THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL PRACTICES OF COMPARATIVE THEOLOGIANS

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In this article, I will mainly expose and assess comparative theological views on comparison as an epistemological norm. More specifically, in what follows, taking cues from a comparative educationist, George Z.F. Bereday, and a contemporary theorist of interreligious learning, J.A. Berling, I will first set up a heuristic apparatus to analyze the process of comparative learning; and then, in the four subsections that immediately follow, I will gradually expose the different, interconnected epistemic procedures of comparative theologians, especially, those of Francis X. Clooney.[1]

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[1]However, one might perhaps ask why a theological project should be cross-checked with a non-theological model (Clooney himself raised this question while commenting on an earlier version of this article); and hence some methodological clarifications are in order. Ever since its development into an academic discipline, meta-reflections on the theory and practice of engaging religions have also been part of the study of religion. Scholars of religion have gradually come to the awareness that it is the subject matter that shapes the method of study in the field. Religious data can hardly be circumscribed by the parameters of a single discipline. This growing methodological awareness is evident in interdisciplinary exigencies that have become increasingly manifest in the field over the recent decades. Put simply, interdisciplinarity is an important aspect of interreligious

Second, I will propose that comparativists might benefit from a study of the history of theoretical reflections on the epistemological issues surrounding analogical thinking practices, especially in the Indian traditions. Finally, I will assess comparativists' use of Anselm's definition for their theological self-understanding.

The Constitutive Practices of Comparative Learning

Long before it began to be extensively applied in the field of theology, comparative methods have been widely tried in many other fields of knowledge. Invariably in all these fields, comparative procedures were devised and applied as a practical as well as a methodological response to diversity. In a similar vein, comparative theology is also proposed as an adequate response to the experience of religious diversity.[2] According to Clooney, it is more a practice of deep learning across religious borders, where one moves back and forth between one's own tradition and that of the religious other. Before we go more into the specifics of the comparative process of interreligious learning, it might be illuminating to take a glance at a close analogue of comparative theology, namely, comparative education.[3]

Comparative analysis in the context of education, according to Bereday, has four steps:

> First *description*, the systematic collection of pedagogical information in one country, then *interpretation*, the analysis in terms of social sciences, then *juxtaposition*, a simultaneous review of several systems to determine the framework in which to compare them, and finally *comparison*, first of select problems, then of the total relevance of

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engagements and their assessment. For the critical analysis of comparative practices in theology, we, therefore, choose to use an interdisciplinary model.

[2]Francis X. Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning across Religious Borders*, Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, 69.

[3]Thanks to some obvious similarities, we may consider comparative education as a close analogue of comparative theology. Traditionally, both developed from within the discipline of the history of their respective domains, that is, from the history of education and the history of religions; learning is the foremost justification for both enterprises; and finally, a good deal of both initiatives share more of the same American self-knowledge born from an awareness of inevitable plurality. See George Z.F. Bereday, *Comparative Method in Education*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964, 4; David Tracy, "Theology: Comparative Theology," in *Encyclopedia of Religion, 2nd Edition*, ed. Lindsay Jones, Farmington Hills, MI: Cergage Gale, 2005, 9125-9126.

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education in several countries – these steps […] point the way to the
future for comparative education.[4]

Thus, within a full-fledged comparative project of cross-border
learning, there are at least four phases: (a) an initial description of the
entities chosen for comparison, which involves specifying their
identity and circumscribing the scope of the inquiry; (b) an in-depth
evaluative study of both, especially the unfamiliar one, using the best
resources at hand; (c) juxtaposition of the different aspects of the
entities now brought out through the study, and which in effect
establishes similarities and dissimilarities, leading to the formation of
a certain hypothesis; and (d) comparison proper, where the
hypothesis evolves into a clear insight. Not long ago, Berling also
made a similar effort to articulate the different threads of
interreligious learning processes, which she thought were helpful for
alerting interreligious learners of the different dimensions of their
cross-border engagement. She deserves to be quoted at length.

> In this [interreligious learning] process learners: (1) enter other worlds
> through engaging and crossing boundaries of significant difference;
> (2) begin the task of interpretation and understanding by responding
> from their distinctive religious locations; (3) enter a series of
> conversations and dialogues both with the voices of the other
> tradition and also with other Christians seeking to develop a more
> flexible language for understanding the Christian tradition in relation
> to other religious possibilities; (4) begin to live out new relationships
> and Christian practices based on the new understandings; and (5)
> internalize the learning process so that they can continue developing
> such conversations and relationships.[5]

As a close reading would easily clarify, there is little difference
between the analytical apparatus Bereday proposed and Berling's
conceptualization of the processes of interreligious learning; if we
integrate the fifth thread of learning into the fourth in Berling's
model, then the two models will begin to match well and illuminate
each other. Although discussed one after another, the four phases are
neither successive steps nor simultaneous moves in the strict sense;
rather comparative learning evolves like blossoming of a flower. In

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[4]Bereday, Comparative Method in Education, 27-28.

[5]And she continues, "the threads of learning process are held in tension by two
poles: (1) understanding another religion faithfully and (2) reappropriating
Christian tradition in light of new understandings and relationships." J. A Berling,
"The Process of Interreligious Learning," in *Interreligious Learning*, ed. D. Pollefeyt,
Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2007, 25-26.

what follows, we will make an effort to organize the different threads of learning in the comparative theological project. We do not claim that our analytical apparatus can comprehend all different aspects of comparative theological learning. There is, perhaps, more in any genuine interreligious learning which neither a comparative theological narrative can articulate nor any critical-outsider-analyst can grasp. Although we are thus well aware of the unfathomable breadth of interreligious learning and the actual limits of critical analysis thereof, we may still venture to critique, hoping that an exercise as this will (a) point out overlooked mistakes, (b) offer an opportunity for comparativists to reflect on their practices, and (c) intimate those dimensions of interreligious learning that are either ultimately inarticulable or merely fantastic.

Phase I - Crossing the Boundaries

In the first phase of cross-religious learning, comparativists have to specify the identity of the religious entities chosen for comparison (Bereday), which obviously demands a conscious crossing of the boundaries and a significant engagement with religious others (Berling). Although many of us may find ourselves in a culture where religions overlap, the crossing of one's religious borders and the entrance into the world of one or more other religions is indeed a conscious choice, especially in the academic field. Selective comparative engagement with religious others is much more than a conscious approval of difference and plurality. Why and to what extent should one undertake a comparative work is an important question, though none can deny the fact that crossing of borders is simply a possibility full of promises. In the case of Clooney, the crossing has been admittedly to certain textual and ritual traditions in a certain part of the Hindu religious world in India, and that, too, with the clear purpose of deepening his own understanding of the Christian faith which he shares with the members of the Society of Jesus, in particular, and the Roman Catholic Church in America, in general. Scholarly engagements with scriptural and theological texts, often in the original cultural context in which they are preserved, have been his preferred point of entry into the vast Hindu world. Although he positions himself as a scholar of Hinduism, and not as a Hindu scholar, as he himself has rightly observed, his cross-scriptural reading does not remain an intellectual accomplishment alone; it is a

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spiritual event as well.[6] Among the many practices he considers essential for reading texts across borders, four are worth mentioning in this section that deals with the first phase of comparative learning processes: (a) deciding the precise text(s) one wants to and one can afford to read; (b) (preferably) learning the language of the texts one has chosen to read; (c) reading the text attentively; and (d) going to the textual and historical contexts as and when it is required.[7] Thus, the first phase which includes specifying the identity and circumscribing the scope of the analogue is itself a good deal of work, partly because the other is different and unfamiliar, despite many possible similarities.

