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CHAPTER 43

Is There or Shall We Need a “Home” for Comparative Theologies?

A Ru (Confucian) Response to Francis X. Clooney

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As a Ru¹ scholar who researches Ruism and Christianity and teaches courses in comparative philosophy, religion, and theology, I am eager to join the contemporary revival of the discipline of comparative theology (CT) led by Francis X. Clooney. Such eagerness derives from two main reasons: first, theology is a discipline for which Ru scholars to date have not yet created a stable set of vocabulary to engage. Second, within contemporary CT scholarship, we have not yet witnessed a robust contribution from Ruism which is capable of methodically pursuing CT from a primarily Ruist perspective. To remedy these two situations, it is necessary for Ru scholars to ascertain what theology is and what methodologies CT theologians are currently practicing.

There is no better way to start addressing these two questions than studying Clooney's works, given that, first, contemporary CT theologians often devise their own methods while at least keeping Clooney's method in mind. Second, meta-theorists of CT are constructing taxonomies to categorize varying kinds of comparative study of religions, with Clooney's works looming large in these taxonomies. I have been aware of the significance of Clooney's CT scholarship since my graduate studies at Boston University during 2014–2018 under the supervision of Robert C. Neville and Wesley J. Wildman, who are prevalently thought of by CT theorists as having furnished an alternative model of CT to Clooney's. I am therefore grateful to the Boston Theological Interreligious Consortium (BTI, formerly the Boston Theological Institute), through which I could take courses across major institutions dedicated to CT studies such as Boston College and Harvard University. Clooney was then (and still is) a faculty convener of the Doctoral Colloquium of Comparative Studies at Harvard Divinity School, which was a major venue for me to present my emerging dissertation chapters.

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Because of this academic background of mine, Clooney's works also loom large in the few publications I have contributed to the field (Song 2020a, 2020b, 2021). While still striving to remedy the aforementioned situations of Ruist CT, I will address several questions in this chapter to continually celebrate the significance of Clooney's works in the field: what I have learned enthusiastically, neutrally, critically, and constructively with Clooney. Overall, I will invite CT scholars to treat my answers to these questions as a Ru response to Clooney's Catholic CT.

Enthusiasm

My enthusiasm to learn with Clooney on CT consists of four major points.

First, the devotional and contemplative reading that Clooney exemplifies in his commentarial work on classical Hindu texts is a potent antidote to the pervasively objectifying method of South Asian studies, from which method I think East Asian studies (i.e., the area studies in which Ru studies are supposed to be located in the academy) also suffer. Decolonial scholars of Hinduism (such as Mandair 2004) once critiqued the objectifying method as a "secularist gaze" of apathetic onlookers which may lead to the repetition of colonial events. According to the critique, the gaze cannot attend to the normativity of philosophical and religious truths claimed by traditions and, accordingly, it also undermines the accuracy of Western understandings of the discursive traditions in the areas which the area studies are allegedly studying. Clooney's CT scholarship therefore demonstrates admirably how to surmount such a critique.

Second, the devotional reading does not diminish the academic quality of Clooney's commentarial work, and Clooney achieves this mainly via two approaches: (1) Clooney takes a meticulous consideration of traditional commentaries and contemporary studies of Hindu texts while seeking to highlight the religious truth expressed in those texts. The same can be said for his studies of Christian texts as well. (2) On top of his work on particular texts, Clooney constantly attempts to explain his general comparative methodology while inviting scholars of varying disciplines to scrutinize his CT method.

Third, given that being simultaneously devotional and academic in one's exceptional scholarship is not a minor accomplishment for a scholar working in the current academy, the most important point I have learned from Clooney is his ability to balance the three major institutional forces which have both constrained and contributed to his scholarship. The aforementioned two approaches respond respectively to the institutional strictures of the Department of South Asian Languages and Civilizations, from which Clooney obtained his PhD at the University of Chicago, and of academic theology, for which Clooney has worked in major universities such as Boston College and Harvard University. Besides, the so-called confessional approach of Clooney's CT, which, as I will analyze later, aims to enhance one's commitment to the religious truth of one's "home" tradition via slow and contemplative reading of another tradition, serves Clooney's religious self-identity as a Jesuit priest. "Harmonization (和 *he*)" is the highest ideal a Ru scholar strives to achieve in terms that the Ru shall respond appropriately to each of the multiple values of things at hand. Therefore, I celebrate Clooney's ability of harmonizing the roles that he shoulders in varying institutions and of flourishing his CT scholarship in a well-balanced manner.

