THA 526: Comparative Theology

Prof. John Renard, HU 245, T 3:45-6:15, Spring 2008
HU 337, 977-2869; renardgj@slu.edu
TR 12:30-2, OBA

Working Definition: Comparative Theology is the study of how theological change has taken place historically in the context of inter-religious relations, and of the implications of serious interchange between and among religious traditions for the future of Christian theology.

Objectives:
1) To become acquainted with the fundamentals of the emerging sub-discipline of Comparative Theology
2) by employing a set of four Historical and three Systematic models as hermeneutical tools by which to
3) reconstruct and interpret historical and systematic theological case studies as background against which to
4) appreciate the importance of the larger world religious scene as the context in which Christian theologians must learn to do their work for the next century.

Method: Each student will choose a historical area and a theological topic including these options: scripture/exegesis, “ecclesiology,” divine immanence/transcendence, revelation, faith and reason, providence, structures of authority
Weekly sessions 1-8 combine elements of lecture, class discussion of common readings, reports based on individually assigned readings. Sessions 9-11 will continue with some lecture input first hour, and discussion; second half for discussion of common readings and assisting each other to craft case studies, and 3-4 brief reports on individual short readings focused on individual’s choice of period and/or systematic topic. One or two students will be responsible each week for leading discussion, preparing several questions to stimulate group involvement. Sessions 12-13 will be devoted to individual research reports.

Required Readings:

H. Kung, Islam: Past, Present & Future [K]
Cabezon, Scholasticism: Cross-Cultural and Comparative Perspectives [C, w. Ch. #]
Henderson, The Construction of Orthodoxy and Heresy [H]
J. Renard, “Comparative Theology: Definition and Method” [CT – will email pdf to all]
J. Renard, Handy Religion Answer Book [R, w. Ch. #]

Schedule of Sessions and Readings:

I. Introduction and Background

1/22: Organization, Introduction to Comparative Theology and Description of Model 1.
(Hereafter each of the next seven classes will involve: lecture input on major theological themes in the major faith traditions in H; discussion of common readings; and brief reports on short readings individually assigned for the model listed, and a description of the model on which we will focus for the following week.)

II. HISTORICAL MODELS

1/29: Inter/intra-developmental Model
R1: Definitions/Methods (Weekly item for R: Identify two “theological” themes.); C pp. vii-15; K xxiii-76
Discussion Leader: ____________________ ____________________
Model report: ____________________ ____________________

2/5: Inculturation and Conflict Model:
R4: Islam; C2; K 77-154
Discussion Leader: ____________________ ____________________
Model report: ____________________ ____________________

2/12: Inter-Textual Model:
R2: Judaism; C4; K 155-240
Discussion Leader: ____________________ ____________________
Model report: ____________________ ____________________

2/19: Genre-evolution Model:
R5: Hinduism; C8; K 241-322
Discussion Leader: ____________________ ____________________
Model report: ____________________ ____________________

III. SYSTEMATIC MODELS

2/26: Phenomenological/Thematic Model:
R3: Christianity; C1; K 323-405
Discussion Leader: ____________________ ____________________
Model report: ____________________ ____________________

3/4: Textual hermeneutic Model:
R8: Confucianism; C7; K 406-484
Discussion Leader: ____________________ ____________________
Model report: ____________________ ____________________

3/11: Systematic/Functional parallels Model:
R7: Daoism; C5; K 485-577; Critique of K DUE
Discussion Leader: ____________________ ____________________
Model report: (Renard)

3/18: SPRING BREAK

IV. Further Background and Discussion of Common Readings

Lecture and Discussion material: during the next three sessions, we will continue with background lectures on various traditions. Discussion will focus on the common readings as listed. In addition, 4 students will make very brief reports on a reading chosen in connection with individual research interests (7-10 minutes), pointing out key thematic and methodological issues as they bear on the student’s nascent research topic.

3/25: R6: Buddhism; C6; K 578-662
Discussion Leader: ____________________ ____________________
Reports: ____________ ____________ ____________ ____________
4/1: R9: Shinto; C3; H 1-84  
Discussion Leader: ___________________ ___________________  
Reports: ____________ ____________ ____________ ____________  

4/8: CT article; C9; H 85-177  
Discussion Leader: ___________________ ___________________  
Reports: ____________ ____________ ____________ ____________  

DUE: Outline re: H as it bears on Comparative Theology.