Already at this initial stage, the Christian reader of other religious texts has to begin to answer a question that now slowly arises and will become more complex as one moves forward in the comparative learning process: the question of multiple loyalties. In the case of one's engagement with Sanskritic traditions in Hinduism, the issue arises with the learning of language itself, that is, the second practice in the list above; for, according to orthodox Hindu traditions, language is divine both in its origin and its function. One does not need to precipitate the issue of loyalty by linking it to basic language learning, yet, it is not completely negligible for one who calculates the end prize of interreligious learning, especially when one insists that it is both religious and academic at the same time. But, for Clooney, the issue of loyalty arises more with the third and fourth practices, namely, through one's attentive reading, and still further, by further exploring the textual and historical contexts. While reading Hindu texts, he continues to maintain his loyalty to his Catholic Christian foundations; but, at the same time, he tries to cultivate a certain empathy for the particular Hindu tradition he engages.[8] How best can one practice empathy, and will empathy, even in its finest form, meet the requirements of religious loyalty? Of course, questions such as this presume that understanding of a religious text is an instance of religious understanding. Much of our understanding about these kinds of issues depends on the persuasive power of reliable first-hand testimonies from people who allow interreligious

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[6]Clooney, Comparative Theology: Deep Learning across Religious Borders, 59.
[7]Clooney, Comparative Theology: Deep Learning across Religious Borders, 60.
[8]Clooney, Comparative Theology: Deep Learning across Religious Borders, 64.

engagement to happen in their life and works as well as critical inner-theological assessment of such testimonies made by scholars in respective home traditions.[9] Clooney, however, seems to address this issue quite academically (thus, leaving unaddressed the (Christian) theological questions multiple religious loyalties raise), and, as a result, treats this as a question of objectivity in reading texts (and at a later stage in appropriating them). Therefore, it concerns the impossible neutrality of research works in general.[10] Accordingly, his effort is centred upon trying to find a helpful direction in honest acknowledgement of unavoidable biases.[11] Although one is perfectly right to address this question as Clooney does, one might also wonder whether what is at stake here is only a question of the strict objectivity of knowledge claims in the texts. It is possible, I think, to refine this question in epistemological terms and thus to redirect it towards gaining some idea about the porosity of knowing selves, whose subjectivity might be shared, and the porosity of religious texts which possibilizes other-religious reading of the same. Yet, quite a lot of ink has been spilt on the question of multiple religious loyalties and the issue of cross-religious understanding; and, much of the avoidance or reluctance in engaging in interreligious learning seems to have come from unsettled doubts about religious identity and understanding in-and-after interreligious learning. Therefore, it is important to approach the questions of understanding and loyalty more deeply than it is being discussed presently; especially when comparative works done so far seem to provide us with convincing data for an epistemological reconsideration of the issues.

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[9]In any case, as Catherine Cornille notes, "all empathic resonance with the religious other is […] at best approximate or analogical, and one's understanding of the religious other never complete" (*The Im-possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*, New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2008, 212).

[10]To approach the issue in context, see Part IV, entitled, "Neutrality and Methodological Agnosticism," in Russell T. McCutcheon, ed. *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion: A Reader,* London: Cassell, 1999, 215-280.

[11]He says: "Bias is hard to eradicate but, good or bad, it gives us a direction, we can become freer, more vulnerable in our reading. Even if the complexities created by multiple loyalties might be finessed by strict neutrality, we do better to face directly the vital religious tensions involving individual and community, faith and reason, learning my tradition and learning another tradition. This provides a better template for the costs and profits that accrue to reading across several religious traditions by the practice of comparative theology" (Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning across Religious Borders*, 64).

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Consider, for instance, the stakes Clooney has identified in a cross-cultural study of Vedāntic discourses. All four practices, as listed above, involved in reading texts across religious borders, are present in the case of studying Vedānta: first, choosing to study, for instance, Śaṁkara's commentary of Bādarāyaṇa's *Uttara Mīmāṁsā Sūtra,* in which case one has to consider other competing commentaries as well; second, learning Sanskrit; third, reading the text, which requires a certain skill in exegetical thinking; and, fourth, immersing oneself in the textual context which requires an indwelling in the specific canonical worldview. In order to bring out the porosity of epistemic selves as well as that of the text, let us focus on the role Sanskrit plays both in allowing readers to access a Hindu text and in allowing the meaning of the text to come to the fore in the course of exegesis. Referring to the interpretation of verse 3.1.1-2 of the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* Clooney says:

> The Vedānta's exhaustive and exhausting grammatical and ritual exploration of the *Muṇḍaka* text can be understood as a grammatically rendered replay of the Vedic *brahmodaya* […]. By their immersion in the arcane realities of rituals and grammatical thinking, the Vedāntic commentators turn from the content of language to language's own rules (which are never separate from ritual's rules) as the locus of language's self-expressing mystery: the play of text and grammatical forms serves to open up the meaning [...]. [12]

That the textual dynamics are capable of opening up meaning (which is more literal than referential) implies that meaning is susceptible to appropriation by skilful exegetes. But, on the other hand, it also remains a fact that, exegetes, as lingual beings, can learn the rules of any language where meaning shows up. Porosity of texts and that of the reader-selves lies in language's original capacity to self-express meaning and commentators' acquired capability to bring out the meaning of (even a foreign) text by analyzing its language rules respectively. In summation, comparativists' reading of other religious texts is an effect of the porous linguality of the readers and the porous textuality of religious classics, both of which vouch for the porous rationality that materializes divine-human communication.

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[12]Francis X. Clooney, "Vedānta, Commentary, and the Theological Component of Cross-Cultural Study," in Frank Reynolds and David Tracy, ed., *Myth and Philosophy*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990, 303.

