WHAT ARE COMPARATIVE THEOLOGIANS DOING WHEN THEY ARE DOING COMPARATIVE THEOLOGY?[1] A LONERGANIAN PERSPECTIVE WITH EXAMPLES FROM THE ENGAGEMENT WITH ISLAM

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"I am large, I contain multitudes."
– Walt Whitman

Abstract

This article explores Lonergan's potential contribution to understanding current questions in the methods of comparative theology. There is an impasse in the latter methodologies influenced by specialized methods and the investigation of differences. All this is heightened by a post-colonial context that is reluctant to ask theological questions that might point beyond comparison, and, by the resistance to comparative theology by other members of the faith community.

Written by a Lonergan scholar who has done comparative theology and a comparative theologian who has studied Lonergan, this paper locates the crux of the issue to lie between what Lonergan calls the functional specialties *dialectic* and *foundations*. Methodologically, comparative religionists do not move beyond *dialectic*. However, comparative theologians will need to if they are to do more than just compare – committing not only to their own faith tradition, but to some extent, to truths that lie in the other tradition they study.

Keywords

Comparative Theology, Dialogue, Lonergan, Method in Theology, Dialectic, Foundations

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[1] The title of this article is not to be confused with a similar title (Griffiths 2014: 40-45). The similarity is merely coincidence, if Lonergan had been asked the question when he was alive, he would frame the methodological question around comparative theology in this way: "What are comparative theologians doing when they are doing comparative theology?"

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Introduction

Comparative theological method in Catholic theology is at an impasse. In a previous essay on Lonergan's approach to religion it was stated: "Comparative theologians have already come to this conclusion [that theology in the future will be inter-religious] but their specialized methods have not sufficiently met [what Lonergan would call] the methodical exigence. Consequently, they have little to say about the ultimate goal of comparative theology or its role in a broader constructive or systematic theology" (Dadosky 2020: 71).[2] The editors of a recent volume would argue to the contrary that "it is neither necessary nor possible to consolidate a single and final list of components essential to comparative theological method" (Clooney and von Stosch 2018: 3). Instead, they counsel patience, finding value in the fruitful interpenetration of diverse comparative theological approaches, including those that emphasize doctrinal implications, those that emphasize the highly technical and specific work of particular comparisons, and those that aim for desired ethical outcomes.

Nevertheless, in the current state of affairs it seems that (Catholic) comparative theologians who have been engaging deeply with other religions find themselves in one of four situations: 1) they essentially do comparative religion but without moving beyond the investigation of

[2] Catherine Cornille identifies the ultimate goal of comparative theology to be to "inform and enrich all of the classical areas of theology", (Cornille 2020: 176). However, precisely how this gets worked out remains to be determined. We believe Lonergan's eight functional specialties can help clarify that task.

differences; 2) they privately adhere to or participate in the practices of the other religious traditions they study without trying to integrate the two within themselves, fostering a kind of split religious personality; 3) they privately try to integrate the other religions they study but do not communicate those endeavors publicly, and; 4) they publicly attempt to creatively move beyond the identification of differences by exploring possible theological integrations, such as in the examples that will be given in this essay further on.

This article is written by a Lonergan scholar who has carried out comparative theology and a comparative theologian who has studied Lonergan. The purpose of this paper is to resource Lonergan's eightfold method of functional specialties in order to shed light on the method within comparative theology. As we will explain below, there is an impasse in comparative theological method that concerns the transition between what Lonergan calls the functional specialty *dialectic* to that of *foundations*. In short, *dialectic* pertains to identifying differences and foundations pertains to engaging the differences more deeply from a presupposition of unity based in the natural and graced transcultural aspects of human living. For Lonergan this is his philosophy of intentional consciousness, on the one hand, and the possibility of genuine transcendent encounters with the sacred, on the other hand.

The first two situations comparative theologians find themselves in listed above reflect those theologians who do not move beyond the functional specialty, dialectic. The second two options reflect those who are attempting to move beyond dialectic to foundations. The challenge will be to explore creative and careful higher integrations that avoid a truncated theology of religions on the one hand, and superficial multi-religious participation, on the other hand. What the outcome would look like we cannot be certain but it may involve a return to some of the pioneering creative methods such as those exemplified by Louis Massignon (1883-1962) and Paolo Dall'Oglio, S.J. (1951-) for clues as to how to proceed.

Anyone familiar with Lonergan's thought will recognize in the title of this article an adaptation of the way Lonergan would approach these methodological issues: "What am I doing when I am knowing?", "Why is doing that knowing?" and "What do I know when I do that?" (Lonergan 2017b: 27). Lonergan did not explicitly comment upon comparative theology, largely because the discipline as we have come to know it today did not exist in his time. Still, the existence of other religions was a question of increasing importance for the later Lonergan. And if the

question would have been put to Lonergan at that time he likely would have framed the methodological question as: "What are comparative theologians doing when they are doing comparative theology?"[3]

The Problem of Method in Comparative Theology

We will attempt to summarize the issue here in the context of Lonergan's method. Scholars of comparative religion seek to compare the beliefs and practices of two or more particular faith traditions. Methodologically, the comparative religionists do not make a faith commitment to any of the traditions they study. As Francis Clooney observes:

> Comparative religion…entails the study of religion – in ideas, words, images and acts, historical developments – as found in two or more traditions or strands of tradition. The scholarly ideal is detached inquiry by which the scholar remains neutral with respect to where the comparison might lead or what it might imply religiously. Even if she is deeply engaged in the research and sensitive to communal issues, her responsibility is primarily to fellow scholars (Clooney 2010: 9).

"Comparative theology," on the other hand, "marks acts of faith seeking understanding which are rooted in a particular faith tradition but which, from that foundation, venture into learning from one or more other faith traditions. This learning is sought for the sake of fresh theological insights that are indebted to the newly encountered tradition/s as well as the home tradition" (Clooney 2010: 9). Similarly, Catherine Cornille states: "Comparative theology… differs from other areas of theology in that it reflects on theological questions in relation to the data of other religious traditions, and it differs from religious studies in that it approaches this data from an explicitly normative religious perspective" (Cornille 2020: 176). Hence, the key difference between the comparative theologian and the comparative religionist is that the former makes a

[3] Lonergan's universalist notion of genuine religion would be in sympathy with the rise of comparative theology. On genuine religion, see (Lonergan 2017b: 106-8). See also (Crowe 1994: 147-179).