V. Research Reports  

Research Project Case Studies: Using the Historical and Systematic Models as tools, analyze the comparative dimensions of a case study which you will design around a doctrinal issue as developed in a particular historical context. Supply a one page outline-summary to rest of class for reference during your presentation. Max 20 minutes, depending on total number enrolled in class, with time for discussion.

4/15: Research Reports  
________________________ _________________________ _________________________  
________________________ _________________________ _________________________  

4/22: NO CLASS  

4/29: Research Reports  
________________________ _________________________ _________________________  
________________________ _________________________ _________________________  

5/5: DUE: Case-study Research Outline  

Assignments and Methods of Evaluation:  

Discussion: All will be expected to 1) be prepared to discuss each week’s common readings; 2) lead discussion for one class (perhaps more, or along with one other student); 3) present one brief summary report (7-10 min.) on an article or short piece related to the model under discussion that week, half summarizing content and half answering the methodological question: “How might this reading contribute to this model?” 4) present one brief report on a self-chosen reading (7-10 min) and 5) be prepared to respond to reports and presentations of other students. 25%  

Methodological Critique Outlines: Write two 2 page idea-outlines: 1) a methodological critique of K (DUE 3/13), and 2) a thesis/argument re: how material in H bears on this course’s development of Comparative Theology (DUE 4/10). Begin with a thesis in which you suggest the main points you will cover to argue your position, including: assessment of author’s use of sources, tone or point of view, assumptions, etc. and end with an assessment of the book’s relationship to the models. That is: you will begin with a thesis about the author’s method (which may incorporate the author’s main thesis). Combined total 15%
Collaborative Project: Chart for Comparative Purposes: Working in concert in three small groups, using a chart on Islamic thought provided, and an outline of Islamic theological themes/disciplines, devise similar chart and outline designed to represent major themes and disciplines explicitly comparable in Christian theology 10%

Research presentations -- Case Studies: Please supply a one-page outline summary to all. 20%

After choosing a historical period and defining a scenario using one of the historical models, focus on a specific example of doctrinal elaboration and analyze the development’s comparative dimensions. E.g., the Christological doctrine of “person” and the Patristic/Conciliar “dialogue” with Hellenistic culture; or the evolution of Christian interpretations of Genesis 1-3 in dialogue with Jewish and Islamic interpretations in Medieval Spain; or developments in ecclesiological thinking resulting from 19th century American missionary work; or key issues in the works of major “comparative theologians” such as Robert de Nobili or Matteo Ricci; etc.

Pay special attention to:
- specific texts or other documentation that would provide the basis for study
- theological issues and questions suggested by the case
- methodological matters that would require particular attention
- relationship of your study to your own theological education

KEY QUESTION: in what way does your data suggest that theology changed as a result of the interaction between/among faith communities (see Working Definition above) that gave rise to at least implicit “comparison”?

Reports 15-20 minutes, 5 for discussion/response.

Written Research Report: Write up the results of the research project in idea-outline form of 8-10 pages. DUE MAY 5 30%

YES, an idea-OUTLINE (!) structured as follows:

I. Thesis statement: the difference between a thesis statement and a journalistic report is that while the latter provides the “who, what, where, and when,” a thesis goes further and argues for a “how and why.” A thesis usually grows out of some question or problem as expressed in the Topic Sentence, for which the thesis suggests some kind of solution. A thesis statement also lays out the main points you intend to develop. In case study, your thesis will include some idea as to how your case study will incorporate your chosen historical and systematic models.

II. Development/Body of argument: Here you take each of your main points and illustrate them, showing how you are developing your case using the key elements of the historical and systematic models you have chosen. Development requires that you make it clear how one main point leads to, requires, or implies the next. Persuasiveness requires that you illustrate each point with supporting evidence that “opens up” the main point in addition to justifying it.

III. Conclusion -- Implications: Here you make a suggestion as to how your comparative theological case study contributes to an understanding of your work as a Christian theologian. Here you suggest some further implications, going well beyond merely summarizing what you have said in your argument. In other words, here you answer the burning question, “So what?”

As for FORM, please use this more or less standard arrangement: I, II, III; A, B, C; 1, 2, 3; a, b, c; i, ii, iii; etc. Since an outline is meant to show clearly how your argument subordinates supporting ideas and data to leading ideas or larger categories, use either 2 or more subheadings or none at all -- i.e. A, 1, 2, B, etc; not A, 1, B, 1, etc.