

Rules for Doing Comparative Religion

[Original formulation by Rev. Krister Stendahl;
further development by Prof. Todd Lewis]

1. People represent themselves.

Comment: Bear no false witness. Read original texts.
Hear from believers directly.

2. Compare like to like; match level to level.

Comment: When comparing ideal teachings, carefully match your ideal with the others' ideal(s). Beware of comparing your ideal to the other's real, and vice versa.

3. 'Holy envy' is OK.

Comment: How could the world religions survive so long without offering sources of inspiration? There is much to admire in other faiths' scholasticism, spiritual exercises, ethical stands, etc. In other words, one need not hate all others to love one's own spouse faithfully.

4. Faith in the Golden Rule.

Comment: Loving kindness was articulated by the Indian and Chinese sages centuries before Christ. The Golden Rule of treating others as one would like to be treated is universal. Extending oneself with empathy and respect will be reciprocated by similar attitudes from all people of good will.

5. Hypothesis: God may Enjoy Diversity.

Comment: Half a millennium of Christian missionizing later, all the world's great religions have held their centers. Witness the lilies of the fields and the witness of all species in creation.
Take the pluralism of God's creation seriously.