TRADITION AND TRANSGRESSION IN THE COMPARATIVE THEOLOGY OF FRANCIS X. CLOONEY, S.J.

THINKING RITUALLY: REDISCOVERING THE PŪRVA MĪMĀṂSĀ OF JAIMINI
Vienna: Indological Institute of the University of Vienna, 1990
Pp. 295. N.p.

THEOLOGY AFTER VEDANTA: AN EXPERIMENT IN COMPARATIVE THEOLOGY
Albany: SUNY Press, 1993
Pp. xviii + 272. N.p.

SEEING THROUGH TEXTS : DOING THEOLOGY AMONG THE ŚRIVAIṢṆAVAS OF SOUTH INDIA
Albany: SUNY Press, 1996
Pp. xxi + 351. N.p.

HINDU WISDOM FOR ALL GOD'S CHILDREN
Faith Meets Faith Series.
Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998
Pp. xiv + 160. N.p.

PREACHING WISDOM TO THE WISE: THREE TREATISES BY ROBERTO DE NOBILI, S.J., MISSIONARY AND SCHOLAR IN SEVENTEENTH CENTURY INDIA
Translated and Introduced by Anand Amaladass, S.J. and Francis X. Clooney, S.J.
Jesuit Primary Sources in English Translation.
St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2000
Pp. xxii + 346. N.p.

HINDU GOD, CHRISTIAN GOD
New York: Oxford University Press, 2001
Pp. viii + 205. N.p.

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Introduction

Francis Xavier Clooney as a scholar defies easy characterization. He is an Indologist whose work extends from considering the complexities of Advaita Vedanta to reflecting upon the resonances of Tamil devotional literature. Yet he is also a Catholic priest of the Society of Jesus and a theologian who has been formed in a tradition powerfully shaped by the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas and the spiritualities of Ignatius of Loyola and Pedro Arrupe. Clooney describes himself as "a comparative theologian" who seeks to probe how the juxtaposed texts of diverse religious traditions can inform one another and transform those who read them. His work is born not only in the creative tension between his training as an Indologist and Catholic theologian, but also from the desire to transcend the conventional boundaries that often circumscribe these two seemingly distinct modes of inquiry.

This essay will review Francis Xavier Clooney's major publications and examine some of the implications of his comparative theological project. Clooney's scholarly output has been voluminous; he has authored or co-authored seven books and over seventy-five articles. This essay, however, will address only a small portion of what has become a truly impressive corpus of scholarship. I will focus upon his major works and trace the development of his comparative theology and comment upon its relevance both to Indological inquiry and to broader issues concerning interreligious encounter and dialogue. Because Clooney's scholarship proceeds carefully and inductively, this essay will initially engage the specificity of his writings. I will then move to reflect upon the implications of Clooney's comparative theology more generally by considering the underlying assumptions that inform his vision of interreligious encounter and dialogue. I will argue, finally, that Clooney's penetrating work deftly mediates between tradition and transgression and thus opens suggestive possibilities for connecting the contemplative work of comparative theology to the pursuit of social justice.

Comparative Investigations

Francis Xavier Clooney was born in Brooklyn, graduated from Regis High School, and began his Jesuit formation at Fordham University where he received his B.A. in 1973. In reflecting on what led him to South Asia, Clooney recalls that he knew little of India at Fordham. But during his junior year he attended a conference on the international work of the Jesuits. There he heard Father Horatio de la Costa, a Jesuit from the Philippines, speak about the worldwide apostolate of the Society of Jesus in order to exhort his brother Jesuits "to have a heart as large as the world" (see Clooney 1996a, 5). For reasons that Clooney cannot specifically identify, de la Costa's talk influenced him deeply and he began to explore the possibility of going to India to fulfill the expectation that he devote some years to high school teaching after his graduation. Despite various admonitions that going to South Asia would damage his faith or be a misuse of his talents, Clooney traveled to St. Xavier's School in Kathmandu, Nepal. Sleeping under a mosquito net in a dormitory with his Hindu and Buddhist students, Clooney developed a transforming interest in the rich cultural and religious life of South Asia. When he returned to study at Weston Theological Seminary in 1975, he recalls that it seemed like "a kind of death" (Clooney 1996a, 13) He then decided to continue his studies in the Department of South Asian Languages and Civilization at the University of Chicago, and after receiving his Ph.D. went to teach in the Theology Department of Boston College in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts.

