
A Methodology for Interreligious Theologizing: Toward an Interstitial Theology

S.T. Ruparell

Tinu Ruparell is presently a Ph.D. student in the Faculty of Divinity at the University of Cambridge. His research interests include interreligious dialogue, hermeneutics, and Indian philosophy.

In what follows I shall address what has become a common objection to interreligious theologizing: the problem of incommensurability. After briefly clarifying the questions this thesis presents I shall suggest a possible response to it and delineate a methodological framework by which interreligious theologizing can be fruitfully undertaken.

Firstly I must clarify what I mean by interreligious theologizing. In the work of Bede Griffiths, Raimundo Panikkar or Don Cupitt, we find attempts at synthesizing Christianity and Hinduism or Buddhism into a unified, consistent whole. Interreligious theologizing is here a way of doing theology—an attempt at synthesizing distinct and often disparate religious traditions into a coherent system. At its best, it is not a crude attempt at creating a sort of “super religion” composed of elements of all, but a much more cautious and conservative effort at introducing particular elements of one tradition into the context of another. One of the dominant and, I shall argue, problematic methodologies by which this has been done in the past turns out, I suggest, to be not very different from genetic engineering.

The molecular geneticist seeks to create new and better genes or gene products by using a technique of recombination. Using existing DNA, either from a single species or from different species, she splices together selected sections from different chromosomes into novel combinations—

recombining DNA from one part of the genome into another part of the same genome, or into a host from an entirely different species. Recombination is essentially an editing process and just as a writer edits a sentence or paragraph to make it more precise or communicate better, so the genetic engineer edits together parts of the genetic code in order to make it code its resultant protein better, or perhaps create a new protein altogether. This recombinant editing process is essentially creative: the geneticist's overall aim is to create new cells or even new forms of life which, for example, might have resistance to disease or could themselves be used as therapeutic measures in combating disease.

The parallels of genetic engineering to the work of an interreligious theologian are not difficult to spot. The theologian, herself working within a particular religious and cultural framework, recombines old or existing elements from her tradition with religious and philosophical elements of another tradition, creating what might be called a recombinant religious tradition. Like the geneticist, she too is an editor: editing together the elements of a theology in order to make it more comprehensive and coherent. Her aim is to create a theology which better reflects or better organizes its tradition and, hopefully, one which is potentially more resistant to philosophical ills and/or therapeutic for chronic religious diseases.

There are, of course, problems, both with this analogy and with recombinant techniques themselves. No analogy can be pushed to extremes, and I do not here wish to imply that interreligious theologizing is a scientific endeavor, nor that elements of a philosophy of religion can be abstracted from their contexts as mechanically or methodically as can strings of DNA. But inasmuch as genes are an organic, integral, dynamic, and formal organizing element of their own wider context (the cell, or indeed the entire organism), the analogy to a theology in its wider religious tradition is, I believe, legitimate.

The difficulties associated with recombinant techniques themselves pose the more serious questions of *criteria*, *possibility*, and *viability*. By what criteria does one decide which pieces of DNA to choose and, once chosen, can the DNA be extracted or replicated without mutating or even completely destroying it? If the extraction is successful, the pivotal question is whether the recombination will be viable: will it produce a still-born mutant or a living, healthy hybrid? And if viable, will the hybrid be capable of reproduction or merely a sterile chimera? On the genetic model, the analogous questions for the theologian are (1) determining criteria for choosing which elements of a religious tradition can be extracted or replicated; (2) whether this can be done without thereby destroying their sense; and (3) if successfully extracted, whether recombination within a disparate web of linguistic and cultural symbols will be

viable and fertile. These are some of the questions posed by the problem of incommensurability, and it is to this that I shall now turn.

