orthodox theologians and schools. I personally had the chance to come across Comparative Theology almost twenty years ago, in the framework of my work on Missiology. And I thankfully recall that my actual involvement in the discussion was due to Professor Norbert Hintersteiner, who encouraged Orthodox participation and urged Professor Ulrich Winkler to invite me to contribute an article to the ongoing discussion in 2013 (Papathanasiou 2013; Papathanasiou 2014).

It is certainly understandable that, for those who are already aware of Comparative Theology, it is rather tiresome to listen

¹ This study expands the paper “Comparative Theology and the Orthodox: An inquiry into the tension between faith and the religious other, differences and dichotomies”, which I delivered at the International Conference “Eastern Orthodoxy and Inter-Religious Encounter in a Secular Age”, organized by the Volos Academy for Theological Studies and the Department of Theology and Religion, University of Exeter in Volos, Greece, 15-16 September 2017.

again and again to the history and basic presuppositions of Comparative Theology. Yet I feel obliged to delineate both (its history and basic presuppositions), not only for the sake of those who may be less informed, but also because scrutinizing the issues involved is necessary for a holistic approach and evaluation of the Comparative Theology.

2 On the openness of Faith

To be precise, the Comparative Theology we are dealing with is called “new” comparative theology, in juxtaposition to older attempts at a theological approach to other religions between the 17th and 19th centuries. The term *comparative theology* seems to have appeared as early as 1699 in James Garden’s (1645–1726) work. It referred to intra-Christian encounters yet in search of common ground, thus anticipating the interreligious comparative meeting (Maggioni 2016, 115-118).² No doubt, the encounter with the religious other has conditioned the opening-up of the Church to the world from her very beginning. Different attitudes such as participation in research, dialogue, debate, missionary translations and contextualization have ceaselessly taken place in history and very often have shed light on the other’s identity and helped the self-understanding of each part (Hintersteiner 2007, 468).

New Comparative Theology was proposed mainly by the Roman Catholic professor Francis Clooney (as well as his colleague James Fredericks) toward the end of the 1980s. Ever since, it has been the subject of both lively elaboration and vigorous contro-

² Maggioni presents the work of many “fore-runners” of the Comparative Theology even since the Middle-Ages (Pietro Lorenzo Maggioni, “Comparative Theology: Toward a Semiotic Theological Foundation”, PhD diss., Graduate School of Arts and Sciences of Georgetown University, Washington DC., 2016, pp. 119-134).

versies (Ray 2014, 50-67). In any case, it is broadly acknowledged that the readiness of the comparative theologian to host certain, palpable elements of the religious other, and draw insights from them, can serve the interreligious encounter as well as the deepening of the religious experience.

The founding concept of Comparative Theology has been that a theologian with a certain confessional affiliation embarks on a critical and *sui generis* comparison between two religious traditions; the home tradition and another. The term “confessional” here means that the agent of the comparison shares a certain faith; it means nothing negative such as fanaticism or intolerance. The existence of faith has to do precisely with the *theological* nature of Comparative Theology, which is apparently different from the manifested neutrality of comparative religion and the alleged apathy of the religious studies. For confessional comparative theologians, theology is better

equipped to understand the foundational existential dimensions of faith in other religious traditions than the supposedly neutral stance of religious studies can. [...] Comparative theology does not solely aim for the appropriate representation of other religions but is faced with questions as to the *meaning* of these other faiths: What do they mean to their followers, and what do they mean to comparative theologians?³ (Gruber and Winkler 2014, 7).

I absolutely agree with Perry Schmidt-Leukel, that to bracket or exclude the implications of one’s own religious presuppositions would once again mean to fall back into the business of a purely phenomenological comparison – and

³ As it has been noticed, “The main difference between the new direction and the past comparative theology is that, formerly, engagement with another tradition had no purpose with respect to one’s own religion [...]. The goal of comparing theologies was not to understand one’s own religion and ultimately to understand God better” (Daria Schnipkowitz, “Response to Jeannine Hill Fletcher: Is there a natural (Catholic) Comparative Theology?”, *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 24, no.1, 86-90, 2014, p. 87).

apart from that, there are good reasons to doubt whether such a bracketing is possible at all (Schmidt-Leukel 2009, 102).

