

John J. Thatamanil, Union Theological Seminary



*John J. Thatamanil, Associate Professor of Theology and World Religions, Union Theological Seminary, New York. He has taught a wide variety of courses in the areas of comparative theology, theologies of religious pluralism, Hindu–Christian dialogue, Buddhist–Christian dialogue, the theology of Paul Tillich, process theology, and Eastern Orthodox theology and spirituality. Thatamanil seeks to revive in his work a commitment to speculative reflection as found in the work of Paul Tillich and Alfred North Whitehead. He is on the hunt for a viable “process Tillichianism.” Thatamanil’s first book, *The Immanent Divine: God, Creation, and the Human Predicament: An East-West Conversation* (Fortress Press, 2006) provides the foundation for a nondualist Christian theology worked out through a conversation between Paul Tillich and Sankara, the master teacher of the Hindu tradition of Advaita Vedanta, and is an exercise in constructive comparative theology. Thatamanil is currently at work on his second book, tentatively entitled *Religious Diversity After “Religion”: Rethinking Theologies of Religious Pluralism* (Fordham University Press). He is a past president of the North American Paul Tillich Society and is Chair of the AAR’s Theological Education Steering Committee.*

The teaching team and the Fellows of the AAR/Luce Summer Seminars in Theologies of Religious Pluralism (TRP) and Comparative Theology (CT) are pleased to report on the successful conclusion of their yearlong labors as part of Cohort II of this multiyear project funded by the Henry Luce Foundation. Cohort II met for a second week from May 29–June 5, 2011, at the Catholic Theological Union, Chicago. Our first weeklong meeting took place from June 13–June 20, 2010. As was the case with Cohort I, this second weeklong summer was given over to hearing about the teaching and research projects undertaken by Fellows over the course of this past academic year.

The work of each Cohort is, quite naturally, shaped by the research questions and teaching passions of the group in question. In this Cohort, there were deep and sustained interests in multiple religious participation, Hindu theological approaches to TRP and CT, Muslim approaches to comparative theology, and several Fellows with interests in philosophy of religion

and philosophical theology. The structure of the Summer Seminars has the teaching team make presentations and lead the work of teaching in our first summer gathering. This second summer, by contrast, is driven by the questions and agenda that emerge from the Fellows themselves.

Cohort II Fellows did make brief individual reports about their various teaching and scholarly activities for the year but spent the bulk of their time in collaborative small group work. Two kinds of groups were constituted, one based on similarity of teaching institutions and the second on the basis of overlapping research interests. In addition to groups formally constituted in advance, Cohort II Fellows also constituted new groups on site and often met in vigorous and animated conversation on several nights after the formal programming of the day was completed.

The indefatigable labors of Cohort II extended not only to late night scholarly debates but also included a visit to The Art Institute of Chicago and at least one late night outing to a private karaoke room in which members of the teaching team and Fellows belted out thematically and theologically fitting songs, including George Harrison's "My Sweet Lord" and "Stairway to Heaven."

The visit to the Art Institute not only included the Institute's noteworthy collection of Asian Art but also the important exhibit by Jitish Kalat, "Public Notice 3," displaying the Swami Vivekananda's historic 1893 speech given to the World Parliament of Religions. Kalat has melded the speech with the colors of the United States terrorism threat code, featured on the steps of the Art Institute, where this speech was originally given. For Fellows working on questions of religious diversity, seeing this installation was both moving and timely.

Also rewarding was our trip to Devon Street to see Muslim communities from Pakistan and India living alongside Hindu communities and Hasidic communities, all within the space of a few blocks. Particularly striking for some in the group was the presence of evangelical Indian Christians holding up signs and passing out "Get out of hell free" cards on Gandhi Marg. Thinking about religious diversity became quite vivid by seeing it lived out on Chicago streets. The group was also enriched by a visit from Eboo Patel and introduction to the work of the Interfaith Youth Core. Patel compelled the Cohort to ask vital questions: "How do we measure the real world outcome of our work in theologies of religious pluralism and comparative theology and our work in interfaith cooperation? Should we be asking this question? If we did, how would we measure it?"

A particular strength of this Cohort was its generation of new questions for future work in TRP and CT. No comprehensive list of questions can be offered, but enumerated below are many of the central questions that consumed our attention:

1. How do we think about theologies of religious pluralism and comparative theology in light of those who identify themselves as SBNRs, Spiritual but Not Religious? Cohort Fellow, Linda Mercadante taught us that the fastest growing “religious group” in America are those who check “none” on religious identification surveys. There are more nones than mainstream Protestants now in America. Mercadante argues that these so-called “nones” are persons with deep spiritual longings, though not well articulated. She contends that the religious experience of such persons cannot be deemed multiple religious participation or syncretism; transreligious or extra-religious spirituality might be better terms.

2. What new meanings and methods accrue to the term “theology” when preceded by the term “comparative”? What are the sources and norms for comparative theology? Is it different from “comparative philosophy” and if so how?

3. Analogously, how does one think of comparative theology and TRP when one does not have a singular tradition of origin? Much comparative theology trades on the language of crossing over and coming back, but what if you are multiply positioned to start with?

4. What would a public comparative theology look like? How could comparative theologians contribute to an interreligious public space?

5. What would it mean to take gender and race seriously in how we do TRP and CT? This question was in part foregrounded by the work of Cohort Fellow Monica Coleman on the nature of black religious pluralism.

6. How would comparative theology and the theology of religious pluralism be deepened by a serious encounter with philosophy of language?

7. So much of the history of interreligious apologetics was conducted in hegemonic and colonial contexts. This has made us “gun shy” about a normative argument as such. Can there be a healthy way of conducting normative argument in nonhegemonic contexts? Even in our classrooms? Can apologetics be a legitimate form of comparative theology?

8. What will comparative theologies look like when reflection engages Native American and other oral and aboriginal traditions? These questions were foregrounded by Allen Jorgensen and Laurel Schneider.

9. Another important conversational trajectory concerned theologies of immigration. How is comparative theology generated by the reality of immigration? Can there be comparative theologies of immigration? What is the relationship between the border crossing of the comparative theologian who moves across religious boundaries and the rather more literal movement of immigrants across national boundaries?

10. Can we imagine an interfaith liberation theology? Can the comparative theologian function as a liberation theologian for an interfaith base community?

11. What would a comparative liturgical theology look like? What would happen to Christian liturgy and Christian liturgical theology after a serious encounter with Buddhist liturgies and liturgical theology? These questions were foregrounded by James Farwell, Claudio Carvalhaes, and others.

12. What would it mean to start comparative theology from theology construed as theo-poetics? How might poetic creativity touch upon divinity? Can one write comparative theo-poetics to divinity? Can there be a theo-poetic comparative theology?

13. What is the teaching office of the comparative theologian? Christian theologians have a teaching office for Christian communities and Buddhist thinkers for Buddhist communities, etc. What communities does the comparative theologian serve? Multiple religious believers? The SBNRs? Do they want theologians to help them to guide them into “interreligious wisdom?”

Even this partial list of questions generated by Cohort II should suffice to indicate that the work of this Cohort can be counted as a remarkable success. The teaching team and Cohort Fellows left believing that the work of TRP and CT had been immeasurably enriched by our collective labors. We also left convinced that these questions could be the subject of multiple dissertations and books in these growing fields. Hence, it is unsurprising that members of the teaching team are looking forward with enthusiasm and gratitude to the coming Cohort III, which is made possible by a renewal grant from the Henry Luce Foundation. Look for [application details](#) in this issue of

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