Phase II - Knowing the Other

The second phase of comparative learning, according to our interlocutors, includes an in-depth study of the two instances chosen for comparison (Bereday), something which develops through interpretation and understanding in strict correlation with the distinctive religious location of the two instances (Berling). As mentioned in the previous section, in Clooney's view, reading scriptural and theological texts is the most reliable and fruitful practice in interreligious learning. And, in order to read texts in view of an in-depth context specific understanding, he proposes the practice of commentary. The practice of commentary, which is in fact a close reading, "implies reverence for the text that is studied, a recognition of the truth it passes down, and a willingness to subordinate personal interests and novelty to the wisdom of the tradition that has preserved and cared for the texts in which that wisdom is inscribed."[13] Reflecting on his own experience with this kind of non-critical, ultra-reverential reading practice, Clooney refers to the question of loyalty any interreligious learners like him might confront. While, on the one hand, he says that readers outside the tradition will have to take textual dynamics seriously,[14] on the other hand, he admits that one's Christian faith will prevent one from realizing the logical fulfilment of the religious reading of a Hindu text.[15] Let us take the example of his own commentarial reading of the three holy mantras of the *Śrīvaiṣṇava* Hindus.[16] The textual dynamic of these mantras works well when it succeeds in evoking deep commitment in the readers to *Nārayaṇa* with *Śrī*, which in the context of prayerful chanting or commentarial reading finds expression in worshipping *Nārayaṇa* with *Śrī*. But, being the Christian reader he is, Clooney does not worship *Nārayaṇa*; his Christian commitment prevents him from doing that. Not worshipping *Nārayaṇa* is of course a mark of his Christian theological credibility; but, as a matter of fact, it also looks as if it badly betrays a serious cross-tracking at an early stage of the race. A self-consistent comparativist, at least when viewed from the perspective of comparative reading, at the second

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[13]Clooney, Comparative Theology: Deep Learning across Religious Borders, 60-61.

[14]Clooney, Comparative Theology: Deep Learning across Religious Borders, 63.

[15]Clooney, Comparative Theology: Deep Learning across Religious Borders, 65.

[16]Francis X. Clooney, The Truth, The Way, The Life: Christian Commentary on the Three Holy Mantras of the Śrīvaiṣṇava Hindus, Leuven: Peeters, 2008.

phase of his/her cross-border learning is expected to study the instances under comparison as deeply as possible, following the directions of the text even to the extent of getting *refigured*, to put it in Paul Ricoeur's words; he/she should not confuse this dimension of cross-border learning with other dimensions of learning, namely, juxtaposition and comparison.[17] Nevertheless, it is this apparent inconsistency in comparative reading procedures that leads us to an understanding of the *theological* use of comparative learning.

Like any other Catholic Christian, Clooney is not unaware of the fact that he cannot take a full-depth plunge into the sea of meanings which the three holy mantras of the Śrīvaiṣṇava Hindus evoke; he is satisfied with a certain level of learning that is deemed sufficient for a direct close sighting of the way these mantras function in a devotee through prayer. Perhaps, we must make a distinction here. From an analytical perspective, what is seized by a comparative theologian in other-religious theological texts is only part of their reflexive content, not their referential content. Following the distinction made by John Perry in his *Reflexive-Referential Theory*,[18] we use these terms in the following sense. The referential content of theological texts consists in necessary conditions that must be fulfilled by both the disclosure and appropriation of meaning the texts are about. On the other hand, reflexive content, quite in continuity with the referential content of texts, consists in implicit conditions of true disclosure and appropriation and, more distinctly, in explicit conditions of texturing. It is the latter set of explicit material conditions (language rules) that a comparativist *qua* comparativist can try to fulfill; and yet, it can lead a

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[17]One might object that the problem I am highlighting here becomes a problem only when we analyze the act of comparative reading with the artificial heuristic apparatus which divides comparative learning process into four phases, and that comparative learning is a back and forth movement from beginning to end. But, if a cross-border learning process is thus simply a back and forth movement at the will of the learner over and above the dynamic of the specific kind of learning strategy one uses and the potentialities of the *other* one engages, then one must perhaps reconsider the trust one has placed in the strategy of reading.

[18]See John Perry, *Reference and Reflexivity*, Stanford: CSLI Publications, 2001. For critical evaluation of the intent of Perry's theory, see Isidora Stojanovic, "Two Problems of Overgeneration for the Reflexive-Referential Theory," available from http://jeannicod.ccsd.cnrs.fr/docs/00/28/36/97/PDF/two_problems_for_RRT.pdf, accessed on 22 February 2012. See, also, Stojanovic's "What Is Said, Linguistic Meaning, and Directly Referential Expressions," *Philosophy Compass* 1, 10 (2006): 1747- 1791.

comparativist, if only he/she wills, to the narrow gates that might open to the referential content of the text of whose texturing one has been studying closely and persistently. Now, applying the referential-reflexive distinction in our effort to understand the nature and function of theological texts in Hindu-Christian comparative learning, we may consider, though with fear of simplification, "the arcane realities of ritual and grammatical thinking" as pointing to the referential content and "the play of text and grammatical forms" as referring to the porous end of reflexive content.[19]

This distinction is also helpful for understanding the nature of "the theological component" of Hindu-Christian studies. As Clooney rightly observes, even while one enters a certain Hindu textual corpus by closely following "the play of text and grammatical forms" with the help of reliable forerunners from the canonical tradition in which the text one studies took form, one cannot but notice a certain power that both shapes the identity of the textual community and carries away the imagination of the members of that community along the ideals the text testifies to. Clooney links this power inherent in the text to the "active theological component" of the text; and he calls it the "sacred intrusiveness" of theological texts.[20] It is possible for a comparativist to recognize the "sacred intrusiveness" of theological texts from one's own and other traditions; and obviously, such a recognition is not a coast-free neutral intellectual exercise. It may drag one to the question of truth, which implies that it is an exercise that has bearings on one's worldviews and ways of life. Basing himself on his experience of reading Śaṁkara's commentaries of *Uttara Mīmāṁsā Sūtra* with the assistance of the Vedāntic canonical tradition, Clooney says:

> They constantly intrude upon and (at least threaten to) reshape the world of the reader, even the "unbelieving" reader, the historian, the scholar. Reading such texts can in some cases rewrite the world in which one reads those texts. To study Vedanta and to work through the Upaniṣads with Śaṁkara is to find oneself implicated in the world

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[19]Clooney, "Vedānta, Commentary, and the Theological Component of Cross-Cultural Study," 303.

[20]Clooney, "Vedānta, Commentary, and the Theological Component of Cross-Cultural Study," 306.

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> of those texts, […]. Positively put, this intrusiveness is expressed in
> the claim that the text indicates the way to salvation.[21]

Is this not the height of a theological encounter that can legitimately
happen in an interreligious learning? The moment of recognition of
the "sacred intrusiveness" in an alien text is simultaneously a
moment of anamnesis for a comparative theological reader of the
sacred intrusiveness of his/her home tradition. This moment of
simultaneous recognition and anamnesis is also a rare spiritual
moment which offers us an insight into the porosity of our being in
general and our rationality in particular.

Phase III - Searching for a Common Ground

According to the heuristic procedure we introduced in this article to
understand the epistemological practices of comparative theologians,
the third phase of interreligious learning involves a juxtaposition
meant to establish both similarities and dissimilarities, ultimately
leading to the formation of a certain hypothesis (Bereday) and to
enable one to seek for a more flexible language for understanding
one's tradition in relation to the religious other one engages (Berling).
To start off with a concrete case, let us take, once again, Clooney's
commentarial reading of the three holy mantras of the Śrīvaiṣṇava
tradition. Unlike comparative education, which places instances side-
by-side to bring out similarities and dissimilarities, Clooney always
privileges similarities. So long as differences "do not obliterate
similarities,"[22] he believes that researchers are at liberty to focus on
one of the two. Of course, researchers are not only free but also
strongly urged to make judicious choices in their works. As a matter
of fact, comparative learning begins with certain intuitive judgment
in reference to similarities between two textual traditions; and, in that
sense, comparative reading is an intelligent, judicious learning
process. Yet, one still wishes comparative theologians who now focus
on similarities that might also reflect on questions like: Is there
anything that pulls one back to one's home tradition even while new
quests push one to the edges? From a commonsense point of view,
comparison works well when similarities and differences remain in a
tensile relation; similarities-in-difference are the ground for

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[21]Clooney, "Vedānta, Commentary, and the Theological Component of Cross-
Cultural Study," 306.