The work of Comparative Theology has some very special features and is highly textual. The comparative theologian does not deal with major religious ideas and convictions, but focuses on details which he/she intuitively finds in the texts of each religion. In this procedure (which implies discovery of similarities as well as of differences), comparative theologians expect to deepen the understanding of his/her own faith. Clooney claimed that Comparative Theology

Is a theological discipline confident about the possibility of being intelligently faithful to tradition even while seeking fresh understanding outside that tradition [...]. Rarely, if ever, will comparative theology produce new truths, but it can make possible new insights into familiar and even revered truths, and new ways of receiving those truths (Clooney 2010, 11, 112).⁴

However, this point of view (the confessional) represents only one of the major currents within the Comparative Theology discourse. Another major current may be so-called non-confessional or meta-confessional, which, in few words, conceives of Comparative Theology as a quest, as a means to discover new truths (Cornille 2019, 9-42).⁵ In my opinion, however, the starting point for both currents is the existence of a certain faith or a

⁴ Cf. Catherine Cornille, "The confessional nature of Comparative Theology". *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 24, no.1: 9-17, 2014. DOI: 10.2143/SID.24.1.3040771, pp. 9-17. Athanasios N. Papathanasiou, "Is Comparative Theology Orthodox?", *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 24, no.1, 2014, pp. 104-118, p. 108.

⁵ Noteworthy, Keith Ward makes a sharp distinction between confessional theology and comparative theology (Keith Ward, *Religion and Revelation: A Theology of Revelation in the Word's Religions*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1994, p. 40). Clooney remarks that gradually Ward seems to blur this distinction (Francis X. Clooney, *Hindu God, Christian God: How Reason Helps Break Down the Boundaries between Religions*,

certain conviction, even a non-religious conviction. So, I think that there is no real dichotomy between the confessional and non-confessional currents. And I will explain why. A primary characteristic of Comparative Theology is its renowned vulnerability

We move from reading at a distance, with a professional control that correctly and necessarily prizes detachment, toward a submission to these texts, immersion finally in a double reading that makes us vulnerable to the realities of God and self as imagined by the authors. [...] We are left in a vulnerable, fruitful learning state, engaging these powerful works on multiple levels and, paradoxically, learning more while mastering less; we have more teachers and fewer masters (Clooney 2008, 22, 209).

The notion of starting point is very important, because humans are not mere objects without spiritual orientation or even without ideological coordinates which elevate humans to beings which interrogate and interpret the world and the life. But the starting point can never be *a priori* taken for granted as the final point! This is an ecumenical anthropological truth, especially vibrant in the case of Comparative Theology, no matter how contradictory it may sound as far as its confessional character is concerned. Comparative theologians act on the basis of their personal faith; at the same time however they are ready to move beyond any self-confinement which actually keeps them alienated from the religious other. This is exactly the source of their vulnerability! In Marianne Moyaert's words,

comparative theologians engage in crossing borders, moving back and forth between one's own tradition and the strange religious tradition, allowing themselves to be truly immersed in both. [...] As go-betweens, they invest in learning from the other, accepting that this also entails disturbing experiences

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 26). Needless to say, Clooney's theology merges Ward's two poles (confessional and comparative theologies) into one prospect and discipline.

of alienation, disenchantment, and friction (Moyaert 2012, 8).⁶

Thus, the vulnerability of comparative work is genetically connected with the possibility of change. “It is altogether possible that the starting point may not be left untouched, but may be reappropriated”, as the confessional James Fredericks has put it (Fredericks 1999, 9).⁷ This acknowledgment is not far from what Keith Ward aptly notes. The thinker –he says– has to be “prepared to revise beliefs if and when it comes to seem necessary” (Ward 1994, 48)⁸, provided that the thinker has real concern for the meaning of life, I would add.