Clooney's first major publication introduces the close attention to language and text that consistently characterizes his comparative theological readings of Christian and Hindu traditions. *Thinking Ritually: Retrieving the Pūrva Mīmāṃsā of Jaimini*, as the title makes clear, engages the Pūrva Mīmāṃsā tradition of Vedic reflection by boldly attempting to excavate the thought of Jaimini from the later Mīmāṃsaka commentary. Mīmāṃsā is an ancient school of Indian thought that, as Clooney tells us, arose from the need to reflect upon the process of codifying and systematizing Vedic ritual texts and practices. Clooney directs his attention to the *Mīmāṃsā Sūtras* of Jaimini, the earliest extant work of the Pūrva or earlier Mīmāṃsā tradition. In his introductory remarks, Clooney observes that most Indian and Western scholars, as well as many Mīmāṃsakas, have understood Jaimini through the later *Bhāṣya* of Śabara. Clooney then uses Śabara in his effort to distinguish and retrieve the structure of Jaimini's reflections. Leading the reader

through a consideration of the *Sūtras* and their vocabulary, Clooney argues that Jaimini radically "decenters" the human performer of the ritual by placing him as one element within "a much broader network of values and connections" subsumed within *dharma* (163). Moving finally to the later Mīmāṃsaka commentary, of which Śabara's *Bhāṣya* forms a part, Clooney considers the significance of "*apūrva*," which Clooney glosses as "the unseen link between the sacrifice and its results" (223). In tracing the use of *apūrva* from Śabara through Kumārila Bhaṭṭa and Prabhākara Miśra, Clooney observes the shifting significance of *apūrva*: it is rooted in action for Prabhākara while for Kumārila it is a "transcendent reality" that both precedes and survives the sacrifice and is located "in the eternal *ātman* of the performer of the sacrifice" (223) As he traces the application of the term *apūrva* by these Mīmāṃsaka scholars, Clooney advances the hypothesis that Upaniṣadic and perhaps early Vedāntic thought came "to overshadow" Śabara's system and led to a split in Mīmāṃsā between the various explications of ritual performance and the reasons behind them (252). *Thinking Ritually* is a work for Sanskritists and Indologists that challenges understandings of the Mīmāṃsā tradition as an unnuanced whole while simultaneously attempting to appreciate Mīmāṃsā "on its own terms" rather than within a framework imposed upon it by concerns of other philosophical or commentarial traditions. But perhaps Clooney's discussion becomes most suggestive in its final reflections. In the epilogue, Clooney reflects upon the deep connections between Pūrva Mīmāṃsa and the later Uttara Mīmāṃsa and argues that Vedānta itself cannot be understood without a sophisticated grasp of the Mīmāṃsa tradition, a position that will deeply shape his next major publication.

Clooney's engagement with Mīmāṃsa reaches its fullest expression in his *Theology After Vedānta: An Experiment in Comparative Theology*. In a lengthy and well-structured introduction, Clooney defines his comparative theological project as the "intention to inscribe within the Christian theological tradition theological texts from outside it, and to (begin to) write Christian theology only out of that newly composed context" (7). In *Theology After Vedānta*, Clooney turns to Advaita Vedānta, the school of Indian thought focused upon the Upaniṣads that developed, at least initially, as a commentarial tradition explicating the *Uttara Mīmāṃsa Sūtras* of Bādarāyaṇa. Crucial for Clooney is not only the link between Vedānta proper and Uttara (later) Mīmāṃsā, but also the position that Vedanta is best understood as a sophisticated exercise in theology. By calling Vedānta "theology," Clooney is countering the conventional understanding of Vedānta as "philosophy" and thus sets the context for what is, at least in part, a theological "reinscription" of Indology and Indological inquiry.