[22]Clooney, The Truth, The Way, The Life: Christian Commentary on the Three
Holy Mantras of the Śrīvaiṣṇava Hindus, 182.

comparison. Such being the case, if comparativists at this third phase of the interreligious learning process, namely, juxtaposition, focus only on the similarities between two traditions, skipping the differences for whatever pragmatic reasons, then the hypothesis that would emerge in the course of juxtaposition will also largely be one-sided. In addition, from a logical point of view as well, as Michael Morreau argues, similarities do not simply add up to provide us with a new insight. Morreau constructs his argument in three stages: first, he shows that "there really does have to be a balance of similarities if there are to be useful overall similarities;" second, he establishes that there is no such balance of similarities in comparative procedures; and finally, he justifies his skepticism about comparative similarities by showing that "a relation of comparative overall similarity must always have a dictator if it supervenes on similarities in several respects."[23] Morreau's central analytical tool, namely, dictator, – "a critical respect of similarity that excessively influences overall similarities" – is, in my reading, capable of re-opening the discussion on the aspect of hegemony in comparative theological works.[24]

Clooney seems to solve the issue of differences among traditions by dividing the work of interreligious interactions: differences have to be further investigated in careful *doctrinal exchanges* while interreligious *commentarial reading* works with similarities.[25] The job of a Christian theologian engaging another religious tradition can be neatly divided

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[23]Michael Morreau, "It Simply Does Not Add Up: Trouble with Overall Similarity," in *The Journal of Philosophy*, CVII, 9 (September 2010), 469-490. Joseph Kaipayil also has leveled an argument against the use of comparative method in philosophy in his *The Epistemology of Comparative Philosophy: A Critique with Reference to P.T. Raju's Views*, Rome: Centre for Indian and Inter-Religious Studies, 1995.

[24]It is indeed a topic widely discussed, especially from post-colonial perspectives. See for instance, Hugh Nicholson, "The New Comparative Theology and the Problem of Theological Hegemonism" in Francis X. Clooney, ed. *The New Comparative Theology: Interreligious Insights from the Next Generation*, New York: T&T Clark, 2010, 43-62.

[25]"And where differences do seem nearly insurmountable, we can still move forward simply by choosing to take up others among the myriad possible points of connection made evident in the commentarial practice." To this, he adds the following footnote: "The flexibility of interreligious reading too, compared with the difficulty of doctrinal exchange, suggests that other dialogues, such as Muslim-Christian, a reading of each other's sacred texts, with traditional commentaries, is a promising way to proceed," Clooney, *The Truth, The Way, The Life: Christian Commentary on the Three Holy Mantras of the Śrīvaiṣṇava Hindus*, 182.

in this way because the basic epistemological practice that makes interreligious comparative learning possible demands that we respect the tensional relation between similarities and differences at every stage of the learning process, lest we come up with half-truth claims, or a totally new notion which has no direct roots in either tradition. One may wonder if the notion of spirituality that Clooney intermittently uses is one such claim. Spirituality seems to be a *tertium quid* comparative theologians are compelled to construct, a trans-religious notion against which the worth and usefulness of the religions under comparison are measured. This becomes very apparent when Clooney sets the background for interreligious prayers, wherefrom he seems to gain spiritual insights and theological meanings. He writes:

> It would also miss the point of the Mantras were we to dwell for too long on theological and ethical meanings or even on issues of reading intrerreligiously. To fully understand the implications of the Mantras, we must not postpone endlessly our appreciation of the more specifically religious, experiential and prayerful dimensions of the Mantras. Their spiritual insights – particularly the sense of sinfulness, total helplessness and dependence, the recognition of grief and hope for its ending, the value of receiving and trusting a divine word – indicate values and states that can surely be cultivated by a Christian who journeys along a Christian spiritual path, desiring an encounter with God as intense and intimate as that voiced in the three Mantras.[26]

Thus, seeing the textual similarities side-by-side, the comparative learner is moved to hypothesize the various possibilities of thinking, living, and praying in the *way* the religious other seems to think, live and pray. Yet, the fact is that the establishment of similarities and differences and the search for a language intelligible for both traditions are both integral aspects of the single act of comparative learning.

Phase IV - Generation of New Insights

It is in the final phase of comparative learning that the learner earns the fruits of her/his work. At this stage, hypotheses developed in the context of the juxtaposition of two or more instances which the learner has studied in the best way possible evolves into insights (Bereday) and the learner begins to think new thoughts and live out

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[26]Clooney, The Truth, The Way, The Life: Christian Commentary on the Three Holy Mantras of the Śrīvaiṣṇava Hindus, 190.

new relationships with *others* and the *Other* (Berling). Let us come back to the example from Clooney. After juxtaposing the three mantras with similar texts from the New Testament, he says that "placed together, neither separated nor confused, these Mantras and these words of Jesus affect the meaning of one another and so too the reader's reception of either and then both texts [...]."[27] This crucial impact on the meaning of the texts and the reception of this meaning by readers from either tradition leads readers, he further explains, to "locate and draw upon these potent Mantras through the construction of possible affinities, opening some fundamental intertextual dynamics [...]."[28] In Clooney's estimation, the intertextual dynamics across religious borders is simply similar to the dynamics between two texts within a tradition where one is interpreted in light of the other:

> Just as commentators ceaselessly cite older texts to illumine the text at hand, and by doing so both clarify meanings and yet too open up new possibilities as the cited texts enter a creative relationship with the text being explained, so too in this interreligious context, interreligious citation and the consequent double reading provide possibilities even beyond the specific expectations already identified by the commentator.[29]

The issue we want to highlight is the seemingly easy transposition of intra-religious commentarial practice into interreligious commentarial reading. Technically, Clooney is proposing the principle of *upasaṁhāra* (coordination or combination), which he has meticulously exposed through his analysis of the continuity and development between *Mīmāṁsā* and *Vedānta*, for interreligious learning. Compare the above citation, where Clooney passes from Hindu commentarial practices to interreligious commentarial practice, with the following quote, where Śaṁkara makes a similar move between interpretation of Vedic rituals and interpretation of the Upaniṣadic texts.

> When it says, "Let him make an oblation," it is the same human effort that is being enjoined regarding the same *agnihotra*, whatever

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[27]Clooney, The Truth, The Way, The Life: Christian Commentary on the Three Holy Mantras of the Śrīvaiṣṇava Hindus, 189.

[28]Clooney, The Truth, The Way, The Life: Christian Commentary on the Three Holy Mantras of the Śrīvaiṣṇava Hindus, 189.