This perspective somehow reminds us of Hans Georg Gadamer’s “fusion of horizons”, meaning the transformation of the reader as a result of his/her penetration in a text (Gadamer 2013, 350, 415, 601).⁹ Clooney asserts that the comparative theologian experiences a tension when entering the texts, and thus he encounters Gadamer who claims that agony and antagonism interweaves in the work of translation (Gadamer 2013, 405, 420). However it has been noted that for Clooney the tension in the interreligious reading is a creative one, so his own approach has a decisively positive orientation (Hedges 2016, 7). I believe that exactly the longing for creativity, for deeper understanding of the faith, conditions vulnerability.

⁶ See also important clarifications by Perry Schmidt-Leukel, *Transformation by Integration. How Inter-faith Encounter Changes Christianity* (London: SCM Press 2009), pp. 102-103. Cf. Anita C. Ray. “(Re-)discovering comparative theology: An Australian perspective”, *Pacifica* 27, no.1, 2014, p. 54.

⁷ See also Francis X. Clooney, *Hindu God, Christian God: How Reason Helps Break Down the Boundaries between Religions*, p. 26.

⁸ See also Athanasios N. Papathanasiou, “Is Comparative Theology Orthodox?”, *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 24, no.1, 2014, pp. 104-118.

⁹ See also Richard Hanson.. *The Hermeneutics of Comparative Theology*. (Chestnut Hill, Mass.: Boston College University Libraries, Boston College, 2006), pp. 6-7.

In my opinion vulnerability comes to the fore with Comparative Theology, but it is not a recent invention. As I mentioned on another occasion (Papathanasiou 2014, 110), in the Christian tradition, the disciple of Christ continually finds himself confronted with the Master's challenge, "Do you also want to go away?" (John 6: 67). This challenge has not been posed by a modern advocate for human rights or by postmodern religious consumerism. It springs from the heart of Christian identity, which means that (contrary to traditionalist collectivism and nationalism), faithfulness to Christian identity implies personal reconsideration and reaffirmation! If one is a Christian (or better: if one remains a Christian), this happens because he/she is finding meaning in this faith at each given moment. Whenever he/she ceases to find meaning, he/she has no reason to remain a Christian. Personal conversion is the very heart of Christian identity; an event which is not realized once and for all, but needs to be continuously renewed (Papathanasiou 2011a). It is not by chance that in every celebration of the Holy Liturgy the faithful has to confess / reaffirm his/her faith (reciting the Creed) before proceeding to Holy Communion, although he/she is already a member of the Church.

3 On Theology of Religions

Here comes the question on the relationship between Comparative Theology and the theologies of religions, that is with the typology established by Alan Race in 1983, Exclusivism, Inclusivism and Pluralism, or rather in plural (Exclusivisms, Inclusivisms and Pluralisms), because in fact each paradigm has in the meantime developed into a wide range of views (Harris, Hedges, and Hettiarachchi 2016, 1). Allow me to note, by way of example, that for the celebration of the thirteenth anniversary of Race's typology the monumental collective volume *Twenty-First Century Theologies of Religion* was published in 2016. The volume manages

to present the forest (or perhaps the jungle) of the variable contributions, criticisms and new proposals made in the course of these thirty years. One parameter is the question whether the theology of religions is still meaningful or, on the contrary, whether it has reached an impasse.