A good portion of *Theology After Vedānta* is dedicated to understanding what Clooney calls the "Advaita Text." Clooney argues that readers need to understand Advaita in its wholeness, as a "Text" that includes not only the Upaniṣads and Uttara Mīmāṃsā, but also later commentaries. Clooney devotes his second chapter to "the texture of the Advaita text" (37-75) and leads the reader through a discussion of Advaitic texts and commentary—from passages from the *Chāndogya* and *Taittirīya Upaniṣads*, to Bādarāyana's *Uttara Mīmāṃsā Sūtras* and commentaries by Śaṃkara and Vācaspati. For students and scholars of Advaita, especially engaging is Clooney's discussion of how *pādas* and *adhikaraṇas*, the fundamental structural divisions in the Advaita Text, are woven together. Clooney introduces us to *saṃgati*, the connections within a *pāda*; *nyāya* or "textured reasoning;" and "strategies of coherent practice" such as *upasaṃhāra* or "coordination" and *samanvaya* or "harmonization" (44-55). The discussion then moves serially to consider the "truth" of the "Advaita Text" and its "Readers." In his concluding reflections, Clooney draws upon his reading of Vedānta to compare Amalānanda and Aquinas on the issue of attributing various namings to Brahman or God while still preserving the underlying unity of the Divine. Clooney draws upon a variety of methods to pursue his comparison: from Advaitic moves such as *upasaṃhāra* (coordination) and *adhyāsa* (superimposition) to conversation and post-modern understandings of collage. Through this discussion Clooney "retrieves" crucial parts of the "Thomistic Text," such as Aquinas's use of scripture and the commentarial tradition exemplified in the writings of Cardinal Cajetan. *Theology After Vedānta* is a patient and preliminary attempt to begin a process of reflective and comparative reading of texts that will transform the reader.

With *Theology After Vedānta*, Clooney takes his place within a long line of Catholic theologians who have engaged what he would call "the Advaita Text." But while Clooney is hardly the first Catholic to encounter non-dualism, his approach to Vedānta is quite distinctive. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the famous Bengali convert to Catholicism, Brahmabhadhab Upadhayay, published a series of powerful writings that brought elements of Thomism together with Vedānta to articulate a vision of Catholicism that would embrace Indian cultural forms. But Upadhyay's vision of Indian Catholicism was intimately connected to his commitment to challenge British colonial domination, a political agendum that finds little parallel in Clooney's discussion of Vedānta over a century later. The French Benedictine Henri Le Saux came to India and chose the name Abhishiktānanda ("he who takes joy in the anointed one") to symbolize his entry into *saṃnyāsa*, the stage of total renunciation. In his writings, the Upaniṣads and Vedānta become part of an effort to justify an ascetic life that belongs upon "the further shore," beyond the regulations that normally govern the consecrated religious life within the Catholic tradition. Clooney's comparative investigations, by contrast, are firmly rooted in a particular academic and ecclesiastical context. He writes as an academic for a scholarly audience and does so fully acknowledging his own location within the Jesuit tradition. Yet unlike many popularizers of Vedanta within Catholicism, Clooney does not use a bowdlerized version of non-dualism to deconstruct or collapse conceptions of truth or hierarchy in order to challenge institutional Catholicism.

Interestingly, the Catholic scholar with whom Clooney shares most is the German Indologist and Catholic convert, Paul Hacker. Like Hacker, Clooney displays great virtuosity as an Indologist, for his sophisticated textual readings are the fruit of a long engagement with the linguistic and philosophical complexities of Vedānta and other Indian schools of thought. Like Hacker too, Clooney is concerned with the demands that texts place upon the reader and resists efforts to make their difficulties or challenges somehow more palatable to outsiders who seek to engage them. Also like Hacker, Clooney remains deeply concerned with how texts of the Hindu tradition relate to Catholicism. Yet here the similarities quickly dissipate, for Hacker's discussions are often self-consciously polemical and apologetic as he denounces what he considers "pagan" and "demonic" elements within the Hindu tradition that must either be rejected or purified by the truth of the Christian gospel (see Hacker 1980). By contrast, in *Theology After Vedānta*, Clooney reinscribes his own Catholic commitments through and after an engagement with Vedānta. He patiently defers questions of truth in favor of "an experiment in reading" (154) made possible by a deep engagement

with the specificity of "the Advaita Text." For Clooney, this is an exercise that is "practical" and one that cannot be separated from its tempo or rhythm. As practical knowledge, Clooney's comparative theology thus seeks to uncover the "activities and changes" that make comparison, rereading, and reinscription possible.