The roots of comparative theology go at least as far back as Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1934). Richard Crouter states: "Through Otto the legacy of Schleiermacher is also linked to Mircea Eliade and the study of the history of religions" (Schleiermacher 1996: xxxii); Two followers of Schleiermacher, Rudolf Otto and Gerardus Van der Leeuw, both had dual doctorates in theology and another religious tradition.

religious commitment or faith stance in at least one of the traditions studied, whereas the comparative religionist does not.[4]

The relationship between comparative theology and comparative religion can be further clarified by applying the eightfold functional specialization that Lonergan distinguishes in *Method in Theology*. The sequence of eight functional specialties "separates successive stages in the process from data to results" (Lonergan 2017b: 122). Lonergan proceeds throughout the volume to spell out how this mediation occurs as a methodical process through eight functional specialties within two phases of theology, a mediating phase (research, interpretation, history, dialectic), and a mediated phase (foundations, doctrines, systematics, communications – or praxis). According to this schema, comparative religionists and other scholars of religion employ primarily the mediating phase of functional specialties: research, interpretation, history, and dialectic. That is, they collect data pertaining to religious phenomena, provide interpretations of the data; they study those interpretations in historical context; and they make comparisons between differing interpretations. Functioning *as* comparative religionists, they do not take the extra step into the mediated phase, especially foundations, because this functional specialty establishes the religious horizon of faith and belief through religious, moral, and intellectual [one can add psychological] conversion – it involves taking a stance, or a religious commitment.

In contrast, the comparative theologian, who also employs the first four functional specialties with respect to their discipline, would (in theory at least) invoke the functional specialties of foundations, doctrines, systematics, and communications. As stated above, the task of comparative theologians presupposes a commitment to the truths and values of a given tradition. The notion of one's own faith commitment pertains to the functional specialty *foundations*, which involves fundamental experiences of transcendence and conversion. A principal role of *foundations*

[4] The following comment concerning the comparative religionist approach by Heinz Robert Schlette seems relevant to the current discussion when he states: "The question may then be raised again whether the scholar in the science of comparative religion can 'understand' Jesus or the Buddha. He[She] can depict and compare these figures. He[She] can intellectually convey what their teaching and the demands they make are, their similarity and their uniqueness, but can anyone in this matter ultimately 'understand' unless he[she] commits himself[herself]?" (Schlette 1963: 55). With this distinction in mind, is it possible that comparative theologians, because of their faith commitment, might be able to understand another religion better than a comparative religionist, since they embrace the value of religious belief existentially in a way the comparative religionist does not?

establishes the subject's religious horizon.[5] There follows the affirmation, and to some extent the development of *doctrines*, the "understanding" of the mysteries of faith in *systematics*, and *communications* (praxis) of the doctrines/theology/mysteries within the tradition to the wider community. In contrast to comparative religionists, comparative theologians have a faith commitment to at least one of the traditions they study and at the very least presumably they have a deep sympathy for the faith tradition with which they compare their own. However, there is frequently more than sympathy; there is deep commitment to the other religion as well. In *foundations*, the comparative theologians would take a definitive stance. While that stance may be fundamentally different than the other religion they study, it may also equally include affirming the truths discerned in the religion studied and appropriating that value within their home tradition.

Moreover, there are important methodological issues that have arisen in our current theological context and these present deep challenges. The reasons for the impasse mentioned above are manifold but can essentially be pared down to two. First, truthful statements about another religious tradition and its relationship to Christianity often require what Lonergan calls the "elimination of the unauthentic" (Lonergan 2017b: 273). The theologian's or the community's understanding of another religious tradition may be based upon false or inadequate information, or it may be skewed by bias. Authentic understanding of another religion requires considerable effort, time, and good will from the scholar as well as a confrontation with his or her own biases. Hence, when James Fredericks called for a moratorium on so-called theologies of the world's religions, he was concerned that such attempts do damage to one of the traditions by overlooking important differences and also by imposing or reading other beliefs into the traditions studied (Fredericks 1999: 166).[6]

A second reason for the impasse is that the efforts of comparative theologians going further to *foundations* may be resisted by other members in the Christian community and by ecclesiastical authorities who fear accommodationist tendencies, dual religious practices, or syncretism will follow once the truths of the other faith are affirmed or taken

[5] A second role of *foundations* is to derive general and special theological categories but that role does not concern us here.

[6] Fredericks' call for a moratorium stems from: 1) inadequate caricatures of other religions in the past, and 2) the risk of not taking real differences into serious account. In both cases, the basis of his call comes from within what Lonergan would call the functional specialty *dialectic*.

seriously for their genuine transcendental value. To go further would require comparative theologians to take an existential stance about the truths they apprehend in the other religion(s) they study.[7] It is to move beyond the first four functional specialties into a theological stance that personally appropriates the genius of the religious other, to invoke a phrase by Gilbert Ryle. This immediately disposes one to accusations of dual religious belonging and syncretism.[8] Thus while there are important exceptions, by and large Catholic comparative theologians are not moving to the further functional specialties (foundations, doctrines, systematics, communications – praxis).[9] Moreover, it is unclear if they even think they should move into the mediated phase, and this has resulted in the methodological impasse we have identified.

To the extent that comparative theologians move into the functional specialty foundations, they do so because they find themselves deeply affected and transformed by the other religion(s) they study.[10] The question of a theology of religions arises naturally in part because they want to be able to relate the truth claims they find in the religions they study with their own root religion. Indeed, even Fredericks's call for a moratorium on theologies of religions does not preclude it being temporary (Fredericks 1999: 166). From the perspective of Lonergan's eight

[7] Michelle Voss Roberts includes as additional reasons the assumption that "religions are like languages" and therefore "their differing grammars and vocabulary make them incommensurable" and that theological comparison is perceived as "sloppy method – more like magic than science" (Voss Roberts 2016: 3).