Many proponents of Comparative Theology claim that their discipline is an alternative to the theologies of religions, a decisive step beyond all of them. "At this time at the history of Christianity", it has been said, a completely satisfying theology of religions is no longer possible" (Fredericks 2004, 99).¹⁰ I personally agree that Comparative Theology offers the opportunity for new insights, but I do not share a –say– militant polarization between Comparative Theology and Theology of Religions. I believe that the tripartite scheme (Exclusivism, Inclusivism and Pluralism) can be elaborated and must be enriched, but cannot be replaced. No theologian can escape responding to the dilemmas and questions posed by the three basic options. In a few words, Comparative Theology and Theology of Religions have to work together.¹¹

In my opinion, to be a Christian means to accept the centrality, the universality and the finality of the Triune God and the Kingdom, as well as the distinction between the canonical and the charismatic boundaries of the Church. I strongly believe that the Christian faith is inclusivistic, regardless of how this can be expressed in sophisticated ways and freshly coined terminology (Papathanasiou 2011b). Exclusivism shrinks the living God, while pluralism deconstructs the doctrines of the Incarnation

¹⁰ See also Francis X. Clooney, "Reading the World in Christ: From Comparison to Inclusivism". In *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, edited by Gavin D'Costa, 63–80, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1990, pp. 63–80.

¹¹ Pietro Lorenzo Maggioni, "Comparative Theology: Toward a Semiotic Theological Foundation." PhD diss., Graduate School of Arts and Sciences of Georgetown University, Washington DC, 2016, pp. 28, 112, mentions scholars who oppose the rejection of Theology of religions (Stephen Duffy, Kristin Beise Kiblinger and Schmidt-Leukel).

and the Trinity, conceiving them merely as Greco-Roman interpretations of the divine mystery and denying their universality and finality (Race 2016, 379-383). Quite the contrary, I would repeat that “comparative theology depends on a specific theology of religions, even if that theology of religions is not explicitly worked out but only implied by the comparative theologian’s confessional starting point” (Drew 2012, 1043). As Paul Ladouceur has put it, “Comparative theology can be considered the application of the notion of inclusivism to specific non-Christian religions; it does not entail a suspension of one’s own faith, but rather its deployment in the context of the mystery of the divine economy for the salvation of all humans and all creation” (Ladouceur 2019, 337).¹²

Allow me to open a parenthesis here in support of Christian inclusivism, which I consider important in order to understand the springboard of the Christian theologians who participate in the toils of both, theology of religion and comparative theology. I believe that inclusivism imbues the entire Christian faith and doctrine. We are all aware of the much discussed tension between Christology and Pneumatology. For some, Christology has to do with the institutional church only and represents a centripetal, exclusivist vision, while Pneumatology constitutes the process of opening up to the entire world. But this dichotomy is highly questioned. Let me repeat here that the renowned “hypostatic independence” of the three Persons of the Holy Trinity, introduced by the Orthodox Bishop George Khodr, needs to be approached in ways that neither fragment the Trinity nor negate Christ’s finality. It is not only the Spirit that acts worldwide, it is also the Logos, the second Person of the Trinity, whose role has cosmic dimensions, since the *logoi*—the reason of existence of all

¹² See also Paul Ladouceur, “Religious Diversity in Modern Orthodox Thought”, in: *Religions* 8, no.5, 77, 2017. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel8050077> Ladouceur 2017, a thorough presentation of modern Orthodox inclusivist approaches.

beings—are rooted in the God Logos. We might also pay attention to the universal action of Christ. Christ is incarnate as well as risen. That means that Christ is not only the “historical Jesus”. Through the action of the Spirit, the incarnate Son has been a historical reality but also an eschatological intervention free from the bondage of history. That means that Christ is mystically acting wherever he pleases and is mystically moving the borders of his church wherever he likes. The recognition that both the Holy Spirit and Christ himself (each in their own way but not each in an autonomous way) have cosmic dimensions is of immense importance, since it takes into account the biblical assurance that the entire creation is going to encounter Christ at the *eschaton* (1 Cor.15: 28). Instead of the “hypostatic independence” I would propose the seeming paradoxical formula of “relational independence”. The Spirit (or rather each Person) is free to act wherever it pleases, in an unlimited universality, but it always leads mystically to the Trinity and its Kingdom (Papathanasiou 2019, 43-44). End of the parenthesis.