While Vedānta has always been a central focus of Clooney's scholarship, perhaps the work closest to his heart remains *Seeing Through Texts: Doing Theology among the Śrīvaiṣṇavas of South India*. *Seeing Through Texts* examines the songs of the *Tiruvāymoḻi* created by the Tamil saint Śaṭakopaṉ in praise of Viṣṇu. Clooney first considers one song in which a young woman goes to the temple town of Tolaivillimaṅkalam and returns enraptured by her "lotus eyed Lord" Tirumāl. As the discussion moves forward, Clooney leads the reader through the one hundred songs of the *Tiruvāymoḻi* and the commentary of the Ācāryas upon them. In one sense, Clooney structures *Seeing Through Texts* much like *Theology After Vedānta*: he examines not just a text or texts, but a "Text" in its multifaceted richness and unity. But unlike *Theology After Vedānta*, there is a palpable passion to the discussion in *Seeing Through Texts* that conveys not only Clooney's deep affinity with the *Tiruvāymoḻi* and Śaṭakopaṉ but also something of the transformation possible when one begins to use words in order to read and to see "through texts" much as one would gaze through a window while still remaining aware of the glass. In the concluding parts of *Seeing Through Texts*, Clooney uses collage to great effect and affect. In juxtaposing a passage from the *Song of Songs* to verses from the *Tiruvāymoḻi*, Clooney reflects upon the mirroring forms of desire in the two texts, a desire that is also "infused" by the reader's own longing (262). *Seeing Through Texts* thus is not simply an extension of the comparative theological method outlined in *Theology After Vedānta*. While Clooney does make use of many of the same analytic moves to reinscribe his own theological method in relation to the *Tiruvāymoḻi*, his reflections on the great work of Śaṭakopaṉ are also the product of an experience of rupture and rapture.

Wisdoms

While *Theology After Vedānta* and *Seeing Through Texts* establish Clooney as a sophisticated textual scholar, only those well versed in Indology or Catholic theology would be able to engage them fully. But Clooney's work also has much to offer to readers who are neither Indologists nor Catholic theologians. In *Hindu Wisdom for All God's Children*, Clooney endeavors to write a book for a non-specialist audience that seeks to encourage "readers to see for themselves and to explore their own experience in the mirror of Hindu wisdom" (xi). *Hindu Wisdom for All God's Children* began as a series of lectures given at John Carroll University and retains the accessibility that must have characterized their initial presentation. Clooney ranges broadly, from a discussion of creation and notions of self in the Vedas and Upaniṣads, to examining myths of Śiva, Kṛṣṇa and the Goddess. Throughout his discussion, Clooney arranges his material by presenting "Hindu wisdom" as a series of theological questions concerning meaning, truth and identity. But these questions are not posed as the abstract speculations of philosophers or as the esoteric concerns of mystics. Instead, Clooney presents "Hindu wisdom" as a very human wisdom that in its relatedness to human concerns reflects the divine.

In introducing *Hindu Wisdom for All God's Children*, Clooney is characteristically circumspect. He makes no claim that his discussion represents some kind of normative compendium of "Hindu wisdom." Of course, what counts for "wisdom" is often a contentious issue. In this regard, Clooney's discussion of Gandhi raises some important issues. Clooney fleshes out much of what some Indians and many Westerners find compelling about Gandhi: his relentless quest for self-knowledge and truth, his commitment to "right-action" and non-violence, and the affective quality of his personal writings. In comparing Gandhi's vision to that of the Catholic activist Dorothy Day, Clooney makes a valuable comparison that resists a facile characterization of both of them as "social activists" but nonetheless shows how both Gandhi and Day saw the face of God in the poor.

The irony of Gandhi and Gandhism, however, is that they are both subject to derision, ridicule and suspicion within much of contemporary Indian society. In the street vernacular of many North Indian cities, Gandhi's name is sometimes used as a vulgar epithet for those with sexual idiosyncrasies. Some Hindus would reject Gandhi's accommodation of Untouchables and Muslims in a favor of a more strident and muscular vision of Indian nationhood. While some Muslims admired Gandhi deeply, others considered him untrustworthy or even a fraud, and in Pakistan, for example, a perusal of bookstalls in Islamabad, Lahore or Karachi would find not a few books in both Urdu and English that explicitly blame Gandhi for the slaughter of partition. Many Dalits also found Gandhi's attitude toward them patronizing and dismissive of their religious sensibilities and would agree with the harsh criticism that Bhim Raoji Ambedkar directed toward Gandhi and the Congress.