[8] While syncretism and dual religious participation are often seen pejoratively, a more positive and nuanced rendering of these terms is possible. For example, Carl Starkloff distinguished between a syncretism of symbols and a syncretism of doctrines. See (Starkloff 2002: 96). See also (Dall'Oglio 2003). Similar to Dall'Oglio, Cornille suggests that syncretism is a fact of the history of religious development and comparative theologians may make this fact more acceptable to mainstream theology, (Cornille 2020: 104). On dual religious belonging, perhaps it is better to speak about dual religious participation, which can have different degrees. For a variety of approaches to these pertinent questions, see (Cornille 2002).

[9] For example, although we are addressing Catholic comparative theology, it is worth noting that Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen emphasizes the differences in the major world's religions, but does not go further, leaving open the question how it is different from comparative religion (Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen 2020). Among exceptions, see (Knitter 2009; Voss Roberts, 2016). While the authors in Voss Roberts' volume do not propose new doctrines *per se*, several recover and promote fallow Christian teachings or practices as a result of comparison (e.g., Bidlack). Some are explicit about how comparative study or interreligious friendships have transformed their own Christian identity and practice (e.g., Sydnor, Von Stosch).

[10] A pioneering work by a group of Canadian anthropologists emphasizes that researchers experience personal transformations in their encounters with other cultures and religions. See (Young and Goulet 1994).

functional specialties it would be to ask: What would it mean for comparative theologians to go beyond dialectic to the further functional specialty, foundations? How would their results affect systematic or constructive theology?[11] One could assume as well, that the movement into foundations, distinctively for comparative theologians, does include a commitment to the other religious tradition they engage with, although not to the same degree as their commitment to their home tradition. But it often entails at least asking to what extent the truth claims of the other may be true, and if so, creatively engaging the other for some possible integration or higher viewpoint, as we will see below Massignon's commitment to Islam demonstrates.[12]

When Paul Knitter took the Bodhisattva vows, he moved beyond just studying them to actually living by them. In terms of Lonergan's functional specialties, he was moving beyond dialectic as a comparison and contrast.[13] He was making a commitment to a specific set of Buddhist teachings and practices. Does this mean that moving beyond dialectic to foundations will necessarily yield a kind of dual religious participation? Not necessarily, but comparative theologians need to have the freedom to explore this new theological terrain. The contribution that Lonergan makes, apart from placing the work of comparative theologians in a methodological context, is to presume that since God's grace is offered to all, and if *being in love in an unrestricted manner* is an expression of genuine faith, then part of the role of the comparative theologians is to help discern the fruits of genuine religion in the different religions they study.

Dialectic and the Encounter with Differences

For Lonergan the functional specialty, dialectic, is where one gets to the root of differences between two or more perspectives. But dialectic does not just concern people dealing with texts but also people encountering other people. Lonergan states "[B]esides the dialectic that is concerned

[11] Cornille expressed the methodological pluralism in terms of *confessional* and *meta-confessional* styles in comparative theology and how the two overlap. See (Cornille 2020: chapter 2). We believe her distinctions, albeit with qualifications, are in some ways descriptions of the underlying methodological dynamic between *dialectic* versus *foundations*.

[12] Although he was not a theologian by profession, in several key writings Massignon essentially functions as one, engaging in Christian faith seeking understanding about and in relation to Islam.

[13] See for example the Preface 'Am I Still a Christian?' in (Knitter 2009: ix -xvii).

with human subjects as objects, there is the dialectic in which human subjects are concerned with themselves and with one another. In that case dialectic becomes dialogue." Nor does this process preclude friendly disagreements. It is not uncommon, as Lonergan states, to find "persons [who] are authentic and know one another to be authentic yet belong to different traditions and so find themselves in basic disagreement" (Lonergan 2017a: 153).

When comparing perspectives, the dialectician can anticipate three kinds of differences: 1) complementary, 2) genetic and 3) contradictory. Complementary differences make for a greater whole as each perspective brings to light differences lacking in the other. Genetic differences bring out the differences based on development. In the case of interfaith dialogue this could mean identifying people at different stages of development. Christianity today, for example, is at a different stage of development than in the age of say, Caesaropapism. For the most part Christian self-understanding has moved beyond the fusion of church and state. The third type of difference is rooted in the presence of bias and/or the lack of conversion. Conversion here does not mean a nominal conversion to another faith (although it does not preclude it), but rather it is to be understood as a transformation of a block in development, be that psychological, intellectual, moral or religious (Lonergan 2017b: 273).[14] Conversion can also occur within the comparative theologians as they confront biases within themselves and re-appropriate their own tradition in light of their studies.

There is a further development to Lonergan's notion of dialectic to be considered, that of a *dialectic of religious identity*. There is a tension within Christian identity between those who focus on their identity as distinct from another religious tradition, or *specific identity focus*, on the one hand, and those who focus on the commonality with the other religious tradition, or *general identity focus*, on the other hand. Such dialectic applies to Christians in general but also to comparative theological methodologists in particular, as one can discern different approaches. For example, Henri de Lubac had more of a specific identity focus in his approach to Buddhism while Paul Knitter, by contrast, has a more general identity focus in his dialogue with Buddhism. Henri de Lubac was an important pioneer engaging Buddhism as a Catholic theologian. But as

[14] Technically, Lonergan does not specify psychological, but it has to be presumed following the work of Robert Doran. A justification of that presumption is beyond the scope of this paper.

much as he admired Buddhism for its great spiritual insight, he was clear that its differences with Christianity were irreducible and he did not go further for any deeper integration (See de Lubac 1988: 497-510).[15] In this way, his comparative approach was a specific identity focus since his conclusions settled on distinct differences. Knitter, on the other hand, admits a necessary dependence upon Buddhism for his own Christian faith (See Knitter 2009: xi). His comparative approach is a general identity focus, because he sees something essential in Buddhism that enriches his Christian faith. Rather than stopping at the differences, he is going deeper into the Buddhist practices in order to be a better Christian, as he claims.

In sum, one could say that the functional specialty *dialectic* focuses on the differences, albeit with a comprehensive view in mind, at least as a heuristic possibility. By contrast, the functional specialty, *foundations*, focuses on a deeper commonality with a view towards discovering and living out of a foundational reality. Lonergan claims that there are two foundational commonalities or transcultural bases that provide for this common understanding. The first is philosophical, a transcendental method that all human beings come to know and do in the same general way: through experiencing, inquiring, understanding, judging and deciding. One could call this a natural basis for common unity. This resonates with a recent statement by Pope Francis in *Fratelli Tutti* when he speaks of "the search for the solid foundations sustaining our decisions and our laws." He notes that this calls for acknowledging "that the human mind is capable of transcending immediate concerns and grasping certain truths that are unchanging, as true now as in the past" (Francis 2020: 208).