The incommensurability thesis has been formulated in a number of ways, depending on the field to which it is made to apply. Within the context of interreligious encounter, a basic form of the thesis holds that any one religion shares no non-superficial standards of truth, value, or meaning with any other distinct tradition. Since each tradition exists within its own complex interrelated and interdependent web of reference, there exists no Archimedian point of shared criteria of relevance from which any two religions can be judged. This is the line of argument drawn by so-called post-liberal theologians such as George Lindbeck, Kenneth Surin, and John Milbank. Lindbeck construes the incommensurability thesis in terms of distinct and mutually incompatible cultural-linguistic systems. Against both experiential-expressivist and positivist models, he defines religions as comprehensive, cultural-linguistic and interpretive schemes, made manifest in narrative, myth and ritual, which help to structure human experience of the self and the world (Lindbeck 1984, 32). Religions are, Lindbeck suggests, in this respect like the Kantian *a priori*; they are similar to idioms which "make possible the description of realities, the formulation of beliefs, and the experience of inner attitudes, feelings and sentiments" (Lindbeck 1984, 33). Lindbeck's incommensurability is not, therefore, simply a matter of disagreement as to the nature of God or ultimate reality; it is, rather, a case of untranslatability between conflicting, distinct languages. Being an adherent of a particular religion is for Lindbeck significantly like being a speaker of a particular language, and one's religion, like one's language, constructs the particular way one experiences self, neighbor and cosmos. So the Hindu and the Christian, for example, do not each thematize, though in different ways, the same basic experience of God; they have fundamentally different experiences, as distinct from one another as the experience of driving a car is from reading a poem.

The incommensurability thesis springs from the more fundamental problems surrounding inter-cultural and inter-linguistic encounter. In philosophical circles these more basic questions have been focused in what has come to be called the problem of translation. This problem strikes at the heart of the larger issue of the hermeneutics of inter-cultural encounter and the nature of understanding as the real center of the incommensurability thesis. A successful response to the incommensurabilist line, then, will also be based on the nature of understanding.

The problem of incommensurability for the sort of interreligious theology I am here considering lies in how, with such apparently diverse and disparate cultural-linguistic systems as, for example, those of India and

Western Europe, anything (much less a theology) can faithfully represent or embody both traditions without being either fatally inconsistent or nothing more than a mixture of superficialities. Let us take for our example Hinduism and Christianity.¹ On the genetic model each tradition exists as a distinct, internally self-supporting web of language, belief, action, values, traditions and histories, and while there may be similarities between these systems, even regions of overlap (indeed we would expect there to be some overlap—Hindus and Christians do, of course, share a common physiology and many of the vicissitudes which beset the human being), these areas do not get at the heart of what it is to be Christian or Hindu. The centers of these webs of culture and language lie at apparently different and irreconcilable points, therefore to incorporate these centers into one overarching system, or to search for a single, underlying, essential experience of which these traditions are merely variants, would do violence to the integrity of each. The incommensurabilist holds that part of what it is to be Christian is precisely that it is not being a Hindu and vice versa. Any theology that blurs this distinction cannot then legitimately be called Christian or Hindu. Though careful not to be labelled a radical, Lindbeck even rejects the (above) suggestion that since all humans share a common physiology, this might be a common ground between the religions. On Lindbeck's view, even commonalities based on physiology would scarcely rise above the cursory (Lindbeck 1984, 37). The incommensurability thesis leaves us, then, in the case of Hinduism and Christianity, with two mutually exclusive ways of experiencing, relating, acting, feeling, and living: two incommensurable forms of life.

I do not suggest that we accept Lindbeck's view in full. For one thing, Lindbeck fails to take the witness of history into sufficient account. The history of religions could very well be seen as the history of encounter, interrelation, synthesis, adaptation, and dynamic growth. Religions have always 'traded' one with another. Lindbeck's portrayal of religious traditions construes their boundaries as too static and impermeable. I do think, however, that a moderate form of the incommensurability thesis must be admitted if we are to maintain the genetic model. Religious traditions can be seen as languages in that they are self-referential, interdependent cultural-linguistic systems and therefore by and large autonomous, and this view may cast doubt on any possibility of building an interreligious theology. Any attempt to create, on the genetic model, a

1. In using the terms "Hinduism" and "Christianity" I do not mean to imply that these refer to reified entities. There are, I take it, no such things as Hinduism or Christianity—only a number of separate and distinct traditions which, sharing family resemblance, are grouped under these names.

recombinant religious tradition may fail in the end since trying to abstract elements of a religion destroys their sense and weakens the coherence of the donor tradition; trying to introduce these elements into the recipient tradition would only result in the fatal rejection of the transplant. On the genetic model, Hinduism and Christianity turn out to be perhaps too distinct and disparate for us to try to hybridize them with any success, and while this paradigm may provide an evocative picture of the potential benefits of interreligious theologizing, in the end it falls prey to the essentialist critique of relying on a foundational common medium through which recombination can take place. The incommensurability thesis attacks just this claim. No common medium suffuses the religions, therefore any methodology which implicitly assumes one is bound to fail. The possibility of an interreligious theology on the genetic analogy is therefore either a dead end or of very limited value. If an interreligious theology is to be built and its possibilities realized, a new methodology must be found which avoids the problems of incommensurability and delivers on the promises of a more healthy and robust theology.