Fourth, despite being a leader of the contemporary CT revival, Clooney repeatedly admits that CT remains a relatively young discipline, and his approach to CT welcomes alternatives. While trying to pursue CT primarily from a Ruist perspective, I am particularly encouraged by the following words of Clooney (2021, pp. 130–131; my translation):

The necessity of working on comparative theology starting from non-Christian perspectives is great for the sake of preventing a new kind of elitism from taking hold under the form of an

“exclusively Christian” comparative theology. This opening is possible only if scholars can show that “theology,” insofar as it is a discipline, is not the property of only Christians, that it is not regulated by Latin, Greek, German, and English grammars, as if researchers in other regions or traditions should imperatively not only write in English or German, but also accept the meanings of terms we use in theological analysis.

Evidently, pursuing CT from non-Christian perspectives is unavoidable for enhancing the academic status of CT, since the diversity of scholarship contributed by CT theologians in a genuinely global fashion can be readily put into further comparison and scrutiny by the academy. Nevertheless, given the paramount significance of Clooney’s work, I still deem it necessary for non-Christian CT theologians to learn “the meanings of terms” that Clooney utilizes in his theological analysis before embarking on non-Christian CT projects. In the following, I will present my neutral learning of the major terms of Clooney’s CT methodology.

Terms

A typical self-portrayal of Clooney (2010, pp. 7–9) to the disciplinary nature of CT is that CT is “faith” in one’s “home” tradition seeking “understanding,” and the in-depth understanding of the religious truth(s) of other tradition(s) can therefore “intensify” the truth of one’s own. Since truth central to one’s faith is committed or appreciated, Clooney specifies that CT is normative while distinguishing itself from the typically non-normative discipline of comparative religion. However, Clooney’s comparison usually does not yield normative conclusions. It instead aims for the “intensification” of religious truths rather than “progress” in either adjudicating or advancing these truths (Clooney 2021, p. 119). Although expressing occasionally his wish that a “new scholasticism” (Clooney 2019a, p. 75) would be generated in the future to confront issues of truth more directly, it remains unclear whether Clooney himself devises his CT methodology for this long-term purpose. For meta-CT theorists such as Catherine Cornille (2020, pp. 18–19), Clooney’s approach is furthermore summarized as a “confessional” type of CT, which deepens the truth of one’s home tradition via comparing it with others.

I have to admit that I had a great difficulty for a long period of time to fully understand those key terms of Clooney’s CT methodology, not only because these terms mutually define each other. It is also because the Ru tradition did not have any ritual of initiation similar to baptism where a neophyte confesses their faith in a creedal form to God and to their receiving home community. A cluster of other Catholic religious practices connected to baptism are accordingly absent from Ruism as well, such as the institutional sanctification of the Creeds as theological orthodoxy versus heresy,² the declaration of faith by churches and individuals under suspicion, and the catechumenate. Instead, Confucius (*Analects* 15.36; my translation) taught his students that “When the cause of being humane is at stake, never yield to your teacher.” While bearing a remarkable resemblance to Aristotle’s dictum (paraphrased from *Nicomachean Ethics* 1096a11–15) that “I love my teacher, but I prefer truth,” this teaching of Confucius precludes the Ru tradition from forming any “creedal attitude” (which I will analyze later) toward embraced truths of faith. Having grown up in a generally Ruist cultural milieu and being dedicated to pursue Ruist CT, I was therefore unable to distinguish the act of philosophically advocating from religiously confessing truth due to my lack of those underlying religious practices and historical memories.