The second transcultural basis for a common understanding is the fact that *being in love in an unrestricted manner* is a transformative dynamic state – a universal human phenomenon albeit rooted in the universal offer of God's grace (Lonergan 2017b: 264-65). This is what Lonergan means by genuine religion and might be a notion with which comparative theologians may raise critical questions. But we believe that what Lonergan means by genuine religion is similar to what Pope Francis means when he writes of a "universal dimension to our call to love, one that transcends all prejudices, all historical and cultural barriers, all petty interests" (Francis 2020: 83).

[15] "I had always had a certain attraction for the study of Buddhism, as I consider it something like the greatest human feat, because of its originality and its multiform expansion across time and space as well as because of its spiritual depth" (de Lubac 1993: 32).

Finally, foundations are necessary because we are not content to identify differences with the Other and leave it at that. For Lonergan, by virtue of our humanity, we are oriented to foundational reality. In other words, we are wired in our hearts and minds to seek a deeper human unity and that unity lies in the fact of our common humanity and the universal offer of God's love. As mentioned above, what dialectic does is to prepare the "elimination of the unauthentic" that might make its way into foundations as a truncated horizon (Lonergan 2017b: 273).

Beyond Empathy to Friendship as Method

Empathy as a method of dialogue is helpful. It can assist an amelioration of triumphalist attitudes that Vatican II sought to paradigmatically reverse. But it can also have limitations. In effect, it can function as a modified form of *épochè*, harking back to a phenomenological suspension of judgment, of which occasioned Hans Urs Von Balthasar's critique of Gerardus Van der Leeuw (Balthasar 1982: 500).

First, empathy and *épochè* are both methodological approaches apropos to the first four functional specialties (research, interpretation, history and dialectic).[16] For Lonergan, empathy would likely come into effect in interreligious dialogue which at least initially occurs in the functional specialty, dialectic. However, as Lonergan states, "…beyond dialectic there is dialogue."[17] The latter's advantage being "to transpose issues from a conflict of statements to an encounter of persons" that is "open to friendship" and "prompts us to cure" conflicts (Lonergan 2017a: 175-6).

While empathy may work in the area of foundations to a certain extent, it does not account for the mutuality required for sufficiently reckoning with differences encountered in the dialogue.[18] Therefore, we propose *friendship* as the method that takes one beyond dialectic to foundations because it implies a *mutual* identification while also reckoning with the different kinds of differences in dialectic, not in order

[16] Another key component of phenomenological method is the categorization of different types.

[17] While we are focusing primarily on method in comparative theology rather than interreligious dialogue, the two are intimately connected. Catherine Cornille (2008) and Louis Roy (2019: 159-183) have both offered principles for carrying out dialogue.

[18] The methodological necessity but insufficiency of *épochè* and its transcendence through the evaluation and potential integration of what comparative theologians learn from other religious traditions is the subject of much of Catherine Cornille's work (2008). See also (Clooney and von Stosch 2018: 19-36).

to ignore those differences, but in order to seek a deeper unity or to challenge another in a loving spirit as the case may be. Friendship requires a commitment to the *relationship* and even the integrity of the tradition of the other. Friendship includes an Ignatian sense of discernment in order to discern the different types of differences as the fruit of a mutual exchange. Friends can challenge each other in ways the other contexts may not be effective. As David Burrell states: "The quality of exchange among friends, which can allow for a common pursuit along different paths, requires the capacity inherent in analogous terms to let similarities retain their differences" (Burrell 2000: 61). However, *foundations* may be the place where differences may be accepted as well as challenged in some cases, and friendship is the model that we believe can best carry this out. There is a risk in dialogue of a naïveté that is too irenic or too hospitable toward differences that might otherwise need to be challenged. But friends can challenge each other when they disagree.

John Henry Newman once declared: "The best preparation for loving the world at large, and loving it duly and wisely, is to cultivate an intimate friendship and affection towards those who are immediately about us" (Newman 1997: 52-3). The case for friendship as a method in interreligious dialogue and comparative theology has been previously argued but recently christened as *the* method for engaging the religious other in Pope Francis's encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*.[19] Therein, Francis cites the Bishops of India: "The goal of dialogue is to establish friendship, peace and harmony, and to share spiritual and moral values and experiences in a spirit of truth and love" (Francis 2020: 271). Hence, a comparative theologian moving into the functional specialty foundations will be seeking unity with the religious other at a profound personal and religious level. Besides identifying irreconcilable differences, they will consider the extent to which certain truths of the other tradition (which may be very different from their own faith tradition) may be true. They will befriend the other tradition and/or individuals in that tradition. This friendship

[19] While it is not the practice of papal documents to single out living theologians for their inspiration, one must give credit where credit is due. While it is not clear where Pope Francis gets his idea about friendship and dialogue, in this case, the pioneering work of James L. Fredericks must be noted (Fredericks 1999: 173ff at 175). See (Fredericks and Tiemeier 2015). Noteworthy in the latter edited volume is the republication of Fredericks's early essay "Masao Abe: A Spiritual Friendship" (155-165), which recounts how his own friendship with a renowned Buddhist scholar and practitioner enabled him to effect successful dialogue and comparative theology. See also (Dadosky, 2022: 519-537).

evokes an obligation to the other which provides a foundation for creative breakthroughs in which a deeper unity can be found or synthesis can occur.

Something like that comes through in a recent book on *Interreligious Friendship* edited by Jim Fredericks and Tracy Tiemeier. The contributors to the volume are theologians who emphasize the connections between their work and their interreligious friendships. Many of them pick up on Fredericks's notion of interreligious friendship as a kind of *theological virtue* and method. Friendship is foundational in a sense in that it orients the comparative theologian's disposition towards a deeper encounter with the other – one that often pushes the explicit boundaries of their own tradition.

