

The Journal of Interreligious Studies

A Collaboration Between Hebrew College and Boston University School of Theology

Special Issue in Partnership with Boston College *Engaging Particularities XVI* (2018)

Issue 25

February 2019

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From the Managing Editor

Since 2003, the Boston College Theology Department has hosted an annual conference for emerging scholars in comparative theology. Drawing from its Jesuit heritage, the theology department seeks through this conference to accomplish the mission of Decree 5 (Our Mission and Interreligious Dialogue) from the 1995 General Congregation of the Society of Jesus.¹ I have been aware of this ongoing conference, entitled *Engaging Particularities (EP)*, for some time, and even participated in it myself years ago.² Given how impressed I have been with the quality of papers at this conference, I decided that a partnership with *EP* whereby the authors of some of the conference papers are invited to transform their talks into publishable pieces would be a worthwhile endeavor. And thus, the process of compiling this issue began.

The 2018 conference organizers, Michael VanZandt Collins and Hans Harmakaputra, were also the guest editors for this collaborative issue. This issue could not have been published without their diligent effort working with me; our Associate Managing Editor, Silvia Glick; and the authors in producing this collection of articles. Their introduction that follows situates the conference theme in the larger context of the discipline of comparative theology; therein they also prelude each of the articles with respect to the 2018 theme. That being the case, I will not reproduce their excellent work here. Rather, I will close with some words on the discipline of comparative theology as it relates to the mission of the *JIRS*.

The *JIRS* has published a few articles from the field of comparative theology in the past. However, when I began my role as the journal's Managing Editor, I suggested adding comparative theology explicitly to the journal's publication purview. The term "comparative theology" has had a mixed history, the details of which surpass the ambit of this introduction.³ It has variably been called interreligious theology and intercultural theology. In brief and to generalize, a comparative theologian engages her "home" tradition in conversation with one or more other traditions in search of theological insights; she often writes confessionally and constructively for her "home" religious community of interpretation, but with proposals that others (e.g., adherents of other religious traditions, "nones," scholars in the field of religious studies or area studies) may find academically, intellectually, and/or spiritually meaningful. As such, comparative theology is a discipline that is interreligious by definition.

Interreligious studies is situated at the "interface between a more traditionally secular Religious Studies discipline, and a more traditionally confessional theological discipline,"⁴ and its scholarly projects and products often contain prescriptive and normative proposals that relate

¹ "Our Mission and Interreligious Dialogue," http://www.sjweb.info/documents/sjs/docs/Dr%205_ENG.pdf, accessed Jan. 24, 2019.

² See <https://engagingparticularities.com> for more information, including details regarding past and future conferences.

³ Three books offer extensive and critical introductions to the field: Francis X. Clooney: *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010); Francis X. Clooney, ed., *The New Comparative Theology: Interreligious Insights from the Next Generation* (London: T&T Clark, 2010) (this volume in particular contains pieces that critique the field's looming hegemony and Eurocentrism); and Francis X. Clooney and Klaus von Stosch, eds., *How to Do Comparative Theology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018).

⁴ Paul Hedges, "Interreligious Studies," in *Encyclopedia of Sciences and Religions*, eds. Anne L. C. Runehov and Lluís Oviedo (New York: SpringerReference, 2013).

theory to praxis, i.e., there is an interest in social change, religious tolerance, mutual understanding, and being accountable as a scholar-activist to a religious or secular community broader than the academy.⁵ But interreligious studies is also “a subdiscipline of religious studies that engages in the scholarly and religiously neutral description, multidisciplinary analysis, and theoretical framing of the interactions of religiously different people and groups.”⁶ Given the broad purview of the field, “interreligious studies is thus a malleable discipline of which comparative theology may be a first-order instantiation, or which may study particular exercises in comparative theology in a second-order analysis thereof.”⁷

For this reason, I explicitly expanded the *JIRS*'s mission to include the discipline of comparative theology. It is my hope that the critical insights from interreligious studies will challenge the looming hegemony of comparative theology, given the latter's Eurocentric, Christian theological methods and conclusions.⁸

With this in mind, I hope that this partnership with Boston College's *Engaging Particularities* conference will remain an ongoing collaboration for many years to come.

Axel Marc Oaks Takacs
Managing Editor

⁵ See, e.g., Hedges, “Interreligious Studies,” as well as Eboo Patel, Jennifer Howe Peace, and Noah J. Silverman, eds., *Interreligious/Interfaith Studies: Defining a New Field* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018), xii.

⁶ Kate McCarthy, “(Inter)Religious Studies: Making a Home in the Secular Academy,” in *Interreligious/Interfaith Studies*, 12.

⁷ Axel Marc Oaks Takacs, “Comparative Theology and Interreligious Studies: Embracing and Transgressing the Dialogical Relationships Among Religious Traditions,” in Volume 4 of *The Brill Companion to Comparative Theology* (forthcoming, 2019).

⁸ See Takacs, “Comparative Theology and Interreligious Studies,” for how interreligious studies may critically and constructively relate to comparative theology in terms of the former's intersectional methods.