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Abstract

This dissertation explores the potential of the “theopoetics” of Richard Kearney, John D. Caputo, and Catherine Keller for Christian theological reflection on religious difference and interreligious encounter. It suggests religious difference appears marked by an unruliness or “anarchy,” which theopoetics may lead us to embrace rather than repress.

The first chapter thus sketches the main issues in Christian theology of religions in recent decades, tracing this unruliness of religious difference in deepening layers. Taken together, what emerges is a growing understanding of the *groundlessness* of Christianity, especially its assumptions of superiority, the *unavailability* of a comprehensive neutral viewpoint or unifying schema, the *unsettling* and *unfinished* nature of interreligious encounters, and the need for *critique* of the most central categories through which Christianity has viewed religious difference.

With this debate established, the next chapters turn to Kearney, Caputo, and Keller in a dedicated chapter for each author. While their direct writings on religious difference are of varying depth, resources may be found especially in Kearney’s understanding of narrative collective identity and imagination, in Caputo’s deconstructive wariness of systematization, and Keller’s relational apophasis and her reading of Genesis 1 as the Divine calling forth creation from an unruly *tehom* or Deep. Taken together, theopoetics offers a way to figure the *groundlessness* of religious attachments, the *non-privileged* place of Christianity, its indelible *relatedness* to others, and an embrace of critique, challenge, and negation, without falling into silence or neglecting the communal, traditional, and indeed political nature of religion. Further, theopoetics seeks to resist stabilizing these insights into a comprehensive schema or renewed privileged vantage point.

Drawing on these resources, the final chapter explores a direction a more intentional theopoetics of the interreligious might take. Drawing on insights from religious studies and related fields, it argues religious difference historically appears to always already insist itself into the formation of religious identity, thus at the same time *constituting* and *destabilizing* religious traditions. This leads into a more (quasi-)ontological investigation of difference and its unruliness, proposing to think it as a in proximity to *différance*, *khōra*, and *tehom*, and suggesting interreligious translatability can be seen as opening religion up to an aporetic relatedness, perhaps already divine. Finally, a theopoetics of religious difference will seek, in these aporetic conditions, to not only envision but also *evoke* a sense of community as interreligious solidarity, calling forth relationship from the depths of difference.