Interiority and Transformation

According to Lonergan, authentic subjectivity provides theology with its foundations (Lonergan 2017b: 273). These foundations in turn establish the horizons for the subsequent functional specialties, doctrines, systematic theology and communications (practical theology). In the functional specialty *foundations*, as mentioned above, the foundations pertain to two transcultural realities, one natural, the other supernatural. The natural one is *generalized empirical method*, or the basic philosophical position, insofar as the theologian is attentive to her experience, intelligent in her understanding, reasonable in her judgments and responsible in her decisions, then her personal horizon, free of the fourfold bias (dramatic, individual, group and general) is properly disposed to deriving further categories and developing doctrines, systematic theology and praxis. Insofar as bias persists in any of its kinds or degrees, its fruits will bear forth accordingly in the further functional specialties. For example, Leonard Feeney, S.J. (1897–1978) had a truncated personal horizon that prevented him from extending salvific grace to Protestants, a popular doctrine at the time referred to as "Feeneyism." This earned him the recognition, as Lonergan is supposed to have quipped somewhere, as "the first to be excommunicated for teaching excommunication."

The fact of a supernatural transcultural reality presumes that God's grace, sufficient for salvation, is offered to all universally and exists outside of the explicit mission of the church prior to, during its emergence, and in present circumstances. With respect to the comparative theologian, she is likely drawn into the wisdom of another religious tradition in part

because of her own love for God. Her encounter with the other tradition enriches and paradoxically leads her to a deeper understanding of her own tradition, calling for creative innovation in the case of unity and respectful clarification in the case of difference. This matches with at least one definition of comparative theology to be "a critical study of another faith as a resource for thinking in new ways about" one's own (Grumett and Plant 2012: 59). This implies: 1) a turn to interiority and 2) the possibility of "conversion."

In terms of interiority, Peter Phan states that the "interior experience of the encounter of two or more religious traditions," is "not something one looks for or demands at will." Rather it is "a gift to be received in fear and trembling and joy" (Phan 2004: 81). With respect to special theological categories in *foundations*, Lonergan states that the first set of categories will be derived from "religious experience." Likewise, he acknowledges the need for "studies in religious interiority" (Lonergan 2017b: 272). This is specifically where comparative theologians can offer a contribution. In her essay on comparative theology, Carla Mae Streeter concludes we need "theologians who are deeply in touch with their own religious experience, and willing to risk articulating it" (Streeter 1989: 277).

In terms of conversion, for Lonergan, the functional specialty *foundations* is where transformations can take place. For example, Simon Mary Aihiokhai recounts how, as a Nigerian seminarian with the Spiritans, he met with a village medicine woman in order to convert her to Christianity. During the course of their burgeoning friendship, their frequent meetings, and praying together, it became clear to him that he was the one undergoing the more dramatic change, as evident in his increasing openness to her traditional indigenous practices. He refers to the process as a "gradual conversion," adamant that: "She taught me about God" (Fredericks and Tiemeier 2015: 190-1). No doubt his friendship with her provided the context for a broadening of his own religious horizon, which is the very thing that *dialectic* identifies and *foundations* calls forth.

This commitment in foundations, as Lonergan states, "is to the categories only as models, as interlocking sets of terms and relations." In the case of comparative theology and interreligious dialogue, the commitment may be to the process, and a spirit of friendship may stabilize that process. But the acceptance of the fruits of the interreligious friendship and exploration in foundations would be subject to the subsequent functional specialties, doctrines, systematics and communications (Lonergan 2017b: 273). Therefore, in *foundations* there must be room to be exploratory and

discerning. An example of this process from the Christian ecumenical movement could be illustrated in the WCC 1982 Lima document, "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" (BEM). Therein the member churches of the WCC attempted to come to a common understanding in three basic areas of Christian practice. There have been other understandings reached since then between Catholics and Orthodox and Catholics and Protestants. Whether and to what extent such initiatives are successful is another matter, but from Lonergan's point of view, the formulation of joint documents would mark a movement from *foundations* towards *doctrines*. But in the process of foundations, those involved are committed not only to respectful disagreement, but more importantly, to finding a deeper unity – a unity based in a common humanity and in a belief that God's love is offered freely to all. A recent extraordinary interreligious example is the document on "Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together," which is intended to be "a witness to the greatness of faith in God that unites divided hearts and elevates the human soul" (Francis 2019). It was signed by Pope Francis and his friend the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Ahmad al-Tayyeb, and it was based upon a series of encounters and dialogues between the two men. Their friendship is also a source of the encyclical mentioned above, *Fratelli Tutti*.[20]

Of consequence are three principles to guide comparative theology and dialogue if they are to move beyond the first four functional specialties and into foundations and beyond. The list is not necessarily exhaustive. The first, previously stated, is to invoke the method of friendship, as when comparative theologians make friends with members of other religions and work together on the basis of that friendship, such as Fredericks's fruitful friendship with Masao Abe, for example (Fredericks and Tiemeier 2015: 155-165). Or, it can be more generally as when one forms a friendship with another religion or with the founders and teachers of certain traditions, such as Francis Clooney's lifelong friendship with the Hindu thinkers and saints he encounters in sacred texts. Moreover, friendship is not only the method, as stated above, according to Pope Francis it is also one of the goals of dialogue.

[20] Although he does not refer to him as a "friend" in *Fratelli Tutti*, Francis refers at least five times in the text to his meetings with Ahmad al-Tayyeb. Michael Cardinal Fitzgerald, commenting on *Fratelli Tutti*, does describe the relationship between Francis and al-Tayyeb as "friendship" (O'Connell 2020). We must mention also "A Common Word" (Mu'assasat 2012), a paradigmatic invitation by Muslim scholars for Christians and Muslims to agree about the centrality of love of God and love and neighbor in their respective traditions.

Second, a comparative theologian who moves into the functional specialty foundations maintains the commitment to her/his own tradition but also retains a commitment to the other religious tradition(s) hence providing a basis for creative theological innovation. Third, in keeping with the commitment to two or more traditions in the functional specialty *foundations*, comparative theologians will consider that certain propositions that differ from their home tradition may in fact be true – doctrinal reaffirmations or creative innovations may emerge from the two coming together. This coming together is not superficial but rather a potential higher integration for religious understanding. From that perspective one discerns for the possibility of mining a deeper unity. This is not to say that beneath differences there *de facto* lies a deeper unity, but rather it is to push the exploration further in order to find the possibility of a deeper connection between the traditions, one that may also provide the basis for healing centuries of misunderstanding and division as the case may be. All three of the principles can be summed up by Pope Francis in *Fratelli Tutti*, where he offers "a principle indispensable to the building of friendship in society: namely, that unity is greater than conflict… This is not to opt for a kind of syncretism, or for the absorption of one into the other, but rather for a resolution which takes place on a higher plane and preserves what is valid and useful on both sides" (Francis 2020: 245).

