

WORLD RELIGIONS AS A SOURCE FOR CATHOLIC THEOLOGY—A CASE STUDY: HINDU AND BUDDHIST INTERPRETATIONS OF WORSHIP

The goal of the workshop was to progress beyond the preliminary—and now generally accepted—notion that the world religions should be taken into account by Christian theology. Asking the further question, “In what concrete ways can the *content* of other religions become a source for Christian theology?”, the presenters decide to focus on a single example, liturgical theology, and within that discipline on the issues of *lex orandi/lex credendi* and *liturgical inculturation*.

In his introductory remarks Joep van Beeck placed the workshop’s goals in the context of current renewed appreciation for the study of the detailed, concrete reality of “positive religions”; he noted too the abstraction of much modern “theology of world religions” and stressed the importance of constructing a theology of religions which does not excuse the theologian from attention to the content of those religions.

Frank Clooney’s paper, “Hindu Perspectives on Lex Orandi/Lex Credendi,” drew on materials from Hindu India’s Mimamsa and Vedanta schools of thought. Mimamsa [from around 200-100 BC] is best described, *mutatis mutandis*, as a school of liturgical theology, one which rethought and redefined orthodox ritual practice in the face of strong criticisms from within and outside the orthodox fold. Vedanta [from before 400 AD] drew on both Mimamsa and the more philosophical, speculative thought of the late Vedic texts called the *upanisads* [700-300 BC] to develop a comprehensive theology of transcendent divinity and the transcendent human destiny accomplished through knowledge.

The paper highlighted two Mimamsa-Vedanta theses pertaining to liturgy, theology and also Scripture. First, liturgy, Scripture and theology are best understood together, as defining and providing the context for one another. That each of the three arbitrates, as it were, the relationship between the other two is a key Hindu position amply developed and defended in both the Mimamsa and Vedanta traditions. The advantage of Christian theological attention to this position is significant: if both theology and liturgy are seen as rooted in Scripture, their differences are attenuated and common features accentuated. So too, attention to the liturgical reference of both Scripture and theology suggests a reformulation of the question of how theology grows out of Scripture. In general, the famous maxim might better read: *lex orandi, lex credendi, lex legendi*.

Second, Mimamsa and Vedanta favor the view that religion in all its aspects is performative, to be enacted, not simply known or assented to. Thus, Scripture

is essentially a "script" about and for use in the worship of the community; liturgy subsists in its performance, and not in the books about it; theology develops from Scripture and liturgy in order to see this world in a new light, so as to be able to see and attain the transcendent goal. All three can then be judged by the criteria for good performance, which, although allowing for judgments and not reducible to subjective tastes, are not identical with the truth criteria enunciated in more theoretical disciplines. Just as good directors and performers are sensitive to the local and the immediate circumstances and have room to interpret the "script" for the local audience without thereby abandoning the script and its author's intention, it will be helpful in Christian theological discussions of unity and diversity in liturgical practice to stress its performative nature, and thereby to reconceive the criteria by which the success of local instantiations of the tradition's universal truths is judged.

Charles Hallisey's "Worship in a Scale of Forms: A Buddhist View" began with comments on the newly emerging discipline of "comparative theology," in which comparison, by the process of what Shklovsky has called "defamiliarization," makes possible fresh approaches to the theological positions of one's own "home" tradition, and more adequate solutions to old problems. Hallisey then focused on the problems of inculturation, how a religion goes about adapting to one or another culture outside the religion's original, "home culture" and, analogously, how even within its home culture the tension between a religion's most well articulated, reasoned presentation of itself and its diverse popular expressions must be arbitrated. Using the example of Southeast Asian Theravada Buddhism, Hallisey explored the ways in which medieval Buddhist thinkers understood the unity of diverse Buddhist practices ranging from simple, popular worship of relics of the Buddha to the attainment of enlightenment as the highest form of devotion. For this purpose he cited a medieval Sri Lankan Buddhist text, which weaves together the "four worships": material worship, learning, moral practice and enlightenment.

How are all four "one worship?" Using R. G. Collingwood's notion of a "scale of forms"—a series of graded elements which mark "at once a difference in degree and a difference in kind"—Hallisey suggested that the Buddhist understanding of the unity-and-diversity of religious practices recognizes that there are in fact marked differences, even of kind, in Buddhist worship, while nevertheless insisting that the range of such practices can still be understood as Buddhist. According to Hallisey, the entire Buddhist "scale" is structured around the feeling of affection and gratitude one has toward the Buddha, a feeling expressed in various ways that are connected even if different in kind as well as degree.

This suggests that the ethical criterion of right responsiveness and right behavior is more central to Buddhist thought and more useful in Buddhism's understanding of its coherence than other models of scriptural or liturgical or theological uniformity. If the Christian community were to assimilate this Buddhist model and begin to think about liturgical unity and diversity as a scale of forms structured around an ethical core, it could likewise conceive of the church's diverse religious practices and ways of talking about them as parts of a single scale—the entirety of which is motivated by gratitude toward Christ and the desire to act accordingly. Because the scale allows differences of kind and degree, the unity of the church

thus described would not have to be identified with one or another narrowly conceived kind of uniformity.

David Carpenter's response began with attention to the convention's theme, "The Sources of Theology," and stressed the radical nature of the claim—underlying both papers—that "there are specifically religious sources for Christian theology that lie outside of the historical revelation traditionally recognized as authoritative." If this is so, he suggested, it places us in a fundamentally new theological situation, which will require explanation, perhaps through a new version of the idea of "progressive revelation."

He then posed these questions for discussion: What theory of religion underlies comparative theology? Can or must "comparative theology" be clearly distinguished from the "history of religions," or is "comparative theology" really the convergence of theology and the history of religions? Is the notion of "inculturation" adequate to, or even compatible with, the type of theological encounter envisioned by comparative theology? Finally, what does the centrality of praxis imply for the method of a comparative theology: is the comparison of "first-order" practices and historical processes a more appropriate subject matter for comparative theology than "second-order" doctrines?

The lively discussion which followed focused not so much on the specific issues pertaining to liturgical theology raised by the papers, but on the general issue of the import of world religions for theology. Within a consensus that the experience of other religions and the scholarly study of their theologies must go hand in hand, a diversity of viewpoints emerged as to how this was to be achieved and which movement was to be given priority.

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