[29]Clooney, The Truth, The Way, The Life: Christian Commentary on the Three Holy Mantras of the Śrīvaiṣṇava Hindus, 189.

the differences among the *śākhās* [in which the injunction is heard].
So too, there is a similar injunctive force [*codanā*] in this text [which
is found in the Upaniṣads of both] the *Vājasaneyins* and *Chandogas*.
[…] So too, there is the same form [*rūpa*] for the act of knowledge in
each text, namely being made of *prāṇa* as specified by the
qualifications of being oldest and best, etc. Just as the offering
material and the deity are the form of a sacrifice, *so too* the object of
knowledge [*vijñeya*] is the form of the act of knowledge [*vijñāna*],
since it is informed by that [object]. The name [*samkhya*] too is the
same, "the meditation on the *prāṇas*". Therefore acts of knowledge are
to be [more completely] composed from all [by drawing on] all the
Vedānta texts.[30]

It is obviously important to dwell a while on the principle and
practice of *upasaṁhāra;* it would not only clarify the notion of
comparison Clooney inherits from his study of Hindu texts but also
offer us an opportunity to assess the viability of the basic
methodological exchange at the back of comparative theology project.

Upasaṁhāra as conceived and practiced by Śaṁkara is "an intelligent,
skilled, 'borrowing' among Upaniṣadic texts."[31] The Vedāntins
borrowed this principle of combination, as clear from the above
quotation, from the *Mīmāṁsā* tradition which rejected the view that
differences of Vedic schools (*śākhās*) constituted differences of Vedic
rites. Vedāntins argue that "there is continuity across *śākhā*-
boundaries in four areas that count: the *saṁyoga* (connection with the
rite's promised result [*phala*]), *rūpa* (the form of the rite, its named
deity and offering material), *codanā* (injunction or injunctive for
instigating the performance) and *ākhyā* (the name of the rite –
'agnihotra,' etc)."[32] This assumption of continuity and the related
principle of combination were taken over by Vedāntins while
engaging different Upaniṣadic texts. Quite in line with the *Pūrva
Mīmāṁsā* practice of combination of ritual descriptions across *śākhās*,
Vedāntins attempted a selective combination of Upaniṣadic
meditations. The assumption was that "comparable meditations – i.e.,

    [30]Francis X. Clooney, "The Principle of *Upasaṁhāra* and the Development of
Vedanta as an *Uttara Mīmāṁsā*" in Mandana Miśra and R. C. Dwivedi, ed., *Studies
in Mīmāṁsā: Dr. Mandan Mishra Felicitation Volume*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass
Publishers, 1994, 281-282.
    [31]Clooney, "The Principle of *Upasaṁhāra* and the Development of Vedanta as an
Uttara Mīmāṁsā," 280.
    [32]Clooney, "The Principle of *Upasaṁhāra* and the Development of Vedanta as an
Uttara Mīmāṁsā," 281.

those which are legitimately similar in name, content or form – can be determined to be the 'same' everywhere, and so combinable, even if they are not identical in every detail."[33] The principle and practice of *upasaṁhāra* has at least two unique foundations: the dynamic interplay of Vedic texts and the belief in the indeterminacy of the textual and extra-textual referent, *Brahman*. Just as an interpreter of a text has to be familiar with the language rules in order that he/she may be able to recognize the meaning disclosed in the text in the course of exegesis, so should a meditator be familiar with all aspects of *Brahman* so that he/she can discern the traces of *Brahman* in the course of his/her meditative practices. There is indeed a very important point that Clooney brings out through his study of the method in Vedanta in light of the interpretive strategies in *Mīmāṁsā Sūtras*: "Though the object of knowledge is simply one, one ought not to seek to reduce language to the same simplicity; for the unity of the known is available by the practice of 'working through' the plurality of the Upaniṣads."[34] This is definitely a very valuable hermeneutical principle which a Christian reader can borrow from Hindu religious other and fruitfully employ for a reconstructive and yet innovative theological work within the Christian plural tradition(s). But, given the fact that both Vedic-Vedāntic Hinduism as well as mainline classical Christian theologies ground themselves on their own irreducible absolutes – *Brahman* and the Father of Jesus Christ respectively – how far can one be sure of the viability and usefulness of the principle of combination for interreligious learning between Hinduism and Christianity is a pertinent issue.

Perhaps, apart from intra-traditional theological reconstruction, one can also use this principle, not for interreligious learning, but for certain trans-religious learning. Clooney's claim to have marked off "a new common ground, a site for richer and deeper insight, interacting and creating new possibilities for reading, reflection, and prayer,"[35] seems to reflect more a moment of trans-religious learning carried out from above or between two religions rather than the fruits of interreligious learning done from within one of the two traditions.

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[33]Clooney, "The Principle of *Upasaṁhāra* and the Development of Vedanta as an *Uttara* Mīmāṁsā," 281.

[34]Clooney, "The Principle of *Upasaṁhāra* and the Development of Vedanta as an *Uttara* Mīmāṁsā," 281.

[35]Clooney, The Truth, The Way, The Life: Christian Commentary on the Three Holy Mantras of the Śrīvaiṣṇava Hindus, 189.

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It seems so because the claim is no longer about a certain heuristic space between textualities; it is clearly about a new concrete situation, a new hybrid discipline, and a new real community of believers with complicated loyalties and with ever more complicated concepts of God. This suspicion prompts us to inquire whether *upasaṁhāra* is the most appropriate strategy for interreligious learning, though, as previously mentioned, it has tremendous potential for theological reconstruction of any individual pluralistic religious tradition. If one were to start off the interreligious engagement with an insight into irreducible difference between the background concepts of the two religions that one tries to interrelate, even though one also perceives some points of overlap in many respects, then the proper work site of deep learning across irreducible traditions is not so much the comparable aspects of texts and (textual and extra-textual) referents as the porous rationality of the indissolubly singular interreligious learners. This might imply that scholars involved in interreligious engagements look for epistemological strategies that not only build on similarities but also take differences quite seriously. Having suggested this less-trodden path in interreligious learning, it must be noted that what follows is not so much a critique of Clooney's practice of *upasaṁhāra* as a fresh methodological imagination occasioned by his comparative practice. Moreover, it is going to be an effort to build on the insights we glean from David Tracy.