I suggest that the semantic structure of metaphor can provide both the methodology and the framework of a successful interreligious theology. I shall now use Paul Ricoeur's analysis of metaphor as the basis of a new methodology for interreligious theologizing.

Metaphorical Foundations

Ricoeur is a proponent of what Janet Martin Soskice calls incremental theories of metaphor, that is, Ricoeur believes that metaphor adds to the cognitive impact of language. Relying on and refining the work of Max Black, I.A. Richards, Emil Benveniste, Monroe Beardsley and others, and contrasting his view to both the traditional 'Aristotelian' theory of metaphor as substitution of names, and the analytic view of metaphor as merely pleasing or evocative nonsense, Ricoeur delineates a view of metaphor as a "figure of speech by which we refer to one thing in terms which evince another" (Soskice 1985, 15).

Against Aristotle's hypothesis, Ricoeur rightly questions the rendering of metaphor as a phenomenon of naming. The classical account of metaphor restricted the contextual locus of meaning to the word, and while words are the vehicles of metaphor, metaphors require the enlarged semantic context of the sentence for them to be realized (Ricoeur 1977, 65). The sentence or statement, not the word, is the fundamental unit of meaning in discourse. As Plato shows in the *Cratylus*, the question of the 'truth' of individual names cannot be decided without reference to how the name is situated with respect to its verb (Ricoeur 1976, 1). The *logos* requires at least a name and a verb, and the work of metaphor can thus

only be understood in the wider context of the interaction between subject and predicate with all its possible complexity. Ricoeur therefore speaks in terms of the *metaphorical statement* and his ensuing theory “will [concern] the production of metaphorical meaning” in this context (Ricoeur 1977, 65).

Another criticism which can be levied against the Aristotelian substitution theory is that it misleads us into thinking that the creators of metaphors are using them to express something which could be better expressed in literal terms. This view led Locke (following Hobbes) to remark that metaphors are a form of verbal trickery or deceit, used “for nothing else but to insinuate wrong ideas, move the passions, and thereby mislead the judgement” (Soskice 1985, 13). But this runs counter to the actual experience of constructing metaphors. As Soskice points out, “the particularity of a metaphorical description is not that it translates literal thought, but that the very thinking is undertaken in terms of the metaphor” (Soskice 1985, 25).

Locke’s remark reflects the view put forward in the emotivist theories of metaphor propounded by philosophers in the analytic and especially positivist traditions. These theorists construe(d) metaphor as deviant word usage designed to elicit some emotion or attitude. Metaphors are mere rhetorical tools, devoid of cognitive content, designed to elicit some attitude in their readers or hearers. In this respect, some of these philosophers liken metaphors to certain religious or moral utterances. These theories make metaphors out to be not unlike speech-acts such as promises, commands, or prescriptions and, as with some of these speech-acts, metaphors are deemed to be devoid of cognitive weight—they contribute nothing to the meaning of a sentence. Their work is in drawing our attention to something or nudging us into noting something (Soskice 1985, 28). On emotivist theories, the structure of metaphors is just as it appears on the page: a conjunction of words which maintain their literal significations, and the meaning of a metaphor is simply what shows on its surface—usually an absurdity or plain falsehood.

The main weakness of emotivist theories of metaphor lies in their inability to explain what emotive impact a metaphor might have when they are said to be devoid of cognitive significance. Emotivists claim that metaphors lack meaningful content, but maintain that they elicit emotional attitudes or “nudge us into noting certain things,” or into “making certain judgements.”² But, as Soskice points out, it is notoriously difficult to spell out how a statement might have emotive impetus without at

2. Donald Davidson, What metaphors mean. In Donald Davidson, *Inquiries into truth and interpretation*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. (As quoted by Soskice 1985, 28).

the same time drawing that impetus from some cognitive content (Soskice 1985, 27). Surely the emotions are moved by some sort of realization, and how can we realize something—anything—without grasping a meaning? Whatever metaphors do in a sentence, clearly they do it, at least in part, by conveying some meaning.