All of this is certainly not to dismiss Gandhi or Clooney's discussion of him. By presenting Gandhi through the religious concerns that animated him, Clooney makes Gandhi accessible to the audience for whom he is writing while simultaneously offering an important corrective to the analytic tendency of much of contemporary scholarship that focuses exclusively on issues of power. But to ignore how relations of power can often contribute to shaping "wisdom" as a descriptive term also runs the risk of presenting an overly simplified or romantic understanding of what does and does not count for "wisdom" within particular social or cultural contexts. When Clooney follows his discussion of Gandhi with a consideration of the social activist and writer Mahasweta Devi, it is a move that is particularly well chosen, for the pursuit of wisdom is inextricably linked to the quest for justice.

While Clooney's most suggestive work remains his original and explicitly theological investigations into the process of comparison, his scholarship has also endeavored to reclaim the work of his Jesuit predecessors who have similarly engaged the religious traditions of South Asia. In collaboration with the Indian Jesuit theologian and Indologist Anand Amaladass, Clooney brought together and translated some of the most significant writings of Roberto De Nobili in a volume entitled *Preaching Wisdom to the Wise*. Roberto De Nobili was an Italian Jesuit missionary who maintained a mission in the South Indian city of Madurai from 1606 to his death in 1656. Of course, De Nobili is famous for the integration of Brahmanical customs into his missionary work and is identified as one of the most effective, if controversial, proponents of what now would be called "inculturation." *Preaching Wisdom to the Wise* includes De Nobili's lengthy Latin treatise, *The Report on Certain Customs of the Indian Nation* and also makes available for the first time in English two of De Nobili's Tamil works, *The Dialogue on Eternal Life* and *The Inquiry into the Meaning of "God."*

The translations included in *Preaching Wisdom to the Wise* are eminently readable and have much to interest Indologists, Catholic

theologians and, interestingly, ethnographers. *The Report on Certain Customs of the Indian Nation* represents De Nobili's most extensive effort to justify his adaptation to Indian custom by arguing that symbols such as the sacred thread, the distinctive tuft of hair and the wearing of sandal paste are primarily social customs that can be embraced by Christians in their efforts to proclaim the Gospel. This treatise also includes extensive descriptions of the practices of Brahman communities and, as Clooney observes, is important as one of the earliest descriptions of Hinduism from the perspective of a Western observer. In *The Dialogue on Eternal Life,* De Nobili quite creatively uses characteristically Thomistic formulations concerning the importance and limitations of reason to critique Hinduism, a critique that is structured as a traditional dialogue between a teacher and disciple. *The Inquiry into the Meaning of "God"* sets forth the characteristics of "the one true God" and then summarily moves to show how Hindu deities do not reflect these qualities. In reading De Nobili's treatises, one cannot help but be struck by the power of his intellect, even though his approach seems rather unfashionably polemical when judged by contemporary standards of interreligious dialogue. These treatises constitute a valuable resource not only for scholars interested in the history of Catholicism's engagement with other religious traditions but also for scholars of South Asia who would find echoes of De Nobili's voice in Orientalist discourse.

In addition to making De Nobili's writings available in English, *Preaching Wisdom to the Wise* offers an exceedingly valuable introduction that sets De Nobili's work in its cultural, theological, and ecclesiastical context. Clooney insightfully reflects upon how Hindus would have received De Nobili: Vaiṣṇavas would have argued that De Nobili fundamentally misunderstood the nature of divine descent in his critiques of idolatry, while Śaiva Siddhanta theologians would have at least found common ground with him in the belief that reason and truth are intimately related (22-23). De Nobili's missionary work came during a period of intense creativity in the Society of Jesus, and Clooney compares De Nobili to his Jesuit confrères who also engaged the cultures of Asia: Alessandro Valignano, who wrote a catechism for the Japanese Catholic Church that attacked the religions of Japan; Gonçalo Fernades, a fervent opponent of De Nobili's missionary strategy; Jacabo Fenicio and Diego Gonsalvez, who both combined what could be called ethnographic description of southern India with theological apologetics. What emerges in Clooney's introductory remarks is a sense of the rich ferment of Jesuit missionary activities in the seventeenth century. But Clooney also details the Thomistic underpinnings of much of De Nobili's polemics against Hinduism, most fundamentally manifested in De Nobili's conviction that reason can provide a transcultural base for interreligious discussion and missiological polemic. De Nobili thus is not only a missionary and ethnographer but also a comparative theologian whose example will come to influence Clooney in some rather unexpected ways.