Let me give a token of the inclusivistic incense of Christian worship. A hymn in the Christmas Orthodox liturgy recalls the pilgrimage of the three Magi, the three Wise Men to the newborn Christ, and urges the Christians today: “Let us find out, we faithful, where Christ is born! For this let us follow the star wherever it goes”. But following the star, one could say, means that Christians have to find something really meaningful in a foreign tradition. I recall here that the Three Wise Men were led to the newborn Christ through their own religious tradition, absolutely distinct from the divine revelations made to Israel. Several church fathers have commented on that. One could say that the hymn resembles a call to the faithful to study in this perspective the *Avesta* book of Zoroastrianism or the *Bhagavad Gita* of Hinduism. According to the Gospel of Matthew the three Magi informed King Herod that they had observed “his [the newborn King of the Jews] star” rising in the sky (Mat. 2:2), while the Jewish chief priests and teachers of the law found in their own Holy Scriptures the name of his birth place, Bethlehem (Mat. 2:4-6). John

Chrysostom commends that what appeared as a star was in reality God's energy or an angel; God, he says, took the initiative to address the Magi in their own religious way, yet in order to free them from the captivity of astrology (John Chrysostom 396C; see also Isidore of Pelusium 396C). On the contrary, the Jewish sages did not receive any fresh sign, apart from the old Biblical prophecy about Bethlehem. Here again Saint Irenaeus of Lyon marks the contradistinction and alludes to Saint Paul's exaltation of God's unseen initiatives (Irenaeus 871A):

And Isaiah boldly says, "I was found by those who did not seek me; I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me." But concerning Israel he says, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people." (Rom. 10:20-21, NIV).

In other words, encounter, investigation of God's traces outside the canonical borders, and dialogue, are all attributes of Christian theology *per se*.

In this framework it is obvious that the comparative work has to avoid the apriorism that all religions have a common essence or that all lead to the same conclusions. "The comparative theology project", says Marianne Moyaert,

embodies the virtue of hospitality [...]. It does this in a very specific way, since the comparative theologian wants to be both host and guest at the same time [...]. Over against reducing the other to sameness (cf. pluralism) on the one hand and alienating the other (particularism), comparative theology seeks to build bridges between two text traditions while always recognizing that both are irreducible to one another. It concerns an attitude of 'active receptivity: it is making room for the stranger in one's own [...] home in a way that does justice to the otherness of the other' [...]. Comparing seemingly

incomparable texts is also an opportunity, for it opens up the possibility of creativity and innovation¹³.

Differences do not always mean one thing. As Leonard Swidler has emblematically pointed out, the

differences may be (1) *complementary*, as for example a stress on the prophetic rather than the mystical, (2) *analogous*, as for example, the notion of God in the Semitic religions and of *sunyata* [: absolute] in Mahayana Buddhism, or (3) *contradictory* where the acceptance of one entails the rejection of the other, as for example, the Judeo-Christian notion of the inviolable dignity of each individual person and the now largely disappeared Hindu custom of *suttee*, widow burning (quote by Allan Race 2016, 383).¹⁴

Apparently the complimentary differences comprise a promising factor while contradictory differences nourish dichotomies. The ability to discern them both is really important for a meaningful encounter, be it convergence or debate (my only objection to Swidler concerns his example of *sunyata*. Insofar as *sunyata* excludes the notion of personal existence, it cannot be counted as analogous to the Biblical concept of God).

Here then comes Particularism's opposition to the Theology of Religions. Particularism claims that the differences between religions are absolute, so each tradition is "particular" to itself and therefore no interpretations or judgments about others can have

¹³ Marianne Moyaert, "On Vulnerability: Probing into the Ethical Dimensions of Comparative Theology", *Religions* 3, no. 4, 2012, pp. 14-16, DOI: 10.3390/rel3041144.

