

FUNDAMENTAL THEOLOGY/METHOD – TOPIC SESSION

Topic: Method in Theology/Religious Studies and Interreligious Dialogue
 Convener: Jeremy D. Wilkins, Boston College
 Moderator: Matthew Vale, University of Notre Dame
 Presenters: Katie Mahowski Mylroie, Boston College
 Anna Bonta Moreland, Villanova University
 Kristin Haas, University of Notre Dame

This session explored method in Theology and Religious Studies as it relates to interreligious dialogue. In her opening paper, “Exploring Ecofeminist Methodology: Insights from Comparing Ivone Gebara’s Trinitarian Theology with the Hindu Kali Tantric Tradition,” Katie Mahowski Mylroie described an ecofeminist methodology grounded in the comparison of the Christian cycle of life, death, and resurrection with the Hindu cycle of *Samsāra*. Briefly describing the work of Christian female theologians such as the cosmological approach of Elizabeth Johnson, the work of Brazilian liberation theologian Ivone Gebara—and feminist efforts to transcend male–female dichotomies in general—she then detailed elements from papal addresses related to Christian ecological concerns and theology.

Mahowski Mylroie considered the six types of comparative learning in Catherine Cornille’s *Meaning and Method in Comparative Theology* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2019): intensification, rectification, recovery, reinterpretation, appropriation, and reaffirmation. She demonstrated reaffirmation, in which the figure of Kali provides the occasion for a new appreciation of the truths in Gebara’s Trinitarian theology, and also recovery, with the Tantric tradition’s concrete bodily theology inspiring the recovery of embodied Christian theological epistemology. Highlighting throughout her central point that a tension exists between what Christian theology can learn from the Hindu Kali tradition and what cannot be absorbed from it, Mahowski Mylroie approached the presentation from the Christian perspective, asserting that Hindu ecotheology, and its thinkers, can help fill some gaps in the Christian tradition. In particular, the view of life and death as continuous in the Kali tradition of Hinduism was compared with the traditional Christian views (especially those of Gebara) of life, death, and resurrection.

In the Kali tradition death is always there, part of the same continuous process of evolution, and the Christian tradition can, likewise, consider life, death, and resurrection as continuous. The presenter’s reflections on the resource selection process of comparative theologians engaging with a tradition that is different than one’s “home tradition” was interesting. Questions and discussion related to this venturing into other traditions and how this impacts a theologian’s own relationship to, and ideas about, their home tradition.

Anna Bonta Moreland followed with “Unifying the Methodologies of Comparative Theology: A Critical Analysis of Five Recent Works,” in which she discussed comparative theology within the larger field of theology/religious studies (T/RS) through five recent academic publications. Moreland asserted that studies in method have recently become a necessity, as its heterogeneity threatens the unity of T/RS as a field. Scholarship in the area of comparative theology is produced “fast and furiously” and there is a need to ensure that the different academic developments are in conversation with one another. To that end, she put the following recent works on

method into dialogue: *Circling the Elephant: A Comparative Theology of Religious Diversity*, John J. Thatamanil (Fordham University Press, 2020); *The Enigma of Divine Revelation: Between Phenomenology and Comparative Theology*, Jean-Luc Marion and Christiaan Jacobs-Vandegeer, eds. (Springer, 2020); *Doing the Work of Comparative Theology: A Primer for Christians*, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen (Eerdmans, 2020); *Considering Comparison: A Method for Religious Studies*, Oliver Freiberger (Oxford, 2019); and *Meaning and Method in Comparative Theology*, Catherine Cornille (Wiley-Blackwell, 2019). Comparative theology within T/RS can be seen as faith seeking understanding to help counter the diffusion that has been happening and bring such work all together into the one discipline.

The question-and-answer session mainly involved Moreland's exploration of identity and those with deeply held beliefs coupled with her framing of comparative theology as relational theology. Discussion ensued about religious pluralists, metaconfessional theologians (and their engagement with science and other approaches), evangelization, accountability to a particular ecclesial community, and the vulnerability that is part of engaging with the people, texts, and bodies, of those with different deeply-held beliefs.

In the final paper of the session, "Interreligious Dialogue and Foundations of Doctrinal Humility: A Critical Appreciation of Cornille's Contribution," Kristi Haas advanced the conversation about the work of Catherine Cornille in relation to comparative theology in light of the fundamental-theological basis for the virtue of "doctrinal humility" in interreligious dialogue. While taking inspiration from the works of Cornille on doctrinal humility, Haas took issue with and called into question Cornille's interpretation of the relationship of truth and humility in the historical Christian theological tradition, in particular the argument from eschatology and the reading of Bernard of Clairvaux, and demonstrated that her argumentation serves to undermine key theological justifications for humility. She highlighted both a strong form and a weak form of doctrinal humility in Cornille's works, one of which is more problematic than the other, and which scholars need to address in further theological treatment of the topic, especially at the level of fundamental theology. Rereading certain sources of Cornille's, such as the *De gradibus humilitatis* of Bernard of Clairvaux, and drawing on the methodology of Louis Bouyer, Haas revisited the relationship of truth and humility in selected biblical and historical sources to develop a more Christological and pneumatological account of doctrinal humility; this can serve to bolster the amenability to dialogue of theological justifications for humility.

During the question-and-answer session, discussion ensued about Bernard of Clairvaux's vision of Christian life as incomplete, the attitudinal posture of an appreciation of the goodness, grace, and mercy of God, and the relationship between certainty and doctrinal humility. A participant raised the question of whether humility about a faith tradition's doctrines is critical to interreligious dialogue or whether approaching the dialogue while holding in mind the unity with Christ and the healing and relationship to others that happens through Christ during interreligious dialogue might be the most important.

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