Clooney in Context

Clooney excels in the interpretation of texts and his hermeneutics revels in the specificity of analysis. He defers questions of truth in favor of close, provisional readings that are always open to reinterpretation or, to use a word that Clooney himself uses, "reinscription." Given the tightly circumscribed nature of his theological investigations, it is sometimes difficult to discern how they all fit together as pieces of a larger project. But I would argue that Clooney's comparative theology can be understood, at least in part, as intimately related to his vision for Catholic education.

In a widely discussed article published in *Conversations in Jesuit Higher Education* (1999), Clooney makes what he calls "the dangerous suggestion" that Catholic institutions take seriously questions of religious diversity and pluralism. Clooney begins by recalling how his Hindu students in Kathmandu asked if a picture of the Goddess Saraswati could be placed in the classroom alongside the crucifix. While Clooney's Jesuit superior rejected the idea, in revisiting the issue some twenty-five years later, Clooney envisions a new sensitivity to diversity and dialogue on Catholic campuses that embrace the Jesuit tradition of higher education. Clooney suggests that Catholic colleges and universities should "tone down the rhetoric" (34) that suggests that Catholicism somehow has a monopoly upon religious experience. He specifically argues that Catholic colleges and universities should honor and make visible their religious diversity by readjusting and recontextualizing the curriculum to include works beyond the Western "great books" canon, by making appropriate hires in campus ministry and by instituting a "rotating" series of holidays "to celebrate other religious traditions" (35). In making this "dangerous proposal," Clooney observes that its consequence is not relativism, but "an educative religious encounter" that can deepen the religious lives of all those who study on the campuses of Catholic colleges and universities.

Clooney's contribution to discussions surrounding the mission and identity of Catholic institutions comes at a crucial period in Catholic higher education. According to the norms of Apostolic Constitution *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, Catholic institutions of higher education must ensure that Catholics constitute the majority of the faculty while those Catholics who teach in "theological disciplines" must obtain a "*mandatum*" from the local bishop in accord with the Code of Canon Law. While his proposal might seem "dangerous" to some within Catholic institutions who have a tightly circumscribed conception of what being "Catholic" should entail, Clooney's intent is most certainly not to enter the heated confines of intra-Catholic polemic for he only mentions *Ex Corde* in passing. Instead, Clooney's article has a much broader frame of reference that is most intimately connected to his comparative theology. By arguing that Catholic institutions should promote religious pluralism, Clooney envisions an academic context that would allow for the encounter, dialogue, reading and rereading between and among religious traditions. This is an open-ended process, one that depends upon time, and one that must be worked through, not worked around. But as Clooney shows us in his comparative theological works, engaging the texts of another tradition can transform the reader, who is then able to reinscribe and rewrite his or her own religious commitments. What is dangerous about Clooney's proposal is not that it relativitizes Christian truth claims or challenges the Catholic tradition, for it seeks to do none of these things. Instead, Clooney's proposal may appear dangerous because it paradoxically envisions a way of deepening Catholic identity by radically expanding the context in which that identity takes its form.

One of the most striking aspects of Clooney's discussion is its consistent emphasis upon "authenticity." Throughout the essay, Clooney repeats the phrase: "Jesuit colleges and universities should promote religious diversity and dialogue in an authentically religious way." With this statement, Clooney echoes the Catholic theologian Bernard Lonergan's discussions of authenticity, particularly in *Method in Theology* (1971). Clooney seemingly wants to emphasize that engaging diversity through dialogue is an intellectually