¹⁴ Cf. Ernst M. Valea, *Buddhist-Christian Dialogue as Theological Exchange: An Orthodox Contribution to Comparative Theology* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick 2015), p. xvi: "We should not look for a unifying spirituality that would eradicate theological differences, as an alleged guardian of peace and reciprocal understanding. What we should seek instead is a way of dialogue between religious traditions that can respect all, that can deal with disagreements and cherish the religions as they are".

real meaning¹⁵. Particularism is right in taking into account true differences / dichotomies, but fails in recognizing any common ground or common quests. As a matter of fact, it may devolve into Exclusivism or extreme postmodernism, which no longer sees any common language. On the contrary, Comparative Theology takes into account the incommensurability between traditions but at the same time it affirms the possibility of a dialogue, hosting the other in the home tradition of the thinker. In any event Christians have been invited to “discern the spirits” (1 John 4:1) cherishing light and love wherever they are nesting, and discerning darkness and hatred wherever they are lurking.

4 On witness and truth claim

As I implied at the beginning, Comparative Theology is connected to missiology. Comparative theologians’ emphasis on the *theological* character of comparative work brings to the fore the issues of witness / martyrria and of truth claims. As is well known, the world has long suffered under the weight of colonialist missions, cultural hegemonism and the authoritarian imposition of several “truths”. It is also well known that since the middle of the 20th century, the Western world proceeded to an impressively brave self-criticism and rejected the colonialist missions. Well done! But the problem which emerged is that deep feelings of guilt led many to the rejection not only of colonialism, but also the very concept of mission and the very notion of truth claims. A manifestation of this syndrome has been the shift of interest from theology to cultural studies. The problem here is not the dialogue of theology with other disciplines (such a dialogue and

¹⁵ Allan Race, “Afterword: Persisting with the Typology and Pluralism”, in: Elizabeth J. Harris, Paul Hedges, Ahanthikumar Hettiarachchi (eds.), *Twenty-First Century Theologies of Religion: Retrospection and Future Prospects* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2016), p. 376.

even osmosis is urgently needed), but a possible eclipse of theology and discourse on the hope that we have (cf. Peter 3:15). In the course of the ongoing discussion about missiology, the Roman Catholic Missiologist Robert Schreiter has aptly noted:

In terms of intercultural theology's interlocutors, it seems that the social sciences will continue to play a pre-eminent role, be that cultural anthropology, sociology and social analysis, or post-colonial studies. An important question to put here also is how intercultural theology relates to missiology or studies of Christian mission. Because of its implication in colonialism, there have been widespread efforts to distance older understandings of Christian mission and to move toward a more neutral description of the spread and the growth of Christianity in intercultural terms. Thus, professorial chairs and departments or faculties of missiology have rebranded themselves "intercultural studies" or "intercultural theology." The long-standing missiological journal *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft* renamed itself *Interkulturelle Theologie*. These attempts were honest efforts to extricate missiologists from the stigma of colonialism and point to a new direction in the study of contemporary Christianity. In some instances, the rebranding was also an effort to justify a field of study in an increasingly secular and sometimes hostile university environment. Especially here a caution for intercultural theology can be found: it has to be more than an innocent description of intercultural interaction (Schreiter 2017, 96).

"More than an innocent description"! Obviously, yes! What is desperately needed is advocacy for the quest for truth. As long as this advocacy is bypassed by good-willing people, it is –alas!– usurped by fundamentalists who violently separate truth from love, truth from freedom. So we have to witness to the fact that there is no human consideration, there is no judgment or conviction which is not imbued with a truth claim. Even the claim that humans are not the proprietors of the truth (and I agree with

that), is itself a truth claim. Even the claim that there is no universal truth (and I disagree with that), is itself a universal truth claim. This means that not only bridges but also ruptures have their own meaning, each one under certain conditions. Openness, for example, refutes bigotry. Resurrection refutes death. Liberation refutes oppression. Let us think seriously on the importance of this kind of ruptures. What will be left of theology if the comparative theologian is fascinated with certain texts but bypasses the fact that these texts may depict the serenity of an oppressing class and hush up the cries of the oppressed?¹⁶ In short, the tantalizing dilemma is not a “question of truth or no truth”, but “Which kind of truth”?