Having sketched some critiques of the substitution and emotive theories of metaphor, we can now move to Ricoeur's own view.

Ricoeur provisionally begins his description of metaphor by defining it as the result of tension between (minimally) two semantic units or ideas in a statement or utterance (Ricoeur 1976, 50). This tension is one of incongruity, illogicality, inconsistency, or even sheer nonsense. An example will show this more clearly. Consider the metaphorical utterance, "The Lord your God is a consuming fire" (Deuteronomy 4:24; Hebrews 12:29). Clearly what one means by 'God' is not literally a consuming fire—the two are of different categories. It would be tantamount to saying, "Wednesday is fat," to use Wittgenstein's example. Calling God a consuming fire is a category mistake: a literal interpretation of this utterance is therefore illogical. Furthermore, there is clearly more going on in this metaphor than a mere accident of naming: a predicate is being applied to God, something is being said, a cognition expressed. The metaphor is created through and grounded in the tension between the two terms of the utterance, here the subject 'God' and the predicate 'consuming fire'. The construction of this statement produces a tension and out of this tension is born the meaning of the metaphor. Ricoeur describes this *production out of tension* as a "self-destruction" or a "transformation" of literal interpretations into metaphorical ones (Ricoeur 1976, 50). The power of a metaphor to produce new meaning out of old is akin to squeezing water out of wet towel by wrenching and twisting it into a new shape. But does this 'wrenching and twisting' transformation do violence to the terms? Is the literal signification of the terms destroyed altogether? Ricoeur, refining his account, reminds us that at the level of statement what are brought into productive tension are the literal and metaphorical interpretations of the utterance:

What we have just called the tension in a metaphorical utterance is really not something that occurs between two terms in the utterance, but rather between two opposing interpretations of the utterance. It is the conflict between these two interpretations that sustains the metaphor. (Ricoeur 1976, 50)

Clearly then, the literal significations of the terms must be maintained for there to exist a literal interpretation. These literal significations ground a metaphorical statement to the word as its locus (Ricoeur 1977,

66). Thus the self-transformation of metaphor is non-violent. The process is closer to a metamorphosis: a transformation towards and into the metaphorical interpretation.

Ricoeur then turns his attention to the role of resemblance in the interaction theory. On Aristotle's substitution theory a word could be substituted for another by virtue of its similarity in meaning to the first word. One chooses the substitute metaphorical name by virtue of its resemblance to the word to be substituted. But if, in the interaction theory, two parts or levels of a metaphor are in tension, does this not effectively rule out resemblance? Is not difference rather than resemblance a prerequisite for tension? Ricoeur answers that it is not the prerequisite but the work of metaphor to bring to light hitherto unnoticed relationships: "[Metaphor] consists precisely in the bringing together of what was once distant" (Ricoeur 1976, 51). In metaphor, then, something is disclosed: a new relationship (possibly a resemblance) is discovered between what were thought to be very different significations.

Against emotivist theories, Ricoeur views metaphors as full of meaning. The tension which results when new and surprising predicates are applied to subjects is the fertile ground from which springs a forest of new, living, dynamic meanings. Meaning is borne of the movement of thought back and forth from one pole to the other in a dialectic where each pole transforms and is transformed by the other. But it is not the case that any two thoughts held in concert can form a metaphor. The distinguishing characteristic is, as Ricoeur states, "[that] the two thoughts of metaphor are somehow disrupted, in this sense, that we describe one through the features of the other" (Ricoeur 1977, 80). This principle I shall, following Wittgenstein, refer to as *seeing as* (though I could just as well use a construction like *living as* or *interpreting as*) and in Max Black's terminology, that which is seen is called the *focus*; that through which one sees, the *frame* (Ricoeur 1977, 85). Each is required for the metaphoric event. By the use of Black's terminology I do not want to suggest that there are always or only two subjects to each metaphor; metaphors are 'about' one subject but utilize two or more ideas or sets of ideas in order to speak about it. Using the term 'focus' does, however, acknowledge the centering of a metaphor on a word or words, around which lies a contextual frame of other words, all of which are required in the metaphorical statement. As Ricoeur remarks, "an entire statement constitutes a metaphor, yet attention focuses on a particular word, the presence of which constitutes the grounds for considering the statement metaphorical" (Ricoeur 1977, 84).