and spiritually serious endeavor that calls for maturity and discernment. But defining "authenticity," like trying to understand "wisdom," is a vexing endeavor. In Jesuit institutions of higher education, for example, there can sometimes be an implicit hierarchy of "authentic religious practices" in Catholicism itself: Marian devotion, corporal mortification, benedictions, the veneration of relics and crucifixes and other elements found in traditional Catholic practice are often considered to represent mere "piety" and not real "spirituality." While Clooney does not apply his standard of authenticity to questions of dialogue and diversity within Catholicism, the issue is nonetheless instructive. On the one hand, a call to authenticity on a Catholic campus could be understood to be an exhortation to reflect upon the assumptions undergirding religious faith. On the other hand, one can also sense how understandings of "authenticity" can also be shaped by very particular experiences of class and ethnicity as well as by other concerns that should be generalized only with great caution. When extended to the question of interreligious pluralism, one wonders how a particular notion of "authenticity" might circumscribe the context of dialogue. But perhaps Clooney's emphasis upon authenticity serves to make explicit a kind of minimum standard necessary for any academic polity to encourage diversity and respond to pluralism in a self-conscious and disciplined manner. Nonetheless, the issue remains whether notions of "authenticity" prevalent in various forms of academic discourse are sensitive to competing notions of "authenticity" that arise beyond the confines of the Catholic or secular academy.

Hindu God, Christian God

Francis Clooney's most recent book, *Hindu God, Christian God*, represents the most expansive vision of his comparative theology. In his introduction, Clooney harkens back not only to Śaṭakopan̲ but also to Roberto De Nobili. Clooney recalls a deeply moving experience in a great temple dedicated to Nārāyana that was once frequented by Śaṭakopan̲. Drawing upon this experience, Clooney writes that *Hindu God, Christian God* is for theologians who "persist in thinking at that edge where faiths encounter one another" (v) and must negotiate new possibilities with unchangeable commitments. The argumentative core of the work, however, is that reason can provide a framework for dialogue among religious traditions—a position that Clooney relates explicitly to Roberto de Nobili. The result is a stunning theological investigation, rich in specificity yet breathtaking in breadth. Clooney arranges his discussion around four theological questions: the existence of God, the identity of God, divine embodiment and revelation. In surveying Christian and Hindu approaches to these questions, Clooney compares a suggestive array of theologians: from Richard Swinburne, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Karl Rahner and Karl Barth to representative thinkers from the Nyāya, Mīmāṃsā, Vedānta, Tamil Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva traditions. Clooney thus recapitulates and extends the corpus of his earlier work through a variety of close and sophisticated readings of Christian and Hindu theologians. Prompted by Clooney's comparative positionings, Hans Urs von Balthasar meets Vedānta Desika while Karl Rahner's discussion of the symbol of Jesus's Sacred Heart is compared to understandings of Śiva's embodiment advanced by Śripati Paṇḍita Ācārya and Arul Nandi among others. In reading *Hindu God, Christian God*, one cannot help but be deeply impressed by its intellectual depth and dexterity: the linguistic and analytic skills necessary to bring such theological figures together constitute the product of decades of scholarly and contemplative discipline. In his conclusion, Clooney sets his specific comparative investigations as part of a vision for contemporary theology as necessarily interreligious, comparative, dialogical, and confessional.

For Clooney, theology does not proceed to articulate more specialized and specific beliefs "internal to a community" (170). Instead, theology moves from the convictions central to a religious community to enter a broader conversation about the nature of God and God's relation to life and the world. Like "Texts" which extend themselves through reflection and commentary to encompass ever more complex questions, comparative theology proceeds inductively through numerous examples and experiments to weave together another larger "Text" that embodies an ever deepening awareness of the divine. While some will inevitably take issue with Clooney's faith in reason, or with his claim that the Hindu and Christian thinkers he chooses are engaged in "theology," or with his position that theological claims should not be considered to be tradition specific unless proven otherwise, there is no doubt that *Hindu God, Christian God* will be a touchstone in scholarly considerations of interreligious dialogue for many years to come.