5 Conclusion

Comparative theology contributes a lot to deepening one’s faith through God’s mystical presence in religious otherness. In this process, offering hospitality to otherness and witnessing to your own faith are not two irreconcilable things. They go hand-in-hand. Any encounter and any dialogue are meaningful insofar as each interlocutor has really to contribute something special. In this perspective differences are not always an obstacle but, quite the contrary, they may consist the presupposition of the encounter and a great opportunity for each part to enrich his/her own orientation. This can happen as long as differences meet on a common ground, such as human soul’s thirst for enduring love, deep freedom, and endless life. When the difference proves to be

¹⁶ Important issues related to the liberating perspective are approached by Joshua Samuel. “Toward a Comparative Theology of Liberation. Exploring the relevance of Comparative Theology for doing Indian Liberation Theology”, *Interreligious Studies and Intercultural Theology* 1, no.1, 2017, pp. 47–67, <https://doi.org/10.1558/isit.31058>.

a dichotomy beyond any common ground, the encounter becomes impossible. All scenarios are actually open-ended in the adventurous quest for meaning.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Chrysostom John. "Homily 8 to the Goths". PG 63:499-510.
- Clooney, Francis X.. 2008. *Beyond Compare: St. Francis de Sales and Śrī Vedānta Deśika on Loving Surrender to God*. Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press.
- Clooney, Francis X.. 2010. *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning across Religious Borders*. Malden MA: Wiley – Blackwell.
- Clooney Francis X.. 2001. *Hindu God, Christian God: How Reason Helps Break Down the Boundaries between Religions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Clooney Francis X.. 1990. "Reading the World in Christ: From Comparison to Inclusivism". In *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, edited by Gavin D'Costa, 63–80, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis.
- Cornille Catherine. 2019. *Meaning and Method in Comparative Theology*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Cornille Catherine. 2014. "The confessional nature of Comparative Theology". *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 24, no.1: 9-17. DOI: 10.2143/SID.24.1.3040771
- Drew Rose. 2012. "Challenging Truths: Reflections on the Theological Dimension of Comparative Theology". *Religions* 3, no. 4: 1041-1053. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel3041041>
- Fredericks James L.. 2004. *Buddhists and Christians*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books.
- Fredericks James L.. 1999. *Faith among Faiths: Christian Theology and Non-Christian Religions*, New York: Paulist Press.
- Gadamer Hans Georg. 2013. *Truth and Method*. Translated by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. London and New York: Bloomsbury.
- Gruber Judith and Ulrich Winkler. 2014. "Is Comparative Theology Catholic?", *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 24, no.1, 7-8. DOI: 10.2143/SID.24.1.3040770
- Hanson Richard. 2006. *The Hermeneutics of Comparative Theology*. Chestnut Hill, Mass.: Boston College University Libraries, Boston College.
- Hedges Paul. 2016. "Comparative Theology and Hermeneutics: A Gadamerian Approach to Interreligious Interpretation", *Religions* 7, no. 7. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel7010007>