The relationship between the poles of a metaphor, the focus and frame, need not be one of resemblance. Both resemblance and diversity

are required for the dialectic of metaphor to be maintained. While *seeing as* allows for the discovery of similarity, it also requires and puts into relief the unlikeness of the frame and focus (Ricoeur 1977, 82). Resemblance is but one of the techniques with which the frame affects the focus; a novel and common attitude taken towards both also allows one to discover the root of the metaphor (Ricoeur 1977, 82).

But a further question arises. How does "seeing as" actually create the metaphorical event? What occurs in the disruption of the focus by the frame (and vice versa)? Ricoeur's explanation, following Black, is worth quoting here in full:

Let our metaphor be 'Man is a wolf.' The focus, 'wolf,' operates not on the basis of its current lexical meaning, but by virtue of the 'system of associated commonplaces' (40)—that is, by virtue of the system of conceptions to which a reader in a linguistic community, by the very fact that he speaks, finds himself committed. This system of commonplaces, which are added to the literal uses of the word, which are governed by syntactic and semantic rules, forms a system of implications that lends itself to more or less easy and free invocation. To call a man a wolf is to evoke the lupine system of associated commonplaces. One speaks then of man in 'wolf language.' Acting as a filter (39) or screen (40), '[t]he wolf-metaphor suppresses some details, emphasizes others—in short, *organizes* our view of man.' In this way metaphor confers an 'insight.'³

Two characteristics in the above description are noteworthy: the work of metaphor is in the *organization* of a subject, and the new words 'filter' and 'screen,' being themselves visual terms, are particularly appropriate for the definition of metaphor as *seeing as*. A filter or screen allows the viewer to select and separate pertinent aspects of what she is looking at. These aspects can then be emphasized or de-emphasized in the organization of a subject. For Ricoeur, these two synonymous features are central to his concept of *redescription*. Redescription is re-organization or re-interpretation of the subject through an alien screen or filter, the re-organization taking place through the relevant aspects brought to the fore by the screen. The focus and frame can thus be understood as redescribing each other in terms of their own associated commonplaces. In the above example, then, not only are men spoken of in 'wolf language' but wolves are seen through 'man language'. Both terms of the metaphor are redescribed.

The above quotation also refers to systems of associated commonplaces. A word's associated commonplaces include more than just its

3. (Ricoeur 1977, 87). The numbers in brackets are Ricoeur's own and refer to Max Black, *Models and metaphors*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1962).

other accepted uses. If all that occurred when one used a term or predicate metaphorically was that other uses of the term came to mind, the power of metaphor to create meaning would be hobbled—metaphor would once again be reduced to a phenomenon of the word. The associated commonplaces of a term are all of the linguistic, experiential, and psychological elements which contribute to the meaning of that term. In this way metaphor reaches beyond language to life. Moreover, the associated commonplaces need not be 'true,' in the scientific sense of corresponding to observable events. The associated commonplaces for living metaphors must, however, be "readily and freely evoked" (Ricoeur 1977, 90). This point introduces a distinction between living and dead metaphors. Live metaphors are those of invention in which the response to the simultaneous, dialectical affirmation and denial of a metaphorical statement is the creation and extension of meaning. Dead metaphors are those which through repetition have become part of the accepted lexicon—part of the accepted meaning of the terms of the metaphor (Ricoeur 1976, 52). An example of a dead metaphor might be "the mouth of a river"; a live one, "an innervated conscience."

I have now outlined the locus and process of metaphor as Ricoeur develops it, and situated it with respect to other theories of metaphor. While a number of issues remain, let us now turn to how this view of metaphor provides the framework for interreligious theologies.

Conversations, Interstitiality, and Theology

If we simply apply Ricoeur's interactionist structure of metaphor to the problem of constructing an interreligious theology, we might begin by provisionally setting elements of the two traditions beside one another as two poles of a metaphor. But which elements? Similar questions of criteria and viability which confronted us on the genetic model appear now on the metaphorical model. How does one decide which elements of a religious tradition can be used in a metaphor and whether this can be done without the elements thereby losing their sense? The question can be answered if we remember Ricoeur's criticism of Aristotle. Aristotle's mistake was to make the locus of metaphor the word rather than the statement or utterance, and we commit the same error if we imagine elements of a religious tradition as simple and discrete. On Ricoeur's interactionist view, a metaphor is realized only in the wider context of sentences or statements. We must look to broaden our theological contexts. This means that one cannot extract single theological ideas, word-like, out of their environments. The poles of our interreligious metaphor must be analogous to statements, that is, they must appear within their semantic contexts. There will indeed be a center or focus to each pole of

the metaphor but, as we saw above, this focus is only constituted within and through a frame—its wider context.