The fact that I now understand better the cause of my difficulty derives from my continual learning of the Christian way of life, particularly regarding the history of early Christianity, medieval scholasticism, and the Protestant Reformation. It is evident that Creeds play a crucial role in

Clooney's conception of theology as "faith seeking understanding" (FSU), as well as in his general CT methodology. As stated by Clooney (2019a, p. 53, 2019b, pp. 219–220) on multiple occasions, notwithstanding that Creeds in their doctrinal format cannot exhaust the ultimately unfathomable divine mystery, the whole body of Creeds shall be treated as implying an unalterable and determinate expression of faith in the divinity, and theologically, these Creeds shall be employed to rule out "bad alternatives" so as to keep the integrity of Catholic orthodoxy. All other components of Clooney's CT methodology are construable accordingly: the "home" tradition or community sanctifies the Creeds, and in this new age of global religious diversity, the "understanding" of other tradition(s) will be summoned by CT theologians to intensify their own "faith" which has been predetermined discursively by the Creeds. Since the declaration of Creeds is integral to the confessional rituals of Catholicism enumerated above, "confessional" CT refers to the type of comparative study of religion which is committed to a determinate, doctrinal form of faith in such a home tradition.

Critique

On New Year's Eve 2022, I received emails from Dr Clooney, which, while celebrating my new publication on his CT methodology, questioned my depiction of it as too "rigid." In my view, there is no better way to honor Clooney's scholarly friendship indicated by these emails other than continuing to discuss issues of concern to him and to the CT field in general. I hope my above analysis of the role of Creeds in Clooney's understanding of theology by no means sheds doubt on his exemplary open-mindedness toward non-Christian religiosity. Quite contrary to this doubt, Clooney's CT methodology implies that the more open the theologian in question is toward the particularity of religious truths expressed in Hindu texts, the more his commitment to Catholic truths gets intensified, and vice versa. This is how, as analyzed above, Clooney balances the shaping institutional forces to his CT scholarship. My following critique therefore by no means regards the devotional way of reading Clooney so exquisitely demonstrated in his Hindu commentaries. Instead, the critique will be about the conceptual level of Clooney's understanding of theology. Since Clooney also encourages the invention of new CT vocabularies from non-Christian perspectives, I deem the following critique of Clooney's CT methodology as aiming to rally around his call.

My main critique of Clooney's CT methodology is that its foundational concept of theology as FSU, with faith defined, first, as being shaped by a determinate set of doctrinal strictures (namely, the Creeds) and, second, as seeking cultural devices for the self-understanding of the faith, is one among many theologies construed differently in varying contexts of Western intellectual history. The validity of the concept to undergird a certain CT approach is therefore contingent on a variety of historical and intellectual factors, and cannot be taken for granted as the starting point of global CT thinking. Let me prove why this is so by analyzing Clooney's predecessor, Thomas Aquinas, whose understanding of theology is evidently located in the scholastic tradition of FSU.

It is well known that Aquinas (*Summa Contra Gentiles* I.3.2, translated by A.C. Pegis) distinguishes theology into two kinds: revealed theology attends to truths about God that "exceed all the ability of the human reason. Such is the truth that God is triune." Natural theology addresses truths that "the natural reason also is able to reach," such as that God exists. Unmistakably, the former lies in the realm of "faith," whereas the latter in "understanding." However, while explaining "what is faith" in the triune God, Aquinas (1939) frequently refers to the Nicene Creed to rule out alternative, heretical conceptions of the triune God. Therefore, FSU means for Aquinas exactly what is meant by Clooney, namely, the human experience of faith toward ultimate reality is filtered through the Creeds at first, and then, the faith seeks its own self-understanding via cultural devices fit for the time. In Aquinas's time, the mobilized cultural

device is mainly the rediscovered Aristotelianism and other ancient Greek thought, whereas in Clooney’s it is the in-depth reading of non-Christian, Hindu texts.