Towards Re-conceiving the Notions of Comparison and Theology

Tracy, in his contribution entitled "theology" in the *Encyclopedia of Religion*, has neatly described the history of the term and concept of comparative theology. The main thrust of the article is that any theology in any tradition that takes plurality seriously must eventually become a comparative theology. Comparison, for him, is "mutually critical correlation" and theology, "the hermeneutical attempt to establish mutually critical correlations between" a religious tradition and the historical situation where it finds itself. In this sense, his is an essay in fundamental theology that bears on all theological practices. Let us draw on a distinction he makes in order to highlight both the *comparative* and *theological* character of theological engagement with historical contexts. As a *theologian*, one has to offer "two distinct but related interpretations: an interpretation of the tradition and an interpretation of the contemporary situation," but as a *comparativist*, one has to bring out the kind of relation that

exists between the two interpretations (that of the home tradition and that of the context).[36] In Tracy's estimation, there are three possible relations between theologian's two interpretations: (a) identity; (b) analogy; and (c) disjunction.[37] Clooney's project seems to explore the first of the three kinds of relations which Tracy identifies in the field of comparative theology. However, one must immediately add that identity would not be the most appropriate word to describe the complexly nuanced relationship Clooney discovers in-and-after his comparative reading of Hindu and Christian texts,[38] since the general trajectory of his comparative reading project tends to imitate the *advaitic* commentarial movement from *upasaṁhāra* (combination) to *samanvaya* (harmonization). This would justify our provisional classification of his work as intended to bring out identities. In this section we will examine if we could proceed towards discovering the second kind of relation comparativists could bring out: similarities-in-difference or analogy. Of course, we have already been presupposing this kind of relation between religions while we were assessing Clooney's project in the preceding paragraphs. That it is possible to address the question of plurality and difference in terms of identity, analogy and disjunction implies that a meta-comparison of these three ways of engaging plurality is also possible. In that sense, our proposal is not meant to deny the rightful place of scholarly comparative works around the paradigm of identity; rather it modestly explores another related yet distinct way of dealing with diversity. Nevertheless, this also implies that Clooney's project is not in continuity with Tracy's theological project of analogical imagination in Catholic theology. Although Clooney has advertised

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[36]Tracy, "Theology: Comparative Theology," 9132.

[37]"[T]he concept 'mutually critical correlations' suggests a number of possible relations between the theologian's two somewhat distinct interpretations: (1) identities between the questions prompted by and the responses to the situations and the questions and responses given by the tradition (as in many liberal and modernist Christian theologies); (2) similarities-in-difference, or analogies between those two interpretations (as in many Neo-Confucian 'theologies'); and (3) radical disjunctions, or more existentially, confrontations, between the two (as in the Hindu and Buddhist insistence on the necessity of the reality of a 'higher consciousness'); or the radical dialectic of the sacred and the profane in archaic ontologies; or the radical correction of traditional self-interpretations of a religion after the emergence of historical consciousness" (Tracy, "Theology: Comparative Theology," 9132).

[38]Francis X. Clooney, *Theology after Vedanta: An Experiment in Comparative Theology*, New York: State University of New York Press, 1993, 64-69, 168ff.

his project as having "Tracy-plus" aspects in it,[39] as a matter fact, his project explores only one aspect – the aspect in reference to textual similarities – of the comparative theological work Tracy introduced in his seminal article in *Encyclopedia of Religion.*

A truly Tracy-plus approach to the question of religious diversity must begin with what Tracy has achieved. Tracy's achievement lies in bringing out the importance of the analogical imagination for Catholic systematic theology, which thus becomes a thoroughly hermeneutical enterprise and still further, in bringing out the interrupted nature of all theological hermeneutical projects. Such being the case, one has to re-conceive the comparison in "comparative theology" as analogy; and to explore "Tracy-plus" aspects in the project, especially in Hindu-Christian hermeneutical projects, one has to consider the Hindu views on analogy as well.

As a matter of fact, most of the best minds in our intellectual history, both in India as well as in the West, have grappled with the place and function of analogy in thinking and communication. In the West, ever since Aristotle's *Prior Analytic* which presented syllogism as a deduction from the particular to the particular – a deduction with the help of examples or analogues – analogy began to gain a unique place in thinking procedures, only to become a crucial issue for theorists who tried to explain the so-called thinking procedures of deduction by analogy.[40] Two Western scholars who have recently explored the rich possibilities of analogical thinking for philosophy and theology

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[39]Clooney, Comparative Theology: Deep Learning across Religious Borders, 43.

[40]About the pervasive influence of analogy in the Western thinking, especially in philosophy, Zilberman writes: "[T]he entire canon of philosophical literature is based almost exclusively on analogies, examples, paradigms and incomplete inductions (which resemble analogies very much). No less than content, this also concerns formal logic. If we analyze it carefully, then the stagnation (mentioned by Kant) and the obvious crisis of classical syllogistic can be explained by the fact that within the syllogistic, analogy is hidden. As one of the premises of a syllogism there should be general judgment. However, no general judgment (except a pure tautology of the sort 'the green grass is green') exists in nature. A well-known example 'All swans are white' held until the discovery of the Australian black swan. Therefore, any syllogism is deduction from the particular to the particular. But this, according to the Aristotelian definition (I, ch. 24), is the form of a deduction by analogy (or 'by means of example'). Any attempt to clarify the nature of this deduction immediately caused logic to fall in to a paroxysm of interpretation […]" (David B. Zilberman, *Analogy in Indian and Western Philosophical Thought*, ed., Helena Gourko and Robert S. Cohen, New York: Springer, 2006, 45).

are Ricoeur and Tracy respectively.[41] In Indian traditions too, already from the *sūtra* period onward, *upamāna*, (roughly translated as "comparison" or "analogy") was quite important, both as a thinking practice and as a topic of debate among different schools of thought.[42] However, despite its ubiquitous presence, analogy has seldom been understood comprehensively and assessed theologically in our times. David B. Zilberman strongly reminds us of this unnoticed gap in the critical scholarship of most fields of knowledge:

> Tropically speaking, analogy can be called both a foster parent and a bastard child of philosophy. Almost all of what is substantial in philosophical reasoning is woven of various analogies and similes. By the chain of analogy philosophy is bound to a theology – and the same matter makes bridges from it into the theory of literature and art. When taken in the historical and comparative cultural perspective, it is not difficult to notice that the flesh of analogies is lost in the shifts between historical epochs and cultures, and that what remains is a thin skeleton of universal logical truths and deductive structures. Both in theology of revelation and in modern philosophy of science, analogy is considered as the only, more or less rational, mechanism of discovery and cumulative growth of knowledge. In phenomenology, theory of communication and semiotics, analogy is widely used and sometimes misused […]. This nomenclature of references can be easily extended. It looks even more antithetical because since Aristotle, little has been added to our knowledge of the logical structure of the inference by analogy, and despite the availability of a rich collection of instances and ways of analogizing in the above mentioned domains of science and humanities, we still lack a comprehensive systematization and description of the general principles of the analogy mechanism.[43]

An attempt to introduce the crux of the debate on analogy within the Indian intellectual traditions will not only shed more light on some issues we raised in response to Clooney's project but also help us to think about engaging our religious others in another way. In what follows we will show how this debate bears on an anticipated analysis of comparative (analogical) practices in Catholic theology.

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[41]See Paul Ricoeur, The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language, trans. Robert Czerny with Kathleen Mclaughlin and John Costello, London: Routledge, 1978; Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning, Fort Worth: Texas Christian University, 1976; and David Tracy, The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism, New York: Crossroad, 1981.

[42]Shiv Kumar, *Upamāna in Indian Philosophy*, Delhi: Eastern Book Linkers, 1980.

[43]Zilberman, Analogy in Indian and Western Philosophical Thought, 235.