Below, we will look briefly at the example of two pioneers in Christian-Muslim comparative theology and identify how they have ventured beyond dialectic and into foundations in varying degrees, as Lonergan conceived it, without betraying their home traditions or the traditions they befriended. We do not comment on the success or failure of their efforts. We mean only to highlight their creativity as worthy of attention and emulation.

Louis Massignon

In May 1908, Louis Massignon (1883-1962) underwent a religious experience that he called the Visitation of the Stranger. While on an archeological expedition in Mesopotamia, despairing of the sins of his young adulthood, he encountered a mysterious presence that left him feeling at turns judged and forgiven. Although it would ultimately lead him back to his native Catholic faith, that religious experience was also seriously bound up with Islam (See Massignon 2001, Massignon 1989: 39-42, and Krokus 2017). There was the gratitude Massignon felt toward the Alussy family who sponsored him in Baghdad and secured his release from

Ottoman custody when he was accused of espionage and became gravely infirmed. He claimed that as the occasion of his learning the values of hospitality and the given word, virtues he would forever after associate with Islam. There was the fact that the Visitation of the Stranger was an encounter with the "Unique, Transcendent, and Absolute God" so familiar to readers of the Qur'an and that in order to understand that encounter Massignon first turned to the biographies and manuals of medieval Muslim mystics (Mason 1988: 27). And there is his conviction that among those responsible through intercession for his conversion to Christian faith was, perhaps paradoxically, the tenth-century Baghdadi Muslim Al-Hallaj (858-922), who became the subject of Massignon's doctoral thesis, published and expanded to four volumes in its second edition. Massignon writes in the preface: "Not that the study of [Hallaj's] life, which was full and strong, upright and whole, rising and given, yielded to me the secret of his heart. Rather it is he who fathomed mine and who probes it still" (Massignon 1982: lvx). Across thousands of miles and hundreds of years, Massignon and Hallaj were, somehow, friends, and Massignon's conversion was, somehow, both Christian and Muslim. When asked whether he accepted Islam, Massignon answered: "I believe in the real, immanent, personal God of Abraham, not in the ideal Deity of the philosophers and of the Devil, and that is the first link that unites me to my Muslim friends" (Massignon 2009: 213). When asked whether there were saints in Islam, he responded: "I have encountered them, and now, forty years later, I can attest that my return to the Church is the fruit of their prayer, and that for me, their neighbor, they are not outside the Church, which I rediscovered with them" (Massignon 2009: 220).

Massignon's long engagement with Islam, which was rooted in reciprocal, mutual hospitality, and which was carried out not only in his scholarship but in the Badaliya sodality he founded with Mary Kahil (1889-1979), resulted in his making theological judgments. He affirmed the sameness of the God of Abraham and the God of the Qur'an, and he accepted Islam's Abrahamic heritage, especially its claim that Muhammad and the Qur'an represent a return to the religion of Abraham who was neither a Jew nor a Christian [Q 3:67]. He accepted a qualified inspiration of the Qur'an and a qualified prophethood for Muhammad, and he argued that Arabic played a privileged role as a language of revelation.

In a particularly creative theological move, borrowing a mathematical category that has to do with a function that returns to its starting point, Massignon introduced the idea of *temporal involution* to explain that "by a return to the most distant past" Islam "announces the closure of

revelation, the cessation of waiting" (Massignon 1997: 65). Massignon understood Islam's "mysterious infiltration into the Holy Land" as representing the return of the exiled Ishmaelites, announcing the ongoing validity of pre-evangelical, pre-Mosaic patriarchal worship (Massignon 1989: 14). In other words, he found a way to include Islam as one in a privileged family of "Abrahamic religions" (a term he coined) such that each displayed a particular genius for one of the theological virtues – Judaism/hope, Islam/faith, and Christianity/charity – and such that each was involved in a set of mutually informing and correcting relationships with the others, albeit with Christianity ultimately fulfilling the other two religions (Massignon 2011: 20).

This brief overview of Massignon's encounter with Islam, suggests it to be grounded in foundational experiences. He expressed the three principles mentioned above. He befriended Islam and members therein and had a deep love and commitment to its integrity. He reappropriated his own Christian tradition through his encounter with Islam. His foundational religious experience was unpacked for him through his reading of Islamic medieval mysticism. He started to move from foundations to doctrines with his hypothesis of *temporal involution*, which suggests how Christians might be able to accept in a qualified manner the Islamic covenant through the legacy of Ishmael, going further in that regard than *Nostra Aetate* did.

Paolo Dall'Oglio, S.J.

Paolo Dall'Oglio, S.J. (1951 –)[21] is responsible for one of the most dramatic gestures in recent decades in the promotion of Christian-Muslim encounter and mutual understanding. Beginning in the early 1980s, Dall'Oglio oversaw the restoration of Deir Mar Musa, a sixth-century Syrian Christian monastery located around 80km northeast of Damascus, and he founded a new monastic community called al-Khalil, Arabic for the "friend of God," which is the biblical and Qur'anic title for Abraham

[21] In July 2013 Paolo Dall'Oglio, S.J. surreptitiously traveled to Raqqa, Syria where he met with leaders of what the world would later recognize as ISIS. Some say he sought to facilitate cooperation among rebel factions; others to negotiate the release of hostages, others to seek protection for local Christians. Each of those concerns was close to his heart, but tragically he has not been heard from since. Some of the following Dall'Oglio sources are articles posted on the Deir Mar Musa website, which was shut down during the civil war. One of the authors of this article retrieved and printed the English-language version of the relevant articles in August 2011. Since they were unnumbered in the originals, our author has assigned section numbers to each paragraph.

as well as the Arabic name for the city of Hebron, home to the tomb of Abraham and Sarah. Deir Mar Musa belongs to the Syriac Catholic rite, is canonically organized according to three priorities – contemplation, manual labor, and Abrahamic hospitality – and is dedicated to friendship and mutual hospitality with its Muslim neighbors (Dall'Oglio 2009: 173).