Conclusion

During a period of research in rural North India, I attended a gathering of religious leaders sponsored by the local Catholic mission. The meeting developed in a way that seemed sensitive to many of the issues that emerge in Clooney's discussion of comparative theology. Catholic priests and nuns, along with leaders from Hindu and Muslim communities, gathered in the mission's chapel. They did not debate religious questions nor did they plan for social activism. Instead, they read from their sacred texts and quoted sayings from their gurus and saints. If Clooney's comparative theology is an "experiment in reading," then the dialogue I witnessed was an experiment in listening: it deferred questions of truth in favor of a patient engagement with different traditions in the hope that an intertextual religious awareness would develop over time. Yet outside the chapel that day were lay Catholics, who happened to be Dalits. They were excluded from the dialogue, not only because their largely oral traditions were different from those of the religious leaders invited to take part in the service, but also because they were simply "untouchable." As the Hindu theologian Parimal Patel remarks in an afterward to *Hindu God, Christian God*, Clooney's comparative project places rather "asymmetrical demands" before Western and Indian theologians in light of the "historical, intellectual and political realities of Christianity's encounter with 'others'" (185). Of course, to bring the experiences of Dalits into the discussion would problematize the issue even more deeply for those Christian and Hindu theologians who remain sensitive to the numerous "asymmetries" that allow particular forms of discourse to dominate discussion both between and within the world's religious traditions. Clooney himself is characteristically circumspect about the scope of his comparative theological project in *Hindu God, Christian God*, for he writes that his approach certainly does not represent the only way to "theologize." Clooney, however, does observe that "the cry of the poor will be heard, or not, whether or not a theologian has decided what to make of the difference between [Karl] Rahner's and Sudarśana Sūri's assessments of divine embodiment" (174-75). While this may be true, for better or for worse, the question remains whether the exclusivity required by comparative theology is nonetheless open to other, perhaps radically

destabilizing, insights from those whose experiences and "cries" are not inscribed within the margins of canonical texts and textual practices.

There is a dynamic tension in Clooney's work between tradition and transgression. On the one hand, Clooney's deep respect for tradition is evinced by his careful and nuanced discussions of the various writings and readings that together constitute "the Text" of a particular tradition. On the other hand, however, he juxtaposes certain texts in potentially destabilizing ways and most clearly in his work on Vedanta, he engages texts that he is not "authorized" to read. In his reflections on his life as a priest and scholar, Clooney sometimes characterizes himself as "contemplative" or "bookish," in contradistinction to many of his brother Jesuits who had committed their lives to the quest for social justice through various forms of religiously inspired activism. But Clooney dedicates *Theology After Vedānta* to six Jesuits, their housekeeper and her daughter who were murdered in El Salvador in November of 1989. While in the transgressive aspect of his work there lies the potential for bringing readers or listeners into conversations with "Texts" that have once excluded them, Clooney generally does not push his work in this direction. Although he is admirably self-reflective in many of his writings, Clooney does not address how the specific institutional, ecclesiastic, and disciplinary contexts of his work shape the choices he makes as a comparative theologian. On one level, this is an issue that concerns why Clooney privileges texts or "The Text" and so valorizes the religious vision of the contemplative, the cleric, or the scholar, when one could, for example, also engage the religious vision of the prostitute, bonded laborer, or slave. But on another less speculative level, this is an issue that concerns how the political economy of academic and religious institutions influences the production and presentation of scholarship. Clooney is a theologian who has negotiated, or perhaps "transgressed," a variety of institutional and scholarly boundaries. For other scholars who also seek to move beyond conventional disciplinary confines, it would be interesting to learn how Clooney understands his work in relation to the applications of power in the academy that allow certain discursive practices while excluding others. For Clooney to engage this issue would not only clarify the relationship between tradition and transgression in his work, but also perhaps create an opening for considering other and perhaps more unsettling voices as "authentic" contributors to the work of comparative theology.

By weaving together an ever-expanding number of texts, the scholarship of Francis Xavier Clooney proceeds much like the "Texts" it seeks to engage. Among Indologists, Clooney's contributions to the study of the Mīmāṃsā tradition and Tamil devotional literature would without question merit high praise for their linguistic skill, scholarly discipline, and insight. Among theologians concerned with issues of interreligious encounter, Clooney's intellectual breadth and sophistication would have few peers. But for readers there emerges another aspect of Clooney's scholarship that is perhaps more striking still. Clooney has a strong scholarly voice that is both disciplined and passionate. Underlying this discipline and passion is a humility reflected in an openness to the intellectual and spiritual demands of reading. Within scholarly circles, of course, humility is a virtue that is rarely praised. Yet in reading his work, one does sense how Clooney himself has been deeply transformed by the "Texts" he has encountered. It is for this reason, perhaps more than any other, that Francis Xavier Clooney serves as a compelling yet gentle guide for such theological experiments in reading.

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