Nevertheless, is it not the case that the Nicene Creed, the earliest state-sponsored Creed of the Roman Catholic Church, was the outcome of an enduring and intense theological debate and, hence, its normativity to the general concept of theology remains contingent on a variety of historical and intellectual factors? As indicated by the history of the formation and impact of the Nicene Creed first issued at the Council of Nicaea in 325, we can list at least four of these factors:

1. The belief of early Christians in scriptures as revealed words of truths about God which are distinct from and superior to pagan classics such as Greek philosophies (Ayes 2006, pp. 391–392; Ferguson 2002, pp. 1–22).
2. The pre-Nicene use of tenets by early churches to recapitulate the reading of scriptures in declaratory or liturgical rituals (examples of which have been raised above) and in patristic writings (Edwards 2021, pp. 136–141; Ferguson 2002, p. 39).
3. The conversion of the Roman emperor Constantine to Christianity, as well as Constantine’s will to solidify the imperial authority via achieving the unity and concord of Christian believers (Dam 2021; Drake 2021).
4. The theological debate among church leaders regarding Arius and Arianism, which originated from Alexandria in the early fourth century, and then spread to larger regions of the Roman world (Lyman 2021).

Because these four factors can be counted as among the causes of the origination of the Nicene Creed, it is entirely conceivable that in another context of Western or non-Western histories, the lack of any of these causes may not lead to the formation of a similarly creedal expression of faith and, hence, seekers for religious truth in these alternative contexts may not entertain an idea of theology similar to the scholastic FSU. Another perspective to understand the contingent nature of the role of the Creeds in the scholastic conception of theology is that although originally meant to be an unchangeable and sufficient expression of Christian faith, the Nicene Creed kept being modified to address new problems that the Church faced over time (Gavrilyuk 2021). Sometimes such modifications were so significant as to contribute to divisions within the Church, one prominent example of which was the addition of the word *Filioque* (Latin: “and from the son”) contributing to the schism of Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches (Dunn 2021, p. 352; Gavrilyuk 2021, p. 343). The Protestant Reformation furthermore complicated the contingent nature of the Creeds, since not all Protestant denominations are creedal.

Given that the Creeds, as sanctioned by a sovereign institution of religion, were meant to be an unalterable and determinate expression of faith (though they often failed at such an endeavor), I will define the mentality of religious practitioners surrounding their intention for such a doctrinal closure of faith as a “creedal attitude.”³ Given that the major terms in Clooney’s CT methodology define each other, I will furthermore sustain that the creedal attitude is pivotal to the confessional conception of comparative theology as faith in a home tradition seeking deepened self-understanding via comparison with other religious traditions. As the origination of the creedal attitude toward faith is contingent, Clooney’s CT methodology is contingent as well. This conclusion implies that apart from situational factors, Clooney has made his own personal choice of pursuing CT as such.

Such a choice of methodology surely affords positives to Clooney’s CT scholarship, as I have enthusiastically learned. As a Roman Catholic priest, Clooney has his full right to choose whatever path of comparative studies of religion he deems as the best fit. However, the contingent nature of Clooney’s CT methodology may also lead to controversial consequences, of which I list a few for the purpose of this chapter so as to conclude my critique.

First, while embracing a closure of faith by its determined expression in the Creeds, Clooney cannot explain adequately his motive of studying Hinduism. In other words, apart from the external fact that Hinduism alongside Catholicism has been rediscovered as a major world religion, we cannot easily find strong reasons internal to truths of Catholicism that motivate Clooney's contemplative reading of Hindu texts. For instance, after meticulously studying one Hindu and one Catholic classic on a shared topic, Clooney (2019a, p. 43) says, "We begin to learn two doctrinal systems together, holding their truths next to one another, not because we think that to do so is a good idea, but simply because we must do so, because we have studied both together." The implied logic here seems to suggest that studying two doctrinal systems together is a *forced* task by a matter of fact, rather than deriving from any good reason or genuine need intrinsic to the dynamics of faith.