Dall'Oglio has written about the rationale for his Christian-Muslim work, often to justify himself before ecclesiastical superiors, and he frequently cites the influence of Louis Massignon whom he describes as his "spiritual master" and as "more than a teacher. He is a source of inspiration and an intercessor for my spiritual growth and my mission in the Islamic world" (Dall'Oglio 2009: 75; See also Dall'Oglio 2008: 329). One of the goals of Deir Mar Musa has been what he calls *radical inculturation*. Dall'Oglio accepts the Qur'anic designation of Christians as *Nasara*, i.e., the people of Nazareth, and he is happy for his community to be counted by local Syrian Muslims as "our Christians" (Dall'Oglio 2009: 51). In other words, he intends for Deir Mar Musa consciously to function within an Islamic landscape, not over and against it, not lying low until Christianity finally triumphs: "We now consider Islam as being the human group to which we belong and in which we are happy to live, thankful that we have been chosen by God to participate in the life of the *umma*" (Dall'Oglio 2010: §29). It is a direct and deliberate reversal of a Christian-colonialist mindset. It is comparative theology in a performative key.

Like Massignon, Dall'Oglio has imagined that some "conclusions, hopefully positive," about Muhammad could eventually become "part of the universal catechism of the Church" (Dall'Oglio 2009: 100). In one area Dall'Oglio goes further than his mentor. Whereas Massignon expressed nervous surprise when Pope Pius XI once referred to him, favorably, as a "Muslim Catholic," Dall'Oglio openly proclaims his "double belonging" as Christian and Muslim (Anawati 1996: 266). He asks: "Do I consider myself personally a Muslim? I think so, through evangelical grace and obedience. I am a Muslim because of the love of God for Muslims and Islam. I cannot but be a Muslim by way of the Spirit and not the letter" (Dall'Oglio 2003: §30). On more than one occasion he has expressed his frustrated wish to participate in the *Hajj*: "I do not hide my desire to go on pilgrimage to Mecca and to return from there to Jerusalem, together with the sons of Ishmael, the community of Muhammad" (Dall'Oglio 2003: §34).

Dall'Oglio has nonetheless been a loyal, if difficult, son of the Catholic Church, and he remains convinced that Jesus of Nazareth and the

Kingdom of God are meant ultimately to animate every culture and civilization. In addition to monastic vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, the monks and nuns of Deir Mar Musa commit themselves to "the service of the Muslim world until the arrival of the Kingdom of Heaven" (Dall'Oglio 2009: 178). In *La Rage et la Lumiere*, Dall'Oglio shares his "Abrahamic dream," which involves a vision of Isaac and Ishmael embracing and singing together at the tomb of Abraham, their descendants intermarrying and living both in Mecca and Jerusalem, the children playing together, the families celebrating Friday-Saturday as one continuous day of worship, and everyone who sees them exclaiming in the idiom of the New Testament: "See how they love one another!" The role of the Christians is simply to accompany and serve their Abrahamic siblings, joining in the songs of praise to God (Dall'Oglio 2013: 165-6).

Dall'Oglio's long encounter with Islam has affected his ecclesiology. For Dall'Oglio the job of the Church in an Islamic culture is to be "Gospel leaven in an Islamic dough" (Dall'Oglio 1999: §21). It is not to convert that culture to institutional-civilizational Christianity but rather to offer itself on behalf of the development and spiritual maturity of the authentic *Islamic* values in that culture and, further, to learn from and appropriate those values. He has pointed out, for example, that there is no specific Christian way of fasting; therefore, Christians in a Muslim context ought to learn to appreciate and to appropriate the Muslim mode of fasting. That is the heart of the "radical inculturation" mentioned above: "We mean by *radical* something that goes beyond folklore, clothing, carpets on the floor, bare feet in church and a fluent use of the Muslim religious language" (Dall'Oglio 2003: §23). To live the Gospel "is a matter of witnessing to the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth in favor of Muslims" (Dall'Oglio 2009: 66). Christian living supports, promotes, expands, and even unleashes the values and potential already inherent in Islamic societies. Understanding and integrating Islamic values requires what Dall'Oglio calls the "sacrament of good neighborliness" (Dall'Oglio 2009: 52). Living, working, struggling, celebrating, even praying together has a mysterious way of affecting one's theological judgments. Whether they are Christians and Muslims in Syria or Jesuits and Confucians in China, neighbors who know each other find it difficult to condemn one another (Dall'Oglio 2009: 81). Many Christians fear the expansionist-universalist tendency of Islam, but Dall'Oglio does not. He admits that Islam sees itself, and often polemically, as the final call to human unity before God, but he responds: "I am happy to think of our vocation in the Islamic world as a participation in the carrying out and realization of the

universal vocation of Islam. This carrying out and realizing is, I believe, an essential aspect of the universal dimension of our Christian vocation. The idea that our particular passions for the universal might conjoin and integrate, without becoming confused or diluted, is a very dear spiritual hope of mine" (Dall'Oglio 1999: §31).

Dall'Oglio is a pioneer who perhaps deliberately pushes the boundaries as a form of Christian kenosis in order to realize a rapprochement between Islam and Christianity. Nevertheless, we see in Dall'Oglio's work the embodiment of the three principles: friendship with Muslims and with Islam, a commitment to his own tradition and a commitment to the truths of the tenets of Islam. Performatively, he has moved beyond dialectic to foundational reality as demonstrated through his life witness and commitment – and the fourth vow of the religious community he founded to effect a unity within the Abrahamic faiths.

Much more could be said of Massignon's and Dall'Oglio's theologies, and not all of it complimentary, but they are witnesses to the kind of creative insights that may occur when theologians live in friendship with religious others. In Massignon's case it meant an expanded understanding of prophethood, revelation, and providence. In Dall'Oglio's case it has additionally led to a further decentering of the Church in relation to other religious traditions. In both cases the intellectual breakthroughs result from commitments made not only to ideas but to persons, and both theologians have benefited enormously from the freedom to explore and experiment. In both cases, as we understand it, the authors moved from Lonergan's functional specialty dialectic, where they identified similarities and differences between Christianity and Islam, into functional specialty foundations, where they articulated how their religious conversion or falling-in-love with God allowed them to seek unity and integration beyond or in spite of the differences. But they also moved beyond foundations, proposing for the Church's examination new doctrines, practices, and self-understanding.