Our metaphorical model thus dictates that the poles of the metaphor should be conglomerations made up of a more or less central idea plus the proximate notions which make up its context and by which we understand its wider meaning. Of course the interdependent nature of theological concepts makes the semantic context potentially without limit, however in practice there is, I suggest, a vanishing point where we can draw a boundary around an idea's associated notions. Following Gadamer, this extension of associated commonplaces might be called an idea's horizon. So our interreligious metaphor will not involve single elements of a theology but will put into a productive tension whole theological horizons which themselves, by virtue of their scope, will reflect an aspect of religious life. In this way the metaphorical model avoids the problem of destroying a notion's sense by extracting it from its context. In the process of metaphor religious contexts come into play.

The demand to supply our metaphor with clusters rather than individual elements also points to a way of overcoming the problem of choosing which theological aggregates to put into tension. When two theological horizons are combined in a metaphor there will exist some degree of indeterminacy. By virtue of the wide scope and the interconnectedness of a theological horizon, the interanimation between poles of the metaphor may produce a metaphorical twist between components of the horizons which we could not predict. What we hope to happen in a metaphor may not. In choosing to bring together two particular theological horizons we may unwittingly bring together two *altogether* different ones. This characteristic of the interactionist view of metaphor does not provide a solution to the question of finding criteria for choosing theological horizons so much as it eludes the problem. Using any theological horizon opens the doors to the others since *at some level* all the horizons are related. This interrelation, perhaps best thought of in terms of family resemblance, constitutes living religious traditions and is one way in which traditions are defined. What the metaphorical model of interreligious theologizing does, in effect, is bring together—in the form of their associated theologies—segments, sides or aspects of the whole complex body of religious life. The marriage of religious traditions in metaphor involves the horizons of each tradition through the vehicle of a particular metaphor. So we begin metaphorical interreligious theologizing not by choosing which doctrines or ideas to hybridize, but by tying together large sections of complete religious traditions.

Now that we have the poles of our interreligious metaphor, how will the process of metaphor work and what will it produce? On Ricoeur's

view, metaphors are generators of meaning, and our interreligious metaphor will produce part of an interreligious theology. This will not be just another evocative way of comparing religions: the creative force of metaphor will produce *de novo* a dynamic source of meaning—one which, like a change in models, opens other new and potentially fruitful theological avenues. The metaphorical model does this, moreover, without a violent syncretism, since in metaphor the literal signification of the poles is required and conserved. Therefore our interreligious metaphor will maintain the particularity and distinctive nature of the religious traditions it brings together.

Categorical transgression plays an important part in interreligious theologizing. A tension is created when two traditions are put in a dialectic where resemblance is simultaneously affirmed and denied. Categorical transgression will therefore obtain since each tradition exists as its own cultural-linguistic class—its own distinct form of life. The boundary between the two is not impermeable, as the post-liberals would have us believe, but can be breached by the dialectic of metaphor. What Lindbeck and Surin see as an obstacle for interreligious theology, the metaphorical model capitalizes on and indeed requires.

The back-and-forth hermeneutic circle inherent in metaphor functions to transform its poles. Each pole is 'seen as' or rather *seen through* the other. An aspect of a Hindu tradition, for example, is redescribed through the context of a Christian tradition and vice versa. The Hindu pole thus becomes Christian and the Christian Hindu, yet in themselves they remain the same. It is only within the relation of metaphor that the transformation is achieved.

The metaphorical twist also reveals resemblances which were previously hidden and suppresses or hides other aspects of each pole's horizon. This means that a great many combinations of the two traditions can be brought into metaphorical tension. One does not have to bring together analogous theories of God, or analogous doctrines of salvation. The only limitations on the metaphor will be the skills of its philosopher-poet.