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The works accomplished by Shiv Kumar and Zilberman are quite illuminating for the first half of this task; and for the second half of the task one will have to reconsider the use of Anselm's "faith seeking understanding" as the sole definition of theology.

Upamāna and Christian Comparative Practices

Ziberman's warning for Western analysts of Indian *upamāna* is important to note from the very outset: first of all, the epistemological procedures and logical operations that led to the development of various theories of analogy in India are quite different from the ones employed in the West; and secondly, despite any terminological similarity (*upamāna*), there is a substantial diversity of views on the nature, role, value and scope of *upamāna* across different systems in India.[44] Kumar has also alerted researchers to this problem.[45] Both scholars agree that one has to keep a chronological order while re-taking the different views; but Zilberman goes a step further in his reflective retrospect of the Indian debate to periodize the entire discussion into three broad, overlapping, stages: "(1) methodological stage (7th century B.C. – 2nd century A.D.); (2) epistemological stage (2nd century A.D – 11th century A.D.); [and] (3) logistical stage (12th century A.D – 18th century A.D)."[46]

As the periodization indicates, it was from the second century onwards that Indian thinkers began to examine the exact epistemic function of analogy (recourse to examples) within a structure of logical deduction. More importantly, from that time they began to situate analogies "within a procedure of discovering new knowledge and of confirming its trustworthiness as given by an immediate perception or reported as an authoritative testimony."[47] But, this, in Zilberman's estimation, led to an "epistemological crisis" in Indian thinking: having placed the justificatory weight more on the *example*, one who claims to engage in deductive reasoning has to first of all admit that he/she is actually proceeding non-deductively or

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[44]Zilberman, *Analogy in Indian and Western Philosophical Thought*, 47. Analysts of the debate on analogy in Indian traditions will be overwhelmed by the sheer immensity of literature on the topic. It is hardly possible to investigate all the different basic texts (*sūtras*, *bhāṣyas*, *varttikās*, etc.) and the related scholarly discussions in each school in one full book length study; and perhaps it is needless for the present purposes as well.

[45]Kumar, Upamāna in Indian Philosophy, ix-x.

[46]Zilberman, Analogy in Indian and Western Philosophical Thought, 49.

[47]Zilberman, Analogy in Indian and Western Philosophical Thought, 49.

analogically, and, secondly, that, because the procedure is analogical (i.e., in reference to an example at hand) what is actually happening is a self-confirmation. Thus, in most major Indian traditions, analogical reasoning has not been a means of discovering anything new; rather, it has been, to put it in Zilberman's words, "a means of non-discovering [new knowledge]; i.e., a reduction of every fact of experience (taken not as direct experience, but subject of a group's consensus) to a ready-made scheme of logical, psychological and semantic principles."[48]

However, deduction by analogy was not immediately abandoned due to the epistemological vacuum upon which the whole edifice of apparently new knowledge stood; on the other hand, thanks to its ability to proceed non-deductively (thus escaping tests of external justification) and yet to retain a certain irreducible identity, analogical thinking became an icon of openness and flexibility. This was no surprise, and tradition-specific thinkers, be they philosophers, theologians, or any social scientist, soon adopted analogical thinking as the apt method to continue thinking in a world characterized by a radical plurality of views, though ironically without ever noticing that the influx of diverse views was occasioned by pressing analogical thinking more to produce new knowledge than to verify and refresh one's old knowledge. However, some grasped the limitation of analogical thinking began to re-think the place of analogy in cognitive life. For they seized "the essence of the epistemological crisis," which, Zilberman explains, "consisted of the fact that it was proven to be the mode of reduction of any notion to the status of a subject of an empty logical class, or it means that all cognitive structures are circular analogies."[49] It is in the face of this real epistemological crisis that certain Indian theories of analogy evolved into the third *logistical stage*. At this stage, all (non-)knowledge gained through analogical imaginations are organized not as the material conditions for unity, but, as Zilberman writes, "as the formal rules for achieving a consensus under the condition of accepting a certain, deliberately-specified metaphysical position, which only figuratively can be considered as cognitive."[50]

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[48]Zilberman, Analogy in Indian and Western Philosophical Thought, 50.

[49]Zilberman, Analogy in Indian and Western Philosophical Thought, 49.

[50]Zilberman, Analogy in Indian and Western Philosophical Thought, 49.

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Those systems in the Indian tradition that refused to accept *upamāna* as an independent source of knowledge did so because they decided to act in conformity with the metaphysical traditions they belonged to. In addition, conversely, rootedness in a certain common metaphysical tradition (which is likely to be more interpretatively cognitive than being purely cognitive) becomes the minimum condition for analogical thinking. As the stock example of Indian theorists – cow-*gavaya* analogy – indicates, sufficient prior familiarity with domestic cows is necessary for recognizing the similar-and-yet-different animal found in the forest as wild cow (*gavaya*). This example alludes to a situation where the competence of the comparative learners really matter, and by implication, to the fact of the epistemic inversion that happens in comparative theological learning processes where the familiar (home tradition) is employed to understand the unfamiliar (religious others). According to the rejecters of the justifiable epistemic value of *upamāna*, neither the object seeking understanding nor the nature of the new understanding expected to evolve required analogical appropriation; in some cases, perception was found sufficient, in some other cases, testimony was sought for.[51] In other words, the ways of knowledge were determined either by what is out there to be known or by the nature of the resultant knowledge. Then, hypothetically, if what is there is to be known, and the knowledge of it might be totally strange or at least much more than one can conceive, then one has no grounds for comparative learning, and moreover one's analogy mechanism might badly break if one were to give it a try. Such would be the experience, if some comparativists focus on certain radical disjunction exclusively – the third kind of relation Tracy talks about – between the sets of religious data they study. However, space constrains do not allow us to assess the validity of such experience and the viability of the resultant exclusivist approach to religious others.

In summary, experience of plurality and difference can naturally occasion comparisons; and, as to the methods of learning in such

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[51]While the systems of *Nyāya, Pūrva Mīmāṁsā*, and the *Advaita* school of *Uttara Mīmāṁsā* accept *upamāna* as an independent means of knowledge, the other systems refuses to accept that *upamāna* is an independent means of cognition. Neither the acceptance nor the rejection of *upamāna* as an independent source of knowledge was for unanimous reasons. For a details analysis of their positions, see Kumar, *Upamāna in Indian Philosophy,* 159.

pluralistic contexts, what Guy Swanson once posited still stands true: "Thinking without comparison is unthinkable. And in the absence of comparison, so is all scientific thought and scientific research."[52] But, what kind of relation (for instance, identity or analogy or disjunction) comparativists should presuppose or work towards is the crucial question. Although all three relations might exist and might be valid from certain perspectives, none of them can be trusted as an all-sufficient ground of knowledge. Comparative practices, be it in reference to identity, analogy, or disjunction, need to be subjected to cross-examination with the question of knowledge and truth in view. Having said these in regard to epistemological practices of comparativists, let us now turn to the notion of theology presupposed by comparative theologians.