Second, other than acknowledging the de facto reception of religious truths in respective traditions, Clooney seems to have no further criteria to discern truth. Accordingly, Clooney (2019a, p. 94) also declines to resort to the Kantian type of "pure reason" to understand or debate truths since these truths are always considered as "the lived wisdom of a particular tradition evident in these particular circumstances." However, the dualism of pure reason versus particular religions is an early modern legacy of Western thought, which does not necessarily prevail in other contexts of Western or non-Western intellectual histories. It is conceivable that a scholar rooted in a particular tradition is able to be *simultaneously* open to a more universal perspective of truth. On the one hand, the scholar may be committed to speaking in more or less the same vocabulary of faith rooted in a particular tradition, while on the other hand, they may still resort to the common sense of humanity shaped by a global perspective to either entrench, enrich, or revise, without totally abandoning, the traditional vocabulary. In other words, "pure reasoning" and "reasoning via traditions" may mutually enhance each other in a fallible and dynamic fashion. Instances of such mutual enhancement will be discussed shortly.

This uncritical acceptance of the early modern Western conception of pure reason versus particular religions also speaks to the politically conservative nature of Clooney's CT scholarship, which abides by the early modern principle of the separation of church and state quite consistently. Each religious doctrinal system, per the named principle argued by enlightenment thinkers such as John Locke (2017, p. 8) and established by the American constitution, is "orthodox to itself." Therefore, the commitment to truths of religion shall be up to the free choice of individuals and be confined in the private area of religious institutions, with the public area of politics to be safeguarded by citizens' mandatory employment of secular and pure reason. As it does not challenge such a status quo of the established Western order of politics and religion, the capacity of Clooney's CT to contribute to solving new problems⁴ arising to this status remains limited.

Third, since Clooney's comparison of Christian and Hindu texts aims for intensification rather than progress, the creedal attitude toward faith rooted in the Catholic scholastic FSU tradition may have been inappropriately carried over to Clooney's reading of Hindu texts, which may therefore do injustice to the diversity of Hinduism and to the distinction of Hindu from Catholic religiosity. For instance, the determinate nature of Catholic faith shaped by the creedal attitude propels Clooney to attend to the particularity of the Hindu faith. However, a significant proportion of studied Hindu texts, as admitted by Clooney (2019a, p. 24), themselves aim to distill and summarize ancient Hindu wisdom and ritual specifications so as to make these ancient teachings accessible to beginner learners. Clooney's reluctance to reach the level of theorization beyond particular texts would therefore run counter to the theorizing tendency intrinsic to the texts he studied. Besides, there are self-critical and revisionist voices within the Hindu tradition. Bringing these voices into comparison with the creedal Catholic truths so as to intensify the latter would readily

undermine the self-critical nature of these voices. For instance, right before elaborating the significance of the Catholic Creeds, Clooney (2019a, p. 52) concludes his reading of Dīkṣita's *Perspectives* by citing Dīkṣita's own closing words: “If there is anything regarding the courses of our teachings written incorrectly by me and spoiled with error, may generous people of a good position toward true tradition and entirely free of doubts be compassionate in correcting me.” Clooney (2019a, p. 52) avers that a deep reading of such a statement would “gradually make one an insider.” However, an alternative way to interpret Dīkṣita's view is to highlight the Vedānta tradition's nondualism between pure reason and religious particularities so as to indicate that the tradition does not share a creedal attitude, and hence has a different dynamic of faith from Catholicism.⁵ However, with Clooney's reading guided by his general CT methodology, such an alternative remains concealed.

Construction

Given the contingent nature of Clooney's CT methodology which rests on the contingent FSU definition of theology, it is worthwhile to explore alternative conceptions of theology in the Western intellectual history, and these alternatives might be more conducive to the construction of non-Christian CTs. This cautious optimism represents my general approach to a Ruist CT. In other words, because I am following the tradition of “Boston Confucianism” and writing about Ruism primarily in English, I need to study the English vocabulary thoroughly so as to find the best words to translate concepts of Ruism in a way of remaining both authentic to the Ru tradition and accessible to English readers. With my major CT work (developed from Song 2018) under review, I will briefly state how I construct the general framework of a Ruist CT as follows, and readers can also check more details of the framework in my previous publications (particularly Song 2020b) on this topic.