The transformational creativity of metaphor results in a redescription of each tradition in terms of the other. It is in this redescription where a metaphorical interreligious theology will gain its reference to the world. The question of reference is a large one and I cannot attempt a full exposition of it here. Nevertheless the question of whether or not an interreligious theology is connected to the way people actually live is one which must be faced. Ricoeur views metaphorical redescription as the partial creation of possible worlds (Ricoeur 1977, 218). Metaphors allow us to refer beyond our own experience to a created narrative world. With

this in mind, I suggest that interreligious metaphors refer to the space in between the poles of the metaphor. This interstitial space is what Mark Kline Taylor refers to as the "liminal" (Taylor 1986, 36–51). In the dialectic between the poles of metaphor a shaky ground of newly created common significations is slowly built up. This ground is always being broken down, patched up and re-examined by the force of the flux created by the dialectic of metaphor. The liminal space is not a new Archimedian common ground, but a mobile plane of intersection sustained by the metaphorical encounter. It is a boundary phenomenon, a shoreline, created between and at the edges of religious traditions, constructed out of materials taken from both. It is, in effect, a bridge or framework upon which the conversation of religions can take place.

Indeed 'conversation' is a particularly good model for our understanding of the liminal world. Consider, for example, a conversation between a Christian and a Hindu. They bring to the conversation their own histories, aesthetic preferences, social structures, notions of propriety, and moral and epistemic commitments. In short each brings to the encounter their own particular way of being in the world—a particular way of *seeing as*. Let us further assume that they each desire to communicate with and learn from the other and that they share enough of each other's languages for their purposes. The metaphorical nature of conversation allows them to create a shared area of reference in the liminal world between them. The flux of question and answer, of comment and clarification, of graciousness and criticism which takes place during the conversation builds up their shared references and thus allows for communication. It is not difficult to imagine them coming to one or many "aha" experiences, when some idea has finally become clear, when the negative shaking of heads comes to a temporary end, when understanding the other occurs. In this way, slowly, the conversants communicate and are able to extend their experience. The Hindu comes to a realization of how this particular Christian sees or lives in the world and vice versa. Furthermore the conversation can be reflective: through their dialogic encounter each participant, through the other, may be alerted to aspects of his own tradition which were up until then perhaps only briefly glimpsed or even undiscovered.

This sort of conversation (often quite rare in reality) is, I suggest, thoroughly metaphorical. Not only are metaphors required of each conversant in order to understand the other, but the conversation as a whole exhibits metaphorical structure. Two people are brought together and interactivate or interanimate one another. Through the conversation each person sees the world through the context of the other. The world

of each is redescribed and reinterpreted. A mutually shared area of reference is built up in the interstice which separates the conversants, existing necessarily and only in relation to them.

But how is this theology? How does the metaphorical model of a conversation relate to interreligious theologizing? How and for whom is interreligious theologizing done? What is required at this point is an extended implementation of the methodology of interstitial theologizing.⁴ I shall here limit myself to suggesting two ways by which interstitial theologizing can be done and correspondingly, two distinct but mutually dependent outcomes. The first concerns the practice of reading, the second, ritual.

In *Theology after Vedanta*, the Jesuit theologian Francis Clooney describes an experimental methodology of reading which he calls "comparative theology." This is perhaps an unfortunate designation since it may connote the simplistic practice of identifying and cataloguing particular aspects of different religious traditions. But Clooney is not advocating a kind of religious accountancy, and his comparative theologizing is, I argue, thoroughly metaphorical. Very briefly, interstitial reading involves the reading together of texts from distinct and disparate traditions with the conscious aim of allowing each text to inscribe or modify the other—that is, for each text to become a context for and thereby transform the other. This kind of reading, at once theoretical and practical, "depends heavily on the ability of the reader to articulate a viable understanding of the other, in which the encountered other is not manufactured to fit the reader's prejudices and expectations" (Clooney, 7). It is also reading bounded "by the tension between a necessary vulnerability to truth as one might find it...and loyalty to truth as one has already found it, lives it, and hopes according to it" (Clooney, 5). It is thus reading which seeks to be faithful to the temporality and particularity of the texts and the situation of the reader, while being open to the possibility of discovering truth.