Anselm and the Definition of Comparative Theology

It is simply a fact that theologians and Christian philosophers have made very generous use of Anselm's definition of theology: *fides quaerens intellectum*. Stephen Bevans has brought out some ten variations on this phrase in contemporary theology.[53] Although, as said in the introduction, we cannot discuss this issue at length here, we will draw attention to the pertinence of the issue by bringing out some problems surrounding the use of this dogma-like phrase. First of all, the *Proslogion* which, in fact, Anselm had first titled "*fides quaerens intellectum*," is a prayer addressed to the God of the Bible. The specifically biblical rootedness of the *Prosologion* would resist an all-too-easy variation of this phrase. Secondly, Anselm wrote this address "in the role of someone endeavoring to elevate his mind toward contemplating God and seeking to understand what he believes;"[54] and in that sense, his *Prosologion* can hardly allow even a provisional bracketing of the seeker's belief. Indeed, Anselm had prayed, "Lord, giver of understanding to faith, grant me to

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[52]Guy Swanson, "Frameworks for Comparative Research: Structural Anthropology and the Theory of Action," in *Comparative Methods in Sociology: Essays on Trends and Applications*, ed. Ivan Vallier, 141-202, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971, 145. Cited in Charles C. Ragin, *Comparative Method: Moving Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987, 1.

[53]Stephen Bevans, "Variations on a Theme by Anselm: Contemporary Reflections on a Classic Definition," in *Toronto Journal of Theology*, 21, 1 (2005) 33-48.

[54]Anselm of Canterbury, *Prosologion*, edited and translated by Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Richardson, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1974, 89.

understand – to the degree You deem best – […] that You are what we believe You to be."[55] Can the belief Anselm professed be replaced by some religiously complicated imagination of an interreligious learner[56] who expects God to find him/her where he/she is pleased to find God? We are not trying to circumscribe God's action; rather, our point is that the fact that God might find His people anywhere is not a sufficient reason for a person who is called to find God in a certain way to seek Him differently.[57] Perhaps, Henri de Lubac's historical-critical perspectives on the relation between faith and understanding in the Christian tradition can shed some light on the point we are trying to drive home.

 "Like Augustine," de Lubac notes, "Anselm was working to 'transform raw truth to understood truth;" but, as he immediately adds, "neither the process nor the goal was exactly the same any longer."[58] In his estimation, by the early middle ages, the patristic quest for understanding of faith was "laicized" to a certain extent. He writes:

> For the Fathers, the essential mainspring of thought was not identity, or analogy, but *anagogy*. With its roots still in the time original to it, it nevertheless looked forward to the future. From creation, it reached upwards to Christ, and through Christ had access as far as to the *invisible things of God.* Everything sensible was a sacrament, not so much requiring organization or justification, as open to being transcended. […]. In the broadest sense, and according to an interpretation by St. Jerome of an idea of Origen's, it was therefore *perspicacity in the contemplation of the sacraments.* Being "rational" and or "contemplative" therefore meant fundamentally the same thing. […]. Starting from Nature, starting from History, or Scripture, or the Liturgy, starting from everything, the mind had the same orientation towards spiritual understanding, always in the light of the Word and

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[55]Anselm of Canterbury, *Prosologion,* Chapter Two.

[56]Clooney, Comparative Theology: Deep Learning across Religious Borders, 150-151.

[57]Once again, more than speculation, testimony here matters. Perhaps, along with the testimonies of comparative theologians who privilege similarities, one might perhaps also read, testimonies like, Joseph-Marie Verlinde, *De Verboden Ervaring: Van de Ashram narr het Klooster: Relaas van een Zoektocht naar God,* Tielt: Lannoo, 2004.

[58]Henri Cardinal de Lucac, SJ, *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages,* trans. Gemma Simmonds, C.J. with Richard Price and Christopher Stephens, ed., Laurence Paul Hemming and Susan Frank Parsons, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007, 237.

under the impulse of the Spirit. [...]. Since the end of the eleventh century, the balance that it [intellectual activity] presupposes has been broken. Anselm and Rupert, Abelard and Hugh of St. Victor were all the heirs of Augustine. [...] But between the "rationalist" theology of an Anselm or an Abelard and the "symbolist" or mystical theology of a Rupert or a Hugh, the chasm was already opening up.[59]

Focusing further on the specific lead taken by Anselm, de Lubac opines that in *Proslogion* the programme of *faith seeking understanding* constituted an "innovation" and almost "a revolution."[60] With Anselm, the traditional programme of *faith seeking understanding* was quite Augustinian and Augustine-plus at the same time. The Augustine-plus aspects of Anselm's project have to be understood in reference to Anselm's context-specific objectives of writing, on the one hand, and more importantly, his ideal of understanding, on the other hand.[61] However, in any case, for Anselm, faith was not opposed to understanding. On the other hand, as de Lubac succinctly puts it: "If faith presupposes a positive revelation, understanding presupposes a rational revelation, and, as the latter applies to the former, the former is normally destined to transform itself into the latter. Anselm's concept of reason had thus not yet been laicized. But, [...] in its dialectical flavor, in its orientation towards proof, it was the herald of a new era."[62]

But, in comparative theology there is little room for argument; by focusing more on empathetic dialogues and by neglecting the possibilities of dialectical interactions, comparative theologians appear to head towards some curious mystagogical interpretation of religious others. Yet, at the same time, their stress on the technical mastery of religious texts as a pre-requisite for comparative theological work prompts one to wonder if there is an unconscious move towards laicizing the Christian notion of rationality. Should interreligious learners move in that direction, they will have to reflect on a very preliminary question: Are revelation and religion completely inter-changeable categories? From a Christian theological point of view, they are not inter-changeable; but, there is certain inter-

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[59]De Lucac, SJ, *Corpus Mysticum*, 235-236.

[60]De Lucac, SJ, *Corpus Mysticum*, 237.

[61]De Lucac, SJ, Corpus Mysticum, 237. See also Jasper Hopkins, Hermeneutical and Textual Problems in the Complete Treatises of St. Anselm, Anselm of Canterbury, vol. 4, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1976, 106-108.

[62]De Lucac, SJ, *Corpus Mysticum*, 238.

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section between the two. How to explain this intersectionality is now the crucial question as far as the future of interreligious hermeneutics after Tracy is concerned; a Tracy-plus comparative theology begins with this question.

As we hinted at previously, perhaps an attempt to re-found interreligious theological thinking in the possibilities of our porous rationality may help us to understand the relation between the Christian faith and the context of religious pluralism. Such an approach would entail that theology (of religions) works from within an interdisciplinary framework. While addressing some crucial questions in hermeneutics of religion in general and in Hindu-Christian hermeneutics in particular we have already been employing some interdisciplinary analytical methods. However, that interdisciplinarity should not imply simple conflation of disciplines is needless to say. Should there be a conflation of disciplines in cross-religious engagements, theology *after* such engagements, at the best, will have to content itself with a naturalized epistemology. To ward off such problems, comparative theologians, it seems to me, need to acknowledge and address the epistemological crisis that lurks behind their theological confidence, pragmatic choices, analogy mechanisms, and unlimited hope that a certain nuanced consensus will eventually solve the problems religious diversity engenders.