Theology in ancient Western philosophy, such as in Aristotelianism and Stoicism, inquires into the boundary conditions of metaphysics integral to philosophy as a way of life (PWOL). Such a philosophical way of life aims to transform the whole personhood of human individuals from being inauthentic to authentic in connection to a larger cosmic whole via spiritual exercises such as attention, visualization, journaling, dialogue, reading, and so on. Theological inquiries in PWOL are therefore amenable both to transformative spiritual and mystical experience and to rational criticism which draws on a variety of comparative sources, such as different schools of thought and cultural lineages surrounding the ancient Mediterranean world. No creed was created to uniformize these theologies, and any determinate expression of spiritual experience about boundary conditions of realities was also deemed as fallible and revisable. In the contemporary CT scholarship, Raimon Panikkar (2004, p. 143) claims that theology is a “handmaid of philosophy,” and Robert C. Neville (2013, p. 180) specifies the best category for his comparative, systematic theology as “philosophical theology.” They furnish living examples of the PWOL theology.

Besides, Protestant thinkers, such as Friedrich Schleiermacher and Paul Tillich, contribute what may be called the Protestant conception of theology (PCT). PCT construes “faith” as the pre- or supra-linguistic, transformative experience of individuals triggered by their encounter of ultimate reality. When individuals intently cultivate such spiritual experiences, communities of religion are formed and cultural symbols and languages are employed as a pointer to ultimate reality so as to orient individuals toward a certain disciplined way of life. However, no determinate set of linguistic expressions of faith is deemed as final and unalterable. PCT intrinsically strives for new developments of human spirituality, including comparative studies of world religions, to

revise and enrich determinate expressions of faith so as to engage continually the ultimately indeterminate abundance of ultimate reality. In a word, theology per PCT is a discursive and revisable self-reflection of practicing individuals within religious communities to cultivate their spiritual experience about ultimate reality consciously. In the contemporary CT scholarship, Keith Ward, as well as scholar-practitioners in the research program of Theology Without Walls (TWW) at the American Academy of Religion, furnishes distinctive examples of PCT.

Neither PCT nor the PWOL theology adopts a creedal attitude toward faith, and they share a similar understanding of the dialectical relationship between indeterminate ultimate reality and determinate expressions of spiritual experience. However, I think the PWOL theology is more conducive to the construction of a global (and particularly Ruist as I will argue later) perspective of CT mainly because of two reasons. First, Christian symbols still play a leading role in PCT. Second, immediately after the Protestant Reformation, varying Protestant denominations alongside Catholicism and other religions were put into walled religious institutions in the private area of society under the principle of the separation of church and state, and each of these institutions is accordingly treated by the public as orthodox to itself. Consequently, the creedal attitude which demands a closure of faith sanctioned by a sovereign religious institution is enhanced, rather than weakened, within certain Protestant denominations. However, the PWOL theology was practiced in an entirely different sociological setting from the early modern European and American nation-states. PWOL intimates a closer relationship between philosophy and religion, and its open inquiry into ultimate reality is also amenable to comparative studies. Hence, the PWOL theology can help contemporary CT scholars to re-envision the established Western order of religion and politics, and to pave new ways of pursuing CT from a genuinely global perspective.

How can Ru scholars utilize the PWOL theology to construct a Ruist CT? After surveying the varying discourses about *Tian* (天, heaven or the universe), the Ruist designation of ultimate reality, in the intellectual history of Ruism, I find that the discussion of the concept of *Taiji* (太極, ultimate limit) in the *Daoxue* movement (道學, learning of the Way, also termed as Neo-Confucianism in English scholarship) intends to fathom the creative origin of *Tian*. The *Daoxue* also attempts to construct a metaphysical-ethical system rooted in the wisdom of ancient Ru classics so as to furnish a comprehensive orientation to individual human life. Therefore, the *Daoxue* comprises the most adequate comparison to the PWOL conception of theology and can be considered as a major resource for the construction of a contemporary Ruist CT.