- Hintersteiner Norbert. 2007. "Intercultural and Interreligious (Un)Translatibility and the Comparative Theology Project", In *Naming and Thinking God in Europe Today: Theology in Global Dialogue*, edited by Norbert Hintersteiner, 465–491. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi.
- Irenaeus of Lyon, "Against Heresies". PG 7: 437A-1118.
- Isidore of Pelusium, "Letter 378 to Count Olympios on the star which guided the Magi". PG 78: 396C.
- Ladouceur Paul. 2017. "Religious Diversity in Modern Orthodox Thought". *Religions* 8, no.5, 77. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel8050077>
- Ladouceur Paul. 2019. Review of "Christine Mangala Frost. *The Human Icon: A Comparative Study of Hindu and Orthodox Christian Beliefs*. Cambridge: James Clarke, 2017". *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 63, no. 3, 330-337.
- Maggioni Pietro Lorenzo. 2016. "Comparative Theology: Toward a Semiotic Theological Foundation." PhD diss., Graduate School of Arts and Sciences of Georgetown University, Washington DC.
- Moyaert Marianne. 2012. "On Vulnerability: Probing into the Ethical Dimensions of Comparative Theology", *Religions* 3, no. 4, 1144-1161. DOI: 10.3390/rel3041144
- Papathanasiou Athanasios N.. 2011a. "An Orphan or a Bride? The Human Self, Collective Identities and Conversion". In *Thinking Modernity: Towards a Reconfiguration of the Relationship between Orthodox Theology and Modern Culture*, edited by Assaad E. Kattan and Fadi A. Georgi), 133-163. Tripoli and Münster: St John of Damascus Institute of Theology, University of Balamand, Lebanon and Westphalian Wilhelm's University, Centre of Religious Studies, Münster.
- Papathanasiou Athanasios N.. 2011b. "'If I cross the boundaries, you are there!' An affirmation of God's action outside the canonical boundaries of the Church", *Communio Viatorum* 53, no.3, 40-55.
- Papathanasiou Athanasios N.. 2014. "Is Comparative Theology Orthodox?", *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 24, no.1, 104-118.
- Papathanasiou Athanasios N.. 2013. "Ist komparative Theologie auch orthodox?", *Salzburger Theologische Zeitschrift* 17, no. 2, 329-348.
- Papathanasiou Athanasios N.. 2019. "Mission in Orthodox Theology", In *Christian Mission, Contextual Theology, Prophetic Dialogue: Essays in Honor of Stephen B. Bevans*, edited by Dale T. Irvin and Peter C. Phan, 37-54. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books.
- Race Allan. 2016. "Afterword: Persisting with the Typology and Pluralism". In *Twenty-First Century Theologies of Religion: Retrospection and Future Prospects*, edited by Elizabeth J. Harris, Paul Hedges and Ahanthikumar Hettiarachchi, 373-389. Leiden and Boston: Brill Rodopi.

- Ray Anita C.. 2014. "(Re-)discovering comparative theology: An Australian perspective", *Pacifica* 27, no.1, 50–67.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1030570X14522000>
- Samuel Joshua. 2017. "Toward a Comparative Theology of Liberation. Exploring the relevance of Comparative Theology for doing Indian Liberation Theology", *Interreligious Studies and Intercultural Theology* 1, no.1, 47–67.
<https://doi.org/10.1558/isit.31058>
- Schmidt-Leukel Perry. 2009. *Transformation by Integration. How Inter-faith Encounter Changes Christianity*. London: SCM Press.
- Schnipkoweit Daria, 2014. "Response to Jeannine Hill Fletcher: Is there a natural (Catholic) Comparative Theology?", *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 24, no.1, 86-90.
- Schreiter, Robert J.. 2017. "Trajectories in Intercultural Theology". *Interreligious Studies and Intercultural Theology* 1, no. 1, 93–97.
<https://doi.org/10.1558/isit.33160>
- Harris Elizabeth J., Hedges Paul and Hettiarachchi Ahanthikumar. 2016. "Introduction: Theologies of Religions in the Twenty-First Century". In *Twenty-First Century Theologies of Religion: Retrospection and Future Prospects*, edited by Elizabeth J. Harris, Paul Hedges, and Ahanthikumar Hettiarachchi, 1-7. Leiden and Boston: Brill Rodopi.
- Valea Ernst M.. 2015. *Buddhist-Christian Dialogue as Theological Exchange: An Orthodox Contribution to Comparative Theology*. Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick.
- Ward, Keith. 1994. *Religion and Revelation: A Theology of Revelation in the Word's Religions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.