Concluding Comments

What is the ultimate goal of comparative theology? Is it to learn from the Other, and if so, to what end? Is it to identify and celebrate differences between religious traditions? Are all differences worthy of celebration? Is the goal to integrate those insights further into an interreligious theology of theologies? To date comparative theologians have often been reluctant to address these questions head on. There is a methodological

impasse in comparative theology that Lonergan may help to highlight by mapping the role of comparative theology throughout the eightfold functional specialties from his *Method in Theology*.

In this essay the authors have focused on the functional specialties *dialectic* and *foundations*, because this is precisely the point where the methodologies of comparative theologians reach an impasse. For the most part, they proceed through the first four functional specialties (research, interpretation, history and dialectic), ironically in the same manner as comparative religionists. But the theologians have not yet, with a few exceptions, explicitly proceeded to the functional specialty, *foundations*. In fact, they seem less willing to go further into foundations today than some of the pioneers of comparative theology, such as Bede Griffiths, Henri Le Saux, or Louis Massignon, to name a few.[22] To do so involves taking the religious claims of the other seriously in a way that might leave comparative theologians open to the charge of relativism, superficial syncretism, or dual religious belonging.

For Lonergan, the functional specialty *foundations* presupposes that theologians fall in love with God and that their theologizing flows from that religiously transformed horizon. It is the specialty where religious transformation is required, as it provides the proper horizonal orientation (orthopathy) for subsequent doctrines (orthodoxy), systematics (ortho-theory) and communications (orthopraxis). This is what Lonergan had in mind when he stated that the foundations of theology will essentially be a reflection on conversion (Lonergan 2016: 58). From the perspective of the comparative theologian, might we say there is a sense where theologians fall in love with the traditions they study outside of their own? Is there something like an interreligious conversion or religious transformation? The experience of the two thinkers who engaged Islam we highlighted above match Lonergan's description of religious conversion but in an interreligious key. The joint Vatican document, *Dialogue and Proclamation* admitted that the fruits of interreligious dialogue may propel someone to convert to another religion (Pontifical 1991: §41). But is there any possibility of an interreligious conversion?[23] Or, are we talking about a heightened interreligious differentiation of consciousness that results from religious conversion? To claim an interreligious transformation would be to follow Raimon

[22] On "the tortured experiences of multiple belonging of the French Benedictine monk and Hindu sannyasin Henri Le Saux / Abhishiktananda" (Bloechl and Cornille 2015: 107-35 at 109).

[23] For a development of this idea, see for example (Dadosky, 2022: 101-12).

Panikkar (1918-2010) when he stated: "A Christian will never 'understand' Hinduism if he is not converted to Hinduism. Never will a Hindu 'understand' Christianity unless he becomes a Christian" (Panikkar 1968: 11). Panikkar illustrates the difference of what Lonergan means here between *dialectic* and *foundations*, wherein the "conversion" is effected in foundations and is bound up with a commitment.

In this article, we have been trying to identify the impasse and point to a possible way forward. Whether comparative theologians will find value in our analysis remains to be seen, but we are confident that they will recognize some aspects of the methodological impasse we identified. In the meantime, we conclude with some principles to keep in mind while this methodological impasse is engaged.

First, regardless of how comparative theologians address the problems and questions of method they face, there is a value of learning from the religious other, as Clooney has repeatedly emphasized and Cornille has categorized.[24] The differences we discover in the functional specialty *dialectic* may be complementary or they may be irreducible. They may also be differences based on communities at different stages of religious development. To the extent that we learn from another we can find enriching insights that assist us in formulating a deeper understanding of our home faith. For example, the Buddhist insight into desire as the source of suffering can help Christians understand more deeply how the seven deadly sins are, at root, seven deadly (distorted) desires.

Second, given the unprecedented pluralistic and wider ecumenical context in which we are living, comparative theologians should be given the freedom to explore the interreligious boundaries without the fear of ecclesial suspicion and/or censorship. Given the exploratory context of interreligious study and the unprecedented context of religious pluralism today, we must agree with Clooney and von Stosch that "tentativeness" in making conclusions is "not a weakness" (Clooney and von Stosch 2018: 11).

This includes two corollaries. If there is to be any *epoché* or suspension of judgment, it should be a suspension of *all-or-nothing* thinking. The reality is that human beings are all part of the same human family and each of the major religious traditions issue forth their own varied answers to existential questions that confront human existence.[25] For

[24] For example: "I bring what I learn into my reconsideration of Christian identity… highlighting and not erasing the fact of this borrowed wisdom," (Clooney 2010: 16, and Cornille 2020: 116-47).

[25] See for example, *Nostra Aetate*, 1.

example, I may not be able to understand all the lineages and intricacies of Buddhism because I have not studied them in depth, but I can at least understand something about a Buddhist and her existential questions by virtue of the fact that we are both human beings in dialogue.

Another corollary is that this exploratory presupposition should tolerate levels of interreligious participation. This will vary among traditions and contexts. It will vary in that it is one thing for a Christian to attend a Jewish Seder meal, it may be another to participate in ritual animal sacrifice in Hindu practices in Bali or Candomblé in Brazil, for example. It is one thing for a Christian to participate in a Buddhist meditation practice regularly, it may be another to take a formal ceremonial refuge in the Buddha. The exploratory approach will not proceed with *a priori* presuppositions save the basic assumptions of a goodness in humanity, a critical appropriation of one's own tradition and perhaps the tools of discernment which would be applied *a posteriori*.

Finally, in his essay on method in comparative religion, Wilfred Cantwell Smith reminds comparative religionists, albeit ones with at least implicit theological proclivities, something applicable to the comparative theologians who cannot move beyond *différence* in order to search for a deeper common ground. The true learning from other religions occurs, he states, when we realize "'we all' are talking with each other about 'us.'" (Smith 1959). To speak of a methodological impasse in comparative theology is to say that comparative theologians are still engaging the other religious tradition they study as a "them." To move beyond this impasse would be to approach the religious other as an "us." From Lonergan's perspective, this will involve the movement from the functional specialty *dialectic* to that of *foundations*, a move that will make all the difference.

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