More importantly, the *Daoxue* movement took place in the period of ancient Chinese intellectual history when the three major spiritual traditions, namely, Ruism, Daoism, and Buddhism intensely interacted with each other. Using the evidence of exemplary *Daoxue* thinkers' writings, I summarized the Ruist attitude toward other traditions as a non-confessional and seeded open inclusivism. It is non-confessional because no creedal attitude toward faith prevailed in the Ru tradition. Ru scholars normally identified themselves with a historically formed lineage of thought and practice. Their commitment to Ru ideals such as humanism, cosmic harmony, and social activism was discernible, but no intention of demanding a doctrinal closure of faith in the form of Creeds was demonstrated. The Ruist view toward other traditions is "seeded" because the lineage of Ru spirituality is rooted in the reception of historically formed classics within the Ru tradition. At the same time, it is an "open inclusivism" because none of the seeded wisdom was thought of as final and unalterable and, hence, Ruism is intrinsically open to other traditions so as to incorporate new wisdom to enrich its own. This inclusivism is genuinely open because the non-confessional nature of Ru spirituality implies not even a minimal commitment to doctrinal closure of traditional Ru teaching. Hence, we can use a biological metaphor to depict the dynamics of faith within noncreedal traditions such as Ruism: established theological wisdom within the Ru tradition would be like a seed to assist individuals' spiritual growth, and insights gleaned

elsewhere can modify the genetic expression of the seed so as to develop new epi-genetic traits of the rooted tradition in time. Such a dynamic furnishes another example of how “pure reasoning” and “rooted reasoning in particular traditions” can interact with each other in the context of interreligious learning.

Regarding how to start a Ruist CT study with legitimate motivations and how to accurately compare concepts across traditions, I proposed a concrete comparative methodology which combines Jonathan Z. Smith’s situational thinking (which is similar to Gadamer’s hermeneutical consciousness) and Neville’s pragmatic comparative method of vague category. Both of the two components function under the general framework of the Ruist theology of religions as a non-confessional and seeded open inclusivism.

Conclusion

Harkening back to the question asked by the title of this chapter, is there or shall we need a home for comparative theologies? If a home tradition is defined together with the cluster of concepts surrounding the creedal attitude toward faith such as “confession” and the FSU theology, I believe that Catholic CT theologians such as Clooney surely have their full right to choose to remain in and continually solidify their home while pursuing comparisons. However, under closer historical and philosophical scrutiny, we have found that the foundation of such a home is contingent and, therefore, for non-Catholic traditions which lack any of those contingent factors, theologians may not need to treat the traditions of their own as a home defined as such. In the case of Ruism, a biological metaphor such as a seeded lineage of a way of human living, which is rooted, organically growing, and open to new developments of human spirituality, is more adequate to the dynamic of Ru faith during the process of CT studies. In a word, to advance contemporary CT as a genuinely global enterprise, CT scholars and theologians may need to wonder how CT can be conducted in both Western and non-Western traditions alternatively to Clooney’s CT model, despite the fact that this wondering once again confirms the irreplaceable significance of Clooney’s CT in the field.

Notes

- 1 Abreast of my other publications, “Confucianism” will be written as “Ruism” or the “Ru tradition,” and “Confucian” or “Confucianist” will be written as “Ru” or “Ruist” in this chapter. When used as a noun, the plural of “Ru” or “Ruist” is “Ru” or “Ruists.” Ru (儒) means a “civilized human,” and had been the original name of the Ru tradition before “Confucianism” was invented and spread by mainly Protestant missionaries in the nineteenth century.
- 2 Central governments in imperial China might issue edicts to dismiss certain Ru scholars’ learning as “false learning.” However, this official denunciation did not take any creedal format and more often pertained to the ethical praxis and impact of the scholars in question, rather than any creedal conformity of their thinking. See case studies conducted by Santangelo (2021, pp. 13–26).
- 3 My definition of “creedal attitude” is inspired by Ayres’s (2006, p. 275) characterization of pro-Nicene theology as a Christian *habitus* which functions as a “matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions.” I also thank Dr Stephen Meawad at Caldwell University for his help in my study of the concept of theology in early Christianity.
- 4 Examples of the problems can refer to Clooney’s (2021, pp. 137–141) response to the critique of “an apolitical tendency” by Hugh Nicholson (2011, p. 37).
- 5 Such an alternative interpretation of the Vedānta religiosity is advocated by Long (2019, p. 230).

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