A visual and physical example of interstitial reading can be found in, for instance, some of Derrida's writing (see his essay "Tympan"). Derrida decomposes selected texts into "clippings", thus releasing them from their controlling contexts, in order to recompose them in juxtaposition to "foreign" clippings. This strategy, claims Clooney, produces hitherto non-existent meanings which could never be otherwise expressed (Clooney, 173). Collage, used for interstitial theology, forces the reader to momentarily bracket traditional interpretations of religious texts in order to interact with the materials in a new way—one which is guided by the

4. I am presently completing an article which provides just such an extended example.

visual proximities by which the clipped texts marginalize, destabilize and ultimately recontextualize each other (Clooney, 175). Reading in this interstitial way, if done well, both reflects novel interpretations onto familiar texts and creates new readings which are best located in the liminal world between the texts. These new and, with respect to the constituent traditions, somewhat homeless interpretations thus become the basis for the articulation of an interstitial theology.

So interstitial reading, located in, guided and composed by, the individual reader in his encounter with particular texts, is one method of interstitial theologizing. In a community of such interstitial readers, these new interpretations can be further modified, tested, and critiqued, and eventually adopted as being descriptive and/or normative. But this is only half of the story. Interstitial readings can only create intellectual articulations of a form of liminal life—this is a limitation in Clooney's emphasis on reading as the paradigmatic interstitial practice—what is still required, if we are to have more than just a body of theological treatises, is a form of interstitial ritual.

By ritual I mean those actions, observances, outward manifestations, habits, and liturgies consciously practiced by religious communities. Rituals are the things religious communities do as opposed to that which they believe. (Of course belief and action are co-related and interstitial rituals will both effect and be affected by interstitial readings.) An example of an interstitial ritual can be seen in the innovative liturgical practice of Bede Griffiths. Griffiths (a Christian monk dressed in the ochre robe of a *sannyāsin*) began a practice of performing *ārati* ceremonies not in front of a Hindu icon (the traditional context for this *pūjā*) but in front of the elements of bread and wine in a celebration of the Eucharist. The religious richness of this ritual is obvious. Two central acts of worship from disparate traditions are brought together in a single, integral and communal ritual for the psychological and spiritual benefit of those involved.⁵ Such a ritual might best reflect the experience of a Hindu-Christian living in a liminal world between those religious traditions, but it also opens to view a new and potentially fruitful avenue of worship for the Hindu or Christian who is squarely in their own tradition. Furthermore such ritual practice can include those who may be unable to satisfy the theologically and hermeneutically rigorous demands of Clooney's method of interstitial reading.

The practice of interstitial reading and the creation of interstitial rituals can thus form two building blocks of an interstitial theology. More

5. In England, interstitial rituals of this kind are practiced in a number of Anglican churches whose congregations include significant numbers of Indians.

analysis of these two practices is certainly required. I present them here simply as examples of how one might proceed.

In this paper I have tried to show how attempting to hybridize religious traditions using the model of genetic recombination fails to respond to the post-liberal charges of decontextualization and unviability. I then suggest Ricoeur's view of the structure and process of metaphor as a model for interreligious theologizing which avoids these problems and answers the objections of the incommensurability thesis. Implementation of this new methodology, through reading and ritual, can lead to the (partial) creation of interstitial theologies of various kinds. If shown to be successful, this will provide the theologian with a huge new pool of resources by which to tackle old theological problems.

Works Cited

- Clooney, Francis X., S.J. 1993. *Theology after Vedanta: An experiment in comparative theology*. Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press.
- Davidson, Donald. 1980. *Essays on actions and events*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- . 1984. What metaphors mean. In Donald Davidson. *Inquiries into truth and interpretation*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1982. Tympan. In *Margins of philosophy*. Trans. A. Bass. London: Harvester Press.
- Halbfass, Wilhelm. 1988. *India and Europe*. New York: SUNY Press.
- Lindbeck, George. 1984. *The Nature of doctrine: Religion and theology in a post-liberal age*. London: SPCK.
- Ricoeur, Paul. 1976. *Interpretation theory: Discourse and the surplus of meaning*. Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press.
- . 1977. *The rule of metaphor: Multi-disciplinary studies of the creation of meaning in language*. Trans. R. Czerny with K. McLaughlin and J. Costello SJ. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Soskice, Janet Martin. 1985. *Metaphor and religious language*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Taylor, Mark Kline. 1986. In praise of shaky ground: The liminal Christ and cultural pluralism. *Theology Today* XLIII (1986): 36–51.