

COMPARATIVE THEOLOGY

- Topic: How We Began to Learn World Religions
 Convener: James L. Fredericks, Loyola Marymount University
 Presenters: Gerald Sloyan, Catholic University of America and Temple University
 Francis X. Clooney, Harvard Divinity School
 Ted Ulrich, St. Thomas University
 Respondent: Catherine Cornille, Boston College

The comparative theology group addressed itself to the question of “How We Began to Learn World Religions” in three generations, represented by Gerard S. Sloyan, Francis X. Clooney and Ted Ulrich.

Gerard Sloyan (Catholic University and Temple University) was fully trained in the pre-Vatican II era. As a result of his conversations with Jews in the 1940s and 1950s, he recognized the need to develop a theology of religions that would open the church to the world and its religions in a way that would eventually bear fruit in the Second Vatican Council. After the Council, he worked to build religious studies programs at Temple University and the Catholic University of America that responded to the needs of the church in a religiously diverse world.

Francis X. Clooney (Harvard Divinity School) spoke of his experience growing up as part of a generation that grew up around the Council: not old enough to have been fully formed before it, nor young enough to have grown up entirely in the postconciliar Church. As a graduate student at the University of Chicago, he sought a non-ideological, but genuinely theological way to immerse himself in the religious Other. This he found in the close reading of Hindu texts, apart from Christian theological debates regarding Catholic theological debates *about* religions.

Ted Ulrich (University of St. Thomas) has come of age as a theologian after the Council. By the time he was ready for MA level work in theology, Professor Ulrich already had a rich experiential background in Hindu doctrine and meditation practice through his association with a Hindu meditation center in Minneapolis. This experiential background led to conflicts with established Christian theological views of Hinduism, especially in regard to the theology of grace and mystical experience. Later, in doctoral studies at Catholic University of America, the more sophisticated religious hermeneutics of Panikkar, Yearley, Clooney, and Carman became necessary as correctives to Catholic inclusivist theologies of religion in his attempts to do Christian theology comparatively.

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